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AN ORAL HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSIC



Composers' Voices from Ives to Ellington

Vivian Perlis and Libby Van Cleve

*Composers' Voices
from Ives to Ellington*

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AN ORAL HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSIC

Vivian Perlis and Libby Van Cleve

Yale University Press New Haven & London

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Passin' it down—passin' it down to the young 'uns—
—EUBIE BLAKE on oral history



For the young 'uns:

Nola Vees

Morgan, Steve, and Ben Perlis

Charlie and Melanie Ambler

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Preface



“History is not what happened,” wrote the historian George F. Kennan. “History is what it felt like to *be* there when it happened.” It is almost impossible to imagine what it felt like at the turn of the twentieth century, a time when most of the world was without electricity, when music was heard only in live performance, when men wore felt hats and women long skirts, and when the most serious urban problem was horse manure. In less than a century, a quantum leap was made, from the gaslight era to a walk on the moon, from music performed on square pianos in the parlor to sophisticated electronic projection and reproduction. Changes have been not only more rapid but more substantial than in earlier times. As the historian Roger Shattuck points out in *The Banquet Years*, “We feel a greater nostalgia looking back that short distance than we do looking back twenty centuries to antiquity.”

As the twentieth century fades into the past, it comes into clearer focus; yet many questions remain: Who could have predicted that American music would evolve as it did? Who would have guessed that a century that began with musical tastes defined by Mahler, Dvořák, and MacDowell would later contain the disparate styles of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Ives, Copland, and Cage—and would lead to the current panoply? How will this dynamic time be viewed by historians, what will it be called, and who will be considered the major composers?

The dramatic changes in the twentieth century were due in large part to extraordinary technological inventions and advances. Technology, in the form of the tape recorder and video camera, provided the means for expanded documentation of contemporary life at many levels. In 1969 Oral History American Music (OHAM)

was founded at Yale University, making use of technology to record and preserve testimonies from significant figures in American music. OHAM has become an extensive repository of audio- and videotaped interviews. The archive focuses primarily on living American composers, both those who have achieved prominence and others, less known, who have worked behind the scenes.

The history of twentieth-century American music is an exciting story that has been told and retold by a wide range of writers, musicians, and filmmakers. Phrases such as “America comes of age” and “American sound” recur frequently in descriptions of early–twentieth century music. From a long history of importing virtually all artistic products from Europe, America has become a leading exporter of music and musicians and a major presence on the world scene.

This series, *An Oral History of American Music*, chronicles this remarkable tale directly through the voices of those who made our musical history. It presents this material in both word and sound: each of the four volumes consists of a book of edited transcripts and commentary, plus two compact discs featuring selections from recorded interviews interspersed with musical segments. The two elements are complementary parts of a whole. The first volume, *Composers’ Voices*, is based on interviews in the OHAM archive and includes introductory essays and descriptive sections by the authors, as well as previously unpublished recollections of interviewing experiences. The voices of the composers on the CDs are at the heart of this publication—they preserve the intangibles of personality encapsulated in the manner of speech and expression unique to each individual. The sound of a voice holds an intensity and spontaneity that the written word cannot fully convey, just as a page of written music only hints at the emotion and profundity invoked by the sound of the music.

The presentations vary from figure to figure because of the wide range of OHAM’s holdings. Charles Ives and Duke Ellington are represented by those who knew them, while Eubie Blake and Aaron Copland speak directly as primary subjects. A fresh dimension is provided with commentary by other figures, mostly younger composers. It is important to realize that the content of this publication reflects OHAM’s holdings. For example, many interviews were conducted with Aaron Copland, and the section on him is lengthy, while George Antheil died before OHAM was founded, and he is mentioned only in introductory essays. All excerpts, both written and spoken, have been edited for clarity and flow. We have removed the interviewer’s questions and comments in order to place full emphasis on the interviewee. Because of the varied nature of the formats, the contents of the book and CDs are not identical. (Track listings for the CDs are included in the back of the book, and transcripts can be found on OHAM’s website: www.yale.edu/oham/.) The format is loosely chronological, allowing for overlap and connections between volumes. Figures whose lives spanned the century, such as Copland and Ellington, are featured in Volume 1 and will reappear later, while younger composers visit this volume with

comments and observations. Each volume exists as an independent entity, but issues endemic to the twentieth century—nationalism, alternatives to standard tonality, the tension between an American identity and the European roots of concert music, and the division between the cultivated and vernacular, to name a few—are discussed throughout the series.

An Oral History of American Music is not intended to be a complete history of twentieth-century American music, nor does it attempt to include the entire contents of the OHAM archive. Our aim is to bring the voices, thoughts, and ideas from OHAM to a wider audience, and in so doing achieve increased understanding of the art of composition and the issues affecting creative musicians in our dynamic times.

Acknowledgments



First and foremost, we salute the composers who have so generously shared their life histories and musical insights for the Oral History American Music archive (OHAM). These individuals have provided the inspiration and content for this publication. To them, we offer our deepest thanks.

A young composer, David Heetderks, accepted a routine part-time position at OHAM and soon became the person, next to the authors, most deeply involved with the creation of *Composers' Voices*. He contributed significantly to every aspect of this publication. We have found that the computer behaves only for David; the myriad details are tamed only by him; and his vote is the tiebreaker we consistently follow. We cannot thank him enough.

Another young composer, Stefan Weisman, ventured into the OHAM office several years ago looking for a summer job. He too became caught up in the whirlwind of activity. Stefan worked closely with us on all aspects of the CDs and was responsible for initial edits and the all-important music selections. We are grateful for his expertise and for the pleasure of sharing the composers' voices with him.

Composers' Voices has been omnipresent for the entire OHAM staff; every one has made a valuable contribution. We depend on the services of our loyal assistant director, Susan Hawkshaw, and on our intrepid administrator, Deborah Bellmore, who successfully juggles a remarkable range of responsibilities. Assisting at various times and diverse ways: Jack Vees, Ingram Marshall, and Marc Johnson. We appreciate their efforts and enthusiasm.

This could not exist without a few individuals and organizations that have generously supported OHAM. Margaret B. Childs on behalf of the Shirley C. Burden Charitable Lead Trust provided the means to make this publication possible. Other major funders vital to our operation include the Amphion Foundation, Edward T. Cone Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, the Grammy Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, Newman's Own, Inc., Save America's Treasures (National Endowment for the Arts), and the Betty R. Sheffer Foundation. Special thanks to Joan Warburg. Many have supported OHAM through the decades; we cannot name them all, but we can offer our sincere thanks.

We rely on the services of librarians. At Yale: Alice Prochaska, Kendall Crilly, Suzanne Eggleston Lovejoy, Karl Schrom, Richard Boursey, and Richard Warren. At the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts: George Boziwick and Tom Lisanti. At the Library of Congress: Ray White. At the Smithsonian Institution: John Hasse and Reuben Jackson. Librarians are the unsung heroes of academia, and we appreciate their contributions.

Special thanks go to the American music expert Wayne Shirley for his thorough reading of the manuscript. We also owe a great deal to the many individuals who have contributed in various ways: by offering ideas, reading segments of the manuscript, or helping with advice and criticism: Edward Berlin, Carol Oja, H. Wiley Hitchcock, Judith Tick, James Sinclair, Steven Ledbetter, David Hall, Frank Tirro, Olivia Mattis, Robert Kimball, Leroy Parkins, Pia Gilbert, Marilyn Ziffrin, Richard Teitelbaum, Paula Katz, Morris Hodara, and Wesley York. James Kendrick generously advised us on legal and foundation matters. Harry and Ruth Van Cleve also offered legal advice. With charisma, Isaiah Sheffer coached our CD narrations. Many thanks to all of these and our families and friends, who have patiently supported us with the saving grace of humor.

Many individuals generously granted permission for the use of materials. Blair Weille of Composers Recordings, Inc. (CRI), Robert Hurwitz of Nonesuch, Bill Belmont of Fantasy Records, Paul Tai and Dan Parratt of New World Recordings, and Robert Blocker of the Yale School of Music graciously assisted us with music excerpts for the CDs. We thank Susan Feder of G. Schirmer, Inc., Jenny Bilfield of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., and David Olsen of Warner Chappell. We acknowledge those who have helped secure photographs and illustrations, including Patricia Harris, Katherine Weber, Jessica David, Mike Seeger, Michael Strunsky, Alexandra Laederich, Mark Reimer, Severo Ornstein, Henry Weinberg, Leyla Rudhyar Hill, and Charles Ives Tyler. We are grateful to the following individuals and organizations that have offered permissions for use of interviews: Richard La Pine, Electra Yourke, David Kirkpatrick, Christopher Husted, Charles Ives Tyler, Elliot Hoffman, Severo Ornstein, Tim Page, Edith Valentine, Arthur Reis, Jr., Hilda Reis Bijur, Leyla Rudhyar Hill, Mike Seeger, Charles Hanson, Laura Kuhn, Eileen Strang,

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Composers' Voices is an unusually complicated publication that could have been realized only by an organization willing to extend itself with a spirit of innovation that characterizes the material presented here. We thank Harry Haskell, our former editor at Yale University Press, who was there from the start and, with intelligence and sensitivity, helped shape the form in its crucial early stages. We are especially grateful to Lauren Shapiro, editor, for her patience, care, and attention to every detail leading to publication. We recognize and appreciate the extraordinary expertise provided by Dan Heaton, manuscript editor. We acknowledge the assistance of Nancy Wolff, James J. Johnson, Jonathan Brent, and Tina Weiner. We know that it has taken the efforts of many to make our vision a reality, and we thank them all for their support and enthusiasm.

And finally, here's to you LVC—

And to you VP—

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Comments on Oral History



Alex Haley vividly described hot nights in Henning, Tennessee, where he spent his boyhood summers sitting behind his grandmother's rocking chair, hearing relatives share stories of their family lineage.¹ They chronicled the near-mythic African who was chopping wood when he was captured, brought to America, and sold into slavery. These tales led Haley on a dramatic odyssey which eventually found him in a Gambian village, spending hours listening to the village *griot* recite the clan's history, which included a story about the young man who went out to chop wood and was never seen again. Haley eventually wrote the best-selling book *Roots* about these experiences.

The collection of oral testimony like this is perhaps the oldest and most commonplace approach for the preservation and dissemination of history. The practice can be traced back to ancient Greece, with Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (based on interviews with participants), through the medieval troubadours, to A. W. Thayer's biography of Beethoven (which included reminiscences from those who knew him), and into the present. Most of us have direct experience of this sort of history, knowing the pleasure of sitting at the knees of older relatives and hearing their stories. The interchange is direct, personal, and spontaneous, and it often includes information beyond the usual historical fare: a turn-of-the-century iron miner's delight each Christmas when he received an orange (the only time all year he had fresh fruit), or the vivid and haunting description of faces of concentration camp inmates from a young soldier who liberated them. When these rich tales are recorded and preserved, oral history has been made.

In the 1930s two notable oral history projects were conducted. Between 1936 and 1938 the Works Progress Administration sent writers to interview more than two thousand former slaves. The slave narratives were not tape recorded but were taken down on paper by the interviewers, who attempted to capture the subjects' dialects. These are preserved in seventeen volumes at the Library of Congress. One of the first oral histories to use a tape recorder was conducted in 1938, when Alan Lomax recorded a series of interviews with jazz pianist and composer Jelly Roll Morton. These recordings were conducted not on location but at the Library of Congress on tape made of paper. Although the machines were not portable and the interview lacked spontaneity because segments were limited to seven to eight minutes, this series is considered a landmark in the history of recorded sound. The originator of modern systematized oral history was Allan Nevins, who established the Columbia University Oral History Research Office in 1948. By midcentury historians were lamenting the dearth of historical documents, because the telephone had reduced the need for telegrams and letters, and the practice of keeping daily diaries was no longer popular. Today's historians continue to worry about the lack of permanent records caused by electronic communication such as e-mail. Those concerned about the documentation and preservation of history have recognized the value of oral history. Since the invention of the tape recorder, there has been an explosive growth of oral history projects throughout America and abroad.

The Oral History Association, established in 1966, publishes a semiannual journal, holds annual conferences, and provides assistance to scholars, local historians, librarians, archivists, journalists, and teachers. A sampling of book reviews from a recent journal includes such topics as the Hollywood Left, downed airmen and the French underground, an autobiography of a Navajo elder, a history of homosexuals in Mississippi, and the evolution of quilt making in New Mexico.² These reviews demonstrate not only a remarkable diversity but attention to subjects that had not previously been the stuff of history: ethnic and racial minorities, women's work, and homosexual life. While Nevins used oral history to preserve the memories of those who had achieved fame and recognition, later oral historians, such as Studs Terkel, used the methodology to document those who had previously been historically disenfranchised.³ This approach to oral history became a way of telling history from the bottom up—from the viewpoint of the workers, poor people, ethnic minorities, nonliterate peoples, women, and others who previously had no voice. Oral history has also been recognized as a useful supplement to written documentation; for example, there has been an oral history project to accompany the papers of every president since Harry Truman.

Oral History, American Music (OHAM) was founded at Yale University after the success of the Ives Project, an extensive series of interviews with those who knew composer Charles Ives. When it became evident that oral history was an effective means of documenting musical activities of the recent past, OHAM was cre-

ated to obtain memoirs from prominent musicians and those who knew them. It is the only ongoing project in the field of music dedicated to the collection and preservation of oral and video testimonies directly in the voices of those who create the music of our times. While the Ives Project, conducted after the composer's death, consists of secondary sources, most of OHAM's collection are primary sources—interviews conducted directly with the subjects. (In the field of oral history and throughout the four volumes of *An Oral History of American Music*, “primary source” refers to interviews directly with a major figure and “secondary source” refers to interviews with those who knew that figure.)

The OHAM archive is divided into series: the core unit of taped interviews with more than three hundred composers, musicians, and conductors; a video collection; and secondary-source collections including projects on Aaron Copland, Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Paul Hindemith, and Charles Ives, and a history of Steinway & Sons. In addition, OHAM is the repository for many acquired interviews.⁴ OHAM holds recorded interviews with most of the principal American composers of the twentieth century. Early efforts targeted several figures based on artistic achievement and the urgency of time, among them Eubie Blake, Nadia Boulanger, Aaron Copland, Duke Ellington, Leo Ornstein, and Virgil Thomson. The natural progression was from those fragile in age or health to the next generation, among them Milton Babbitt, John Cage, Elliott Carter, David Diamond, Lukas Foss, Lou Harrison, George Perle, and William Schuman. One of OHAM's major activities is to conduct interviews with composers in midcareer and update them at regular intervals. Subjects of such series of interviews include John Adams, William Bolcom, John Harbison, Steve Reich, Ned Rorem, Joan Tower, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. A similar pattern is followed for young composers, among them Derek Bermel, Anthony Davis, Aaron Jay Kernis, Scott Lindroth, Chris Theofanidis, and Julia Wolfe. These interviews often elicit material that may not be available elsewhere, such as childhood memories and early musical influences.

OHAM's goal is not only to create primary source materials but to function as an archive in which these testimonies are preserved. After interviews have been conducted, they are processed (duplicated, transcribed, corrected, and catalogued), stored at the OHAM office, and made available to a wide range of users, including scholars, students, arts programmers, and media producers.

Since the beginnings of modern oral history, its practitioners have debated whether tape or transcript should be the final product. Allan Nevins's original method was to create written documents—transcripts of the interviews. A few minutes of the tape recording were preserved to capture the flavor of the subject; the rest of the tape was erased. In contrast, most oral history projects today, including the Columbia Oral History Research Office and OHAM, preserve all tapes. Transcripts and tables of contents are available for the user's convenience, but scholars are urged to listen to the original tapes to hear the unique inflections, pacing, and

"Soul Fetish"

Oral historians are familiar with strange and sometimes comical errors that occur from phonetic spellings. Those unfamiliar with musical terminology who transcribe OHAM interviews might write about the "Ride of Spring" or "La Mare." An odd phrase came up in the transcript of the interview of a serious and earnest young composer: he described his near fanaticism for soul fetish—he had even studied it with various teachers! This clean-cut fellow hardly seemed the type for bizarre and obsessive religious practices. It eventually became clear that he was referring to solfège, the practice of singing musical excerpts with the sol-fa syllables. Later in the same interview, the composer noted that when he needed inspiration he went to "Lake Beethoven"!

tone of the subject. Consulting the recorded interview has an additional advantage: transcripts can vary significantly depending on the transcriber, and therefore may be confusing or even misleading.

The journalist Janet Malcolm has discussed problems inherent in verbatim transcripts, pointing out the contrast between intelligible prose and "tape recorder-ese," the subject's often unclear utterances as recorded and reproduced mercilessly by the machine.⁵ Malcolm characterizes this tape recorder-ese as containing "the bizarre syntax, the hesitations, the circumlocutions, the repetitions, the contradictions, the lacunae in almost every non-sentence we speak." Malcolm later writes, "When a journalist undertakes to quote a subject he has interviewed on tape, he owes it to the subject, no less than to the reader, to translate his speech into prose."⁶ OHAM's approach is to transcribe as accurately as possible, retaining original speech patterns, which often include grammatical errors, but omitting repetitions and such verbal tics as "you know" or "um." In contrast, the transcripts included in this publication have been translated into prose: considerable editing has been necessary to achieve clear and concise testimony while still preserving the integrity of the subject's original intent.

An oral history interview is fundamentally the record of an interaction between two people. It can bring forth an individual's unique memories and emotional responses to events in addition to collecting historical data. Skeptics have questioned the reliability of oral history testimony, citing the potential for tenuous memory or deliberate distortion of facts. But most historians recognize the necessity to assess all information critically, whether from oral interviews or from diaries, letters, and other traditional sources. Moreover, oral history methodology has a unique advan-

tage over other historical approaches due to its potential for cross-examination. It is the interviewer's responsibility to research the topic thoroughly and be prepared to question information that seems dubious. Additionally, standard procedure for most oral history projects includes not only transcription of the interview but a review and correction of the transcript by the subject. This step reduces the potential for error from memory lapses and misunderstandings. Each interview provides potential as a primary source; a collection of testimonies (from various and sometimes conflicting viewpoints) can demonstrate the richness and complexity of an event or a historical period. The historian Louis Starr, a former director of Columbia's Oral History Research Office, has pointed out, "Our product very definitely is *not* history. It is, we hope, the *raw material* from which some history will one day be written."⁷

We are pleased to write this account of American music using raw material from the OHAM archive—both the transcripts and the actual sounds of the voices. This is a distinctive approach to history, one that aims to preserve the sights and sounds of creative figures as well as the facts of their lives.

Each chapter of *Composers' Voices* consists of a historical and biographical introduction followed by edited interviews. In keeping with this structure, excerpts from an interview with Vivian Perlis are presented below. After thirty years of conducting interviews, Perlis changed roles and was the subject of an interview. She spoke of oral history methodology and her first oral history project, on the leading American composer Charles Ives.⁸



VIVIAN PERLIS

From interview with Libby Van Cleve,
9 July 1998 and 31 March 2004,
New Haven, Connecticut

There was not a grand plan for the Ives oral history project. It just happened that Julian Myrick, Ives's insurance partner, called the Yale Music Library one day and said that he had some materials to donate. Mr. Myrick was about eighty-five, not well, and lived on Park Avenue in New York City. I was a part-time reference librarian, and it fell to me to be the one to visit Mr. Myrick and bring back the Ives materials. I had some sense that I was going to see someone who had been close to Ives, and that it would be a good idea to capture some material in his voice. I had not done interviewing. I did not know that the act that I was about to commit was called "oral history"—or how it was spelled!

Our first interview resembled nothing less than a Bob and Ray comedy routine where I asked questions and Mr. Myrick, who was hard of hearing, would say “yep” or “nope” or “What’s that you’re saying?” My career as an oral historian almost ended before it began—because that interview was a disaster. Nevertheless, I sensed that even though the interview was not smooth, the basic premise of preservation was still a good one. Also, Mr. Myrick invited me back, and his family was very anxious for me to return. They liked the idea that there was somebody who valued his recollections. As an interviewer, I worried about being intrusive, but I soon realized that there was as much value in oral history for the subject as for the researcher.

When Julian Myrick died, the urgency of searching for others who had known Ives became obvious. I didn’t think of it as an oral history project but as an adjunct to the Yale Ives Collection. From the start, I recognized that oral history interviews work best when they are connected with written documentation. Even if the material was already known, the unique way each person expressed himself brought a spontaneity and intimacy that helped to dispel the mystery that surrounded Ives.

Of course, the most important person to interview would have been Ives’s wife, Harmony. Unfortunately, she was in a nursing home and not well, so I did not interview her—it did not seem the fair thing to do. But at the urging of John Kirkpatrick, I searched for the oldest and most fragile Ives survivors and often found myself in hospitals and rest homes waiting for an aged Yale classmate or Ives relative to wake from a nap to tell his story.⁹ Occasionally, an interview was inconsistent with the way a person had been during an entire lifetime. Take Carl Ruggles, for example. He had been a rugged, outspoken character, described as a “craggy eagle.” However, when I saw him, he was ninety-five and really more like a little bird. He was able to make a few pertinent remarks, but generally the interview is not typical of Carl Ruggles in his prime. For that reason, his interview is labeled “restricted” in the oral history collection.

The elderly are mostly remembered as they were last known. An important thing a biographer can do is to try to make an earlier period of time come alive. With the oral history interviews, there were at least a few people who knew Ives not only during his difficult later years. He had been ill for many years and had suffered through physical traumas. To collect material that would depict a different, younger Charles Ives—at the time he wrote his music or during his mature and productive years—was a real challenge. Ives’s

nephews recalled “Uncle Charlie” as a vigorous athlete who played ball and joked with them. Brewster Ives talked about Aunt Harmony reading to the family after dinner every evening. The sound of her voice was so much a part of their lives. When I talked to the housekeeper, Carrie Blackwell, she said she will never forget Mrs. Ives calling her into the parlor to read from the Bible, every Sunday afternoon.

As I targeted Ives survivors and traveled to locations as varied as Aptos, California, to talk with composer Lou Harrison or Brownsville, Texas, where I located Ives’s former secretary, I realized that each interview required a different attitude and each demanded specialized research and preparation. I liked the diversity and enjoyed assuming a different role for each interview.

An exciting aspect of oral history that most people don’t recognize is that important documents are frequently found and acquired as a result of an interview. These can be more valuable than the interview itself. If a librarian or a scholar approaches someone out of the blue and asks for documents, it often doesn’t work. But if you spend time listening to a person’s story, he becomes convinced that you are really interested in him. An example was Goddard Lieberman, president of Columbia Records. He insisted that Ives had given him a music manuscript, and I said, “Oh, no. It must be a photostat.” I bothered Lieberman until he looked for and found the manuscript in a storage closet. It was the long-missing ink score of “St. Gaudens” from *Three Places in New England*, described as lost in Kirkpatrick’s catalog of Ives scores.

There were recordings at the library of Ives playing his own music, but they were in very bad condition and could not be played. This was terribly tantalizing to any Ivesian. They were labeled “Mary Howard Recordings”—so one of the people I looked for over a long period of time was Mary Howard. She had changed her name and retired from her career. After the detective work that is often part of oral history activities, I finally found her. We had a very nice interview about her career as a sound engineer and the wide range of individuals she recorded. Following the interview and lunch came the invitation I hoped for: Mary Howard asked if I would like to see her collection of sound recordings in her attic; she welcomed the suggestion of an inventory, so I returned with a few students. Of course, I hoped we would find the Ives recordings. It doesn’t sound true, but it really is: in the last room, on the bottom of the last shelf, when I had almost given up hope, were the cases with the masters of the only recordings of Ives playing his own music.¹⁰ He sang his

wartime song “They Are There!” in a loud voice and with passion and gusto. It vividly brings to life a sense of who Charles Ives was and what he was like.

There are two basic kinds of oral history projects. In Yale’s Oral History, American Music project, we have concentrated on living composers; we go directly to the source, collecting and preserving the voice and the personality of the creative figure. The other type of project is appropriate when the primary source is not available. This was the case with the Ives Project. The interviews were necessarily with secondary sources. That has a great advantage to it. We all exist as many different people in our lives. You are a student to somebody, a teacher to somebody, maybe somebody’s tennis partner or husband or wife or child; and each of those people views you at a different level. A multilevel biographical approach presents the views of many different people about one person. It seemed to me very appropriate for Charles Ives, since one of the innovations in his music is a kind of multilayering of ideas. This multilevel look at such a paradoxical person as Ives retained the paradoxes but made him seem more human.

As the Ives Project developed and afterward, as I attempted to establish OHAM, I met with more than a little skepticism. The university librarian did not approve of library work that was not literary. Oral history elicited raised eyebrows from other librarians who, aside from anything else, had practical difficulties in dealing with materials that were not the usual format. Musicologists also looked at oral history as being anecdotal compared to the traditional Germanic musicology that has been the basis of the profession throughout the years. There was a certain amount of reticence to accept recent events or experimental music for scholarly projects, not to mention a general neglect of American music. *My* sense was, since we have the means to preserve sound, we can preserve the personality of a composer in a more intimate and spontaneous way than ever before.

OHAM was accepted by the dean of the Yale School of Music with the understanding that it would be responsible for its operation. Fund raising has long been an essential—if not the most enjoyable—part of OHAM’s activities. Over thirty years since its founding, the OHAM archive has become an extensive repository of source materials. Hundreds of composers are represented, from the giants of twentieth-century American music to young composers entering the field today.

Mostly researchers use the written oral history transcripts, which is far from hearing the voice itself. I always felt that the value of this material is in the actual sound of the voices—the transcript is only a reproduction. Sometimes biographers don’t have time to listen, even to a sample, and just want to work through the transcripts—and a red flag goes up. How could someone work on a biography of a composer—with this kind of material available—and not want to hear it?

When the Ives Project was complete, I realized that there was no one doing this kind of work in music, and its importance became clear to me. The fact is I had become hooked on oral history! There was an oral history boom after the tape recorder was invented—and yet music, the art of sound, was slow in the use of this technology to collect and preserve materials. Having started with Ives and being interested in contemporary music, I felt that the most important people to target were the composers. I still feel that way.



[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

ONE

Introducing the Century

1 January 1900



Across the nation, as 1899 drew to a close, the question about the official date of the new century was debated. Was 1900 the turning point, or was it 1901? Newspapers printed readers' views, alongside the latest international news on the Boer War. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* went with the people's choice of 1900 and described the celebration in the nation's capital on New Year's Day: "President McKinley opens social season, notable people attend . . . one of the most brilliant receptions on record." Others held out for 1901. The *New Orleans Picayune* claimed in its issue of 1 January: "This is neither new century nor leap year. The *fin de siècle* New Year was just like other New Year's days in New Orleans." Headlines in the *New York Times* in 1901 read "Twentieth Century's Triumphant Entry; Welcomed by New York with Tumultuous Rejoicing; City Hall gorgeously Decked." The *New York Herald* devoted eight pages to the occasion: "New York, with Prayer and Pomp and Wild Enthusiasm, Welcomes the New Year and the Twentieth Century."

When Aaron Copland, born in 1900, was told that the twentieth century might not have begun until 1901, he said in mock horror, "That I spent my first forty-eight days in the nineteenth century—an alarming thought! The twentieth century is the place to



“Dawn of the Twentieth Century” by Leon Barritt, *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 January 1901

be—where everything was new and *moderne*; there was a sense that anything could happen—nothing was impossible.”¹ Copland’s optimistic attitude reflected the general atmosphere of promise and excitement about the new century. The early years were rich with technological inventions and artistic upheavals of such magnitude that they would change civilization. In musical life, the most far-reaching change came with the invention of the phonograph. To a public who had never experienced music as anything but live performance, recorded sound was an astonishing novelty. It would be some time before its potential was fully realized, but recorded sound would eventually change the fundamental tenets of music making and listening.

The famous Czech composer Antonín Dvořák came to America in 1892 and made a significant impact on composers and audiences. In 1895 he declared that Americans were content to produce poor imitations of European music. Dvořák insisted that America could and should have its own sound by making use of African-American and Native American folk music. Subsequently, several American composers incorporated authentic native materials into their works. For example, Arthur Farwell spearheaded an Indianist movement; and Henry Gilbert and John Alden Carpenter included segments of African-American music in their concert pieces.² No matter how sincere the effort, slave hollers and Native American chants did not fit comfortably into cultivated European forms. Charles Ives found a different way to incorporate a wide range of music from American sources, often using the quoted

material as the very fabric of a piece. Ives's works were so far removed from the acceptable norm that it would be decades before they were heard, and even longer before the world realized that America had a composer with a distinctive national sound.

Classical musicians were expected to study abroad, preferably in Germany. They returned to America, and the best of them eventually headed music programs at the leading universities on the East Coast. George Whitefield Chadwick, Horatio Parker, John Knowles Paine, and Edward MacDowell were considered America's great composers. Most of them, along with Amy Marcy Cheney Beach and Arthur Foote, came to be known as the Second New England School. Each displayed individual characteristics, but all wrote in the forms and styles of the Old World.

At the turn of the century, concert programs were dominated by Brahms and Wagner. A few composers had heard of Debussy and Ravel, the modernists of the times. The German influence on nineteenth-century American music was so pervasive that many cities and towns had German music teachers and bandleaders. Brass bands were very popular, and band concerts in the parks were free and therefore more in demand than symphony concerts and operas, which typically cost twenty-five cents a ticket. Band programs were lighter and more varied, with many "numbers"—some of pure entertainment, such as a magician, yodeler, or perhaps a child prodigy—presented between movements of a symphonic piece. Transcriptions of popular opera arias were often included. Almost all professional performing groups were white (except for an occasional vaudeville group) and predominantly male, but by the late nineteenth century women began to enter the field. Violin and flute were added to piano and harp as acceptable instruments, and by 1900 women had formed a few orchestras, among them the Women's String Orchestra of New York and the Women's Orchestra of Los Angeles.³

If judged by European artistic standards, the West Coast in 1900 was primitive. When Charles Seeger went to California to teach in 1906, he described concert activities in the Bay Area as almost nonexistent. San Francisco, considered a dangerous place to visit, had fifteen thousand Chinese immigrants who celebrated their own New Year with the music they brought with them to America, the land they optimistically called Gold Mountain. Young composers in the West such as Henry Cowell, John Cage, and Lou Harrison came to consider Asian instruments, funeral bands, and Chinese opera as natural elements in their musical lives.

While the cities were teeming with immigrants, the far West and frontier developed their own individual characteristics. Diaries of touring musicians, such as the celebrated band of Patrick Gilmore, describe opera houses and concerts in small mining towns. One young female singer wrote home to her family in Connecticut, "All men wear those large felt hats—even inside!"⁴ Between the two coasts was the vast Mid- and Southwest, much of it rural farmland, still without running water and electricity. While the arrival of the new century was cause for hope, it was

tempered by natural disasters, such as tornadoes, earthquakes, and influenza. Cities such as Chicago and Kansas City, however, were experiencing dynamic growth and affluence. Each locale had its own musicians and unique musical imprint.

From the turn of the century to about 1920, a ragtime craze gripped the country. It was ragtime that knew no regional boundaries. East, North, South, and West played, sang, hummed, and danced to ragtime tunes. Ministers, educators, and parents sermonized and wrote against it—no wonder it was so much in demand! Ragtime, which sneaked in from the underground, played by African-American piano players in lowdown bars and brothels, bypassed the establishment, caught fire with the public, and became a raging success. Even the famous bandleader John Philip Sousa saw its potential and arranged rags for his celebrated ensemble. The combination was irresistible, but it was understood that certain boundaries were to be maintained. The establishment, led by the composer-professors, did not mix with rebellious innovators; neither considered themselves related to ragtime entertainers.

Edward MacDowell (1860–1908) was the most celebrated American composer in the classical tradition. His “To a Wild Rose” was in every young woman’s repertory, to be played when friends and family gathered around the piano for an evening’s entertainment. The eminent critic Lawrence Gilman called MacDowell’s piano sonatas the greatest since Beethoven. When MacDowell was appointed professor of music, Columbia University proclaimed him “the greatest American genius the world has produced.” At the same time, the quirky and original Charles Ives was working in isolation, almost totally unknown.

As dawn came up on the first day of 1900, it was bitter cold in New York City, where both MacDowell and Ives lived. Snow was falling in front of the building on 349 Central Park West, at 96th Street, where Edward and Marian MacDowell resided. Children were selling the first newspapers of the year for ten cents on the street corners. The city had barely slept following the long night of New Year’s Eve celebrations. Across the nation, ragtime pianists had played long into the night, so people could dance to the catchy rhythms of popular rags like “My Ragtime Baby” and “Maple Leaf Rag.”

The MacDowells had listened to the chimes of Trinity, Grace, and St. Andrew’s just before midnight to welcome in the New Year. At breakfast, they noticed the different look of the *New York Times*: photographs rather than drawings were used for the first time. The *Times* reported: “Belief generally expressed that the country is entering a new period of prosperity”; the 100th anniversary of the death of George Washington was announced; and the music page carried a favorable review of *Roméo et Juliéte* at the Metropolitan Opera House. Most attention was given to the New Year’s Day reception at the White House held by President McKinley. Thousands arrived from near and far by horse and carriage, trolley, or train to join in celebrating the new century.

On New Year's Day, Professor MacDowell did not go to his Columbia University office in Morningside Heights, as was his habit on Monday mornings. His academic schedule left little time for composing, except during summer months. He had created the music program at Columbia and was pleased with the positive results and reactions. In the fall of 1899 MacDowell had initiated a course in composition, which added to his full workload. During this year, he had written little music, only some choruses for Columbia, and possibly some revisions of music composed while in Germany in the 1880s. He hoped to spend his winter break working on his own music and preparing a lecture, "Suggestion in Music," to be delivered at Yale University in March.

MacDowell had turned forty a few weeks before the turn of the year. He was robust and energetic, pleased with his university career and with the popularity of his music. Was there a pianist alive who did not attempt his *Woodland Sketches*? In contrast to an active concert season of the previous year, MacDowell played no engagements in the 1899–1900 season. He looked forward, however, to a performance of his Concerto in D minor by the noted pianist Teresa Carreño in Leipzig at the end of January, and to the publication of a piano sonata. Lawrence Gilman had begun a biography of MacDowell, which was published in 1906, when the composer was only forty-five.⁵

With Edward MacDowell's success and Marian MacDowell's recovery from a recent illness, New Year's Day 1900 was a happy time. They were a handsome couple, much in demand by society in Manhattan, respected by the academic community, and admired by the international music world. But within a short time, Edward MacDowell's fortunes changed dramatically. In another year, a bitter struggle with a new university president darkened his life; and in only a few more years, serious illness made MacDowell's life miserable before he died at forty-seven.

The MacDowells had bought a farm in Peterborough, New Hampshire, in 1896, and in the summer of 1899 a hideaway cabin in the woods was completed, where MacDowell could compose in privacy. Gradually, the couple bought more land adjacent to the original farm. On this property, after her husband's death, Marian MacDowell founded the MacDowell Colony, the oldest and best-known artist colony in the United States. As a pianist, Marian MacDowell helped support the colony by performing her husband's music. Her devotion and determination helped make the MacDowell Colony the most admired retreat for artists in America. Despite Edward MacDowell's early fame, he is known today more for the colony bearing his name than for his music.

A couple of miles south of the MacDowells, in a more modest building at 317 West 58th Street, lived a young man of twenty-six, who woke early on the first day of 1900. His name was Charles Edward Ives, and the apartment he lived in was called "Poverty Flat" by the Yale graduates who adopted it as a temporary home while they began new lives and careers in New York City. Ives's roommates were

ambitious and unpredictable. They came and went as their lives and fortunes changed. Poverty Flat was an exciting, noisy place in a time when New York was booming. New Year's Day was quieter than most, since Ives's roommates were away, visiting their families for the holidays. He could use the piano he had installed in the living room without the usual shouts of protest about the "resident disturbances."

Every weekday, Ives left for the insurance offices of Charles H. Raymond & Co., 32 Liberty Street. On New Year's morning, he also had an early start—to fulfill his obligations as organist at the First Presbyterian Church in Bloomfield, New Jersey, where the Reverend J. B. Lee welcomed the new century with a sermon. Ives led the choir in traditional psalms, trying to avoid playing anything too controversial. (He remembered how the congregation had disliked his polytonal rendition of "Adeste Fideles" a year earlier.) After church, Ives may have dashed home among the New Year's Day revelers to work on sketches for his Second Symphony—perhaps the second movement, in which he wove together old tunes such as "Bringing in the Sheaves" and "Where O Where Are the Verdant Freshmen"; or he might have spent New Year's day putting the finishing touches on *The Celestial Country*, a conservative cantata he hoped would win him acceptance in the proper music world. The lukewarm reception given the piece was an important milestone for Ives, for it convinced him once and for all to keep his music private while he made a living in the business world.⁶ He wrote, "As I look back, I seemed to have worked with more natural freedom when I knew the music was not going to be inflicted on others."⁷

By 1900 Ives had composed songs, marches, organ and choral music and his First Symphony, a requirement for his graduation from Yale. The Ives scholar Peter Burkholder placed the composer at the end of the nineteenth century as ready to create his most important works. "When he decided to break his ties with music as a paying profession and make his fortune in insurance, the music he wrote began to take a radically different turn."⁸

No one knew what Ives was up to. He was several years away from courting his future wife, Harmony, and his father, the central figure in his world, had died six years earlier. He had made a friend—Julian "Mike" Myrick—at the Raymond Insurance Agency in 1899, but his new friend did not know much about music. Nor did his roommates at Poverty Flat. After all, Ives's music resembled none other; its derivation was a mystery. He exclaimed in frustration about the sounds in his head, "Are my ears on wrong?" Ives seemed driven by some inner force to compose music so unusual that it was not understood until many years later.⁹

Ives had little in common with MacDowell, yet some connections can be found: each revised and rewrote his scores constantly; each married a strong, sympathetic woman who understood her husband's talents; and each composer borrowed from American folk material.¹⁰ Professor MacDowell, perhaps spurred on by Dvořák's influential presence in New York for more than three years, resolved to be "an American composer." He participated in discussions about the future of American music

and composed several pieces incorporating Native American materials, among them his *Indian Suite* (1896), in an effort to sound American.¹¹ But MacDowell represented the old guard, the European-influenced musician, the establishment that was beginning to change. The concept of innovation was not central to MacDowell's music, although he did think of himself as a modernist. To him *modern* implied allegiance to Liszt and Wagner as opposed to Schumann and Brahms. In contrast, Ives was by nature an experimenter, curious about new sounds and musical expression. Edward MacDowell's popularity, so high at the turn of the century, proved fleeting, while slowly and inevitably, recognition of Ives's genius surfaced and grew.¹²

From the 1890s through the first half of the new century, the search for an American sound took many directions. Even the Europeanized establishment yearned for a genuine home-grown product. Another celebrated American composer, George Whitefield Chadwick, wrote his wishes for the new century in the Chadwicks' family memoir book at the close of 1899:

A few things to wish for in 20th Cent

- I. A great composer born on American soil
- II. A symphony orchestra of Americans with a born American conductor
- III. A fully endowed school for orchestra, opera & composition
- IV. That all hurdy gurdys should be burned and the players hung¹³

Charles Ives (1874 – 1954)

When Ives was growing up in Danbury, Connecticut, he was considered musically talented, but the townspeople would have been stunned to know that “Charlie” would grow up to become one of the great composers of the coming century. He was simply his father’s son, following in Dad’s footsteps. If he was known for anything special, it was for his baseball playing. He was shy, perhaps ashamed, about his music. According to the Ives expert John Kirkpatrick, when Ives was asked what he played, he responded: “shortstop.” Danbury, then a small town noted for manufacturing men’s hats, enjoyed an active musical life, and George Ives, as the town bandmaster, was considered the best all-around musician in the area. Charlie’s natural talent, perhaps inherited from his father, was nurtured by George as soon as his boy showed an interest in music. Charlie would not have been encouraged by others; music was entertainment, not a serious occupation, and as he could see for himself, his father’s choice of profession was not admired by the family or the town. The male members of the respectable Ives family were meant to be lawyers or businessmen—music was a nice hobby for women and girls.

George Ives was not an ordinary musician. He had a vivid imagination and was interested in sounds and how they changed in reaction to various conditions. He experimented with space: a horn over water or from a church tower, a fire truck’s bells, and bands playing different tunes as they marched toward each other from opposite directions. He built his own instruments that made sounds different from the norm, like an ironing board on which he stretched twenty-four strings to make a violin that could produce quarter tones. He brought his family into his experiments, teaching them to “stretch their ears”: he would have them sing “Swanee River” in one key while he played it in another. As the major influence on his gifted son, George Ives made sure his boy had a solid music education, but he left the door open to the many places music could go beyond the traditional pathways. Ives absorbed everything his father taught him, and either took part in or witnessed his father’s diverse activities in the music world of Danbury—band, church, gospel, ragtime, and theater. Ives also absorbed his father’s natural leaning toward Transcendentalism. For example, George Ives responded to complaints about a local workman singing terribly off-key: “Look into his face and hear the music of the ages. Don’t pay too much attention to the sounds—if you do, you may miss the music. You won’t get a wild, heroic ride to heaven on pretty little sounds.”¹⁴ Transcendental philosophy, particularly from his father and the writings of Emerson, was to be central to Ives’s thinking throughout his life.¹⁵

When Charlie was fourteen, the local paper cited him as the youngest organist in the state. By the time Ives went to Yale (class of 1898), he had years of performing experience, and as a composer he had already written a fair number of marches and other short pieces. Notable among them was *Variations on “America”*

for organ, which included several bitonal interludes, composed when Ives was only seventeen. With the death of his father during his freshman year at Yale, Ives lost his strongest support system. No wonder his studies with the celebrated Horatio Parker fell short of success! It has been said that Ives was writing his father's music, which had little resemblance to Parker's conservative approach.¹⁶ Ives soon learned to keep his more adventurous compositions away from the classroom. To graduate from Yale, Ives composed his First Symphony in compliance with Parker's rules and suggestions. Then off he went to New York City to find his way in the world of commerce. Ives made the decision that he would avoid the humiliation endured by his father. He applied his intelligence and imagination to the insurance business, composing music at night and on weekends. Ives always insisted that his work in business helped his music, and his music helped his business.

Within a brief period, Ives composed an extraordinary amount of music, much of it anticipating developments to come later in the century. His innovations include multilayering of unrelated musical ideas; use of unusual instruments; quotation of a wide range of musical material; and experimentation with polyrhythm, polytonality, microtonality, and spatial music. Considering that he held a demanding full-time position as partner in the insurance offices of Ives & Myrick, the scope and size of his output is impressive. His catalogue includes large orchestral works, chamber orchestra pieces, keyboard works culminating in the two large-scale sonatas, and close to two hundred songs (including arrangements and early songs). The songs alone are a huge achievement and have been described as the greatest collection of art songs by an American composer. Ives did not abandon tonality or established forms. Many of his songs are traditional, harking back to the sentimental ballads of post-Civil War America. He used whatever he could find that would best serve to conjure the image of an idea, place, or person in music.

In 1908 Ives married Harmony Twichell, daughter of the Reverend Joseph Twichell; she was considered a great catch and referred to as "the prettiest girl in Hartford." The young couple lived in New York City; in 1912 they built a country place in West Redding, Connecticut. Three years later they adopted a daughter, Edith. Outwardly, Ives was a successful family and businessman; inwardly, he was a frustrated composer with big ideas and important things to say—but without an audience to hear them.

Between 1902, when Ives gave up playing church organ, and 1925, when his *Three Quarter-tone Pieces* were performed by the pianist E. Robert Schmitz, there were virtually no public performances of Ives's music.¹⁷ In 1927 Schmitz persuaded Eugene Goossens to conduct two movements of the Fourth Symphony, one of Ives's most challenging pieces. (Later, when asked about this unusual event, Goossens shrugged it off, saying he had no idea what happened after the downbeat.)

By 1920 Ives was disabled by illnesses that had plagued him since about 1908. He could no longer compose. What energy he had was directed toward re-

vising scores and privately publishing and distributing his Second Piano Sonata (*Concord, Massachusetts, 1840–60*) and *114 Songs*. Aaron Copland wrote, “How, I wondered, does a man of such gifts manage to go on creating in a vacuum, with no audience at all. . . . To write all that music and not hear it one would have to have the courage of a lion.”¹⁸ Ives had the courage, but neglect and criticism took its toll. If Ives became eccentric in his later years, he had good reason. He suffered from various physical conditions, diabetes among them. He also showed signs that are symptomatic of underlying depression.¹⁹ The musicologist Gayle Sherwood points out that Ives was not alone in his bouts of what was then called neurasthenia. In pre-Freudian America, it was common for hardworking, successful businessmen to suffer “nervous breakdowns” and require periodic rest cures at outdoor spas or resorts.²⁰

Performances were few and far between, and recognition came slowly, at first from younger composers and a few supporters of new music. Ives became part of the movement for modern music after World War I, taking a dual role: as patron, he financed many new music efforts; as composer, he wrote music that was performed mostly by the groups he supported. Ives had the admiration of several unconventional figures, among them Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, John Kirkpatrick, Carl Ruggles, and Nicolas Slonimsky. Through the valiant efforts of these and a few other younger composers and performers, the public finally began to pay attention to Charles Ives. John Kirkpatrick’s performance of the *Concord* Sonata in 1939 was a landmark in Ives’s career; Lou Harrison’s conducting the Third Symphony in 1946 (and winning a Pulitzer Prize for Ives) was another. Leopold Stokowski’s attention to the Fourth Symphony and Leonard Bernstein’s to the Second were highlights that shone all the brighter in the dim atmosphere surrounding public acceptance of Ives and innovative music in general.

Ives wrote about many aspects of music and business, but he did not discuss money and how it affected both giver and receiver. Several questions remain unanswered: Were Ives’s works performed because he could pay for them? Was there resentment among full-time composers about Ives’s financial success? How much did loyalty to Ives depend on his generosity toward new music enterprises? Certainly, composers such as Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison admired Ives’s music regardless of his bank account. Others, impressed with his Victorian way of life, considered Ives’s composing a rich man’s hobby.

By the time of his death in 1954, Ives was gradually gaining recognition as a composer, but to most of the public he remained an obscure figure. He had spent the last years of his life in seclusion; many who had known him were growing old and fragile. It seemed that much information about this seminal American composer would be lost. About fifteen years later the oral history project on Ives was initiated; it served to illuminate and preserve many details of Ives’s life and career.²¹

Thirty years after completion of the Ives oral history project, Charles Ives is still an enigma. Performances and recordings have become more common, increasing public awareness of Ives’s work, but his music still cannot be considered main-

stream. The experimental pieces sound “modern” to audiences, who continue to be perplexed. *The Unanswered Question* and *Three Places in New England* are programmed frequently, but they do not reach as broad a public as does, for example, Copland’s *Fanfare for the Common Man* or Bernstein’s *West Side Story*. Ives remains an acquired taste, and as with such tastes, those who have it are passionate about it, while those who do not are in the majority.

Whatever his image with the general public, Ives’s status as a major figure in the history of American music is assured. He is universally recognized as a central figure bridging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the earliest publications on Ives, his life and works have been examined, dissected, discussed, and published more than those of any other concert composer in American music history. What has changed most in Ives studies is the desire to understand more about the man and his music, not only his experimentation, but the totality of his work, including traditional nineteenth century–style music, which demonstrate Ives’s melodic gifts and his mastery of the craft of composing. This side of Ives is no longer discarded as old-fashioned or, as Ives put it, “backsliding.” The earliest Ives supporters, composers such as Cowell and Harrison, were intent on promoting the cause of new music, and they naturally emphasized Ives the innovator. Recent views have focused on Ives’s nineteenth-century roots, with Burkholder leading the way.

The emphasis on popular culture in current aesthetics may only be indirectly connected to Ives’s concert music, yet the openness and inclusiveness in the arts today are more in line with his ideologies than when abstraction was the rule. While Ives’s musical career has benefited from the tenor of the times, his personal reputation has suffered from changes in attitude. In the past, Ives’s colorful language was considered an attractive characteristic of his irreverent personality; more recently, his language has been criticized by younger scholars on the lookout for outmoded attitudes about sex and gender. Ives has been criticized for such phrases as “emasculating America” and his reference to the “ladies, male and female,” who run the music business. Most younger composers, when questioned about Ives’s impact on their work, cite his freedom and the courage to stand by original ideas in the face of criticism and indifference. Some have been more directly influenced, among them John Adams, Henry Brant, Michael Daugherty, and Ingram Marshall.

Between 1969 and 1971 interviews were conducted with sixty people who had known Charles Ives. Relatives, friends, insurance associates, and musicians sensed something special about Ives; in turn, he was drawn to people who appealed to his quirky humor and paradoxical nature. These recorded memoirs were the beginning of the OHAM archive. Many of the interviews were published in 1974 as *Charles Ives Remembered*, recognized as the first documentary oral history on an American composer. A sampling from the wide range of interviews in the Ives Project is presented here. They follow a loosely chronological order, beginning with the few who knew the Ives family and could recall “Charlie” as a boy and during his early years.

Youth and Early Years

Philip Sunderland • Amelia Van Wyck • Bigelow Ives

Philip Sunderland (1871–1972) was interviewed at age ninety-eight. He not only knew Charles Ives but vividly recalled Ives's father, George, and his mother, Mary Elizabeth "Mollie" Parmelee Ives. Ives's mother is rarely mentioned elsewhere, even by the composer in his own writings.



PHILIP SUNDERLAND

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 29 November 1968,
Danbury, Connecticut

His father, George Ives, was the bandleader. He wasn't taken very seriously—he was just the bandleader. He was without reproach, but I don't think that he took a very prominent part. He used to march up by here. They'd be going one way with the band, and another band going the other way round the park here, and the two would clash, and that interested Charles very much. People thought the sounds were discordant. I don't think anybody thought it was very interesting to see the two bands blending and playing different tunes. I don't think that George Ives planned it deliberately, but it so happened that when they went around the park like this and the Main Street Park, they clashed with the other bands.

I don't know whether he made money with the band or not. He was the organizer of it, and he led the band with his cornet on the march. He led the whole kaboodle. I don't remember how large a band it was, but they had all the various instruments—a full-fledged band. I think they had appointments outside of Danbury as well.

George was a genial person. A kind of original creature. I used to see him in the bank when he worked there, and I used to see him in an office where he worked for Mr. Merritt. I don't think George Ives had any income to speak of.

As a contemporary, I knew Charles Ives, boy and man. I knew Charlie when he was quite young. Not very intimately at all. He was the most modest, retiring person you could imagine. And I feel as though I have missed a great deal in not knowing the real Charles Ives. I had some thoughts of my own we might have exchanged. I was very much interested in Thoreau, always, myself. I never had that privilege of talking with him except about the things at hand.

You know, he first appeared in a public capacity as organist of the Bap-

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Charles Ives, Battery Park, Brooklyn, New York, ca. 1913

tist Church. I marveled at that very much. Then he disappeared from my acquaintance. The way I became acquainted with him again, finally, was when the mother lived in the house we were moving, in order to build the Danbury National Bank, of which I was the architect. It was 1924. Charles came to see me and tell me he hoped I'd look after her. And incidentally, he gave me a check for \$2,500 to pay the bills. I didn't think of such a thing as suggesting any payment—he just did this on his own. We never used it all up. Mother

Ives stayed in the house while it was being moved, at great inconvenience. We did the best we could for her. After it was landed and on its foundation and reestablished, she had changes made in the house. The bank had me look after that.

Ives came before we moved the house, while we were moving it, and while we were altering it. He came to see his mother. He seemed to be very careful of her, and wanted everybody to realize that she was to be treated well. Mrs. Ives was a simple lady—not a very prominent person. In her youth, she lived on Spring Street. She was a Parmelee. I knew her brother, Paul Parmelee, better than I knew her.

I never saw Charles after he let that beard grow. He was smooth-faced—he had kind of a baby face. He wasn't striking looking. He didn't look like either father or mother—not the slightest. I've got a picture of George Ives in my mind's eye and a picture of him and they're no relation whatever. I can't think of Moss Ives as being his brother, either.²² Isn't that strange? Moss stayed here all his life, of course, and Charles disappeared.

Charles Ives didn't come to Danbury very much. If he did, he came just to see his mother, and he didn't mingle with the people. He was very shy. As a boy he was an introvert if ever one lived. I can't imagine him being a businessman, yet he was a very successful one and a very well-liked one. I never realized that he had the resources that he seems to have had. When he walked up to me and gave me \$2,500 offhand as though that was just chicken-feed! He was generous and a very kind person. Not self-assertive in the slightest degree.

Amelia Van Wyck, thirteen years younger than Charlie, was an artist, and as such felt a bond with her musical older cousin. She was the unofficial historian of the Ives family.



AMELIA VAN WYCK

From OHAM interviews with Vivian Perlis, 7 November and 21 November 1968,
Norwalk, Connecticut

The Ives family all hoped that the house would stay in the family forever after. It meant a great deal to them. The flower garden was between the house and the barn. There were double Russian violets and loads of lily

of the valley and all around the border of the house little star-of-Bethlehem flowers, and syringas over the side porch. The house always smelled of bees-wax and fruit, and sometimes of the white Madonna lilies they used to have loads of. Charlie and Moss were born in the house. When Moss was coming, Mollie didn't want too much confusion, so George had to go up to the barn to practice the violin. Charlie, who was under two, was sent along; he sat happily in Uncle Joe's buggy playing with the whip while his father practiced. So Charlie's introduction to music began at an early age.

Ives had one younger brother, Joseph Moss Ives (called Moss), who became a lawyer in Danbury. Harmony and Charles Ives were close to their five nephews and niece. Four nephews were interviewed for the Ives Project: Brewster, Chester, Bigelow, and Richard. They recall "Uncle Charlie" as an athletic young adult who enjoyed playing ball and making jokes, as well as sharing his unusual music with them.



BIGELOW IVES

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 12 March 1969,
Danbury, Connecticut

We children always thought it was a very high privilege and exciting thing to be invited into New York to visit with Uncle Charlie and Aunt Harmony, and my earliest recollection of them in New York was when they lived on 22nd Street. That must have been about 1914, and I can recall at that time artists, musicians, and dancers coming to the house to visit. I was about six or seven.

We didn't see much of Uncle Charlie in Danbury because he was reluctant to come back to his boyhood town and kept himself pretty much in the circle between New York and West Redding. We used to see a great deal of them when they were in Redding in the summertime, and that was always a lot of fun. We would pitch a tent down by the pond, stay there for several weeks at a time, and Uncle Charlie would always take time out from his composing in the music room to come out and play ball with us. He'd insist upon it—at least once a day. I thought he was a little unfair, 'cause I was still a little fellow and he'd throw the ball really hard at me. I was rather frightened to be faced with playing catch with the real ballplayer I thought he was. He'd put

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Charles Ives's studio at his home, West Redding, Connecticut

on his old baseball cap when he did this, too—Yale '98. He was very fond of walking in the woods there at Redding, and we would always walk, usually toward evening, and he'd sometimes have picnic suppers out in the deepest part of the woods. He had a picnic table out there. He thoroughly enjoyed that and so did all of his young visitors.

I never had any compunctions about violating the privacy of the music studio. In fact, he never called it that—too fancy a term. It was just a room where the piano was. He would draw you into it when you came into the room. He would say, "Now what do you think of this?" and he would drop whatever he was working on at the moment and divert into a style of composition that he thought would interest a youngster. He'd break into a country jig or a march or one of the ragtime pieces, and he'd do it with such spirit that it was really thrilling. Uncle Charlie was a marvelous pianist. He would occasionally play on the big grand piano out in the living room at Umpawaug Hill, but more often he preferred the one in the studio—the little upright.

He offered music lessons to each one of us in turn—five boys and one girl. But we didn't seem to have the aptitude for it. Sister Sarane was musical, and she did pursue it with Uncle Charlie's help and studied with [Robert]

Casadesus and E. Robert Schmitz. She became proficient enough to play in public. She studied at Fontainebleau one summer. Uncle Charlie encouraged me to play the cornet, and I remember his saying once, "If you learn to play the cornet, I'll even allow you to play this cornet over here on the wall." That was his own father's cornet. It was always with a great amount of respect that he talked to the boys about his own father, and there was never any frivolity in his tone when he was talking about Grandfather Ives.

I recall with particular amusement now when I look back upon it, the times when Uncle Charlie would attempt, and I use that word advisedly, to drive the old Model T car. He was really one of the world's wildest drivers! On one occasion he tried to go up to Bethel with the car. That was quite an extensive drive—six miles or more and farther than he usually went. I remember going through a very narrow, twisting tunnel under the railroad tracks. It was a fairly dangerous spot, and he said that he'd always wanted to blow the horn really loud there. He said, "I was killed here once, and that was enough for me." Which was his pretty corny sense of humor.

During the First World War, he was agitated about the peace movement and wrote this song "We Are There" [*sic*]. He was still toying around with its final form, and he tried to get me to sing it. If I didn't sing with enough spirit or gusto, he would land both fists on the piano. "You've got to put more life into it," he'd say. And there was one little passage which called for a real shout, but I shouted very timidly and he nearly hit the roof! "Can't you shout better than that? That's the trouble with this country. People are afraid to shout!"

His thinking was way ahead of its time in a great many ways. His opposition to the freedom of the air was way in advance. Why should airplanes interfere with the peace and solitude of Umpawaug Hill? He really would shake his fists at them. It was always amusing to us, but he really meant it. He had a fiery temper at times, a very quick one. But a great sense of play. He was more a playmate than a staid old uncle.

When they moved up to 74th Street, there was a short period in the early thirties when I lived with the family, and that was a most enviable experience. That was about a year, maybe two. I recall with pleasure the evenings spent reading aloud. That was a family habit. He did none of the reading because his eyesight wasn't good enough for that. But Mrs. Ives and I would read for sometimes two hours at a stretch from the old classics—Trollope and Dickens.

I believe that he stopped writing just as Aunt Harmony reports it to have been—that he just went to her one day with tears in his eyes and said he simply couldn’t—didn’t have it in him any longer to do any more. He was just used up.

He got quite emotional whenever he came into Danbury. I remember very late in his life, after my own father had died, he did come up to the old house where he had spent so much time as a boy. And he spent the night there and wandered through the old house and spoke very feelingly about the north parlor, and recalled how changed it all was. I did go out walking with him late in the evening, and we went up as far as the Civil War monument. He literally moaned out loud when he got up there and saw how it had all changed. There were no longer any elms, and there were strange new buildings. He said, “I’m going back. You can’t recall the past.” And he turned around and went back to the old house and said he was sorry he went out at all. From that I had an inkling of how deep his love was for a bygone way of life that he apparently had nurtured ever since having left Danbury as a boy. And, of course, the old Danbury’s very much in his music.

We all knew that music was very serious with Uncle Charlie. It seemed as though most of his time away from his insurance office was spent composing or at the piano. If he wasn’t composing, he was rearranging and re-composing. None of us having been formally trained in music, we felt that it was really quite difficult and strange, and we wondered why Uncle Charlie insisted on composing this hard-to-listen-to music. We used to confront him with that. Father particularly. But having heard it over a period of years, you become exposed to the point where you begin to appreciate it. So that now it’s wonderful, exciting music for me to listen to. Then it was always through the medium of Uncle Charlie’s piano, so now it’s quite a discovery to suddenly be presented with a recording done by the New York Philharmonic playing a full symphony.

The Middle Years

Julian Southall Myrick • Charles Buesing • Carl Ruggles
John Kirkpatrick • Bernard Herrmann • Henry Cowell
Lou Harrison • Nicolas Slonimsky • Elliott Carter

Julian Myrick (1880–1969) was Ives’s partner in the successful insurance agency Ives & Myrick of Mutual of New York. “Mike” was also a close friend. He knew little about music, but recognized Ives’s genius and was one of the few to take Ives’s innovative works seriously.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

The only known photograph of Charles Ives with Julian Myrick, his friend and insurance partner, New York City, ca. 1947

JULIAN SOUTHALL MYRICK

From OHAM interviews with Vivian Perlis,
14 October, 4 November, and 11 December 1968,
New York City

We were pretty successful from the start. We were blazing a new field, estate planning. Our agency was the first to have a school for insurance agents. Charlie was responsible for the material that went to make up the classes. He used a formula for the amount of insurance to carry and how to carry it. It was so successful, nearly everyone in the business used it eventually. In spite of his shy and gentle nature, Charlie was a very firm, positive man. He had a great conception of the insurance business and what it could and should do, and he had a very powerful way of expressing it.

He was writing music at the time when I first knew him. He worked very hard at it, but people couldn't understand it. Charlie's music never inter-

ferred with his business. Once when we were moving from one place to another, we had a little safe. He'd cleaned out his part, and I went to clean out my part, and there was a stack of music. I said, "Charlie, you want me to throw this away?" And he looked and said, "God, that's the best thing I've written!" And it was the *Fourth of July*, about to be thrown away.

Charles Buesing, one of the younger men at Ives & Myrick, was impressed with the idealism shown in Ives's teaching and writings about the insurance business and how it could improve people's lives.



CHARLES BUESING

From OHAM interview with Martha Maas, September 1969, New York City

From the very beginning I could notice the marked difference between Mr. Myrick and Mr. Ives. Mr. Ives was a very shy, retiring man. His office was way around the corner, completely out of sight from everyone. Mr. Myrick, on the other hand, was in a glass-enclosed office where he could see and be seen by everyone. I believe that much of the success of the agency was due to Mr. Ives, not only his genius, his planning, his aid to the salesmen, his teaching, but also the kind, gentle soul that he was. I never saw him angry. I never heard him speak harshly to anyone. He was a very kindly person, and people responded to him.

We had very old-fashioned rolltop desks with brass spittoons next to each desk, and I remember the first time I walked into his office. His swivel chair was way back, and his feet were up on the bottom drawer of his desk. His desk was a mix-up of insurance papers and musical compositions. His eyes were closed, and I thought, "Well, I've caught the boss asleep." So I tiptoed in the office, put the paper down on his desk, and never made a sound. As I turned to go, he said, "Charles, when you see me with my eyes closed, I am not asleep." I turned around, and he was in exactly the same position with his eyes closed. He said, "Come in and sit down, young man." Never opened his eyes. And then he asked me about my family, my work, and my future plans. He encouraged me to stay in the business, to go out and do a better job than I was doing as a clerk, and to spread the benefits of life insurance to more people.

We worked half days on Saturdays. We would rarely see Mr. Myrick, but Mr. Ives would be there many Saturdays. One man came by me one Saturday afternoon, and he had tears in his eyes. As Mr. Ives went out the door, he said, "There is a great man." And he told me this story. He had the experience for the past few months of not making any sales. Since we were wholly on a commission basis, if you didn't sell, you didn't eat. Charles Ives walked up to this man's desk and he thought he looked rather dejected. So he said, "Do me a personal favor. Will you take out your wallet? Now," he said, "you open it." Then he said, "will you point it toward me?" The wallet was empty. Charles Ives said, "I thought so. No one can ever make a sale of anything with an empty wallet. Now, I want you to take this as a business loan, and I know you'll have so much confidence with what I am going to put in that wallet that you will pay me back and I don't want any IOU or anything else." And he put fifty dollars in there. It was after the crash, and this man had fifty dollars in his pocket. He hadn't seen that much income in the past couple of months. And it just made such a difference with him. He was a new man. He never had another problem. This is the kind of a man that Ives was. The times were so desperate—those bleak and terrible times—millions unemployed, everybody afraid of losing his job, and Charles Ives did this kindly thing.

He was a great man, and he had the ability to make everyone with whom he was associated feel like a king. He made everyone feel important, and he would talk with anyone. I can remember meeting other executives of our company on the street. If we had not been formally introduced, they would just turn away. I was not at their economic or social level. Remember, this was in the days when men came to work in limousines with high hats and striped pants.

The composer Carl Ruggles (1876–1971) was Ives's close friend, although they had widely divergent approaches to composition and very different personalities.



CARL RUGGLES

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 28 February 1969, Arlington, Vermont

I knew Ives before John Kirkpatrick ever saw him. I think soon after [I wrote] *Men and Mountains* I met Ives. Ives heard it and he was crazy about it. We were going to have a concert together, Stokowski conducting. That

would have been something, wouldn't it? But it didn't happen. Stokie did the [Ives] Fourth Symphony. He's done all my music.

Then Ives was so sick, you know, he never ate anything. I was there when he threw the *Browning Overture*. He didn't like it. "To Hell with the goddamn thing!" he said. (He'd swear something terrible—he could even beat me swearing—that's right!) He said, "The goddamn thing is no good." And he took it and threw it clear across the dining room to the floor. I got up, went over to get that score back, see? I said, "What I hear—such phrases, such magnificent music as that. I wouldn't talk that way about my music—I wouldn't ever!" He said, "Do you think that?" I said, "Certainly do." That was the episode.

There's a man, a little wonderful man that had a great deal to do with his music. That's Mr. Henry Cowell. You're talking about somebody when you talk about him. Cowell had a great deal to do with Ives's Fourth Symphony. Henry Cowell had genius, Ives knew it, and Ives liked him tremendously. I made the cover for one of Ives's works. You know that one? That's Cowell again.²³

If he never wrote but one song he would have been a great composer. That's "General Booth Goes to Heaven" [*sic*]. Now, I don't think anybody's ever said that before, have they? It's a song of genius, that's all. [laughter] No one had a voice that could sing it. This is no song for *anybody* to sing. The beautiful symphonic work called "The Housatonic" . . . that's a very fine orchestral work. Don't you think it's fine?

Ives was not a very pleasant person to meet—very much overwrought. We were very special friends with the Iveses. At Christmastime he came out from the dining room with a check. He said, "Here's something for Christmas,

Interviewing Ruggles

"Slonimsky," I said to the elderly Carl Ruggles, hoping for a reaction and perhaps some reminiscences of the occasions they worked together. "Who?" Ruggles said. "Slonimsky!" I responded louder (Ruggles was hard of hearing). "Who?" he repeated. I yelled, "Slonimsky!" No response. Ruggles had fallen asleep.

After a short nap, he woke and muttered, "Not a very damn good conductor!" "Who?" I yelled. "Why, Slonimsky. Weren't we talking about Slonimsky?" Ruggles shouted.

—Vivian Perlis

you and Charlotte, and I don't want to hear a goddamn word out of you either about it!" That's just a little specimen of him. Of course, he was generous. He had a different kind of humor, altogether different kind. He used to like to kid my wife and Harmony.

I heard him play out in West Redding at his house out there. He was a grand pianist. I wish I was as good a violinist as he was a pianist. He was a magnificent pianist. I never heard a better one in my life than he was. That's something for you!

John Kirkpatrick (1905–1991), the foremost scholar, editor, and performer of Ives's music, was curator of the Ives Collection at the Yale Music Library. While he is known most for his work on Ives, he also edited and performed music by a wide range of contemporary American composers, including Ruggles and Copland.



JOHN KIRKPATRICK

From OHAM interviews with Vivian Perlis, 6 and 18 February 1970, and 24 February 1983, New Haven, Connecticut; and from a private address to a small audience on his eightieth birthday, 18 March 1985, New Haven, Connecticut

It's always fun to talk about Charlie. Of course, I never called him Charlie. Henry Cowell, apparently, got calling him Charlie at one time, and I don't know just how, it was very subtle, he let it be known to Henry that Charlie was a little uncertain about whether he liked it or not. I never tried it. After Ives died, I did call his wife Harmony, but I got the impression after a few years that she wasn't sure that she liked it. They were very, very old-fashioned!

My first interest in American music was when all the excitement was generated by the sudden death of the composer Charles Griffes.²⁴ I'd played his sonata. I was off in France, but I started reading Whitman and being interested in what the Americans were doing—Ives, Ruggles, Roy Harris, Copland, Sessions, Piston. There was something about what the Americans were doing that was more cozy than the Europeans.

Ives was the most paradoxical person I have ever known, in so many ways. In his music, he could write in perfectly conventional language and give it a kind of turn and a kind of fantasy that we value still today. But also he could write the most outrageous music in the view of his times. In his human relations he had one of the kindest hearts that ever existed, but he is at times

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Painting of Katherine Ruth “Kitty” Heyman

positively cruel to performers. In writing down his music he was so wrapped up in the rhythmic adventure that he always focused on as many aspects of the polyrhythms and polytonalities as he possibly could. When I learned *Concord*, for instance, I had to write the whole thing out and make a kind of metrical interpretation of it—to translate it so I had something I could memorize.

Kitty Heyman [1877–1944] was the Theosophist in the music circle. Lots of people went to her soirées and listened to Scriabin and talked about spiritualism and occultism. Carter was interested for a while, Rudhyar. Cowell. Ives’s Transcendentalism was not so far from the most idealistic side of Theosophy.²⁵ Kitty Heyman was important to me in another way, because it was at her apartment in New York I first saw Ives’s *Concord* on her piano, and she encouraged me with it.²⁶

Theosophy has stayed with me a long time, though I’m not meeting so many people I knew from other lives. Maybe I’m less aware of that now. You ask about Ives coming back? I like to think he is in a long period of R and R.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Program of the first complete public performance of Charles Ives's *Concord* Sonata, John Kirkpatrick, pianist. Town Hall, New York City, 20 January 1939

No, I'm not psychic. It only becomes a very subtle hunch. That element is relatively unimportant. The whole point of Theosophy is getting control of your will. Not so far from Emerson and Ives. Do you read *The Over-Soul*? Well, it's stated in terms of the churches, you might say, but that is straight Theosophy.

Most of my time is spent on Ives's *Concord*. I'm trying to make an edition that would be two things at once: (1) a presentation of the way I would like to have played it, and (2) an account of the many different ways he wrote it down, so anyone could see what's in any version, and salt or pepper to taste. Ives's *Concord* goes back to the period when he was mainly a diatonic composer, and when his dissonance was mostly polytonal. The two composers I knew well—Ruggles and Ives—I can see now that they were both unaware of coming to a strange stopping place in their composing: Ruggles to the inability to integrate a musical form in his own style after 1945; Ives to a blind spot in failing to grant his masterpieces certain rights of their own. I see that I've referred to my deep affection for Ives in the past tense—not true at all. My love and reverence for him is now stronger than ever.²⁷

Bernard Herrmann (1911–1975) was one of a small group of young Ives enthusiasts. He became a successful and admired film composer, scoring such movies as *Citizen Kane*, *Psycho*, and *Vertigo*. Herrmann credits Ives as an influence on his music, especially for crowd scenes, where several unrelated ideas happen simultaneously.



BERNARD HERRMANN

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 12 November 1969,
New York City

He told me that he thought Toscanini was just a lot of ladyfinger music. Old ladies listen to that kind of music, he said. I didn't mind any of that. The only thing I found difficult was the sheer mechanics of getting people to play it. The people who were really interested in him, all composers themselves, would have to give up so much of their time—and he didn't want that sacrifice. He was not a professional musician. He never got his music into shape for performance. It was terrible in the early days to try to achieve an Ives performance.

You say he was complicated—I don't think he was so complicated. I think he had things pretty much the way he wanted to have them. He really

wanted to be a businessman and write music when he was walking down to work. He told me he used to walk to work every morning, because he had a chance to work out the music in his head.

I played a lot of Ives's music through the years, and although I always thought there was a certain amount of interest, I never felt that we could get the real kind of interest of a big public. And I don't think that has been achieved even now. Certain works have a good chance. They have become sort of acceptable, but most people don't have the touchstone for listening to Ives, and much of the music is still alien to the listening public.

What I really resent today, even in England, they seem to think that they have just discovered Ives! But from 1930 he was not a neglected composer. He never got mainstream performances in the sense that Copland did. But then he didn't write accessible music like Copland, and he didn't have the ear of [Serge] Koussevitzky, and he wasn't fashionable. Now he is fashionable. People looking around at Ives to find his musical technique or form are all wasting their time, because he didn't have any. I think he made up each technique for each piece. It wasn't even a technique—it was some kind of miasma that hit him and then he went to work on it. Ives's music doesn't go on in time and space. His music is a photographic replica in sound of a happening.

Henry Cowell (1897–1965) was a remarkably innovative composer and one of Ives's earliest and strongest supporters. He and his wife, Sidney Robertson Cowell, wrote the first biography of Ives in 1955.



HENRY COWELL

From acquired interview with Beate Gordon, 1962–1963

Ives first got the idea of tone clusters in church congregational singing. Remember, he played in a church for many years. We were discussing this once, and he said, "You know, Henry, people singing in church don't sing so much because they're musical, they sing because they're religious. Of course there are always a few people who sing the melody right in the middle in the most musical way, but if people are overeager and terribly religious, they're apt to be sharp. They'll get a little bit too high because they are so eager. On the other hand, if they're backsliders, they're flat, because they don't take this with any very great degree of interest. The result is that you

get a tone in the middle, and you get a few tones just a little higher and a few tones just a little lower, all going together in a kind of nebulous haze around the melody proper.” Of course this means chords built in seconds. He uses that in some of his own music. He would quote “Nearer My God to Thee,” and he would have the melody in these clusters of sounds, with the loudest tone on the melody itself, and the tones increasingly soft immediately surrounding, which really gives quite an extraordinary effect.

Ives also described this to me: they were having a square dance, and the music committee made the mistake of engaging two fiddlers to fiddle for the dance. Each was a rugged individualist, so that when asked, “Do you play ‘Buffalo Gals’?” they would say yes. They’d both play at the same time, but each one going his own way entirely, with different rhythms and slightly different tunes, and not giving in at all, not an inch, not a quarter note, to the other who was playing at the same time. Ives delightedly seized on that. These are amusing incidents, and Ives had a joke. But he also saw a serious side to all of this, a certain pathos about this as well as fun, and both of those sides were thought out and exaggerated by Ives. You never hear any of this without seeing the side that has pathos as well as the side that is full of humor.

Lou Harrison (1917–2003), recognized in recent years as one of America’s great composers, was a young, unknown musician when he became interested in Ives’s music. Harrison conducted Ives’s Third Symphony, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1947.



LOU HARRISON

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 24 March 1970,
Aptos, California

Henry Cowell suggested I write to Mr. Ives, which I did, and he began sending me things. Finally there arrived all eleven volumes of chamber music in photostat. I lived with all of this music for a number of years and carted it around with me, first to Los Angeles, then to New York. I grew up with Mr. Ives’s music. I think one of the things that was so very exciting to me as a young man about the scores of Ives was their proclamation of freedom. It was clear that if Mr. Ives did these things, it was possible for others to do them, and other things too. There are times when Mr. Ives’s music

gives me goose pimples all over. Still. I spent bewitched, fascinated years in the scores. I got the idea intellectually from Mr. Ives of inclusivity—that you don’t do exclusively one kind of thing. I really like what Henry Brant calls the “grand universal circus,” and I think Charles Ives was the great creator musically of this, just as Whitman was poetically. When I went to meet him, the only image I could think of was that he looked like God the Father as done by William Blake. It was a cumulative feeling of great reverence, so that the meeting was very exciting and also very funny. The first thing I encountered was Mr. Ives waving a cane so vigorously in a whirling fashion that I was quite frightened. He was shouting, “My old friend! My old friend!” And I had never seen the man before in my life! He literally danced; he got so excited. The meeting was like the parting of the clouds, a divine hand or something, lifting you onto another level.

I wish Mr. Ives had lived in a time and place when opera would have been possible for him. Wouldn’t he have written the grandest opera ever, with that range of expressivity and characterization that the songs show, and the command of theatrical excitement which he could generate? And he would have done it in the grand, Transcendental manner about war and peace—it would have been something for all time.

Nicolas Slonimsky (1894–1995) was a composer, conductor, and lexicographer, and one of the foremost figures on the new music scene for decades. Slonimsky conducted several Ives pieces, among them the world premiere of *Three Places in New England*.



NICOLAS SLONIMSKY

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 29 January 1969, New York City;
and letter to Perlis, 12 September 1973

Ives suggested to Henry Cowell, who introduced me to Ives, to rig up a concert—that of course meant that Charles Ives would be financing this concert. So it happened that I gave the world premiere of *Three Places in New England* by Charles Ives. I developed a method of conducting two different beats simultaneously, one with the right hand and one with the left hand. I felt that the music of Ives required it because of its polyrhythmic combination.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

a

Letters, Charles Ives to Nicolas Slonimsky, 14 July 1929 (a and b), and Nicolas Slonimsky
to Charles Ives, 7 January 1930 (c), regarding the premiere of *Three Places in New England*

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the print version of this title.]

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Ives came to my concert in Town Hall in New York on January 10, 1931. He told me he would come, but in a characteristically Ivesian manner, remarked something like, “Don’t pay any attention to me. Just go ahead and conduct your Boston Symphony men and I will just sit back and listen to you.” I recall that my concertmaster kept saying after each piece on the program, “So far, so good.” Ives told me that he liked the informal manner of the whole concert—that it was like “a town meeting” and that everyone seemed to enjoy it. He seemed happy, in his reticent way, about the whole affair.

Elliott Carter (b. 1908), one of the foremost composers of the twentieth century, was a teenager when he met Ives. Carter alternated between fascination with Ives’s music and consternation at what he considered disorder in much of Ives’s work.



ELLIOTT CARTER

From OHAM interviews with Vivian Perlis, 20 June 1969, New York City,
and 8 November 1999, South Salem, New York

Ives’s influence on my music has varied greatly from ’24 to now. It was very important before I actually decided to become a musician. But when I began to study music formally at college in ’26, its value diminished a great deal. From that time there was a mounting sense of frustration when I returned to Ives’s music, because much of it then seemed so disordered. Later, in the mid-forties, I began to think I had been wrong and that I should go back and reconsider all of Ives’s works more closely. As I did, frequently surprised and delighted, I began to list pages out of order, hardly legible, or apparently missing. It became clear that a great deal of work needed to be done to get some of the manuscripts in shape for performance. I got in touch with Mrs. Ives to propose such a project, asking if Ives would cooperate. Unfortunately, I found very quickly I was temperamentally unsuited to unscramble the confusion of many of the manuscript sketches.

A matter which puzzles me still is the question of Ives’s revision of his own scores. I have often wondered at exactly what date a lot of the music written early in his life got its last dose of dissonance and polyrhythm. I got the impression that he might have frequently jacked up the level of dissonance of

many works as his tastes changed. While the question no longer seems important, one could wonder whether he was as early a precursor of “modern” music as is sometimes made out.

He was a complicated, quick, intelligent man with, obviously, an enormous love and wide knowledge of music, and with a determination to follow his own direction, believing in it deeply. It is most mysterious that it took musicians and public so long to catch on to the fact of Ives’s music, once the contemporary movement began to take hold in the United States in the twenties.

As for myself, I have always been fascinated with the polyrhythmic aspects of Ives’s music, as well as its multiple layering, but perplexed at times by the disturbing lack of musical and stylistic continuity, caused largely by the constant use of musical quotations in many works. But what is striking and remarkable in his work, like much of the First and Second Piano Sonatas, is an extraordinary musical achievement.

In an interview thirty years later, Carter clarified his position:

I felt that I would never talk about Ives again because I didn’t like to be treated as if I was either not telling the truth or misunderstanding what Mr. Ives said. I didn’t like that. It made me rather unhappy because I thought I was telling exactly what I had heard and in a tone that he said it, and what made me quite cross was that all these people who didn’t know anything about him or were not interested, even during the time when he was alive, as I was, were suddenly proving that I was wrong about almost everything. I found that hurt me, and I decided maybe I better just shut up about the whole thing. I claim that the First String Quartet has that movement, which he later used in the Fourth Symphony with considerable changes and considerable modernization, and that proved my point.

Later Years

Anthony J. “Babe” La Pine • Lehman Engel
Mary Howard Pickhardt • Edith Ives Tyler

Babe La Pine (d. 1978) was Charles Ives’s barber and friend. An article about the interview in the *New York Times* on 8 June 1969, “What Will Babe the Barber Say?” caused a stir in the town and made Babe a local celebrity.



ANTHONY J. "BABE" LA PINE

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 30 June 1969, Bethel, Connecticut

Charlie—I called him Charlie—never dressed up in street clothes as long as I knew him. He used to wear overalls with the bib and straps, a big brown hat, and farmer shoes. He walked very fast, but he stooped. And I never took him for a musician. One time I was trimming his beard, and he was looking in the mirror and says, "You know, Babe, your work reminds me of mine." I says, "Gee whiz, Charlie. How does my work remind you of yours?" "The way you're shading it. That goes into my work." When he said shading, I took him for a painter. I never would take him for a musician—gee whiz, old overalls, old shoes. My God, he looked like a gentleman farmer. But one day I'll never forget. I had the apron over him, and the radio was playing in the shop. I pay no attention to the radio—I'm cutting his hair. And all of a sudden, like a shot out of a gun, he lifts up the apron and he says, "Will you shut that damn thing off?" Well, has that got anything to do with him being a musician?

When I got married, he and his wife came over to my house. We bought a new house, and he brought me over a little blue creamer and sugar for a wedding present. I was about thirty years old. Well, I should have saved that. But there was a young lady came in that I knew, and she asked me if I had anything for a white elephant sale. I says, "Well, I have a lot of little things up in the attic. I'll tell you what I do have. I have a creamer and sugar that Mr. Ives gave me, but you would have to really get good money for that." I knew that it was good. So I gave it to her for the sale. That's gone. But if I thought that Charlie Ives was going to pass away and be a noted composer, 'course I would have kept it. I would have given it to the Ives Collection if I had it.

That day they came, he invited us over to his home on Umpawaug Hill for dinner. It was a beautiful home, up on the hill. And there was a beautiful grand piano, but that didn't make sense to me. Anybody could have a piano. The dinner we had—it was a fish dinner. It was unusual to be invited. Because I knew right well that Charlie never invited anybody. He was shy, I would say. Very shy. I don't think he wanted people to know too much about him. The maid would cook. I was sitting next to Mr. Ives and my wife next to Mrs. Ives, and it was quite a long table. It was in the dining room. We were there twice. Both times fish.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Charles and Harmony Ives, West Redding, Connecticut, 1947

One day he says, “This is the last haircut you’re going to give me for quite awhile.” And I says, “No kidding. What’s going on?” He says, “I’m going to London.” I said, “You are? Well, gee Charlie, how about sending me a card?” So by golly, he goes to England, and I didn’t get that card for over a month or more. After a long while, he came back. I says, “For God’s sake, I got the card

all right, but it took long enough.” He says, “It took me long enough to get over there. It took me thirty-one days.” He sent me two cards. I should have saved those cards. But how did I know?

Later, when he was failing, I used to go over to his house. He’d call me up and I’d go over there. I went to the house at least a good half dozen times. Or else his wife would come down to English’s drugstore, which is in the center of the town, and she’d cross over and ask me if I’d go up there to Redding. He always wanted to take me into the garage in the back there and show me all his things—a little football—he used to play football, and he showed me the pants and spiked shoes, baseball bats and baseballs. Mrs. Ives didn’t go for it. “Now, what are you showing him? He’s seen that a hundred times already.” I think he liked to talk to me ’cause he had not too many people to talk to. Then I’d cut his hair and his whiskers outside on the patio with the hand clippers. He liked his beard a little on the pointy side. And that’s what made him talk about the shading. After he passed away, I found out he was a musician. I took him for a painter or sculptor. He wouldn’t talk much at all. That’s why I can’t understand all these people that know him—he wouldn’t talk, to nobody. Period!

Lehman Engel (1910–1982) was a composer and conductor specializing in musical theater.



LEHMAN ENGEL

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 12 October 1969,
New York City

I remember very well my impressions of him and his wife, Harmony, and their house on East 74th Street. It was a painfully plain house, so plain that you knew the people who lived in it must be wealthy, because poor people would have decorated it with *something*. There was absolutely no decoration. Mrs. Ives always sat in a rocking chair and always was knitting. Mr. Ives would start talking to me at great length and heatedly about something that happened to him in his early life when the sissies wouldn’t perform his music.

He always talked about Pa and [Abraham] Lincoln as though they were two people that one met every day on the street—what Lincoln said to Pa and what Pa said to Lincoln. It had to do with parades and marches and celebrations. Everything about him was so apple-pie American. It was Con-

necticut; it was New England; it was picnics and get-togethers and the old songs. He frequently burst into one of those old songs.

Mary Howard Pickhardt had an unusual career as a sound engineer for NBC radio. Charles Ives came to her private studio to record some of his music.



MARY HOWARD PICKHARDT

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 24 September 1969, Washington, Connecticut

I had a very erratic elevator in my building. I'd hear a great crash and then a great shout, and I'd know that Ives was out of it. Then he'd sit down and talk about the elevator in no uncertain terms for about three minutes. The reason he came was that he got letters from conductors and performers who were going to play something asking how they should interpret the music. "Interpret, interpret! What are they talking about? If they don't know anything about music—well, I'll tell them." So he'd sit down at the piano and play very loudly, and sing and make a running commentary while he was doing it. "*This* is how you do it. Now you're stupid. . . . I'll play it over again in case you didn't get it the first time." Mrs. Ives would say, "Now, *please* take a rest." He drank quantities of iced tea, and he'd calm down and then go back at it again, saying, "I've *got* to make them understand."

Edith Ives Tyler, the only child of Harmony and Charles Ives, married George Grayson Tyler. Their son, Charles Ives Tyler, was named after his grandfather.



EDITH IVES TYLER

From letter to George Tyler, 26 May 1954²⁸

Somehow [this is] the sort of thing that one didn't feel like telling of while driving in the car or walking on the street or while bag packing or possum feeding. . . . Mother and I were in the living room and had just finished tea. Everything was very peaceful. I took out my nail file and began to finish doing my nails as I so often do. Late afternoon sun wobbled

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Charles Ives, New York City, ca. 1947

“Ives leaned forward and glowered . . .”

Julian Myrick asked me to take shots of Ives. He was sitting in the wicker chair and had put his left arm way out—which would have made it look chopped off in a picture. Ives leaned forward and glowered at me, but his left hand was still up, so I asked him to bring his arm in next to his body. He said, “No!” very angrily, but then a twinkle came into his eyes and he pulled his arm in and put it on the cane. He leaned forward, and I took a terribly long exposure. And that’s the best picture—the one everyone knows and uses.

—W. Eugene Smith
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
6 July 1973, New York City

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Harmony Ives with daughter Edith, ca. 1914

in the windows, and everything seemed so natural—just as it had been at the time of day from childhood. Mother got up and went into the dining room, and it was some minutes before I realized that Daddy’s music—the *Concord Sonata*—was filling the room. It was not loud, but far off yet strong, the way it always used to echo down the radiator from his room when he used to play up there after tea. . . . Gradually, but not with a start, it came across my mind that he was not now with us in the flesh to play. I did not jump, or feel startled, or get tingly or feel the least bit odd. . . . It seemed perfectly natural to me that he should be able to play. I even seemed to know that if I went upstairs I would see the piano closed and silent but that the music would still sound on. . . . Was it someone playing the piano next door (but how could they do it so well—like Daddy or John Kirkpatrick?). . . . Mother came back in the room and I said “Mother, they are playing Daddy’s music—can you hear it?” She began to listen, but couldn’t. So we both went out into the hall, and there it was much more plain and to my ears echoing down from upstairs. Finally it died away, and he began to practice over old phrases and stop, and then I heard a muffled exclamation of exasperation, and then more chords. Then it got fainter and fainter and just faded away. . . . It was all so natural, so un-uncanny, that I still can’t feel I’m writing of an “experience.” . . . The air there is probably saturated

with it. Anyone sensitive to music living there might well hear it, but he and all of us really only liked that house as a winter place. Daddy's real home is Redding, and I feel that should I ever hear anything like that again it would be far more apt to come about there than anywhere else.

Ives's Legacy

John Adams

The composer and conductor John Adams (b. 1947) has acknowledged the influence of Ives's Transcendental ideas and musical experimentation on his own work.



JOHN ADAMS

From OHAM interview with Ingram Marshall, 12 August 1999,
Sierra Nevada Mountains, California

The Ives Fourth is really the *Finnegans Wake* of music. It is such an imponderable behemoth of mysterious detail, and the condition that Ives left the piece in—the present condition of the parts and the scores, the confusion over what Ives really meant—it requires that one take up vows, as if one were going into a monastery, to learn this piece. It's just not a piece that you pick up a month before the first rehearsal and learn. It's something you have to live with for a long time.

I've conducted a lot of Ives in the past five or ten years, so it seemed right that I should do this piece. But I think when I first approached the Fourth Symphony, I experienced irritation over it because so much of the internal detail is, on the one hand, extraordinarily difficult and unreasonable—basically on a rhythmic level—and yet this detail is obliterated in performance because of the acoustical nature of the orchestration. It's very hard to know how much of that is due to naïve assumptions on Ives's part. He was an immensely, enormously sophisticated musician who nevertheless never heard his orchestral works done in proper performance. I think he heard one performance of *Three Places in New England*, and God knows what that sounded like on very little rehearsal. There was no tradition for performing music of this level of difficulty when Ives was still composing.

So one wonders if, had he been a practical composer like Stravinsky, who did hear *The Rite of Spring* or *Petrouchka* hundreds of times and was able

(complete pause for all players)

Piccolo.

Flutes.
(no 1st)

Oboes.

Clarinets in

Bass Clarinet

Contrabassoon.

Horns.

Coronets.
(Trumpets)

Trombones.

Tuba.

Telegraph.

Tambourine.
Castanets etc.

Piano
or
Harp.

Violin I.

Violin II.

Viola.

Cello.

Bass.

Handwritten notes and markings are present throughout the score, including "Chorus" and "Watchman, Tell us of the Night".

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Style No. 18-24 Str.
Printed in the U.S.A.

Charles Ives, ink sketch page of Fourth Symphony, first movement. Includes hymn "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night"

to tweak it, would Ives have changed his mind; or philosophically, would he have said, “No, that’s the way I conceived the piece, and if you don’t hear these groupings of nine inside of four inside of three in the second violin part—it’s like a town meeting, where everybody has his say.” So I had to overcome this.

I’ve been trying to figure out some of these inner rhythmic activities, which are simply inaudible in performance, and they’re also unrealizable in their precision—triplets that are piled up against triplets but that are staggered by a half a beat, for example, in the second movement. And even if you’ve got the world’s greatest orchestra and unlimited rehearsal time, the simple acoustical problems of having a brass section that’s fifty or a hundred feet away from the podium—it’s almost impossible to realize. But I’ve entered a lot of it into MIDI [Musical Instrument Digital Interface], which has been an interesting and amusing and revealing experience because there you can actually hear what Ives intended.

One of my revelations has been that now I understand why [Conlon] Nancarrow went to the player piano because I’m sure Nancarrow was very informed by these Ives rhythmic experiments and realized that the only way to really achieve that was through a kind of mechanical representation.

In the course of this, I’ve also come to see this work as one of the great masterpieces of music. It’s his summa, and it is really his final work. He contemplated, of course, the *Universe Symphony* and other pieces, but it’s the only one that was left near completion.

It’s a very puzzling work because when you get to the end of the Fourth Symphony, the final moments that are just sublime beyond belief—you get the feeling that you’ve slogged up this mountain and you suddenly reach the summit, and the Milky Way is overhead, and you hear “Nearer, My God, to Thee” hummed by the chorus off in the distance—you feel like you should be at the end of a symphony that’s at least ninety minutes or two hours long, like the longest Mahler symphony. Yet the time scale of this piece is very mysterious. It’s really only thirty-three, thirty-five minutes long, and you’re left wondering if Ives actually made somewhat of a miscalculation in terms of how long—in terms of just pure clock time—it would take to get to this moment. But, again, it’s a work in which information is so compacted that time functions in a very different way.

The other thing about the Fourth Symphony that’s often neglected is that in some way, it’s a piano piece that’s been expanded to gigantic size by the addition of this monstrous orchestra. The solo piano plays throughout, except

in the fugue movement, and the fugue is a piece from an earlier part of Ives's creative life. But the other three movements essentially are an orchestral elaboration of this individual piano part. It's an extraordinary piece of music on every level: rhythmic, harmonic, structural.

What I love about Ives and I particularly love about this symphony is that it's fundamentally a spiritually optimistic work. What strikes me about this is that the works written in Europe at this time were so bathed in pessimism. The common comparison is between the last movement of the Ives Fourth and the last movement of *Das Lied von der Erde*—they both kind of fade out into twinkling outer space, but the Mahler is one of deep, Schopenhauerian resignation and pessimism, and the Ives is just the opposite. It's a kind of New England Transcendental optimism. For me, this is a tremendously meaningful thing because it defines a spiritual difference between the eastern and western hemispheres. I think that, although a lot of American composers have been ridiculed and belittled in Europe as being naïve or optimistic or simplistic, in a sense what makes American music very powerful now—and this includes jazz and ethnic music, as well as American classical music—is that there is a fundamental optimism about it, whether it's Cage or Gershwin or Copland.

“ . . . maybe someone like me . . . ”

Ives is really one of my heroes. I got a recording of the Second Symphony when I was in high school—that one that Leonard Bernstein did—and I became absolutely enamored. And I don't even think it was so much the music—it was the whole idea of Ives. He was a Yankee, and he came out of this puritanical New England tradition and went to Yale and was a businessman. To him music was too important to be a job. I think I always had the idea that if someone like him could be a totally original composer, that maybe someone like me who came out of the same cultural milieu could do it. I didn't think that guys like me were composers! I always thought, well, first of all, they were dead. And if they weren't dead, they were probably Italian guys or Jewish guys from New York or Europe. But the music of Ives I loved too.

—Ingram Marshall
from OHAM interview with Van Cleve,
14 March 1996, Hamden, Connecticut

" . . . music that didn't move . . ."

One piece of Charles Ives that influenced me a lot, and probably a lot of other people, is *The Unanswered Question*. I was only fifteen when I first heard that piece in a record store. It knocked me out. I couldn't think of anything else for a long time. I think this was the first time I had ever heard music that didn't move: the trumpet was always the same, and the strings were always in the same key, and the woodwinds too. That was so beautiful—music that didn't move.

—Tom Johnson
from OHAM interview with Van Cleve,
4–5 June 1997, Paris

" . . . before they even had modernists!"

Sure, I think there's a lot of old fashioned nineteenth-century stuff in Ives. But also, I think Ives was a postmodernist before they even had modernists!

—Jack Vees
from OHAM interview with Ingram Marshall,
27 August 1998, Hamden, Connecticut

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

TWO

On Ragtime and Eubie Blake



Ragtime was everywhere at the turn of the century. Here was a product of African-American musicians that took hold and spread rapidly throughout the United States and Europe. Although a precise definition is elusive, ragtime has been described as an amalgamation of African-American music with European forms. According to the ragtime historian Edward A. Berlin, “Almost invariably explanations included a statement about syncopation.”¹ Characteristic of ragtime piano playing is continuous syncopation in the right hand against a steady beat in the left hand.² The Ragtime Era is usually described as the period from the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 to about 1920; at least a decade earlier, however, pianists, banjo players, and various instrumental combinations were “ragging” all kinds of tunes, including hymns and opera arias. Nothing was sacrosanct.

The earliest original rags were songs, though Berlin points out that they tend to be overlooked in the overwhelming takeover and subsequent perception of ragtime as piano music.³ Ernest Hogan’s “All Coons Look Alike to Me” (1896) was the first major hit. It was followed by turn-of-the-century favorites “Hello! Ma Baby” (1899) and “Under the Bamboo Tree” (1902). Within a few years, the “coon song” faded, partly due to the uncouth nature of the lyrics—as the historian John Hasse points out, “It’s one of the great ironies of the Ragtime Era that the lyrics of racially demeaning songs were frequently set to ragtime—a music created by the very people denigrated by the songs.”⁴ One hit ragtime song followed another, and songwriters became rich and famous—for example, Irving Berlin with “Alexander’s Ragtime Band.” Ragtime’s distribution was en-

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Two couples dancing the cakewalk, 1890

hanced by a new invention, the phonograph. The ragtime mania soon became closely connected to a burgeoning dance craze. Dance halls and clubs were extremely popular. Early dances were the cakewalk and the two-step, followed by the turkey trot, the one-step, and the fox-trot.

Ragtime was ubiquitous—Even Ives heard it at the Danbury Fair from boyhood on. It was the popular song-and-dance music of his generation. Ives wrote rags—at

least he called them “Ragtime Dances”—while he was at Yale; they were played by the band at the Hyperion Theatre in New Haven, where Ives occasionally substituted for the regular pianist. If we judge from the edited and published versions, these are not traditional rags.⁵ They mix snatches of popular songs with hymn tunes, especially “Bringing in the Sheaves,” but the spirit and exuberance of ragtime is retained.⁶

Edward MacDowell also addressed himself to ragtime. The writer John Erskine, who attended MacDowell’s class at Columbia, reported that MacDowell told his students, “Syncopated rhythms are natural to us; why didn’t we try to make out of them something important? I would do it myself, if I hadn’t lived in Europe so long. Ragtime now is not instinctive with me as it is with you—though I did make a try at it in the Scherzo of my Second Concerto.” Erskine commented, “That was the first good word for ragtime I ever heard from a composer in the great tradition.”⁷

Ragtime’s reputation was such that when Eubie Blake’s religious mother heard him “rag” a hymn, “Nearer My God to Thee,” at the piano, she screamed, “Take that ragtime out of my house!” The *Chicago Daily Tribune* of 2 January 1900 carried an article against ragtime titled “Hits Cake Walks and Rag Time.” It reported that local African-American dignitaries were urging “colored people to elevate their race. . . . Stamp down upon the cakewalk, the ‘coon joint’ song, and rag-time music. There is better entertainment for us. . . . We have far more elevating than rag-time music.” Sermons and writings against ragtime served to render it even more popular.

Scott Joplin, “The King of Ragtime,” settled in St. Louis in 1901. His “Original Rag” (1898) and “Maple Leaf Rag” (1899) were moderately successful, enough to enable him to quit the performing circuit.⁸ Joplin’s “classic” rag was slow and stately, closely connected with the high-stepping style of cakewalk dancers. As ragtime spread rapidly across the country, it began to take on regional characteristics, most of them faster than the classic rag. New York in particular developed a competitive fast rag sometimes called “stride piano”; contests between players added to the excitement of the music. The composer and pianist Eubie Blake, born and raised in Baltimore, became one of the New York group. When Blake heard Joplin play, it was at the end of the older man’s life. Blake said politely, “It was ‘Maple Leaf Rag,’ but he played it slowly. I saw him for only about half an hour, but I imagine he did that on every number—pure ragtime isn’t supposed to be played fast. I don’t think he could play it fast then anyhow. He was a fine musician from what I have learned since, but at that time, he couldn’t sit in with the sharks.”⁹

By virtue of his longevity, Blake became a spokesman for Joplin and many other musicians who had died earlier, including James P. Johnson, Joseph Lamb, Luckey Roberts, Willie the Lion Smith, and James Reese Europe. Blake remembered not only the legendary figures of ragtime but many of the participants in the early years of African-American music theater, closely related to ragtime and to earlier minstrel shows.¹⁰

In 1921 Eubie Blake, with the lyricist Noble Sissle and the comics Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles, created *Shuffle Along*. It was one of the significant moments in theater history, although the participants may not have realized it at the time—it was produced on a shoestring; the cast wore borrowed, ill-fitting costumes; and Blake doubled as pit pianist to save money. *Shuffle Along*, starring Florence Mills, became a hit, with 504 New York performances and successful runs in Chicago and Boston.¹¹ Part music, part comedy, and a large part beautiful chorus girls, early African-American musical theater productions were variety shows; plots were almost nonexistent, and music and dance routines were lively. Josephine Baker and Freddie Washington were among the several performers who began their careers in the chorus of *Shuffle Along*. Sissle and Blake followed with another show, *The Chocolate Dandies* (1924). But it was *Shuffle Along* that made history. It also made a great deal of money for those involved, as it heralded a new genre: the African-American musical theater on Broadway.

By the 1920s jazz had replaced ragtime, and movies also became a novelty. Ironically, it was a movie, *The Sting* (1973), featuring “The Entertainer” and other songs by Scott Joplin, that brought ragtime back to life in the 1970s. The ragtime revival catapulted Blake back into fame. In the interim he was known primarily as the composer of “I’m Just Wild About Harry” (1921), subsequently used as Harry Truman’s campaign song in 1948. With the revival of ragtime, Blake was back in demand: he did many interviews for television and radio, starred in his own documentary, and worked on a Broadway show based on his life and music.¹² Blake lived to be one hundred or so, and he quipped, “If I had known I was going to live so long, I’d have taken better care of myself!”



JAMES HUBERT “EUBIE” BLAKE (1883–1983)

From interviews with Vivian Perlis, 21 January and 26 May 1972,
Brooklyn, New York

I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, 1883, so I’m eighty-eight years old now.¹³ I was born of parent slaves. My mother and father were slaves, but they could both read and write. My father was taught by a plantation owner’s daughter, and I think he taught my mother. But they wouldn’t say much, because it was dangerous—they could almost hang a person for teaching a Negro reading. So my father would tell me and show me the stripes on his back, and my mother would say, “John, don’t tell that boy about slavery.” He says, “Yes, I want him to know about slavery.”

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, 1920s

I had to pass two white schools to get to my school. Nobody knows, only the people that lived in that time, what we went through, going to school. I could fight like anything, because I was fighting all day long, with my own people, about marbles or something like that. So you learn how to fight in the ghetto. You know what's wrong with this country? There's too many people getting mangled up together, and then they fight.

I come in one day, mouth all a black mess, eyes black—my father comes in. I said, "How do, sir." "What's the matter with him?" Now, my mother called me "Little Wally" when she was pleased, and "Mr. Blake" when she was mad. "Mr. Blake, he fights all the time. That boy, he ain't going to be nothing." My mother was very religious—not supposed to protect yourself. He said, "What are you fighting about?" I said, "Poppa, I don't like white people. I don't care what you tell me, Poppa. I don't like them." And he looked at me for about five seconds. "You see this land that this house is sitting on?" (Our house is lopsided—the houses are perpendicular, but this is leaning—talk about the Tower of Pisa! How it didn't topple over, I'll never know!) Anyhow, he told me Lord Baltimore, a white man, gave the state this city. He owned the whole of Baltimore, and he gave it to them. That's why it's named Baltimore. "The house we live in, a white man owns it." He says, "When I go to work, I work for the white people. I make a living, then I come home and I bring the money, so you and your mother can have clothes and food. I get it all from white people. All the people aren't bad." He taught me to never say I didn't like white people. He told me once, "When you hate anybody, you suffer more than the person you hate." And he used to say, "Never, regardless of how painful it is, bite the hand that feeds you, and those people feed us." The man was right.

He was a stevedore, unloaded boats. He was the boss, and he got nine dollars a week. Now my father was no "Tom." He had a gift—if you talked to him, leaving out his grammar, you'd think he was an educated man, but he wasn't. He only went to school a half an hour after slavery. He lived to be eighty-three. My mother lived to be seventy-eight, and she had eleven children. I was the eleventh child. The last one. And it's so vivid in my mind—she'd say to me, "I don't know why God let you stay here. There was Willy, there was—" she named them all. I'm the only one who survived. And that's why she said, "I don't know why God let you—I'm not God, I'm not questioning God!" That's the way she'd talk. My mother lived with Jesus in her apron pocket. She'd name my ten brothers and sisters, because I never saw any of them. She said,

"I don't know what you're staying for, you ain't going to be nothing." And sometimes, if she'd be mad with my father, she'd say, "You're your father's son all right. He's no good, and you're no good." Then, when she was pleased with me she'd say, "I don't know who you take after."

You know how a kid totters behind his mother and father? My mother—oh, she loved me—my mother and father just idolized me, no matter what she called me. It was night when they shopped—cheaper—and all of a sudden, they looked back and they don't see me, and my mother screamed, "My son, I lost my son!" Now, this is the widest street in Baltimore, wider than Canal Street in New Orleans, and wider than Market Street in San Francisco, but there was no traffic. I had heard a man demonstrating an organ. I wandered away and climbed on the bench and fooled around until I got a sound. My mother found me, and the manager convinced her I have God-given talent. I was six years old and could play all the tunes when they got the organ pumped. We ended up paying twenty-five cents a week to have a seventy-five-dollar pump organ in the house.

The white people that my mother worked for—her mother gave them a piano because they were going to Paris to live. Rich people used to get tired over here, and they'd go to Paris or Italy or Germany or London. I used to go get my lessons with Margaret, the daughter. Now, Margaret was out of high school. That's how old she was over me. She taught me how to read music, but I always did play by ear. I'd play a song and read it, and when I played them, I'd play them different, but I never changed the man's harmony. But all the tricks and things, I would put in my own, and people used to say, "Gee, when that guy plays, it sounds different from other people"—that's because they play according to what Beethoven and Mozart told them. I didn't like it anyhow, so I'd play it my way. So I stood out.

Ragtime—the first time I ever heard the word was from my mother—"Take that ragtime out of my house! Take it out of my house." Ragtime was simply supposed to be nothing. It wasn't art. Do you know why it wasn't art? Because the powers that be couldn't do it, so they cried it down. They cried down Columbus, they cried down Lindbergh—they said he was nuts. They couldn't do it. Now, ragtime is fine. Now they know how to play it, it's all right. But if it wasn't no good at the beginning, it's no good now!

Everybody knocked ragtime, everybody in this whole country—that's because it come from bordellos—houses of ill repute. (I think I made that phrase famous on the air.) I don't say the other words. I see they write it, but

I haven't deviated from my training much. There are a lot of things I wouldn't say in front of a lady. I can't get with these people. They write down things in the newspaper that I wouldn't say in front of nobody. My wife gives me a time. She says it's an accepted word. I say accepted for those people, not for me. Terrible. I mean, when I say terrible, it's terrible.

When a big-time Negro died, I'd go to the funeral, and they were playing what they played going out to bury this guy—"Dead March"—they'd play the same thing coming back, but in ragtime. And I knew they were going to do it. I live on Eden Street, and the band always come up over this side. They can't parade on Broadway because all white people lived up there. They didn't want us up there. Now, I know that band has got to go up to Ann Street, then turn on Gay Street to the cemetery. Now, I heard them coming up. I'm in the house, and my mother would look around at me—"Don't you follow that band." I'd say, "No, ma'am, I'm not going to follow that band." When that drum would get out of earshot, I'd say, "Mom, can I go out and play?" "Yes. Don't you follow." I'd go down with a lot of Negroes, but coming back I'm by myself. I thought my mother was calling me. She says, "I thought you followed that parade." I said, "No, ma'am, I was right behind the corner playing." But I was way out two miles and a half when I heard her in my imagination—and she hadn't been out there!

There were some pianists that came around playing ragtime—Jesse Pickett, Jack the Bear. Some people said Jack the Bear Wilson composed the "Dream Rag," but Jesse Pickett composed it. He taught it to me. Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, and Charlie "Luckey" Roberts. I've known him when he was a kid. He had on long pants, but he was just a kid. They taught Gershwin to play ragtime. Now he knew how to play the piano, but ragtime was such a far-out thing then. Everybody knocked it, said it wasn't art.

My first job, about age twelve, was with a medicine man, but I only stayed one week. I played cornet and buckdanced off the back of the truck. I got a dollar. But the other men in the band, they got two dollars. So I said to Cap, "Listen, Cap, is that all you're going to pay?" "Mouse"—that's my nickname then—"you ought to be glad you're getting fifty cents. First thing, you ain't got no business in the band. You don't play the notes. You play what you want to. You think I don't hear you. I heard you." He says, "You're putting a whole lot of old rotgut music in my music. I don't want you in the band anyhow." I said, "Well, don't worry, you ain't going to get me in the band." I gave up cornet. It made my neck swell.

When I went to play piano for Aggie Shelton—that's a house of ill repute, a classy five-dollar house—I'm about fifteen. I got three dollars a week and tips. I'm playing rags and a lot of sentimental tunes like "After the Ball." Now, my house where I lived—down here: two rooms; up there: two rooms. My mother and father slept in the front, and I slept in the back upstairs. When I heard the second shoe drop, they were like dead. Out the window! Trouble was I had to pay twenty-five cents a night to rent long pants. After a while, the minister's wife came by. "Sister Blake, do you know that little Eubie is playing piano at night in Aggie Shelton's bawdy house?" My mother said the devil had me. She called it Aggie Shelton's "body" house. She turned me over to my father for a whipping. But I took him upstairs to my room to see that under the carpet I had almost a hundred dollars stashed. He didn't say anything for a moment. "Well son," he finally said, "I'll have to talk to your mother." She left it alone, but she never could see show business. She always wanted me to do "the Lord's work." I know it sounds ridiculous, but I made money and bought them a house—for eight hundred dollars. They never worked after that.

The year Joplin's "Maple Leaf" came out, I composed my first rag, "Charleston Rag"—1899. I played all over Baltimore, and Atlantic City summers. I'd go to work at 9 P.M. and I might get off at 11 or 12 the next morning. You had to play for people to dance, and there was no one there but me—no bass, no drums, just me all night long, unless Big Head Wilbur or Cat Eye Harry might stop in to help me out. I played at the prizefighter Joe Gans's Goldfield Hotel for three winters for the highest class of people. Nothing but the best there. I wrote "Baltimore Todolo" and, to show off, "Tricky Fingers."

I'd go out to Chicago or Philadelphia—and I went to New York as part of the company of "In Old Kentucky," a traveling show. Did a lot of buck-dancing. Traveled around. You're trained to different things. Now, when you asked me about hard times—when they get to fighting in a cabaret you've got to play louder. You can't jump up and leave. The boss wants to quell that fight by playing loud. So that's why, when I go in a restaurant, if the door is there, if I'm sitting like this, back to the wall, I'm uncomfortable because you've got to watch the doors. That's the training—I've been doing it all my lifetime.

All publishers in those days took advantage of young composers. I wasn't so young, but "It's All Your Fault" was the first number I ever had published. And down at the bottom of the contract is where they put in very fine print—this is the reason that I never play my "Chevy Chase" and "Fizz Water" in public—they always took advantage of the mechanicals down at the bottom

of the contract. And, you know, all beginners in composition, they're crazy to see their names on it, so they sign anything. I'm going to get my name on a song—a number published! And that's the way they tricked me. And I never paid any attention to it.

When I come to New York and played for James Reese Europe, they had a white band at the Astor Hotel on Broadway—they tore it down now. The white band had twenty-one pieces, and we had not over ten or eleven, colored. And they'd play "Millicent," a beautiful waltz, and then we'd play it. We would pick up—no matter what they were playing, we'd just take that waltz and rag it. They've got all strings, and we've got saxophones—saxophones didn't become prevalent in this country until the First World War. That's the way it was in those days, when they commenced to let us (*let*, and I use that word advisedly) play in the big hotels. We could play in a millionaire's homes, but we couldn't go in the hotels then, before the First World War. Then later we come to play in the big-time hotels, white people's hotels. And whatever band was playing—you see, they only had what they call polka or waltz, Viennese—that's

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James Reese Europe's Society Orchestra, ca.1915. Back row, third from left: Noble Sissle; far right, on piano bench: Europe. Jim Europe (1881–1919) organized and supervised the Clef Club, which included about fifteen bands. Europe, a powerful force for improving the status of his fellow African-American musicians, brought the Clef Club to Carnegie Hall in 1912 and performed music by African-American composers.

what the white people danced to. And when we commenced to play, they would dance. But the white people never dance to time. I could never understand that.

I met Noble Sissle in 1915. I said, "I'm looking for a lyricist." And we shook hands. That was fifty-seven years ago, and we're still partners. We wrote a song called "It's All Your Fault," and it was a local hit, not a hit in the whole United States or a universal hit. And I don't guess anybody outside of the state of Maryland ever heard of the song. But everybody there was singing "It's All Your Fault." It's a good melody. That's when I started to take composition, to learn how to write music—in 1915.

Sissle and I did shows—*Shuffle Along*, [and] *Blackbirds*—I'd played the rehearsals for the show. Composers very seldom play the rehearsals, but we didn't have any money so I had to do it. I conducted, and we went—Sissle and Blake—on the stage and did seven minutes. That show was so hot that we couldn't stay on there no longer than those seven minutes. We did part of our vaudeville act. Our act was: Sissle sang and I played. Now, I want to go into detail. I hate to do this, but this is history. We played Keith circuit—that was the top of vaudeville in those days. We played all over. We didn't go to the coast or nothing like that. Played as far as Omaha and back. And I remember, we were with James Reese Europe, and we played in the homes of all the big millionaires of this country—we played New Haven to break in. Then we played the Harlem Opera House in New York.

Now, back in the Palace Theater in New Haven where they lay out the acts, all the agents come to see us. We had our own agent, Pat Casey. Now, nobody knows that Pat Casey has got us. The other agents didn't know that. So they come to get this great act—I'm not calling it a great act; the public called it a great act. Now I'll tell you how we worked. We worked with a piano, and with a piano stool. This is the piano, and the stool is set longwise, with the piano on a diagonal so they can see my fingers. You notice I've got very long fingers. They wanted to see that. And Sissle sits on this end of the piano, and we are dressed in tuxedos, just like we were in the millionaires' homes. Now, Pat Casey is there with all the agents—these wise guys—I want this picture to be laid out to your audience. I want them to know what Sissle and Blake—not only Sissle and Blake, every Negro act—went through. Okay, I come out—now I'm in the vernacular. We're dressed in grotesque clothes, ragged clothes, and cork on the faces, see. Pat Casey is sitting there listening to me, and he was a rough Irishman. How he ever talked on the phone I will never know to this day. He would say anything vulgar, cursing all the time. So now we'll play the music for them to come on. [singing] "Dixie," see. Bring

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Sheet music cover of “We Are Americans Too,” words by Andy
Razaf, music by Eubie Blake and Charles L. Cooke, 1917

them on with “Dixie.” And Miller and Lyles and Sissle say to me, “Say, what’s dat thing over there?”¹⁴ I said, “I don’t know what ’tis.” He says, “Well, go and touch it to see what it is.” And I would go over—now listen to how ridiculous this is—I’d touch the piano, bing—not a chord, just one finger. I said, “That’s a pie-anna, see.” He says, “It sho’ is. It’s a pie-anna.” And then I’d sit down and play it. I never saw one before. I didn’t even know what it was. See how ridiculous it is? These were wise Broadway guys, see. Their prejudice blinded them.

Pat Casey sat there and listened to it. He says, “Gentlemen, are you all finished? They’re not going to wear any grotesque clothes. They’re going to wear tuxes. Did you see them at the Harlem Opera House? That’s what they’re going to wear. Tuxedos. And they’re not going to have no piano in the box that the piano came in on the stage, and they’re not going to say they don’t know what it is. They’re going to walk right out to the piano and play it. These men

played with James Reese Europe in the millionaires' homes of the whole United States. Now, you're going to take them and put cork on their faces, and they're not that kind." Now, this is the first time they know it's Casey's act, see. Now, to the Keith people: "Do you want the act or don't you want it?" The Shuberts were just getting ready to open vaudeville there.¹⁵ The Shuberts were very successful. They don't want Shuberts to have it. "All right, Pat." And he cussed, and he laid them out. He said, "You either take them as they is or you won't get them. This is Sissle and Blake." And that's how we went on—as gentlemen, *not* as southern ignoramus Negroes. That's the kind of guy he was.

When we played at the 61st Street Theater, we had to play an audition of the show songs for *Shuffle Along*. When we got to "Love Will Find a Way," we were trembling, because Negroes in this country weren't supposed to have any romance, so you don't put it in a show. If you were a Negro woman, I would just say, "Oh come on, Viv, let's get married." And we'd get married, see, or go together. We had romance, same as anybody else, but the powers that be didn't want to think that way. So when we played "Love Will Find a Way," old man Cort says, "That's enough." But they put the show on with it anyway.

"I'm Just Wild About Harry" was written five presidents before Harry Truman. I really wrote it for Lottie G., my leading lady at the time, and it was in waltz time. She said she couldn't sing it. But I knew her voice, and I was sure she could make it. I said, "Why can't you sing it?" She says, "Whoever heard of a waltz in three-four time in a colored show?" I said, "I did." And she said, "But if you write it in one-step"—the vogue then—I said, "No, I'm not going to change it—it's my prime melody." But Sissle said, "Oh yes, you are. Play it in one-step." I did, and she accepted it. Got me right in the heart! Now Paul Whiteman, every time that "Harry" was dying, he would get a new arrangement made, and it would come right back up again. He did it three times. That's why I love Paul Whiteman in his grave.¹⁶

Paul Whiteman put jazz in Carnegie Hall?—*not* Whiteman, but James Reese Europe was the first one! See how they fixed the history—maybe we would do the same thing if we had the chance. James Reese Europe had an organization called the Clef Club. They'd call the Clef Club and ask for entertainers.

I'm in St. Louis now—we had an advance man, and he come out to the theater with us—what we called a deluxe house. The people coming out of the theater saw him with us—we had to pass the front of the theater, if you don't want to walk two blocks to get around, and I'm tired from playing. People are coming out—now they're the people that just applauded for us. (Now, I've

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Sissle and Blake's "I'm Just Wild About Harry," originally composed in 1921
for *Shuffle Along*

got to use the word.) They said, "Isn't it a shame? In order for that white man to make a living, he's got to walk on the street with two niggers." And they'd just got through applauding us! That's the way it was. That's before Martin Luther King.

Sissle was always more progressive than I, because Sissle went to a white college and everything. So naturally he didn't have the inhibitions that I had. I was born and reared in Baltimore, and I never got to high school. Only went to the eighth grade. And I was always thinking, "Always remember you're

a Negro.” He didn’t have that. So he went to the manager in Baltimore—Ford’s Theater: that’s the sister theater where Lincoln was killed in Washington—and he says, “Did you know that Eubie Blake was born in this town?” The manager says, “No.” Sissle says, “You know, the better class of colored people—and we do have a better class of colored people, whether you think so or not—they won’t come to this theater because they won’t go up in that gallery. I’ll tell you what to do. If you will let them in the theater, open the balcony.” Now, there’s plenty of Negroes came to the theater, but they were like my wife. Nobody could ever tell whether she’s white or colored. So we got a wagon and put a guy with a bugle in it—and beat the bass drum and went all through the colored town, and they had a sign on the wagon—“Sissle and Blake opened up the first balcony for Negroes.” You see what we went through?

James Reese Europe was killed in Boston. I think he was around forty-eight years old. A great man was killed. Jim Europe was one of the greatest men I ever met—personally. I met Booker T. Washington, and for the musical end, Jim Europe was just the same—in the class with Dr. Martin Luther King and Booker T. Washington. He was the savior of—and I’m telling you the truth—he was the savior of the Negro musicians in that day, because the musicians at that day were like what they call traveling minstrels. They would go in a barroom, play guitars, and sing, and take their hats around. That’s how they made a living before James Reese Europe. Like I always say in my conversations with newspaper people, before Dr. Martin Luther King, we weren’t

“He showed me all the tricks . . .”

What [Blake] taught me was that there’s no real separation between performing and composing. The very first thing was we started playing for each other. I played some Scott Joplin and some of my own rags. We went on for hours. We’d have these sessions until three or four in the morning. That man was a night owl! He’d wear Bob Kimball and me out! He showed me all the tricks his ragtime competitors in the early years had.

—William Bolcom

from OHAM interview with Ev Grimes,
4 July 1988, Saratoga Springs, New York

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Eubie Blake, 1972

supposed to be human beings. And he convinced, I'll say, 80 percent of the powers that be that we were human beings. When I talk about before, I always say "before Martin Luther King"; then when I talk about after, I say, "after." Like the people say "before Christ" and "after Christ." Jim Europe was our savior musically. Not that other people didn't try, but they weren't successful at it. Williams and Walker, Ernest Hogan, they—with all their great things that they did, they didn't convince the powers that be that we should be on equality with the white man, musically. Although Will Marion Cook went to Leipzig, Coleridge Taylor—I don't know where he went to school—Harry Burleigh, William Grant Still, these are great musicians I'm naming. But James Reese Europe was the man that put us Negro musicians on par, as far as the powers that be would let us go.

Now, these fellows today, they all of them sound alike. People today, they hear these modern players, and they don't hear the swinging, they don't hear the rhythm. These guys are used to playing with the band, they've got a guitar. They don't play much with this hand. They play like anything with the right hand, but you've got to play it—bum-cha—you've got to swing. And they don't do it today. Count Basie when I first met him in Kansas City—he was a

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Cast of television documentary *Memories of Eubie*, 1979. Eubie Blake at piano; others, left to right: Maurice and Gregory Hines, Lennie Godfrey, Billy Taylor, and co-producers Allan Miller, Ruth Leon, and Vivian Perlis

Interviewing Eubie

Interviews began in January 1972 at the Blake home in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Marion (Eubie's wife) was proud of their house and furnishings, which included a grand piano. It had been her home before they were married, and Eubie enjoyed saying with a wink, "I got the coop with the chicken." Before the interview, we talked about oral history, and Eubie said, "You want my stories? We call that passin' it down— passin' it down to the young 'uns." Following the interviews, videotapes were made of Eubie at the piano. He was proud of being an official "Steinway artist"—"like Rubinstein!" he said with a laugh.

At first Eubie was cautious about talking to a white lady from Yale. He worried about his "vernacular." But as we proceeded, he became comfortable, although he never would say certain words—"jazz," for example. He had been taught that it was improper language to use in front of a lady—it had certain sexual connotations. "My mother was very religious, and I could never deviate from my upbringing!" Eubie explained. When he attempted to describe where he worked as a teenager, Eubie chose between "bordello" and "house of ill repute," saying the words uncomfortably under his breath.

*When Eubie came to New Haven to speak to my class in American music at Yale, he charmed everyone, as he did everywhere. His popularity continued, and it was clear that a television documentary was in order. Fortunately, Eubie stayed well and lived on to star in *Memories of Eubie*, featuring Alberta Hunter, Billy Taylor, Lennie Godfrey, and two unknown young men from a tap-dancing family, Maurice and Gregory Hines. The documentary was broadcast in 1980 on the *American Masters* series as Eubie Blake celebrated his ninety-seventh birthday. During the filming, Eubie had more energy than the younger staff and cast together. He played "Charleston Rag" for the film, and when the cast took breaks, he "ragged" excerpts from Tannhäuser.*

Eubie's one hundredth—birthday celebration at the Shubert Theatre, 7 February 1983, was attended by a mix of young and old friends and admirers. He was not well enough to attend, but the show was broadcast directly to his home in Brooklyn, and his friends and colleagues sent birthday greetings to him. As long as Eubie played piano, he was all right. When he said, "I've been playing that gol' darn thing since I was three years old, and I'm tired of it," it was clear the end was near. Eubie Blake died five days after his birthday celebration.

—V.P.

kid, and I heard this guy—he can swing if he wants to. But the Count is the laziest piano player I ever saw. The layman that don't know will say, "Mr. Blake, I heard so-and-so play, but it sounds different when you play it." When you played in them dance halls and houses of ill repute, the people would want to dance. I'll show you what I mean, see. Hear the bass? Get the rhythm? We had to play it that way because we didn't have anybody to play with us. We had to play it all. Style and personality and the tricks that I know on the piano, these kids don't know.



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THREE

From the Early Modernists



While Ives was composing in isolation, several other renegade composers were working outside the establishment, creating music so experimental that it was rarely performed and virtually unknown to the general public. These individualists signaled the beginning of a revolutionary change in music called modernism. In the visual arts, modernism was synonymous with the abandonment of realism; in music, it was a reaction against tonality and the predictability of long-held European rules and practices. Audiences accustomed to hearing the classics found it disconcerting to be confronted by dissonant harmonies, complicated new rhythms, unusual instruments, microtonality, and untempered scales. Some still struggle to understand this music a century after it burst on the scene.

Modernism's arrival may have seemed sudden, but it was a gradual force that had been seething underground for some time—like a smoldering brush fire ready to burst into flame, sweeping away what had been planted and nurtured in the past. During its first decade, modernism spread rapidly, fanned by the powerful winds of change in Europe and in the visual arts. The Armory Show of 1913 in New York City introduced European painters and sculptors to America. Works by Duchamp, Picasso, Matisse, and many other artists were seen in New York for the first time. A few critics and writers were familiar with the international developments in the arts; they wrote about new music activities in Europe in various newspapers, journals, and magazines. In American publications such respected literary figures as Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank,

Paul Rosenfeld, and Carl Van Vechten wrote about Scriabin, Satie, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, but American concertgoers heard the new music almost exclusively through Leo Ornstein's piano recitals, and a few years later, from the pianist and Pro Musica founder E. Robert Schmitz.¹

During modernism's first decade, America still looked to the Old World for leadership and heroes. Of the six early modernists presented here, three—Carl Ruggles, Charles Seeger, and Henry Cowell—were native born, and three—Leo Ornstein, Edgard Varèse, and Dane Rudhyar—were émigrés from Europe. In contrast to many émigré composers of World War II, the World War I émigrés embraced America as a land of opportunity, became citizens, and were accepted as Americans. These composers worked individually; their music and ideas had no direct connection, but there was a strong bond—the driving need to rebel against the past, to find new means of expression, and to invent instruments and techniques to realize their innovative musical ideas. The Americanist Gilbert Chase described early modernists as “rugged individualists,” while the historian Carol Oja disputes the myth of absolute individualism expounded in earlier studies: “I believe internationalism to have been an equally compelling force. Rather than imagining them as rugged daughters and sons of Paul Bunyan, single-handedly taming the American musical wilderness, I view them as part of an interdependent modernist community. . . . These young people were products of a profoundly interconnected modernist network, which stretched across the ocean, across musical genres, across art forms.”²

Modernism has been discussed and debated by experts in various fields. Questions remain: What *was* modernism? A musical style? Does the term refer to a period of time? A state of mind? An ideology? Perhaps modernism was all of these at one time or another. The term *modernism* became the umbrella for other “isms”: Dadaism, futurism, serialism, surrealism, ultramodernism, symbolism, and the avant-garde. Each had its particular features and goals, and each played a role following World War I, when groups were organized to promote new music. While a definition remains vague, its effects were explicit: modernism caused major changes in the form and substance of the arts. The mere sound of the words—*ultramodern*, *modernism*, *futurist*, *avant-garde*—projected an image of youth, style, and panache. Artists of the new century wanted to be part of the exciting changes; they were eager to be rid of the old-fashioned, predictable routines of the past.

The beginning and ending of modernism are as difficult to pinpoint as a definition. One theory is that it began not long after the Civil War with Debussy's impressionism. Historian Roger Shattuck writes, “In all the arts, 1885 is the point from which we must reckon the meaning of the word ‘modern.’”³ Others point to Erik Satie and Alexander Scriabin as seminal figures. As for its ending, according to Virgil Thomson, modernism “expired on August 19th 1929, with the death in Venice of Serge de Diaghilev.” Thomson points also to the “grave economic events follow-



"Jim is a good old-fashioned modernist."

Cartoon by William Hamilton, *New Yorker*, 31 March 2003. © The New Yorker Collection 2003 William Hamilton from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

ing the Wall Street disaster."⁴ Others believe that modernism lasted until the Vietnam War; yet another theory is that it is still alive in a new incarnation called post-modernism. If so, "that old-fashioned modernism" has come full circle, returning to the tonality it had abandoned in the early years of the century.

The first generation of modernists were scarcely noticed by a public totally enthralled by listening and dancing to ragtime and early jazz. New music was a very small part of the overall musical landscape in the period preceding World War I. The upper classes pursued culture by attending concerts of traditional programs, which sometimes included a novelty by one of the American professorial composers. The occasional performance of a modern piece horrified audiences, who had never dreamed such wild and dissonant sounds could be considered music. Ladies fainted from shock when Leo Ornstein played his *Danse sauvage* (Wild men's dance),

and critics likened Varèse's percussive sounds to life in a boiler room. They warned that none of it should be taken seriously as music. Not only were new works problematic for listeners, they were often judged impossible to perform.

A long view of history suggests that in time the innovators, who were considered outside the mainstream for most of the century, may have come inside. Robert P. Morgan, in an insightful two-part article on Ives and Varèse titled "Rewriting Music History," observed, "The music of the first half of the twentieth century would seem to be most urgently in need of a fresh consideration. Rather than assume that recent musical developments are somehow outside of the mainstream of music history, perhaps we should ask whether this mainstream has not been mislocated."⁵ Morgan suggests that the definition of mainstream may be reversed, depending on changing cultural currents. For example, Ives has taken center stage, and Cowell has become increasingly visible. The impetus for many composers can be traced to Cowell's *New Musical Resources*, written from 1916 to 1919 and published in 1929.⁶

Looking back at the twentieth century, it is clear that Schoenberg and Stravinsky have maintained positions as the most influential and enduring of the modernists. In America, the home-grown Ives, the French-born Varèse, and the Californian Cowell have emerged as leaders. Only a few early modernists were appreciated during their most creative years, but some lived to witness long overdue recognition of their ideas and accomplishments and to hear performances of their works. As the first daring explorers in an unknown world of new sound, these early modernists have rightly been called "the heroic avant-garde."

Leo Ornstein (1892? – 2002)

WILD OUTBREAK AT STEINWAY HALL

A pale Russian youth dressed in velvet, crouched over the instrument in an attitude all his own, and for all the apparent frailty of his form, dealt it the most ferocious punishment. Nothing as horrible as Mr. Ornstein's music has been heard so far—save Stravinsky's "Sacrifice To Spring" [*sic*]. Sufferers from complete deafness should attend the next recital. . . .

—*Daily Mail*, 27 March 1914, signed R.C.

The *Daily Mail*'s dramatic review of Leo Ornstein's first London recital is typical of a life story that was unusual from beginning to end.⁷ Ornstein was the last of twelve children. His father, a cantor in the synagogue of the small village of Kremenchug in southwest Russia, recognized his son's gifts. Leo was sent to St. Petersburg Conservatory with the hope that his exceptional talent might bring fame and fortune to the Ornstein family. Leo remembered playing violin in the student orchestra, with the great composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov conducting, and being sometimes interrupted from a game of marbles when singers from the Imperial Opera would request Mr. Ornstein as an accompanist. Within a short time, Ornstein was admired and welcomed at the most illustrious salons in St. Petersburg.

The tsarist regime in Russia made life dangerous for Jews; the Ornstein family decided to leave for America. After a rough crossing, they arrived in New York and settled on the Lower East Side in modest surroundings. For Ornstein, it was a shock to move from the grand salons of Russia to the slums of New York City. He was accepted for a scholarship at the Institute of Musical Art (later Juilliard), where his teacher was the respected pedagogue Bertha Fiering Tapper.⁸ She sensed the special qualities in Leo Ornstein and became his mentor and friend, and ultimately the strongest influence on his life and music. Tapper made sure her student's talents became known abroad, since a successful concert career was unlikely in America for him. Ornstein traveled with Tapper to Paris in 1910 and again in 1914. At the institute in New York, Ornstein met other young musicians, among them Pauline Mallet-Provost, who became his wife in 1915. Pauline described Leo's superiority at the institute: "It was very frustrating—Leo could play anything faster and better than the rest of us."⁹ Pauline was not from a Russian-Jewish immigrant family—quite the opposite, she came from a long line of New England blue bloods. It was an unconventional marriage, but Pauline's family accepted Leo as the talented boy wonder their daughter met at the institute. Their marriage and musical partnership lasted sixty-seven years, until Pauline's death in 1985.

Ornstein gave his debut recital in 1911; he performed Bach, Beethoven, and Rubinstein—standard virtuoso pieces. He had a phenomenal memory, and when he composed new works he imagined them in their entirety before committing them to paper. His earliest pieces were in a conventional style, but in about 1912 he began to hear strange and dissonant music in his head. Modernism had not yet been

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Leo Ornstein, ca. 1918

introduced in America—Ives was unknown, and it was still a few years before Varèse and Rudhyar were to come to America. But something was in the air—Schoenberg and Stravinsky were becoming well known in Europe. While in America, Ornstein began playing and writing down the pieces that he heard complete in his imagination. While traveling with Tapper in her own country, Norway, Ornstein performed his own music for the first time. To his astonishment, the critics considered his music a joke!

Ornstein was curious about new music, and Tapper did not discourage him when composing became more important than playing traditional repertory. When Ornstein returned to New York, he included pieces by Bartók, Kodaly, Schoenberg, Ravel, and Scriabin on his programs. A series of four recitals was presented in 1916 at the Madison Avenue apartment of Claire Raphael Reis. Ornstein and Reis had been students together at the Institute of Musical Art. At the historic concert series at the Band Box Theatre in 1915, Ornstein had introduced America to such works as Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* and *Sonatine*; Schoenberg's *Drei Stücke*, Opus 11; and Scriabin's Ninth and Tenth Sonatas. As Pauline Ornstein explained, "The musical atmosphere of New York at that time considered Wagner and Debussy terribly modern. Even 'Claire de lune' caused a sensation among concert-goers."¹⁰

Ornstein became a celebrity. An Ornstein concert might be criticized severely, but it was not to be missed. Following his 1914 London appearance, the well-known writer Waldo Frank, an avid admirer of Ornstein's music, pronounced him "phenomenal." In an article on Ornstein, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, Frank wrote: "Leo Ornstein, the youngest of these, gives promise to be the greatest."¹¹ Others called him a radical, an anarchist, an extremist, a futurist. One critic dubbed him

" . . . juicy metal fruits torn apart like ripe peaches . . . "

The vehement Preludes, Moods, Poems, and Dances of Ornstein's first creative period, Debussian in the thickness and richness of their steely harmonies, but oriental and Yiddish in their wailing melodies, their abruptness and dismalness, were heavy with unrelieved tension; full of violent, almost animal cries of anger and pain and fear, threats, defiances, frenzies and occasionally, a well-nigh epileptic joy. . . . Ornstein writes magnificently for the piano. His piano style is the fruit of a sense of the steely nature of the instrument as happy and full, one is tempted to affirm, as any that has existed. Ornstein's characteristic sonority is half metallic and half warm and soft, with the consistency of steel and the iridescence of silky fabrics. Certain chord-sequences call to mind juicy metal fruits torn apart like ripe peaches. Much of this richness is due to Ornstein's extraordinary harmonic sense, permitting him to hear dense, subtly differentiated complexes of tone; and to keep a mass of sound, as thick as any that has ever been given to the pianoforte, steadily running. In this, the piano of Ornstein is the equal of the orchestra of Strauss.

—Paul Rosenfeld, music critic,
1929 from *An Hour with American Music*
(Philadelphia: Lippincott), 63–69

“Leo the Intrepid,” and another wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* (30 March 1914): “The audience remained to the end, hypnotized as a rabbit by a snake.” Critics used his name as a yardstick, comparing other musicians with Ornstein. Even Ives was described by one writer as Ornsteinesque. The critic Charles L. Buchanan devoted a full page in the *Independent* (1 July 1916) to a thoughtful discussion of “futurist music,” and Paul Rosenfeld, also in 1916, in the *New Republic* wrote, “Ravel, Scriabine, and Strawinsky are well on the road to becoming classics; Schoenberg is already a trifle *vieux jeu*. Ornstein alone continues to represent to the critics the composer who delights in ugliness for its own sake, and to the public the grand comic figure it demands the ultra-modern composer to be.”¹²

By 1916 Ornstein was known as the “leading musical futurist,” but he dismissed the title. “How I came to be dubbed a futurist I don’t exactly know. . . . I seem to recollect that many years ago I saw a manifesto by a futurist. . . . I found the rhetoric somewhat pompous.”¹³ Ornstein insisted that he was always guided by his own musical instincts, without theories governing what kind of music he should be writing.

Several of Ornstein’s early piano pieces were published soon after they were composed, among them *Suicide in an Airplane* (ca. 1913), *Danse sauvage* (ca. 1913), *Three Moods* (1914), and *Dwarf Suite* (ca. 1915). In Paris, he wrote *Impressions of Notre Dame* (1914), and, during the war, *Poems of 1917*. Ornstein’s aim was to translate life into sound; his compositional procedure was a spontaneous outpouring of music to match the subject. Each piano piece was a miniature tone poem, an expression of an emotion or an impression of a place or event. Later in life, he referred most often to *Danse sauvage*, “It was then I began to realize that all my training—which was of course very orthodox—was of absolutely no use at all. I was concerned with making the piece as graphic as possible.”¹⁴ *Danse sauvage* is expressive and very noisy. Ornstein used the entire palm of his hand to cover as many notes as possible.¹⁵ He employed no consistent harmonic scheme; rather, the harmonic texture is dictated by the coloring. To achieve an effect of volume and violence, he would feature close intervals, particularly minor seconds. Ornstein’s pieces often include short, percussive phrases repeated at high speed. For example, in *Suicide in an Airplane*, he uses a bass figure throughout the work to be played very fast and to simulate the sound of airplane motors and the feeling of movement. Ornstein explained, “It is probably true that in *Suicide in an Airplane* the music is lateral rather than vertical. . . . Apparently I must have heard it just that way.”¹⁶

An exclusive contract with the Ampico Company restricted Ornstein’s recording activities to piano rolls. But Ornstein was more published than any other American modernist, and a biography was in print when he was only twenty-four.¹⁷ One might assume that he enjoyed the notoriety of women swooning in the aisles and the shock caused by his outrageous pieces. Yet according to both Leo and his

wife, Pauline, the composer had no taste for this kind of life. He had a small hand that made hours and hours of extra practice necessary, and he disliked making small talk at receptions and social gatherings. Even during the period when Ornstein was most active as a concert artist, he and Pauline went as often as possible to their retreat deep in the woods in New Hampshire, at times using snowshoes and carrying their evening clothes in knapsacks for their next engagement.

In about 1920, at the height of his performing career, Ornstein made a major decision: to leave the concert stage in order to compose what he liked, rather than what promoters and audiences expected of him. With the *Violin Sonata* (1915), he felt he had gone as far as he could go with extreme harmonies and forms. Ornstein returned to the stage a few times, once for the premiere of his *Piano Concerto* with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski in 1925; and again to play the piano in his *Quintette* in 1928 with the Pro Arte Quartet, and in 1938 with the Stradivarius Quartet. Pauline and Leo lived quietly in Philadelphia, where Leo taught at the Academy of Music. Later, they both directed the Ornstein School of Music before retiring in 1953. They had gone from a glamorous public existence to a simple

“ . . . my first hero . . . ”

I used to go to Philadelphia for my music lessons with Leo Ornstein. I knew him mostly as a piano teacher, but I also knew that he was a composer. I looked on him as my first hero—the first live composer that I had an intimate, personal friendship with. He was to me a very romantic figure—a very excitable Russian temperament, extremely nice person, but a strict disciplinarian as far as my piano studies were concerned. He wouldn't let me get away with anything. The way he taught piano was characteristic of him. There would be two pianos in the studio and we would play together—Chopin or Beethoven—and if I found that he was taking a ritard, then I would try to suit my performance to his. The communication between pupil and teacher was done on a musical level, hardly verbal at all. He encouraged my first attempts at composition. I don't think he was able to give me much of a compositional technique. But he made a valuable contribution to me as a composer just by being himself, completely in love with music, completely immersed in it, and almost inarticulate about it, showing by example what a musician can be.

—Andrew Imbrie
from OHAM interview with Vincent Plush,
22 September 1983, Berkeley, California

"When you were . . . having a piano lesson, it was like nobody else in the world existed . . ."

Betty Trachtenberg, Yale College Dean of Student Affairs, studied piano at the Ornstein School of Music.

I started at the school when I was quite young. I studied with a succession of teachers. As I advanced, I took classes in harmony, theory, rhythm, analysis, early music history—pretty much the curriculum that any conservatory offered. As I got older the classes became more specific and involved.

I was handed on to Mrs. Ornstein. She always wore black dresses and always had scissors on her piano, so that if I came in with fingernails that were too long, she would make me cut my fingernails. She was a very serious teacher. I guess one of my major memories of her is that she was very serious about her husband. She was very protective of him, to make sure there weren't too many demands on his time. She was very devoted, and her devotion extended far beyond the personal relationship. She used to transcribe everything that he wrote. He would play it; she would notate it. So their relationship was a very close one, very much focused on him as a musician. I had an awful lot of respect for her, and she demanded absolutely the best. She just wasn't satisfied at all with mediocre playing or mediocre preparation, and that's a lesson that has stood me in good stead. I must have studied with her for four or five years, and then she suggested I go on to study with him.

The Ornsteins were getting older. At that time, when I was young, they seemed absolutely ancient. When I studied with him he was in his fifties. They were lively, vibrant, interested, interesting, filled with zest for their own lives and their children, very up on politics and what was going on in the musical world. He was a colorful guy—a little guy. He literally used to come sometimes with his suit over his pajamas, because he was very absentminded. Worldly things were just not part of what he involved himself in. He would forget to eat, and she would remind him that it was time for lunch. He would always go over the allotted hour of the piano lesson; she would come knock on the door to tell him it was time to stop. He used to get into the lesson in the most intense and personal way. When you were in the studio having a piano lesson, it was like nobody else in the world existed. I studied mostly traditional repertoire. And he used to give me a lot of his own work. I can't remember what specific pieces—a lot of it was in manuscript, at that point untitled.

As I got older, I began to learn of his relationships with the artists and writers of the time. Waldo Frank wrote about him, and John Marin, the painter, was a friend. I began to realize how important he was in the life of the arts.

Pauline used to tell me stories about his having stopped playing. He just got terribly, terribly nervous before performances. He couldn't sustain that, so he decided to stop. These stories may be apocryphal, but these are what I remember

from her. She used to tell about how they would be together on the train or car, riding to a performance. For his leisure activity, the way we read books, he would read scores. More than once he would do his concert, and then as an encore would play what he read in the train, just from having looked at the score.

He had a pegboard sitting on the side of the piano with a hundred pegs. If I came unprepared, if a particular passage wasn't the way he thought it should be, he used to call me "childey." (I'm sure I wasn't the only one!) He would say, "Okay, childey," and he would sit down and read the *New York Times*, after having emptied the pegboard. I would play it over and over again and fill the pegboard with the pegs, and then he would stop reading the *Times*, and we would go on. He really meant business; it was very matter-of-fact. There was no guilt trip or anything. "If you're not prepared, we'll take your lesson time to prepare." He pushed the limits of teaching all the way. However, he also had another side that was very sensitive. I remember I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen—around there. I had my own ideas about interpretation. I don't remember what Bach it was; it might have been the *Italian Concerto*, or some of the *Inventions*—I would really ham them up. Now I blush to think of what I did to them. But he was really quite understanding and wonderful, saying, "This is how you feel this now. I don't agree with your interpretation, and you will find that what you're doing to Bach is pretty extraordinary." But we would have discussions; there was an awful lot of talking in those lessons. We talked about music a lot, we talked about interpretation. We talked about politics. I wouldn't call him a radical, but he was certainly progressive.

He talked a lot about his childhood. My sense was that his family was unhappy that he didn't follow his father's footsteps and go into liturgical music. He was just very antireligious, and Mrs. Ornstein wasn't Jewish. That was, I'm sure, part of his rebellion and part of his avant-garde activity. But some of the things I played from manuscript had very cantorial overtones. It was music that I was familiar with—although my own parents rebelled against their parents, my grandparents were still alive, so I was acquainted with music from the synagogue.

I studied with him years after he was active in that avant-garde movement, so I think that he had a more global vision of himself. He talked about himself in the twenties as being a real rebel artistically, wanting to get from the piano all of its capabilities. When I studied with him, he had a greater perspective on who he was, on history, on politics. I think he was more mellow. He saw the effect of his music in the twenties on later composers. When I came to a lesson, I would sit outside because I would hear music, not knowing whether he was teaching, or whether he was playing. Often he was in there himself, waiting and playing Chopin études to keep him limber and to express what he was feeling.

—Betty Trachtenberg
from OHAM interview with Judith Penner,
27 April 1993, New Haven, Connecticut

life of teaching and composing. Leo Ornstein never regretted his decision. He was determined to go his own way, and Pauline, forever admiring of her husband's talent, was always willing to go along with him.

The lack of performances did not bother Ornstein. His attitude was that if his music was worthy, it would be discovered, played, and understood. He said, "I wouldn't go across the street to hear a piece of mine!" After all, he would say, finger tapping his head: "I heard it already—up here." Pauline said about Leo's composing, "The pieces just flowed out of him. It was as though he plucked them whole out of the sky." What Leo heard in his head, he wrote down, with Pauline's help in a unique method of dictation. Many Ornstein manuscripts are in Pauline's hand.¹⁸

Ornstein's early works were for piano or piano and voice. His later pieces include a quintet for piano and strings, orchestral works, string quartets, songs, cello pieces, piano sonatas, and other works for various instrumental combinations. In general, Ornstein's later style (he detested that word) leaned more toward the neo-romantic late-nineteenth century masterworks than did the modernist explosions of his early years.

After years of teaching in Philadelphia, the Ornsteins lived in a trailer, spending winters near Brownsville, Texas, and summers at their beloved home in the New Hampshire mountains. The onetime enfant terrible was living a quiet life, reading and composing. At first, people asked, "Why?" Then, "Whatever happened to Leo Ornstein?" Finally, the questions stopped coming. Leo Ornstein's longevity seems appropriate to his life of extremes, in which he always seemed to outdistance everyone around him. As fate would have it, Ornstein lived to the age of 108: the first major figure of American modernism was also its last survivor.

The Search for Leo Ornstein

Looking for Leo Ornstein was only the beginning: would the reclusive composer agree to be interviewed for OHAM? In 1972 an Ornstein nephew led me to a son and daughter. Their parents were traveling cross country in their trailer. "Dad would not want to be interviewed," I was told. In time, I reached Pauline Ornstein by telephone. She agreed that perhaps the time had come for Leo to break his silence. Several appointments were made with him and then canceled; finally, we agreed to meet at the home of his son Severo, then living in Boston. On a cold February day with snow predicted, I stood at the doorstep and rang the bell. A granddaughter came to the door with a note. "Snow coming. Must return to New Hampshire. We have left some things for you in the dining room."

Music manuscripts had been mentioned only once by Pauline, who had asked on the telephone, "What can we do about the music?" I responded, "What music? Where is it?" "The manuscripts!" Pauline exclaimed, "In the barn, being nibbled by mice. We must do something. Can you help?" Since I had not yet met the Ornsteins, I said, "Yes, but let's talk about it later."

Snow was indeed coming to Boston that afternoon. The air was very still, typical of the atmosphere preceding a snowfall, when it seems time stands still. I entered the dining room and was astonished to see paper boxes and bags filled with sixty years of music manuscripts.

The Yale music librarian, Harold Samuel, was delighted to acquire the entire collection of Leo Ornstein's papers. Off they went to New Haven. I had still not set eyes on Leo Ornstein. An apology arrived—"for missing the chance of meeting you and handing the manuscripts directly to you. I am in the midst of a suite for viola and piano which I want to complete before we leave for the South."

Two weeks later, I rang the same doorbell in Boston. This time it was answered by a rather short gentleman who bowed low as he took my hand and said in a Russian-accented voice, "I was writing a piece, and whereas in earlier times I had a phenomenal memory, now at eighty I am afraid of forgetting if I am interrupted. Now we can talk." And so he did—nonstop and rapidly for hours. It had been years since Ornstein had spoken to anyone in the music world, but he was surprisingly au courant about music, literature, politics, and history. Only an occasional word, such as gramophone, linked Ornstein to an earlier time. He educated himself not for teaching, writing, or conversation, but solely for his own satisfaction.

Following the oral history interviews, videotapes were made "on location" in Brownsville, Texas, at the Sierra Mobile Park, lot 32, where the Ornsteins had chosen to live and work for a time. Other than a small upright piano, the trailer showed no trace of a famous composer and acclaimed concert pianist. As the crew prepared for the "shoot," elderly people straggled out of nearby trailers, wondering whether a murder had been committed!

*When the music manuscripts became available through the Yale Library, performers began to take an interest in Ornstein's works. One of the first was a young Yale pianist, William Westney, who read through the piano pieces and became an Ornstein admirer. He included *Three Moods* in his New York debut recital, and a few years later was soloist in the *Piano Concerto* with the New Haven Symphony for the first performance of the work since its 1925 premiere. Leo Ornstein did not attend his eighty-fifth-birthday celebration. The avant-garde composer of such daring pieces as *Danse sauvage* and *Suicide in an Airplane* was afraid to fly! The first recording of Ornstein's music was produced with Westney and other Yale musicians playing the piano quintet and *Three Moods* (*Music of Leo Ornstein, Composers**

Recordings, Inc. [CRI] 339). As interest in Ornstein increased, other recordings and performances have followed.

At the time of Ornstein's ninety-fifth birthday, family and friends convened in De Pere, Wisconsin, to see him receive an honorary doctorate from St. Norbert's College. He spoke eloquently to the students, still talking rapidly and excitedly about ideas and experiences dating as far back as 1900.

Ornstein continued to compose, except for about a year after Pauline's death in 1985, when he felt he could not survive without her; Ornstein revived, however, and began to compose again. At age one hundred, Leo wrote, "I am beginning to feel my age. I still try to work but on a much-reduced schedule." He began to compose a "musical diary," instead of longer pieces—just in case. More touching was another reflection: "One hoped that some deep disclosure would be made to you, but it seems we just fade—and understand absolutely nothing."

—V.P.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Pauline and Leo Ornstein at the Sierra Mobile
Park trailer camp, Brownsville, Texas, 1977



LEO ORNSTEIN

From interviews with Vivian Perlis, 8 December 1972, Waban, Massachusetts,
and 19 and 20 November 1977, Brownsville, Texas

I was something of a prodigy, and it's natural for the family to make you a little bit younger and cash in on that. And of course, I didn't bother to investigate, I just accepted 1895 as my birth date. When I was moving around and traveling all the time, I had no particular address: we had this place in New Hampshire that I built almost as soon as Pauline and I were married—we've been married now fifty-three years. And so we made North Conway our headquarters. Years afterward, when we were living in Philadel-

Wednesday

Dear Vivian -

Thank you so much
for the birthday card.

It was good to
you to remember.

Ninety eight is
an autumn age to confront. I
try not to capitulate entirely.
I work a few hours in the
morning but begin to wilt
towards the afternoon.

Old age is just a
drag. It clarifies nothing.

One hoped that some
deep disclosure would be made to
you, but it seems we just
fade - and understood absolutely
nothing.

Take care - enjoy
yourself

My best to you as always

Leo

phia and had our own school, something came up. It's irrelevant to any aesthetic matters at all—a mechanical thing in which my lawyer said, in case of death, the children (I have a son and a daughter)—whatever little we might leave them might be claimed by both Pennsylvania and New Hampshire; and he said, I think you ought to establish residence in Pennsylvania. And then some old papers were dug up, and sure enough, he said, “I think there's something wrong; these papers say that you were born in '92—not '95.” They were apparently written in some archaic Russian, and that was the confusion, because my birth date is reported in various places, music dictionaries and all, as 1895. Now it is proven that I am three years older than we thought!

By George, I'm supposed to be a twin—I had a twin sister. We don't look alike and have no particular close relationship, it's just a biological fact. And I'm the last of twelve; not all survived, of course—I think seven of us survived to a ripe age. I only have now one brother; he's a doctor in New York, and he's retired. I'm the last—my sister was born a few minutes before I was. It seems that in those days it was nothing unusual to have a large family; I think the family record says something about Mother and Father being married very young—probably in their teens, seventeen or eighteen; and they lived to a very ripe age. Dad absolutely refused to give up the ghost at all—he lived to the age of 104!

I remember that Dad took me from Kremenchug to St. Petersburg—I must have been about seven or eight years old. In those days moving by train was a very elementary thing—I mean, you're talking about something over seventy years ago. It must have taken about three days from this provincial little town called Kremenchug in the Ukraine to get to St. Petersburg. When we got there, one of the early attempts at the Revolution had taken place, and we saw wooden shutters over some shops, and so on. I played for someone who was the assistant to Yesipova—she was a big pianist of that period and had taught Prokofiev. She was already an elderly woman. I was accepted and given a scholarship, and this man was to prepare me; I was eventually to study with Yesipova.

I do remember a few funny little things: I didn't know who it was, nor did I care, but I remember in the common room where we used to gather, and you had your lunch, at a desk a man with a funny kind of a beard sitting there very often—it happened to be that it was Rimsky-Korsakov, who was teaching at the school. This was the famous St. Petersburg Conservatory. And [the composer Aleksandr] Glazunov was teaching there; I still remember that big,

fat man conducting the orchestra, and I, at that time, a small boy sitting there and playing the fiddle parts under his conductorship.

Father left, and I think there were some people there—an aunt or a young woman studying music who was going to take care of me, and some family with whom I was staying. I do remember an agonizing scene, I suppose one of the most agonizing emotional experiences I've ever gone through. Absolutely. The day came when Father had to go back; and it was one of those indescribable things that can happen to you in a lifetime, but would appear to be almost an artificial setting by some overimaginative writer who has lost control of himself. It was the period during the Russo-Japanese War, and when we got to the station there were all these cars where the men were being shipped and this enormous confusion of thousands of people, and the wives and children saying good-bye to their husbands and sweethearts, and so on. And finally Dad got into the train, and I was told that I ran after the train. Apparently, I was completely devastated. Fortunately, memory is very short, and after two or three days I began to recover. The circumstances become weakened as time goes on, but an emotional state can be retained incredibly. Do you know that it was really weird—when it got toward evening, I always had to rush out quickly to put on the light, because I'd get that horrible, sickish kind of state that is absolutely indescribable. I've never in my life experienced anything again like that at all. The interesting thing to me is the way it hounded me—I think I may have lost it just within possibly the last fifteen or twenty years. But even as a mature person, at twilight—it just happened at that time because that was when the train was leaving—I remember being very much interested in how that can stay with one. But as I say, the intensity of feeling is what remains, while the incident itself becomes possibly somewhat confused in one's mind.

The family decided to leave Russia. I began studying in New York. And a very curious thing—I don't know how—I went, of all places, to a Quaker school. I went there instead of to the public school because the hours were much more concentrated and not so lengthy, and I could then spend time practicing. You see, I had such a very curious bringing-up. It was the proverbial thing, where I was going to be exploited as a youngster—I never thought of writing music at all, the time was spent just practicing these endless exhibition pieces. I didn't really complete high school. I left the Friends Seminary after two years, and I was just in grade school there. Afterward things went in totally different directions. I lived part of the time in England. Then back in

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Bertha Fiering Tapper with students, New York City, ca. 1910. Tapper in center. Seated to her left: Leo Ornstein and Claire Raphael (later Reis); to her right: Kay Swift and Pauline Mallet-Prevost (later Ornstein).

New York, I studied at the Institute of Musical Art with Mrs. Bertha Tapper, a Norwegian. She had a great influence on me; and I went with her to Norway. She had to go back, but there was a local manager who heard me play. And he said, I want this young boy to give two concerts here.

And so I stayed on and began to work. I worked a terrific amount. I suffered from the most incredibly miserable tight hand—I can't begin to stretch an octave between the fifth and second finger, and nobody should play the piano who cannot at least stretch an octave between the fifth and second finger. I'd have to practice incredible hours, wasted on nothing but athletics, which doesn't interest me in the slightest. But then, what happens is you get involved in certain rules not even made by yourself necessarily, but by people outside of you.

I gave some concerts there in Norway, and that was the beginning of my professional career. The first one was evidently very successful because the second one was completely sold out. Liszt; Chopin; Schumann; "Mephisto

Waltz”—what else would a youngster play, brought up playing these exhibition pieces? I began to write the kinds of things a youngster of fourteen would be expected to write: melodious, competent. The whole thing was something of a disaster to the family, my turning to writing—that wasn’t the sort of thing that delivered, you know, and box office receipts don’t swell when you’re writing a *Danse sauvage*.

Well, I was going to Paris. And the manager in Norway gave me a letter to a publishing house in Copenhagen. On the way, I stopped there and presented the letter; some elderly people came around in their august fashion while this youngster played some of these things. I knew that mesmerizing the audience with terrific speeds and a fine tone had some value; but the idea that anything I thought of would have the slightest value—and so, they said they wanted to have a consultation. I played, and they told me to go over to the fish market. When I came back, lo and behold! Not only did I have a contract, but some money was put right into my hand. It may have been \$150 or \$200. That was one of the most exciting things I can recollect from my entire lifetime. The idea that a musical thought that had come to me would have been worth money—and to a boy who was as poor as a church mouse. I remember the excitement was really terrific—never have I been able to recapture that. And I don’t know why it should have meant so much more than all the playing—isn’t that strange?

By the time I was fourteen or fifteen, I went to Paris; and I had a letter to a very famous pianist called Harold Bauer, who was completely oriented to what you’d call the fixed edges of music. I went to see him with this letter and played for him; and he, in turn, said: “The man you must see is [Michel] Calvocoressi.” It was very interesting, the first awakening of a young boy to the sort of complete and very sophisticated world of Paris. And you can just imagine, a kid of fourteen who didn’t speak a word of French. At that time I had completed the *Impressions of Notre Dame* and *Danse sauvage*; the *Three Moods* had not been written yet.

When I met Calvocoressi, he knew that I had to make a living. He had been conducting classes at the Sorbonne; many of the South Americans who spent their winters there and were attending some of the classes were just rolling in money, and he quickly got me work to do. Some of them were interested in having someone teach them operatic roles, and a good many songs of Schumann and Schubert and so on. And I read fairly well, so I played their accompaniments and taught them their songs; and that is how I made my living to

start with. And then there were those lectures, and I played a couple of times. And you know, to a boy of fourteen and a half, the Sorbonne meant very little.

Of contemporary music, I knew absolutely nothing. I think there was a piece by a man who's been long forgotten, by the name of Max Reger—you may have heard the name. I heard somewhere a piece of his and I think there might have been one or two earlier Debussy pieces, but that's all I knew. You hear the "Wild Men's Dance" [*Danse sauvage*], my dear child, it's as current as—it's probably still way in advance of anything that you've heard today.

So many things happened in my life that were so totally different. You see, I completely lost contact with my family when I went to Europe, and ever since then I never really returned home. And suddenly I found myself in a world that my family simply couldn't understand—an almost overripened, oversophisticated world. And once in a while when I did return, it was a question of the usual thing, to be sure that I was well fed and so on. And there was the contact with my parents, the filial part. It was a charming world of human responses, but it was completely disinterested in ideas. And unfortunately I think that's a limitation that possibly I have. I'm only slightly interested in human beings as human beings. I'm primarily interested in ideas.

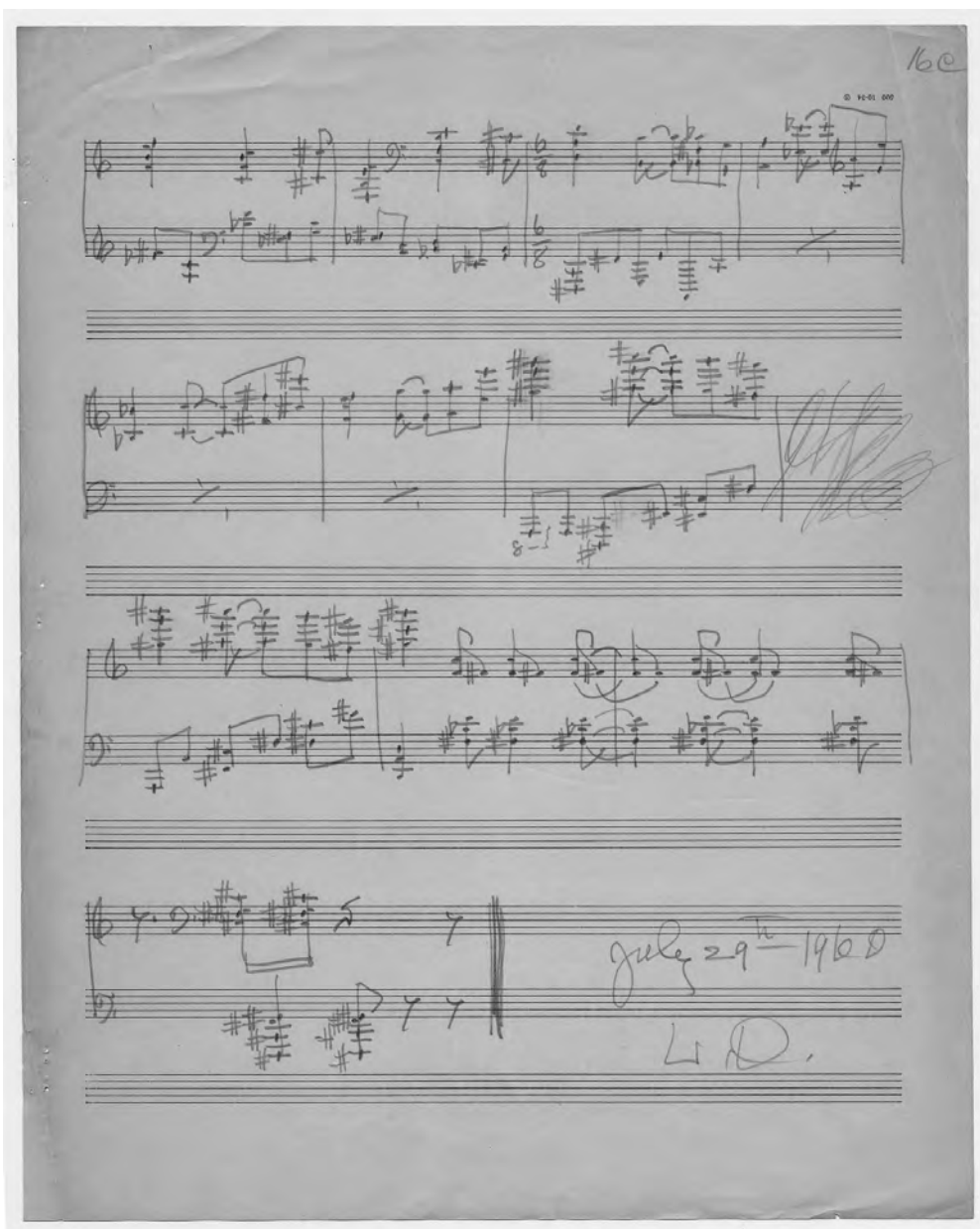
I have been writing music a lifetime, and essentially, if you want to know the truth, my good child, I know nothing more about it now than when I began. And I say it again, say what you will—the gods or whatever you want to call it, or nature, or just simply sheer accident, or just the element of chance. I believe that there is something we don't understand; and if you wish to be religious about it, or if you wish to be occult, you might simply say it comes from somewhere outside of yourself, which probably it does. I don't quite agree that it's a sixth sense—but it does come from outside yourself, because at no time can I really will to write a piece of music. I sit before the white paper there, completely helpless; and if the gods are willing, suddenly I hear something, and then of course I have to decide whether it was worth putting down or whether I should discard it. And usually, if it nags at me long enough, I've got to just put it down, if for no other reason than to get it out of my system. Sometimes it's so irritating to be hearing things, because it makes life miserable for me; these things go around and around in my head, and it can be almost an unpleasant feeling. You'd like to get rid of it and just enjoy your existence without these things crowding in on you, which harass you to some extent. And some of these darned things are so graphic they just get into your skull and stay there, you know, until finally you crowd them out with some-

thing else. Once a manuscript is completed I become almost completely disinterested. I wouldn't go across the street to hear a piece of mine!

I tell you, in some of the things it's been terrific; you take the *Danse sauvage*—that was written by a young person who had no experience whatever with modern music—I still wonder at the age of eighty, why should I have thought of that? I'd been sitting at the piano practicing the [Liszt] Twelfth Rhapsody to astonish the ladies with the speed and accuracy of the passages—and blind the audience with the terrific glissandos and whatnot. Don't ask me why suddenly, having had no experience whatever, that thing came into my head—I'll be blessed if I know. And as a matter of fact, I really doubted my sanity at first. I simply said, "What is that?" It was so completely removed from any experience I had ever had.

When I was preparing a piece to play in public, I was never satisfied—it was actually fixed in my memory, and I really had to hear the thing and have it in my mind. Often, lying in bed before going to sleep, I would test the thing and would see, for instance, whether I could think the whole *Appassionata* before I played it. And then when I could, I said to myself, well, that's about as much as I can do. So that composing is no more, quite frankly, than when you hear a piece of music that you know fairly well; but in this case it happens to be a piece that you've just thought up. Very much is often discarded. And not only that, sometimes the things will come so perfectly clearly and so defined that there is absolutely nothing to do. Then I might just as well be a stenographer. At other times things come that are a little more complicated. They will come in a form that is not quite so defined, and then usually you mull over it and go around it in your mind.

It's quite a cold-blooded business, writing music—you've got to be terribly careful to be able to project what you want on the paper and not to get overexcited yourself. I remember when I wrote the *Three Moods*, which are really frightening—when you hear "Anger," you wouldn't want to be near me within a mile; and when I wrote it, I was just in a perfectly mild state. It was purely an aesthetic experience. What I was concerned with, when the thing hit me, was to try to organize it and get it into some intelligible form, so that I could put it down on paper. Sometimes it's very difficult to find the exact means by which you can put it into intelligible form. It's very unfortunate that in music we have to make some compromises, because the notation has its limitations; and besides that, we ourselves have certain specific limitations—this is an interesting thing I'm talking about now. For instance, you take a syncopa-



Leo Ornstein, autograph page from piano piece "Tarantelle Diabolique," signed by the composer 29 July 1960

tion: now, it doesn't matter how adroit you and I may be, or for that matter, how obtuse—we can only sense and perform a syncopation up to a certain speed.

All I can tell you is, I hear the thing, try desperately to remember it—now I'm having a real hard time because, as a younger man, I had a fairly decent memory—now, at eighty, unless I rush quickly to the paper, I'm liable to forget the idea within five or ten minutes. As a younger man, my memory was much more retentive—I was very fortunate that way. I used to be able to retain a piece of music that might last half an hour. But when there were some performances, finally I was up against it. I played *Three Moods* for years before I actually wrote them down. Once I had the thing complete in my head, then it was an awful chore to write it down. I shall never forget—by Jove, I think it was the *Poems of 1917*, when Fischer decided to publish it; they asked me for it, and I was traveling all the time, and I said, yes, I'm going to get them done. And finally, they invited me up to the office to write it down, and jolly well just literally closed the door on me.

And there's another of the most interesting things that puzzle me, that I've never been able to understand, and no one has ever been able to explain at all to me. This curious thing that one thinks a piece of music exactly at the speed at which it has to go. It's very curious that you never think of a piece—at least I never have—you don't think of the piece and then sort of toss up a coin and say, now let's see, should this piece go fast or should it go moderate? Apparently, the speed is as important as the intrinsic thought is in the piece.

With the Violin Sonata I felt that I was carrying abstract music to the brink. And I really withdrew slightly from that, because I felt that maybe I was entering into the realm of irrationality. To me, you see, music has absolutely no meaning if it doesn't have some emotional impact. I'm not interested in music as intellectual—not at all, I'm bored to death with it. And that's why so much of today's music—I just yawn at it, frankly.

You see, what happened with *Danse sauvage*, apparently, there was some kind of emotional thing that drove it. And then, sort of instinctively and without knowing what it was all about, I grabbed at anything that was at hand to just get the thing down. For instance, in the *Danse sauvage*, there was no mincing of words there; I said, "Well, I guess you'll just have to put your palm here to get the complete percussion sound."

The thing that frightened me a little at that point was: to what extent can the artist indulge himself? He becomes so subjective that he is no longer intelligible to another human being. Because it is possible that in some kind

of trancelike state you might perceive something that maybe appeared to you in one of those hazardous moments between consciousness and the subconscious. I am concerned about the artists becoming so subjective that they cease to have any level of communication. And once they cease to have communication they become something entirely different from art, which transfers one consciousness to another by making it somewhat intelligible. I feel that the arts are at a stage where they just may drown in a sea that is absolutely incomprehensible even to them.

Ultimately, when I wrote down the *Three Moods*, I experienced a terrific kind of a kick. And lots of people who have heard it, who were in their own traditional way of thinking, have apparently been able to get approximately the same kind of a kick; I just had the advantage over them that I had thought of it first, if that's some satisfaction.

When I write music I'm not thinking of experiments—I'm only thinking of projecting something of substance or of having some musical value. It

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

has nothing whatever to do with style. Now, whatever the style may be is just an indirect thing. And besides—now I'm saying something very, very important—one has to be particularly careful of one's own style because it's so easy to simply operate almost unconsciously within the style, forgetting altogether about the substance, substituting style for substance. It's very easy to do, and the composer—any artist, really—has to fight that. And I feel that many of the young people today are much more interested in experiment than they are in music. I'm still interested in music. Yes, I'm interested in experiment, but to me it's something entirely separate from what I'm talking about when I'm talking about the aesthetics of music. The trouble is it takes the most astute kind of a person to be able to distinguish when the artist is operating on his style or when he is operating within substance. And an audience can easily flounder.

There are these two pieces that I'm working on simultaneously now—those two viola pieces that I'm trying to finish off. The strangest thing is that I'll work on pieces which, just listening to them, have absolutely nothing to do with each other. I refuse to be bound by my own style, because I realize that it's a very dangerous thing. So that you will hear two things that seem to be almost by two different people.

One of my things I felt was probably as good a combination, or what satisfied me, was the Six Preludes for Cello and Piano. Some passages are very harrowing, you know. And I think it's safe to say that the Piano Concerto is one of my major things. The Concerto is to some extent a misnomer—it actually is really a symphony with a very elaborate piano part: to call it a concerto in the sense we usually think of it is absurd. Once I played from the original notes, and finally I wrote the thing out and put it in the final form for orchestra; and that's when Stokowski looked at the manuscript and said, "Let's do it." I played the piano part, and we did it in Philadelphia—had a pair of concerts. The following week we did it in New York.

I personally believe that what ultimately holds us to a piece of music is its organization. The organization doesn't necessarily have to be Haydnesque or Mozartean—it can be a logic of its own which has nothing whatever to do with the concept of the classicists. But there still has to be some orderly sense. I believe that may be what probably constitutes a fine piece of music, because I haven't the faintest idea why some notes placed in a certain rhythmic pattern—why they should attract us more than another series.

I cannot tell you—and nobody else can tell me—why they like a piece of music and why they don't; why they think one piece of music is superior to

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Leo Ornstein, ca. 1980

another. It's purely subjective. So the only thing that the critic really can do—and for that you've got to have a man like Paul Rosenfeld, who was able in some curious way to translate one medium into another. He heard a piece of music, he saw a picture, and what it did to him, he was able to project in his writings. And the interesting thing here, my dear, is not the fact that he liked a piece of music or he didn't; the interesting thing that now becomes the fact was what he felt he projected in literary terms—and that's quite a trick to do because the word is such a fixed convention. And what he was projecting, you understand, was his own impression, his own feeling. That is really the essential province of the critic, because otherwise it's nothing but that he happens

to like it or not like it—he can't tell you why, because no one in creation can tell you why one sequence of notes remains with one forever and why one is inconsequential and downright frivolous. No one can say why those notes that appear in the Opus 111 in the last movement of the sonata of Beethoven, which is absolutely one of the profoundest moments—why would those notes produce what they do produce? It does, and why it does, we don't know.

I'm just an old man trying to prolong his life. And I still am fortunate to enjoy it. Why my life should have been prolonged, don't ask me, my dear child. I think of my father at the age of 104—his intelligence was only of a modest kind, a very sweet person but who relinquished any attempt to get into the mainstream of life. For many years he dedicated himself to prolonging his life. I wonder. I wonder.

Edgard Varèse (1883 – 1965)

On a cold, bleak day in December 1915, a young French musician, Edgard Varèse, arrived in New York City. He had left war-torn Europe hoping to find a place where his revolutionary ideas might be tolerated. He was already known in Paris and Berlin as a promising young conductor, particularly interested in modern music. His pockets, almost empty of money, were filled with letters of introduction to influential people in America. New York City was immediately appealing to him. It seemed prosperous; the streets were bustling with commerce, activity, and sounds of all kinds. Varèse was stimulated by the noise and energy of the big city, its machines and technology. “Coming to the U.S. was like coming to the future,” he said.

Varèse was one of many European artists who sought safe haven in the New World during World War I. Another was Marcel Duchamp, one of the most radical experimental artists of the century. Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* had been displayed in the Armory show of 1913, which had introduced modernism to a shocked American public with a brazen display of hundreds of experimental works. Varèse knew about the Armory show and had no difficulty finding Duchamp and other fellow expatriates, nor did it take him long to discover American modernists who gathered around photographer Alfred Stieglitz in his celebrated gallery 291. During his formative years in Europe, Varèse had studied to be an engineer; he had been closer to artists and writers than musicians.¹⁹ In fact, he considered his music to be a form of visual art, according to the Varèse scholar Olivia Mattis, “a merger of the parameters of space and time.”²⁰

Varèse’s American pieces of the twenties reflect the influence of his earlier education in mathematics and physics. Architecturally conceived, they resemble the blocks of granite in nearby quarries which so impressed the young Varèse when he lived in Burgundy with his mother’s family. Varèse explained, “I used to watch the old stone cutters, marveling at the precision with which they worked. They didn’t use cement, and every stone had to fit and balance with every other. So I was always in touch with things of stone and with this kind of pure structural architecture—without frills or unnecessary decoration. All of this became an integral part of my thinking, at a very early stage.”²¹

Varèse studied music against his father’s wishes. After the family moved to Turin, Varèse left home, returning to Paris at age nineteen to attend the Schola Cantorum. There he studied with Vincent D’Indy, Albert Roussel, and Charles-Marie Widor. His first and foremost influence, however, was Debussy, whom he met several times in Paris: “Above all, I admired Debussy, primarily for his economy of means and clarity, and the intensity he achieved through them, balancing with almost mathematical equilibrium timbres against rhythms and textures—like a fantastic chemist.”²²

The years Varèse spent in Berlin (1907–1914) before coming to America were crucial to his thinking. He was introduced to a lively cultural community where he met the virtuoso pianist, composer, and musical philosopher Ferruccio Busoni. The younger composer was very much impressed by Busoni's book *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*, later calling it a "milestone in my musical development." Busoni expressed ideas about the freedom of music and the function of the creative artist. Varèse adopted Busoni's credo: to *make* the laws rather than follow them. Busoni's ideas continued to guide Varèse, although Busoni himself changed considerably in later years, becoming, like many composers after World War I, more conservative and "neo-classic." The composer Otto Luening said that he and Varèse "were very close friends and mostly because he, too, had this Busoni connection. Busoni had been Varèse's mentor ten years before I met him. Varèse got ideas from him about freeing things. Busoni was at that time a great experimenter, and that set Varèse going."²³

Varèse was determined to make a clean break with Europe and become part of American life and culture. He and his second wife, Louise, became permanent residents of New York City, returning to Paris for only a few years from 1928 to 1933. For his American conducting debut in 1917, Varèse planned a larger than normal concert. To honor the war dead, he programmed Berlioz's *Requiem*; the venue was New York City's Hippodrome, which accommodated an audience of six thousand. The concert was a huge success. As a result, Varèse was invited to conduct a Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra tour, but he was dismissed after the first concert. Louise Varèse believed that the tour was canceled due to the scandal caused in Cincinnati when she and Varèse, not yet married, stayed in the same hotel, though in different rooms.²⁴ The following year, with support from interested parties, Varèse became director of his own orchestra, the New Symphony Orchestra, which was devoted exclusively to new music. The orchestra was formed as a cooperative, and the players, as well as the critics, objected to Varèse's insistence on difficult new music programs. Varèse would not compromise; his programs remained unchanged. Much to his disappointment, the orchestra replaced him with a more conservative conductor.

Varèse named the first piece he wrote in the United States *Amériques* (1918–1921), a big score—brash and rambunctious, not unlike Varèse himself, who was often described as larger than life. The piece was intended as a statement that could not be ignored—an introduction to Edgard Varèse, a composer interested in "pure sound." Before writing *Amériques*, Varèse had studied the writings of the physicist Hermann Helmholtz and was fascinated by his experiments with sirens. Varèse said, "Later I made some modest experiments of my own and found that I could obtain beautiful parabolic and hyperbolic curves of sound. I used sirens as musical instruments in *Amériques* for large orchestra and again in 1932 [sic] in *Ionisation* for percussion ensemble."²⁵ Leopold Stokowski conducted *Amériques*, but the premiere was postponed numerous times. Stokowski wrote to Varèse, "The Committee is not

“ . . . the power of sound . . . ”

Arthur Weisberg conducted this huge orchestra in Carnegie Hall, where they did *Amériques*, and I was: “Whoa, it rocks!” The power of sound. You’re in graduate school and you’re parsing things in a microscopic level and you’re appraising small nuances of syntax, and then here’s this composer that just roars and grunts at you. Big funny obelisks that sit there—they’re like power chords. It’s like you turn your guitar on and go, “phwaang!” It’s not even an issue of dynamics. It’s not a matter of loudness. It is just a matter of hardness.

—Steve Mackey

from OHAM interview with Jack Vees,
22–23 February 2001, New Haven, Connecticut

able to give me a free hand in this matter for financial reasons.” After sixteen rehearsals with an expanded orchestra of 142 players, *Amériques* was finally performed in 1926 to boos and catcalls; critics described the reaction as “a veritable riot” and “incredible turmoil.”²⁶ Nothing like it had ever been heard in New York. Stokowski later conducted several other Varèse pieces. He was enormously popular, and his sponsorship and admiration for Varèse served to bring the composer to the attention of larger audiences. Varèse knew that it would cause a furor, but he was supremely confident and well aware of his reputation as an admired and attractive European musician. Varèse formulated a credo to express his goal: “to blow wide open the musical world and let in sound—all sound.”²⁷ *Amériques* was the start of an unswerving dedication to that goal.

Varèse soon became a familiar figure at new music concerts. Whenever he appeared, his presence was felt, and the level of excitement in the audience escalated. A dramatic aura surrounded him. He was quintessentially French, much as he professed to prefer Germany in the years before World War I and America thereafter. His bearing was dashing and romantic—from his mercurial temperament to his attitude of the misunderstood artist and unappreciated maverick. The intensity of his ideas and his unswerving belief in them made Varèse a hero to younger musicians who sought him out for lessons, among them such diverse artists as Chou Wen-chung, Frank Zappa, and Charlie Parker.²⁸

Varèse adopted America with enthusiasm but was not attracted to the kind of nationalism that occupied so many composers in the twenties, and the idea of an American sound held little appeal. He was adamant in his conviction that music expresses nothing but itself, and he would describe his music only in general terms—as organized sound in space. According to Milton Babbitt, “He would never indicate

how he wrote his music. Varèse had all these metaphors for what he was doing. I know exactly what he was doing with these calculations of his, of course. . . . He was calculating the relation of the pitch successions and the durations.”²⁹ Varèse functioned outside the stylistic battles of his time; he was not at all intrigued by serialism, or any other “ism.”³⁰ When the labels *futurism*, *Cubism*, and *Dadaism* were applied to him, they brought forth a rage out of proportion to the subject. Varèse barely tolerated analysis from the few theorists he respected; otherwise, he was reluctant and impatient with critics and interviewers.

As a composer Varèse was a freethinking individualist, yet he also worked with others to promote a variety of new music: he was the founding director of the International Composers’ Guild (ICG), one of the first attempts to develop a concert series devoted to premiere performances of new works.³¹ The ICG was short-lived (1921–1927) and fraught with financial difficulties and conflicts of person-

“I was allowed to spend . . . forty seconds on that before it was thrown on the floor . . .”

I went to him as a young music student who had worked very hard at trying to understand his music. And I remember him being very generous. We talked a long time about a variety of things, some musical, some sociological. Certainly he made it clear to me that extra musical impulses were a perfectly valid way to generate musical activity.

I worked very, very hard at analyzing *Intégrales* and attempting to develop some theory of chordal structure and succession. And I went to New York twice, carrying vast piles of charts and pages with progressions. Each time that I saw him, I think that I was allowed to spend perhaps up to thirty or forty seconds on that before it was thrown on the floor, discarded, and he just would not hear of the idea that his music could be reduced to consistency or method. My effort was to see that there would have to be a design behind the integrity of this music. And Varèse, of course, completely rejected that point of view—it was preposterous and even outrageous for somebody to be spending time attempting to show that there was any order.

I certainly saw the degree to which Varèse focused on details and on the correctness of things, but the correctness clearly came from some kind of very powerful intuitive grasp, and not from any sense of larger order or structural basis. It just wasn’t there.

—Roger Reynolds

from OHAM interview with Vincent Plush,
29 March 1983, Del Mar, California

ality (Varèse was known to have a low boiling point), but it was effective in introducing many important European and American works and as a starting point for the organized movement for modern music that followed. The rocky history of the ICG has been told in various versions: the abandonment of the organization by board members due to Varèse's dictatorial manner, and the loss of ICG's executive director, Claire Reis, to the newly formed League of Composers.³² When the ICG terminated in 1927, sides were taken and bitter accusations followed. The ICG was small and revolutionary; it was at the heart of the heroic avant-garde of the twenties and had the appeal of what later was dubbed "downtown" bohemianism. Varèse continued to promote new music; he soon founded the Pan American Association of Composers (1928–1934), which was responsible for several important premieres of American pieces abroad, among them Ives's *Three Places in New England* and Varèse's own *Ionisation*.³³

After the creation of *Amériques*, Varèse composed several works that explored new ground, among them *Intégrales*, *Hyperprism*, *Offrandes*, *Ionisation*, and *Arcana*. These early works make up the largest and most significant portion of Varèse's slender catalogue of twelve pieces. His most performed work, *Density 21.5*, for solo flute, was composed in 1936. In general, these works are characterized by blocks of sound, existing independently, with no attempt made to move them forward. His language emphasizes timbre rather than pitch and rhythm; melody and form do not exist in the usual sense.³⁴ The composer Stefan Wolpe said, "There is nothing to develop because everything is already present. The language has receded to a couple of elemental phrases. The Varèsian massiveness is simply composed to be what it is."³⁵

Percussion is central to all of Varèse's orchestral pieces. His emphasis on percussion instruments was prophetic—*Ionisation* (1931) was one of the first purely percussion pieces and proved to be revolutionary. The world premiere, conducted by Nicolas Slonimsky (6 March 1933), was in Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall. It was soon repeated at the Hollywood Bowl. The critic Richard Franko Goldman views *Ionisation* as a natural link to *Poème électronique* of 1958, which was composed for magnetic tape.³⁶

Other than a few premieres by the ICG (*Hyperprism*, *Offrande*, *Octandre*), and Stokowski's presentations of *Amériques*, *Arcana*, and *Hyperprism*, it was virtually impossible to hear concert presentations of the works composed by Varèse in the 1920s: he did not write for the usual instrumental combinations, and orchestras could not and would not give sufficient rehearsal time to complex and unusual pieces that called for massive orchestras including sirens and other unconventional instruments. Varèse explained, "In those days the situation really seemed hopeless. I'm afraid I developed a very negative attitude toward the entire musical situation."³⁷ Although Varèse had powerful supporters, such as Lawrence Gilman and Paul Rosenfeld, he suffered frustration at the lack of performances and the technological limitations to create the works he envisioned. Whatever Varèse's frustrations, they

" . . . he was dealing with sound for its own sake . . . "

I had access to recordings of *Ionisation* and *Octandre*. His work was very influential on my attitudes and ways of listening to and looking at and for sound. Not just his musical vocabulary, which is stunning, but the syntax: the grammar that he made for those instrumental sounds was far more relevant to my way of thinking about electronic means than any other instrumental music that I had heard. He was dealing with sound for its own sake, and that was an influence on the way I dealt with sound with tape recorder.

—Gordon Mumma
from OHAM interview with Vincent Plush,
17 May 1983, Santa Cruz, California

could not have been for lack of attention and adulation. "He became the matinee idol of modernism," writes the historian Carol Oja, who urges a closer look at "the myth of unjust neglect."³⁸ After the premiere of *Intégrales*, with Stokowski conducting at an ICG concert (1 March 1925) at Aeolian Hall, he composed *Arcana* (1925–1927). Varèse was at the peak of his career, with rave reviews favoring him over George Antheil, whose famous *Ballet mécanique* premiered within the same week. Yet he was discouraged and virtually stopped composing. His thwarted dreams of electronic instruments in a proper studio are cited as the reason for this hiatus. The composer Vivian Fine explained: "The eclipse of the avant-garde in the 1930s deeply affected composers' styles. Varèse couldn't change and didn't change; perhaps that's why he was so out of place for so long."³⁹ A fog of secrecy floats around Varèse, partly because his papers have been inaccessible.⁴⁰

The application of electronics to music was envisioned by Varèse far ahead of the availability of the machines that would make his advanced ideas come to fruition in the fifties. He was passionate about the importance of developing new instruments, and for years continued to pursue the idea of an instrument for producing new sounds. Louise Varèse explained, "His was an endless search and an endless frustration." Chou Wen-chung, Varèse's closest younger colleague, wrote, "It is now a historical fact that recognition of Varèse came too late for him to fully realize his goals. Therein lies the tragedy. . . . All that he fought for is now either taken as a matter of course, or soon to be realized."⁴¹

With the invention of the magnetic tape recorder and electronic synthesizer in the 1950s, Varèse began to compose again. Products of his later years were *Déserts* (1954), *Poème électronique* (1958), and the unfinished *Nocturnal*, with a text from *The House of Incest* by Anaïs Nin.⁴²

Varèse's first opportunity to work with electronics was in the studio *La Radio-Diffusion* in Paris, at the invitation of Pierre Schaeffer, to finish the tapes for *Déserts*. According to Stefan Wolpe, *Déserts* "present[s] the next higher dimension of orchestral sonority and lets us understand electronic sonority as flowing back into the orchestral sound."⁴³

Poème électronique was composed for the pavilion of the Philips Corporation at the Brussels Exposition of 1958. The piece was a three-track tape transmitted through hundreds of loudspeakers and produced in collaboration with the composer Iannis Xenakis. The leading modernist architect Le Corbusier designed the spectacular building, which, unfortunately, was later demolished. The opportunity to hear Varèse's spatial intentions died along with the building.

Varèse had an intense, unpredictable personality. He was attractive and charismatic when he was not difficult and opinionated. The composer's temperament is mentioned in various polite ways in the literature, including interviews with other composers that constitute an oral history on Varèse.⁴⁴ The *New York Times* critic Harold C. Schonberg described an interview with Varèse: "Just about 20 years ago, this writer first interviewed Varèse. It was like trying to encircle a geyser. Varèse, pugnacious and lively, had strong views about everything."⁴⁵ These views included prejudices that would not be tolerated today. Varèse (as well as his composer friend Carl Ruggles) regarded Jews, African Americans, and other ethnic groups with a measure of contempt.⁴⁶ At that time, similar attitudes were held by others, such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The most candid descriptions of Varèse came from his wife in her memoir, *A Looking-Glass Diary*. His personality swings are explained as manic depressive periods that plagued the composer all his life. Louise Varèse wrote, "A complete change of personality recurred in an instant. . . . It was more than a violent temper."⁴⁷

Varèse endured severe criticism by the music community and critics. He said,

For years, professional musicians looked upon me as a freak, and critics tried to call me a charlatan and had a wonderful time laughing at me. When Stokowski played *Hyperprism* at Carnegie Hall in 1924, Olin Downes, the music critic of the *New York Times*, wrote, "Personally, the music reminded me of an election night, a menagerie or two, and a catastrophe in a boiler factory. . . . We do not believe the day will ever come where this kind of thing will be taken seriously."⁴⁸

Edgard Varèse lived to see his works not only taken seriously but declared masterpieces. For a composer with only a few pieces, Varèse has had a powerful influence. His unshakable belief in technology was visionary. His freedom of imagination and exploration went far beyond the conventional boundaries of music into a wilderness not known to others. Varèse's ideas anticipated the field of electronic music, and his compositions are among the most innovative and significant of the twentieth century.



EDGARD VARÈSE

from edited transcripts of five tape recordings made by Leonard Altman at various times in 1965 at the Varèse home on Sullivan Street, New York City; and lecture at Princeton University, September 1959.

My father took lessons when he was a kid, but he did not know a thing about music. And my mother played the piano like a girl who was going to the parlor to play piano—not Beethoven, not Mozart, but *pièces de salon*. My mother played, and then my father ordered for me not to touch the piano. My father only wanted one thing: that I learn my mathematics to go to the Polytechnics in theory to become an engineer. We had nothing in common. I think that we hated each other. Later, he came to Paris. He made a scene with [the composer Jules] Massenet, and Massenet threw him out. Then the following day my father was called to the commissioner of the police that he would be quiet, or he would get into trouble.

I have but one brother. He's in Argentina, Buenos Aires. Two others just died. All businessmen. For some people, anything they touch, it's money. They are people who want luxury. I am not interested in luxury. I have the gift to reduce the value of money to nothing.

I heard Scriabin's *Le Poème de l'extase* when I was very young, and it made a big impression on me. And Sibelius—I think I was nine or ten the first time I heard *The Swan of Tuonela*. It disturbed me. It made a big impression—the legend, and the quality of sound in that monody, the richness. I think this is in orchestration one of the best things I know—that English horn in *The Swan of Tuonela*.

Of course I began like all music students, by learning the rules, and was subjected to the strictest disciplines of counterpoint and fugue, both at the Schola Cantorum under [Albert] Roussel, and [Charles] Widor's master class, Conservatoire de Paris. My professor of composition at the Schola Cantorum was Vincent D'Indy. He became a bitter enemy when I left his class to study with Widor at the Conservatoire. The reason I left him was because his idea of teaching was to form disciples. His vanity would not permit the least sign of originality or even independent thinking. And I did not want to become a little D'Indy; one was enough. Widor, on the other hand, was extremely liberal and allowed me plenty of rope, either to hang myself or to escape out of the prison of orthodox music. I escaped.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Edgard Varèse, ca. 1925

My aim has always been the liberation of sound; to throw open the whole world of sound to music. My fight for the liberation of sound and for my right to make music with any sound and all sounds has sometime been construed as a desire to disparage and even to discard the great music of the past. But that is where my roots are. No matter how original, how different a composer may seem, he has only grafted a little bit of himself on the old plant. But this he should be allowed to do without being accused of wanting to kill the plant. He only wants to produce a new flower. It doesn't matter if at first it seems to some people more like a cactus than a rose. Many of the old masters are my intimate friends. All are respected colleagues. None of them are dead saints; in fact none of them are dead. And the rules they have made for themselves are not sacrosanct and are not everlasting laws. Listening to music by

Machaut, Pérotin, Monteverdi, Bach, or Beethoven, we are conscious of living substances that are alive in the present. But music written in the manner of another century is the result of culture. And as desirable and comfortable as culture may be, an artist should not lie down in it.

When I was twenty, I came across a definition of music that seemed suddenly to throw light on my groping toward the music I sensed could exist: “the corporealization of the intelligence that is in sounds.”⁴⁹ It was new and exciting and to me, the first perfectly intelligible conception of music. It was probably what first started me thinking of music as spatial—as moving bodies of sound in space, a conception I gradually developed and made my own. Very early, musical ideas came to me, which I realized would be difficult or impossible to express with the means available, and my thinking even then began turning around the idea of liberating music from the tempered system, from the limitations of musical instruments, and from years of bad habit erroneously called tradition.

In 1907 I went to Berlin, where I had the good fortune of becoming an intimate friend, in spite of the great difference of age and importance, of Ferruccio Busoni. When I came across his dictum “Music was born free, and to win freedom is its destiny,” I was amazed and very much excited to find that there was somebody else besides myself—and a great musician at that—who believed this. It gave me the courage to go to him with my ideas and my scores. It was also Busoni who said, “The function of the creative artist consists of making laws, not in following laws already made.”

I became a sort of diabolic Parsifal: looking not for a holy grail but for a bomb that could blow wide open the musical world and let in sound—all sounds—at that time called noise, as sometime even today certain sounds are called.

Among other revolutionary topics we used to discuss was the need to free music from the tempered system that was strangling it, and consequently the need for new instruments. Several electrical inventions were brought out at that time which were to revolutionize music. Needless to say, they did nothing of this kind, but they made me realize that the only hope for getting an instrument that could produce new sounds was for a composer to work with an electrical engineer; and this was long before the discovery of electronics.

Busoni said, “Is it not singular to demand of a composer originality in all things and to forbid it as regards form. No wonder that if it becomes original, he is accused of formlessness.”⁵⁰ The misunderstanding has come from thinking of form as a point of departure; a pattern to be followed, a mold to

be filled. Form is the result of a process. Each of my works discovered its own form. I never tried to fit my conception into any known container.

Conceiving musical form as the result of a process, I saw a close analogy in the phenomenon of crystallization. It seems to me the clearest answer I could give people who ask me how I composed was to say by crystallization. There is an idea, the basis of an integral structure, expanded and split into different shapes or groups of sound, constantly changing in shape, direction, and speed, attracted and repulsed by various forces. The form of the work is the consequence of this interaction. Possible musical forms are as limitless as the exterior form of crystals. Connected with this contentious subject of form in music is the really futile question of the difference between form and content. There is no difference. Form and content are one; take away form, there is no content. And if there is no content, there is only a rearrangement of musical patterns, but no form.

Le Sacre du printemps was a novelty. It was Diaghilev at the time who was really a very important figure. Did I tell you about my last meeting with Diaghilev? One morning I was walking on the street. Suddenly, I heard a voice: "Varèse!" It was Diaghilev. He said, "Oh, you are swine. You are in Paris and you did not come to see me." I said, "First of all, I did not know you were in Paris. I am now seeing you, and I am very glad." He said, "It is a long time since I have had a project. The *Ballets Russes*, it is finished. I have you in mind to do something absolutely beautiful." I said, "What is it?" He said, "It has to be discussed and studied. But, I am going to Venice—"He was going with that little conductor who was his boyfriend at that time—Igor] Markevitch. Then he went to Venice and a few days later, in Venice, he died.

There were a great deal of Russians in Paris. I knew Lenin, I knew Trotsky. There were all these Jews that were intellectual, but to escape Russia on account of the pogroms they came all to *La Sorbonne*. At that time at least one-third of the French police were Russian. Another I knew in Paris is [Wilhelm] Furtwängler. I saw him when he came to conduct. We were on the best of terms. Later, I stood up for him when they said he was for the Nazis. When he came to Paris to conduct *Tristan*, the opera, he came to ask me to be there to translate with the men. He could not speak French.

In August '14 the war broke out. And in four days, I got a score, which I still have here, from Béla Bartók, his own score. And I sent him my own scores. His were published, mine were not published—manuscripts. He never received them.

France is not a country really for music. Paris is finished. Why look, even [Pierre] Boulez doesn't stay in France. He could stay there and do whatever he wants because he's from, I think, a well-to-do family. He came up with talent when nobody was there. Boulez is a good pianist, a very intelligent person, and very, very shrewd, too. The first time that he came here, do you know where he was living? With Cage. He came to see us. It was a very funny thing because I was not expecting—he doesn't look like and he doesn't behave like a homosexual. He's always very reserved—but Cage, right away, you see it!

Where I would live, if I could live all my life, it would be in Berlin. It's so serious. There was a culture. If you are not well recognized now, you will be later. There was a peculiar thing in Berlin: it was the most Jewish country—all the rich Jews, the [Max] Friedländers, the [Arnold] Mendelssohns—all the great families were in Berlin. And the art, the exhibitions. . . . When I used to go back to Paris, it was a provincial town. They [the Jews] were the people giving money. The Mendelssohns gave me money there. I didn't ask for anything. [Max] Reinhardt, the director—all Jews, all the management. If you take among the performers, all of the greatest ones have been Jews. Take all of the great pianists, with the exception perhaps of Liszt. And then they were more imperialistic than the emperor himself. We have plenty of anti-Semitism here. The Jews are not afraid to work, even the rich people, before the so-called families. A Jew is not afraid to go and do what he has to do, and to delve into society. And if they don't like them, he buys them. You can be bought, you know.

"The more we can give up the notion of the mainstream . . ."

When Boulez did a program of Varèse's music and he had Mrs. Varèse on the stage, he actually said that Varèse was outside the mainstream of music, and he was unpleasant and unaccepting of Varèse's work. And he actually felt proper in making such a judgement. I can imagine a musician living a very good life, and finding Varèse at the very center of it.

The more we can give up the notion of the mainstream, the better off we'll be.

—John Cage
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
19 December 1975, New York City

Art is a whore. You need money to make art because you have to live, and as soon as you begin to leave art, you lose face because then you are just a vendor. You make money, but it's not art.

Amériques, it was America for me at that time. It was everything in the mind of man, in the heart of man. It was for me a candle of freedom. It was just two weeks after that the war was declared. Been in Germany, been in Paris, and been here. When I came here, I had ninety dollars in my pocket. Did I know anybody? [Carl] Muck was conducting in Boston, and I knew Muck. He introduced me to the Vanderbilts, Mrs. Whitney, to all these people. But I was very stupid, always spitting in everybody's face. I was very much impressed by two men: Strauss, and—what's his name?—another one who was very nice to me: Mahler. For me, I said I write what I wanted. They don't play me anyway, so what do I care?

I knew [Carlos] Salzedo when the Conservatory of Paris was at that time the first of Europe.⁵¹ I think he was fifteen. He got the First Piano Medal in the morning, in the afternoon, harp—on the same day. [In New York] I said to Salzedo, "I'm going to start the [International] Composers' Guild. It has to be done." He really helped in everything. Then a woman wanted to infiltrate. I kicked out Mrs.—what's her name? [Claire Reis] We had a split so she started the League of Composers. Oh, she had a good public, but she never got our public. I made it known about the fight I had with her.

Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney [Gertrude Vanderbilt] helped us too. Her museum, the Whitney, was not yet a museum. There was a building. We had one room and they had one room for them given by Mrs. Whitney. Then she began to give exhibitions. Then we got that little theater that was on Seventh Avenue. It's torn down now. It was not very big, four or five hundred people, and we got it for nothing. Later on we got another office for nothing, just people who gave it to the society. Salzedo and myself, we were always there. You know that we were the first ones who didn't have to pay taxes for our concerts because we were doing it for nothing.

The guild was doing very well. People came from out of town. It was simply magnificent, the interest with these people at that time. Slonimsky did some conducting. He was very capable and had very good technique. He went to all of Europe: France and Germany, a great deal of conducting in Paris.

[My wife and I] were living on 8th Street, and many people told me about Ruggles. So we met Ruggles. I think it was at the beginning of the second year of the guild. He had one thing for voice which we were the first ones to

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

A young Claire Raphael (later Reis) as chairman of the People's Music League Executive Committee, shown at bottom right in article from *Musical America*, 22 May 1915. Claire Reis later became well known as executive director of the League of Composers.

play.⁵² They never played Americans here in America. They said if it's American, it cannot be good. That was before—What is that man? Their great hero?—Copland, absolutely a product of France: Nadia Boulanger and [Walter] Damrosch. Ives and Carl [Ruggles] were great friends. We played Ives. It was at that time really something very refreshingly American. He has written very beautiful things. He's uneven, but sometimes he's really exceedingly good and original. The sense of sound that he had. [Wallingford] Riegger was played too. He even wrote a piece for us. And there was Charles Seeger, Ruth [Crawford Seeger] too. She wrote a peaceful music, a kind of little canonic thing that was very interesting and quite good. We had all the Americans we could find. We had Cowell too. Cowell was living in California, and then he came here at that time.

I have all the programs. We had Bartók and the *Serenade* of Schoenberg. Then we got the *Double Concerto* [*Kammerkonzert*] of [Alban] Berg. We played in America the first of [Schoenberg's] *Pierrot Lunaire* and *Herzgewächse*. And [Anton von] Webern—immediately the quality of his work—it's elegant; it's

“Varèse was chairman of the board. . . . There was great disorder . . .”

Active in New York musical circles for more than fifty years, Claire Reis (1888–1978) worked with Edgard Varèse on the International Composers’ Guild, then was the founding director of the League of Composers for more than twenty-five years.

Varèse asked me to take over his programs because his audience was too small, the critics wouldn’t come because it was so far downtown, and he was in debt! It was a dark little hall and a tiny audience, and he was doing his best to put this idea across of *only* contemporary music. This was 1922. The next year I began with Varèse and Salzedo, who were practically the only two people running those small concerts—but I insisted that they’d have to come uptown. The Klaw Theater was a theater owned by people I knew; it was dark on Sundays, so they gave it to us for a very small fee.

Varèse really was a very dashing figure, a dynamic figure I should say, a very handsome man, and when he wanted to charm, he could. And as I later learned to my sorrow, he was as difficult to get along with when you weren’t working for him as he was easy to get along with when you were working for him. The year that I was working with Varèse we were very good friends. My husband liked him and liked his wife, Louise. We had a little house out in the country, and they used to come out. Varèse liked to cook, and he’d help us with the food and French salads. We couldn’t have had a pleasanter relationship until the break started.

My husband didn’t mind if once a month we would have a meeting at our home, and Varèse would bring in people at those meetings who were not on the board but wanted to know what was going on. I never was sure who belonged and who didn’t. Varèse was the chairman, Salzedo was vice chairman, I was the executive director, but everybody ran the meetings. Alma Wertheim, Louis Gruenberg, and Lazare Saminsky were on the board. They were such a scattered, heterogeneous group! We had no rules. Varèse would talk, Salzedo would talk, maybe I did a little. Louise Varèse came to some of the meetings, too, and Mimi Salzedo, who also was a good musician. You never knew how many wives or relatives were going to arrive. There was great disorder. Carl Ruggles came in to ask if we had an audience, and he said we shouldn’t cater to any audience—he was afraid of that. Eva Gauthier, who was a singer of modern music, would suddenly appear, and we were delighted to see her.

I respected his point of view until the very end when I discovered he would not repeat works, and that all came about through the great success we had with *Pierrot Lunaire*—its first performance in America [4 February 1923].

When I insisted we had to repeat *Pierrot* because we had about two hundred people who couldn't even get into the concert that night—it was so crowded—he insisted that he could *not* ever perform a work a second time, and he showed me the bylaws. That was the first time I knew we had them, and I felt that I had been cheated by not being told this at the beginning. It went against my nature that a work that needed to be heard should not be heard because of the ruling.

Alma and Lazare Saminsky greatly objected to Varèse's dictatorship on the making of the programs. Varèse felt that this was *his* society, and I suppose perhaps in Europe he felt he could be more of a dictator. He didn't realize that he was creating so much feeling, and he was astonished when these board members just got up and walked out of the meeting. In a temper, they just broke up the meeting and said, "We are resigning." Varèse was startled. I stood by for a while and had many discussions with Salzedo, chiefly because Varèse was in a great state of discouragement, although we had gathered enough money to pay his past bills, and we had a small treasury left over for another season. Salzedo said, "I don't understand how you can leave us, because you are interested in contemporary music—Varèse *is* contemporary music, as *I* am the harp."

I was getting more and more and more interested in the lives of composers and their needs, and I saw that a society could be formed which would not have a dictator, not have the ruling that had made me break with Varèse. We formed a society [the League of Composers] immediately, with bylaws that we all agreed upon. The music we would perform would be from every country, from every trend; the first year no composer on the board would have his work performed, so we wouldn't start off as the other society had, with more or less of a clique feeling, self-serving.

Varèse soon really became an impossible kind of enemy to the league and to me. He struggled to keep his society going, and he felt bitter against me even though I had done all the work that he wanted and enlarged his following also, and I had pulled him out of his financial difficulties. I brought him into the middle of the town; I made a new audience for him. Varèse continued for five years. There were five years of two societies, and as Copland said in his own book [*The New Music, 1900–1960*], instead of one society there were two, which is all the better for contemporary music. It was an unhappy experience, and if there was such a thing as a fight of the two societies, we won it by living on for twenty-eight years or more.

—Claire Reis
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
29 January 1976, New York City

“ . . . William Schuman, the lion’s roar ”

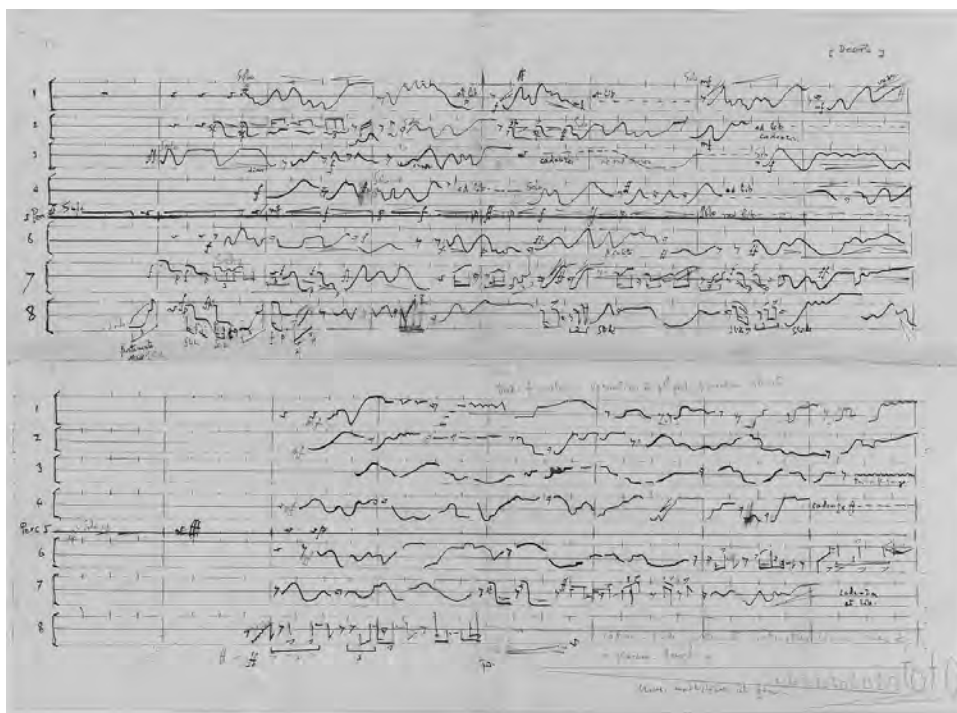
I gave the first performance in Europe of several Varèse works and the world premiere of his *Ionisation* for percussion instruments only, which is dedicated to me. That premiere was in New York. And I had a stellar cast for this performance. Since regular men of the New York Philharmonic simply could not master those rhythms, I had to ask my colleagues to play those instruments. Among the percussion players were the following: Carlos Salzedo, who played the Chinese blocks; Henry Cowell, his tone clusters on the piano; Paul Creston, the anvil; and William Schuman, the lion’s roar. It was an extraordinary occasion and an extraordinary cast. It took place in 1934.

—Nicolas Slonimsky
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
29 January 1969, New York City

clear, and the sounds are beautiful. At that time they were absolutely unknown. It’s a very peculiar thing because they were very well received.

Then some Debussy, but he was already known. We gave Hindemith [*Suite “1922”* and *Kammermusik No. 3*] to have all the things present, but it was a horror, my God. People were just there to have scandal, you know. [Stravinsky’s] *Les Noces*—we did it, and Stokowski conducted. It was jammed when Stokowski conducted. We had the four pianists and the soloist, and at that time everybody was playing for nothing. Stokowski, prestige—he had so much. It was impossible to get a ticket for Stokowski. Here in New York with a hundred dollars at that time, you could not buy a ticket—sold out at the beginning of the season—it was a tremendous success.

In Philadelphia at that time, Stokowski was like a king. Really, you never heard of Philadelphia except when Stokowski began with that orchestra. They came here for, I think, ten concerts in the season. They always did some very interesting work. Then he cooperated with us, with the guild. Stokowski had an orchestra of 132 players. And he gave me seventeen rehearsals.⁵³ He gets what he wants from his people. He has a gesture, and then they get that quality of tone that he wants. One day Stokowski conducted something here of mine [*Amériques*], and after I saw him. He said, “I cannot say anything.” I said, “You have your taste. It’s not compulsory to like my music.” Stokowski came two or three times to conduct for us. Everybody was very generous. Toscanini



Edgard Varèse, first page of *Déserts*, autograph manuscript

came, even after I had a fight with him. Fritz Reiner, [Eugene] Goossens—everyone conducted for nothing.⁵⁴

Because for so many years I crusaded for new instruments, which may have seemed a single fanatical zeal, I have been accused of desiring nothing less than the destruction of all musical instruments, and even of all performers. This is, to say the least, an exaggeration. Our new liberation medium [electronics] is not meant to replace the old musical instruments, which composers, including myself, will continue to use. Electronics is an additive, not a destructive factor in the art and science of music. It is because new instruments have been constantly added to the old ones that Western music has such a rich and varied patrimony. One of the most valuable possibilities that electronics has added to musical compositions, at least for me, is that of the possibility of metrically unrelated simultaneity. My music being based on the movement of unrelated sound masses, I have long felt the need and anticipated the effect of having them move simultaneously at different speeds.

A machine cannot be pushed around. You do not [just] press buttons. You have to experiment. Sometimes, even if you are not disciplined, you get something very beautiful, but it's not what you wanted. It's just a disturbance. You have to know before what you want and put it on paper.

For the *Poème électronique*, first of all I had to start my signals. Your oscillators are the first thing because you can get the sound. You can control

it, and then it's the mixing. *Poème électronique* was absolutely electronic except the voice of a girl. I said to Le Corbusier, "Look, we are going to do something for this a little bit sentimental. You know, they have been occupied by the Spanish in the Inquisition." So I said I'll give them one thing: the first thing the girl begins to cry. Torture, you know. Then later on, just a little, two or three yells of freedom. So, they were very happy to have a thing like that. And immediately they gave me what I wanted. One day I asked, "For a few notes, I need a singer." They sent me a prima donna of the opera in Brussels. And I wrote a little thing, I did it with her. Then I began to do some filtering to displace the voice. At the beginning, I meant that it was a lamentation in the jail. The prima donna, hearing herself in the studio, she thought everything was exploding. But the swine there, you know that [Philips] wanted me out? They cabled that I was impossible to work with, that I was insulting everybody. Le Corbusier, who was in India, [said], "Varèse quits, I quit too, and there is no pavilion."

It was a tremendous success, that thing in Brussels. I never will have a thing like that again. I had four hundred loudspeakers on eight rows. You know, [the composer Iannis] Xenakis is a very good engineer. They did a scaffold of the design, and then you have all these loudspeakers. They had at least six months of trying. They spent a fortune to do that. And then when it was finished, Le Corbusier told me if I was in favor that we'll have this remain. So I said that it was simply magnificent. Then they bickered—the government of Belgium wanted to have it in the garden. So Le Corbusier said to me, "You know what I'll do? POOMPH!" A little dynamite, you know. It was too bad because it was a unique thing.

Boulez asked me for a piece. So I say, "All right, I'll give you the premiere in your country." It's a thing by Anaïs Nin. It's in *The House of Incest*.⁵⁵ For me, I adore that, because it's in the head of the woman. I am going to do a thing very, very tense. It's a woman sometimes speaking about the womb, and sometimes a cry of great tension. I want this played by all the young people. Just a few instruments: I am using one piano. I wanted to have an organ, but an organ absorbs too much of everything, and it's very heavy, so no. But the piano, you don't hear the piano playing. It's just to have a continuity. I am going to have a tuba, two trombones, one horn (and solo, in pianissimo), one or two trumpets. And then I am going to have one oboe, perhaps one English horn, one clarinet, flute and piccolo, and a soprano—a kind that can go clear, clear, clear. She comes out like a little girl, happy—and just then, [monotone, deeply and quietly] "You belong to the night." And then I cut loose. An orgasm. "Whoosh."

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Philips Pavilion, Brussels World's Fair, 1958

To jump from a thing to another one, like a dream. Somebody says, "I dreamed all night long . . ." That's Anaïs Nin. Then I'm going to try to have in between, quarter tones—with the lips.

I don't know why people say, "You are not going to get that." I always get anything I want. I think for me, everything is possible. I have heard all the imbecility: "It's impossible." Here in America I heard when I arrived such a thing. They were so satisfied with what they had.

You know the Bell Laboratories? These people, they have no imagination for sound. But on the contrary they are tremendously interested if you tell them what you want. You want not to copy sound, you want to create sound. Getting out of the tempered system too, which is an imbecility. I want to have all the possibilities, not just the tempered system. We have to get out of that. It's completely forced. Why should we have that and not the number of the frequency? After all, the music of today is not the music of Bach, because Bach was more than one tonal difference from today. We are ruining our ears today because suddenly you think that something is wrong. It's not something wrong. It is something that is disturbing an acquired habit, but a C of today is not a C in the time of Bach.

Schoenberg has these twelve established tones and he moves them like dominoes. They make almost the same sound as the dominoes falling down.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Edgard Varèse, ca. 1960

He has written some beautiful things—the first time with *Pierrot Lunaire*—and then it's to vomit, you go to sleep. It's such a bore. There's no question that Schoenberg is a romantic even in spite of his twelve-tone system. You hear it in *Moses und Aron*. He's a man who could not escape out of Brahms.

Everybody writes dodecaphonic today. Everybody sounds the same, and everything is the same thing. It's the same intervals. There is no life. There is no rhythmical thing. There is a tragedy for the dodecaphonics: they have twelve tones to manipulate, and only ten fingers. And it's true, you cannot play the whole series together. You know, I think that dodecaphonic thing for me is absolutely as dead as it can be.

One who I like very much, and more and more—he is a magnificent musician, and he knows how to conduct: it's Bernstein. Bernstein's music is cleverly done. He is not on the level as a composer as he is a conductor. I know him pretty well, and I like him. When he wants to do something, he does it. It's unbelievable, the activity of that man. It's a joy to work with him. He cannot give you more rehearsals than he is supposed to give you, but he gives you

the maximum. And when he did my thing, I got practically everything.⁵⁶ I think every composer who has to work with him—it's very, very nice. He's a good musician, he understands, and then he's very quick. Of course when he does these big gestures it's not necessary, [but] he's a good conductor, and he's serious.

With jazz, the ones who could have been good become very conventional. I heard the man who was playing—what was his name? He died. He was a god of music in that field. He played a kind of saxophone—Charlie Parker. At that time he lived in New York. He followed me on the street, and he said he wanted to be with us. The day I left I said, "We'll get together. I'll take you for my pupil." Then I had to catch my boat. It's when I went to Europe for *Déserts*. And Charlie Parker died in '55, in March. Oh, he was so nice, and so modest, and he had such a tone. You could not know if it was an angelic double bass, a saxophone, or a bass clarinet. Then one day I was in that big hall there on 14th Street, the Cooper Union. Somebody said, "I want to meet you." She was the widow of Charlie Parker. She said, "He was always talking about you, so I know all about you." And that man was a great star. He wanted to study music and thought I had something for him.

Most of my life I have been rather more closely associated with painters, poets, architects, and scientists than with musicians. While only a few musicians responded to my music in the beginning—or understood my simple though sometimes unorthodox ideas—painters, sculptors, and poets invariably did. Perhaps this is why my point of view has differed so radically from that of most musicians, or vice versa. My musical views having made me musically

"My experiments belong in the wastepaper basket . . ."

I always remember one thing that ought to be very instructive for a number of composers. He said, "My experiments belong in the wastepaper basket." In other words, his music as he produced it, and as he presented it in finished form, was not experimental. He felt that experiments were done, they were put away, and that was that. And I think it's important to keep this in mind.

—Vladimir Ussachevsky
from OHAM interview with Joan Thompson,
10 April 1978, Princeton, New Jersey

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Edgard Varèse with his friend the sculptor Alexander Calder

untouchable, I sought and found the sympathy and corroboration from the practitioners of the other arts. In an article on the first performance of *Déserts*, the French critic Jean Roy, speaking on the fact that music has lagged behind the other arts, pointed to me as one of the few composers who “sets his watch at the same time as the poets and painters.”⁵⁷ He also affirmed that when this happens, the composer is labeled precursor or pioneer and his compositions, dismissed as experiments, are refused the status of works of art. As a matter of fact, I have been called much worse than experimental—my works at one time were treated not even as experiments, but as excrement.

Carl Ruggles (1876 – 1971)

Like Ives and Varèse, Ruggles grew to maturity in the nineteenth century. Ruggles came from a long line of New England seafaring ancestors—or so he claimed. According to John Kirkpatrick, who knew him well, “Carl sort of made up his history as he went along.”⁵⁸ Most people believed his stories. For example, Varèse said, “You really feel in him a tradition of thirteen or fourteen generations of sea captains, whalers. Somebody told me that his grandfather, who was sailing from Cape Cod as a whaler and sea captain, was a friend of Herman Melville, and that sometimes they did expeditions together. This you feel in Ruggles.”⁵⁹ In an article based on conversations with Ruggles, Kirkpatrick reviewed his friend’s biography, reminding the reader that it is mostly fact, partly fiction.⁶⁰

Carl Ruggles was raised near Marion, Massachusetts, a small Buzzards Bay fishing village. He moved to the Boston vicinity in his teens. A violinist from childhood on, he studied composition privately with the Harvard professor John Knowles Paine and worked at various musical trades. For a time, he and Henry Gilbert, another renegade composer, were engravers for a Boston publisher. Boston was his home base until he went to teach in Winona, Minnesota, where he also founded and conducted an orchestra. He married Charlotte Snell, a promising contralto, and they lived in Winona for about five years. A son, Micah, was born in 1915. During World War I, Ruggles went to New York, hoping to interest the Metropolitan Opera in his work, *The Sunken Bell*. Although not successful with the opera (it was never finished), Ruggles met the small group of ultramodernists active in New York at that time, including Varèse and later Henry Cowell. Ruggles joined Varèse and Salzedo in working for the International Composers’ Guild. He liked the small audiences because he was suspicious of popularity, thinking it was dangerous for new music. The ICG sponsored five performances of Ruggles’s music, and later the Pan American Association of Composers gave five more performances, several conducted by Nicolas Slonimsky.⁶¹ Varèse and Ruggles had in common their aggressive opinions and prejudices, and a proclivity for exaggeration. They were also both quick to anger, leading eventually to a bitter falling out. During the ICG years, however, they were together frequently. They must have been a striking and amusing pair—Ruggles, the salty unpolished New Englander; Varèse, the sophisticated European.

The Ruggles papers, housed at the Yale Music Library, are sprinkled with anti-Semitic remarks and are outspoken in criticism of individuals such as Slonimsky and Varèse. The letters show the nature of the burgeoning new music societies, and they reveal connections between the early modernists. Letters from Carl Ruggles to “Dear Heno” [Henry Cowell] dealing with the publication of *Men and Mountains* in the first issue of *New Music* reveal a warm relationship between Ruggles and Cowell, and an increasingly cool and angry attitude toward Varèse. From 26 November 1926:

Here is some news. I resigned from the Guild last Saturday, the day of your concert. I couldn't stand Varèse another minute. The Guild, I'm afraid, has degenerated into nothing but an advertising medium for Varèse and his henchmen. . . . He pulled the Mussolini stuff on me. So I answered him on the 20th with my resignation. That will put a crimp into him for the way he has treated you and others.⁶²

The Ruggles family was frequently in financial difficulty. Ruggles held various short-term teaching positions; the most enduring was at the University of Miami. Typical of Ruggles's self-aggrandizement, when listing his academic appointments, he boosted a brief enrollment as a special student at Harvard to a faculty position. For much of his long life, Ruggles was the recipient of financial support from a loyal patron, an arrangement that was not unusual in the arts before the existence of government agencies and private foundations.

Ruggles was an accomplished self-taught artist and a friend of painter Rockwell Kent. Kent convinced the Ruggles family to move to Arlington, Vermont, where they lived in a converted schoolhouse. In his own lifetime Ruggles received more recognition as painter than as composer. He designed several covers for Cowell's *New Music* publications; his work for chamber orchestra, *Men and Mountains*, appeared in the first issue.

Ruggles's first mature piece, "Toys," was a song in honor of his son Micah, composed in 1919, when Ruggles was forty-three. After the twenties, when Ruggles

"You can hear a certain romanticism in Carl . . ."

Ruggles has been a friend of mine since I first discovered him in 1922, when we started the International Composers' Guild. Immediately I was attracted not only to him but to the quality of his music and the integrity of the man. I think Ruggles, with Ives, is really one of the great pioneers of American music in the twentieth century. You can hear a certain romanticism in Carl, in Ruggles, which might have a certain affinity of temperament with the nature of a man like Schoenberg. You find the same, what I will not call honesty but the same integrity, the same austerity, the same uncompromising attitude and speech in Ruggles that you feel in Schoenberg. You feel this in Ruggles, sometimes a little preaching quality, but something typically New England that you cannot find, certainly not in Europe, but I don't think in any other place of America.

—Edgard Varèse
from lecture,

September 1959, Princeton, New Jersey

abandoned tonality and triadic harmonies, he began to develop an individual contrapuntal style. His instrumental pieces *Sun-Treader*, *Men and Mountains*, and *Portals* resembled the European symphonic works of the late nineteenth century in their grand orchestral sound. For example, the opening of *Sun-Treader* includes bold repeated tympani strokes similar to those in Brahms's First Symphony. His admiration for German music was so great that he adopted the name Carl rather than Charles, his legal name. Ruggles independently created and strictly followed a highly personalized nontonal system that might be compared to Schoenberg's twelve-tone method. His orchestral music is marked by a dense and grainy texture achieved by secundal dissonance and unusual orchestration that contrasted families of instruments. According to Lou Harrison, the orchestral pieces were "in the chromatic dissonant style and showed a certain resemblance to Berg and Schoenberg . . . which also held something rare, something different from these others in its long, continuous, really vocal counterpoints. . . . That counterpoint still has a fresh, singing sound that seems right and reasonable."⁶³

Other Ruggles pieces are for various combinations. Dates are problematic; lists of Ruggles's works are littered with "unfinished" and "revised" versions. The end result is that Ruggles's catalogue consists of a handful of pieces. In addition to those already mentioned are *Angels*, for six muted trumpets; *Vox clamans in deserto*, for voice and chamber orchestra; *Organum*, for orchestra; and *Evocations*, for piano. His last work was *Exaltation*, a hymn tune written in memory of his wife, Charlotte. Stravinsky, writing about composers, cited *Angels* and *Lilacs* (the second movement of *Men and Mountains*) as having "a distinctly American and very lovely lyricism."⁶⁴

Ruggles is often paired with Ives. They shared a New England background, were close in age, and became good friends. Their friendship, which was shared by

"Six fat men with brass instruments . . ."

Ruggles's *Angels* was an extraordinary performance. The work was eagerly awaited because we had heard so little of Ruggles's music. When these six very fat men came out with the six brass instruments and lined on the stage to play *Angels*, the audience burst our laughing. You could hardly get the audience under control before the music was practically over. I can still see these six fat men standing in the front of the stage!

—Claire Reis

from OHAM interviews with Perlis,
21 January 1976 to 6 May 1977, New York City



Carl Ruggles, pencil sketch for unfinished *Symphonia Dialectica*

their wives and families, was puzzling—they were different in so many ways. Ruggles had none of Ives's lofty liberal ideals. He was a feisty character, famous for his off-color stories, while Ives was Victorian in his lifestyle and had an old-fashioned sense of humor consisting mostly of harmless, sophomoric puns. Ruggles was short, bald, and always chomping on a cigar. He has been described as resembling the cartoon character Popeye. Ives was tall, bearded, and shy. Perhaps it was Ruggles's fighting

" . . . the greatest modern composer . . . "

I was very impressed with Ives, realizing what a generous and lovable person he was. He looked like one of El Greco's great portraits, with his beard and sparkling eyes. He and Dad started talking about who was the greatest modern composer. Dad said Mr. Ives was; Mr. Ives said Dad was. I never did find out who was. I believe of all the composers that my father knew, he considers Mr. Ives the most dedicated and respects him more than all the rest.

—Micah Ruggles
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
1972, Miami

spirit and rebellious attitude that appealed to Ives, or perhaps Ruggles was on good behavior when he visited the Iveses. As for the music, the historian Steven Gilbert wrote, “Ruggles’ output remains distinctly different from that of Ives, both in quantity and substance. . . . Poetic titles notwithstanding, Ruggles’ music is quite abstract, completely lacking in the folkloric references one finds so frequently in Ives.”⁶⁵

Ruggles’s magnum opus, *Sun-Treader*, had its American premiere in Portland, Maine, in 1966 at a Ruggles retrospective, sponsored by Bowdoin College, that included most of Ruggles’s music and about forty of his paintings and drawings. Ruggles, at age ninety, could not attend, but his friends arranged for him to hear the broadcast of *Sun-Treader* on the radio. It was conducted by Jean Martinon at the Portland City Hall. The following December, Stokowski conducted the work with the American Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. Again, Ruggles could not attend, but he was terribly proud of Stokowski’s interest and eagerly told everyone who came to see him all about it.

Ruggles is considered one of the significant early modernists, but performances of his works are infrequent. He had the loyal support of such influential musicians as John Kirkpatrick and Michael Tilson Thomas. Ruggles did not spare his strong opinions as he worked with Tilson Thomas on his scores for recordings of the complete works, including *Sun-Treader* and *Men and Mountains*. Tilson Thomas wrote that Ruggles was “a primitive, a Transcendentalist, a salty Yankee. . . . It is romantic music of great rhythmic and tonal complexity.” John Kirkpatrick, best known for his work on Ives, was also executor of the Ruggles estate. Kirkpatrick explained

“He was happy, and so was I, about my involvement . . .”

I don’t remember how I met Ruggles. He didn’t write so very many things. He was happy, and so was I, about my involvement with his music. The responsibility of the conductor is to make the program, and he must do his best according to his imagination to balance things and to make for variety and interest in the program. The public can not like it and stand up and walk out. I have had that happen to me often, especially when I was doing modern things. They just walk out. Or first they hiss, and then they stand up and walk. And I have sometimes thanked them for hissing because you are expressing your opinion, and that is the right of all of us who live, fortunately, in a free country. So they laugh and they hiss a little bit more. It doesn’t work very well, the hissing. It doesn’t stop anything.

—Leopold Stokowski
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
18 February 1972, New York City

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Carl Ruggles, ca. 1961. A handwritten note on the back of the photo reads:
“I don’t know if you’ll like this, Carl, because the camera angle tends to caricature the sharpness, the New England crankiness of nose + chin while keeping the wonderful expression of eyes and forehead—it’s a man who knows he looks beyond his own lifetime into the future of music w/ confidence but no arrogance, and with more tolerance and humor than in your pictures as a young man . . . Love—Sidney [Cowell]”

that Ruggles was critical of others and exacting of himself.⁶⁶ Kirkpatrick was responsible for bringing the Ruggles archive to the Yale Music Library. The large collection, which includes manuscripts, papers, and a few paintings, provides a rich source of materials on Ruggles’s life and works. Certain aspects of the archive are particularly appealing, such as Ruggles’s scores—he often used colored crayons, mostly red and blue, on large brown paper of various sizes.

Ruggles was ninety-three when interviewed for OHAM in a Bennington nursing home. It is a rare recording of the composer's voice. While the interview was primarily to collect information about Ives, Ruggles also talked about himself and his music.



CARL RUGGLES

From interview with Vivian Perlis, 28 February 1969,
Bennington, Vermont

I composed at the piano. So did Ives, too. We both did. So did Wagner. *Sun-Treader* was played in Paris [25 February 1932], and the conductor [Slonimsky] said he would need more money—it wasn't going well. Varèse was over there, and he sent word to Ives, and Ives immediately sent him a thousand dollars for more rehearsals. He was a very rich man, you know. In

" . . . the test of time . . . "

I remember going to see him one time, and I stayed outside while he played an eleven-tone chord—ten with the fingers and singing a raucous tone to make the eleventh—then he'd stop and then he'd do it over again. I waited fifteen minutes or so, and then I went in and I said, "Why were you playing this chord over and over?" He said, "I'm giving it the test of time." He said, "If I could stand it myself after playing it fifty or sixty times, I don't see why you have to wait fifty or sixty years to find out whether it's good or not."

The sense of sonority which was so consistently developed all through the writings of Ruggles meant that at all points there had to be at least one very dissonant tone, among others which in themselves might form triads or other chords of not too dissonant a nature, so that he had a real, woven texture in which he was able to balance dissonance and consonance and make a fabric out of this.

I only hope history will show that he's written a large enough body of works so that his fame will endure, because it should be deserved. If Schoenberg had been just a very nice, pleasant man and not at all neurotic, he might have written music as pleasant as Ruggles.

—Henry Cowell
from interview with John Edmunds,
ca. 1959

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Carl Ruggles at home, Arlington, Vermont, ca. 1951

Paris, [Slonimsky] was trying to conduct in certain ways, and the concert master of the Paris Symphony said, "Mr. Slonimsky, never mind about that fancy stuff you're trying to do, just give us the beat and we'll do the rest." You've heard my *Sun-Treader*? Then you've heard something! Stokowski conducted that. He made a tremendous success with my *Sun-Treader*, Leopold Stokowski. I never go to concerts. I didn't go to this one here, our great festival. They arranged some way so that I heard it over the radio here. The orchestra was the biggest orchestra that's ever been heard for years. Did you go? No? You weren't here? Well that's no excuse!

" . . . they're not sick octaves!"

It was the last year of Ruggles's life; it was an all-Ruggles concert in which we played the *Sun-Treader*. I went to see Carl Ruggles every day during the week of rehearsals, and I told him the trouble I was having in getting the consecutive minor ninths played harshly enough so that they sounded like dissonances. And he said, "That's it. They're dissonances. They're not sick octaves!"

My idea about how to write lines of a nontonal and jagged character I got from Ruggles. Although he believed, as the Viennese serial people do, in using the twelve pitches and treating each one as independently as possible, he had no use for a motive of two or three notes. He believed that nothing is entitled to recognition as a melody unless it goes on for eight or ten bars and longer if possible, without repetitions or manipulation. His idea of asymmetrical rhythm and asymmetrical phrasing impressed me very much, and especially his illustration of it with maple leaves: He asked me to get some from the tree outside. I brought them in, and he put one on top of the other and said, "Look, they're all maple leaves. They're even all from the same tree. You show me two that are exactly alike—you show me one that's symmetrical, that has similar measurements. Yet every one is identifiable as a maple leaf." He said, "That's melody." I think an idea like that has a lot to teach the tone row people.

—Henry Brant

from OHAM interview with Vincent Plush,
11 May 1983, Santa Barbara, California

“Carl could get away with anything . . .”

With Carl you could forget you’ve got a brain. You’d just submerge yourself in this sea of feeling. Carl and Ives were great friends. They admired each other, but I think that Carl admired Ives as a musician, not for his music.

If I had only had the sense to record some of his stories! Did you ever hear him tell a story? You never heard such delivery and such a repertory. He could start in, I swear, of an evening and keep going until the next evening without repeating! And he could tell stories that nobody else that I have ever known could tell. You take the risqué story—the average person tells, and it just makes you sick. I wouldn’t even think of trying. But Carl could get away with anything, except when his wife, Charlotte, would say, “No, Carl, not that one.” And Carl wouldn’t. Charlotte was a lovely and wonderful person. And that marriage is one of the two perfect marriages that I’ve had any insight to. One of them was my marriage to Ruth [Crawford], and the other was Charlotte and Carl.

After Ruth died, I went up to see Carl, and I discovered he was living at the old hotel that burned down. I asked down below before I went up, “How is Mrs. Ruggles?” “Oh, didn’t you know that she died?” Whew. I had to go up and see Carl. Both our wives had just died. Well, you can imagine, it’s an evening I can’t describe. And it turned out at the very end he had written her a hymn tune. Well, he had just completed it, and he wanted to ask me about the voice leading. Carl always would ask me about these things. I would suggest something here and there, and he would always say, “Yes, you’re right, Charles, I’ll change that.” [The “Hymn for Charlotte” was finished and given the title “Exaltation” in 1958.]

On the drive back I realized I’d been unconsciously making up a tune in my mind and some words to it. The words were “Nevermore.” And it’s a popular tune. It could be sung in a nightclub. So, here were these two goddamn American musicians who thought they were in the forefront of music in the twenties—when they really came to grips with their insides, Carl writes a hymn, which he had always had complete contempt for, and I write a popular Broadway tune that I was trying to get over my contempt for. It’s almost too pat to be believed.

—Charles Seeger
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
16 March 1970, San Marino, California

Dane Rudhyar (1895 – 1985)

Dane Rudhyar's passion for America began when he arrived from France before World War I. He wrote, "I feel that anything that breaks down the narrow idolatry of musicians with regard to European musical concepts is valuable."⁶⁷ He adopted both coasts and was a founding member of the New York-based International Composers' Guild and the New Music Society in California. His break from his European roots was so extreme that he changed his name from Daniel Chennevière to Dane Rudhyar, a name derived from the Sanskrit *rudra*, meaning dynamic action, and relating to the color red, the color associated with his astrological sign, Aries, and its ruling planet, Mars.

His music and his philosophical inclinations ran to the sweeping and expansive. Even the titles of his pieces, such as *Soul Fire* or *From the Unreal Lead Us to the Real*, suggest a grand statement—and a mystical one. Rudhyar greatly admired Scriabin, and like him studied Theosophy and esoteric religions and considered music a spiritual vehicle. Rudhyar was the author of approximately forty books, including *The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music*. In this work he discusses the obstacles faced by those composers who "seek to dis-Europeanize music, and develop a new psychological approach to music, and thereby elicit experiences of sound which would be far more magical and consciousness transforming than esthetical."⁶⁸ In the mid-twenties, his philosophies were viewed with some interest by the musicians then involved with Theosophy, including the young Elliott Carter, John Kirkpatrick, and Kitty Heyman, at whose soirées Rudhyar's music was occasionally performed. It was perhaps at Heyman's that Rudhyar met Ives, who was generous to the younger composer. "He sent me some money to buy a little lot in New Mexico, in Santa Fe. He was very nice to me," said Rudhyar, "and he gave money to the New Music Society regularly."⁶⁹ Rudhyar was naturally a messianic figure, so much so that he was employed for seven months in 1924 to play the part of Jesus Christ twice a day in a live prologue to Cecil B. DeMille's silent film *The Ten Commandments*, which was then showing at Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

Like many of his contemporaries, Rudhyar explored dissonant harmonies. But he took a spiritual approach to dissonance, considering it symbolic of American cultural diversity. Carol Oja has pointed out that Rudhyar and Charles Seeger both embraced dissonance, but in different ways. "Seeger developed a systematic theory of dissonant counterpoint; Rudhyar, on the other hand, expressed little interest in systems of any kind, preferring poetic odysseys. Yet in many respects, the two men were not so far apart. Both sought to devise a dissonant form of musical expression emblematic of the New World, and their ideas affected the same group of composers."⁷⁰

The hardships of the Depression brought an end to Rudhyar's compositional career. After 1930 he worked primarily as an astrologer and became a leading expert in the field. In the 1970s he was rediscovered by a number of younger com-

A Visit to Dane Rudhyar

*Rudhyar finally settled in a simple house in the foothills of the San Jacinto Mountains, not far from Los Angeles. He did not disappoint those who made the pilgrimage to visit him—he played the part of guru naturally, with his long beard and white robe. In a 1970 interview Rudhyar talked about his “seed ideas” and displayed some of his publications while herbal tea was served by what seemed like acolytes in beads and sandals. Rudhyar was a genuine bohemian—what later came to be called a “downtown” composer well before the term was invented. Following my visit, Rudhyar wrote (17 August 1972): “The young people who now buy all my books are particularly responsive to my music.” Two books had been published that year: a novel, *Rania*, which had been read in sixteen installments over KPFA radio, Berkeley, during a monthlong series devoted to his music and writings; and a book titled *Astrological Themes for Meditation*. In 1974, just before his eightieth birthday, Rudhyar wrote, “It won’t be very long before I change decades, and I am working under a number of handicaps, but the creative spirit is still high and I have been reciting some of my poems as well as composing a new work for piano.”*

—V.P.

posers, including James Tenney and Peter Garland. Rudhyar started to compose again and worked until his death in 1985. With his belief in reincarnation and life’s cyclical nature, it seems appropriate that Rudhyar’s compositional life could thrive, end, and be born again.



DANE RUDHYAR

From interviews with Vivian Perlis, 18 March 1970, San Jacinto, California;
and with Vincent Plush, 24 November 1982, Palo Alto, California

I started composing after my father died, when I was sixteen and I finished my baccalaureate. I was supposed to go into the law, but I fell ill. I had been ill before—I had a serious operation when I was thirteen. When I fell ill again, it stopped me from having to go anywhere, and I realized when I bought the books that I would never be able to memorize all those things, so I gave it up. Where I was born, it was a middle-class milieu and Catholic. I met

some people after my father's death who were artists, and it brought me into the art world and to the philosophy of Nietzsche and all sort of things like that which completely liberated me from all my surroundings. I was ready for it.

My general idea is that civilization, or as I have come to call it, culture, has a cyclic character. A seed idea—that they are born, they mature, and they decay, sometimes mixing up, but nevertheless, having a very definite entity. Now, this idea came to me when I was sixteen years old, and it was as a result of that that I wrote my first little book, called *Claude Debussy and the Cycle of Musical Civilization* in French in Paris. And I had a chance to show it to [Jacques] Durand, who was the editor of Debussy, who liked it, and a few months later, commissioned me to write a little booklet, *Claude Debussy et son oeuvre*, which I did, but Durand wasn't interested in the philosophical aspect of it.⁷¹ I had the realization that we were living in a civilization which was in the process of slowly disintegrating—and mind you, it was 1912, before the First World War. And nobody thought of that—or at least very few people. And so when the First World War came, of course I said, “Ha ha, I was right.” And it eventually led me to come to the United States.

I came here in November 1916. I found myself with thirty-five cents in my pocket, hardly speaking English, on the coldest day in New York on record almost. The sound between New York and Long Island was frozen. Then I went to Canada. I had met somebody who was nice enough and invited me to come, and I gave some lectures in French there in Montreal, and then came back, and I had written poetry in French, which I recited to a few people. They liked my way of speaking. Gradually I learned English.

I had completely broken from the French culture and my language and my name. I changed my name, and I didn't like to speak French, and I completely was getting into what I saw as the possibility of a new world. Of course, the idea of the New World that we in France got from people like Emerson and Walt Whitman had nothing to do whatsoever with what we found. And then when I came to California in 1920, it was quite different again in another way, but from a musical standpoint, it was absolutely nothing. There was an orchestra and a new one was being formed, the first year, from which I got a thousand-dollar prize for a symphonic poem. But the conductor refused to perform it, because it was too difficult, or too modern. It was the most romantic kind of thing! Now you wouldn't even want to play it at all. But there was absolutely nothing, except Brahms and Beethoven—even the French—Debussy wasn't played at all.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Dane Rudhyar in Spain while waiting passage to America, 1916

I was commissioned to write music for a play in the Hollywood Hills, *The Life of Christ*. That also was considered much too modern—and that was 1920. And in 1922 I did another version of it—much simpler and much more sort of Palestrinian—simple with a few voices and a few woodwinds, and that was performed.

I studied in California and there became very much involved in Oriental philosophy and music. I had no idea what Buddhism was, so I began to hear about it and read as much as I could, and I found all sorts of things which struck me as fantastic from the point of view of history. I stayed in California a great deal of the time, coming very often during the winter to New York. I met Henry Cowell in 1921 in that little group called Halcyon, which was the Temple of the People, to which his mother had belonged, and he was very much interested in at the time. Cowell was two years younger than I was. People have no idea of how Henry Cowell started really. His mother had been a member of the Temple of the People, an offshoot of the Theosophical Society. I was told in Hollywood that the Theosophical Society there was in a great ferment about policies and all that. But those people were very nice, very simple with great love feelings. They were not fighting. I was staying with people from Java, and I went with them to a Theosophy convention. It was that first evening of the convention when I was introduced to Cowell, who I knew was a composer. I had heard his name from Ornstein, who had started playing with his fists on the piano in 1915. Cowell was a young kid in his teens. We became very good friends and we started some things together.

I began to write for piano—a number of things which have been revised—like *Three Melodies for Flutes* was written in that period. I had written *Soul Fire* [1920], which I orchestrated when I came to California and won the thousand-dollar prize. *Surge of Fire* was composed later in 1921. It was on the first concert of the New Music Society of California that Henry Cowell had started [22 October 1925]. I was one of the first members, but he did most of the work on it. He traveled a good deal, and I was in California and he was in New York, so we saw each other when we were where we were. And then, later on, he got in trouble, and he was in jail. I saw him later in New York. Interestingly enough, he became very powerful there. People wanted to atone for his having been selected as an example, or something like that.

One of the first things that he published in *New Music* was my *Paeans* in '28 and then, in 1935, *Granites*. A few things that were played in New York at that time were, more or less, Stravinsky-oriented. Then afterward I had absolutely no influence whatsoever from Stravinsky. If you want to find an an-

cestry, at first it's the very late work of Liszt. For me, the only logical thing was the piano. That's the way it started—Debussy, Erik Satie, Ravel and all that started from the piano. I've had three or four young pianists who were interested in playing something of mine—the trouble I have with them is to make them feel the music. I say, “Just play through it. Feel it. If you make a mistake, what the hell difference? It is the wrong note and so what? But play. Try to see what it says.”

I was introduced to Scriabin's music. I had no idea who he was, and I was extremely interested, because Scriabin was a Theosophist and was interested in the things I was interested in—philosophy, Oriental philosophy, mysticism, occultists. He had certain occult powers, and his *Mysterium* he wanted to have performed in India.⁷²

Varèse wrote me a letter saying they were starting things, and did I want to be a member of it [the International Composers' Guild]? And I said, of course, and a year after, I came to New York and played some of my piano pieces there. I was one of the first members of the International Composers' Guild. I became a good friend with Salzedo and Varèse and all that group. We stayed one summer in Seal Harbor, Maine. At that time, a great number of the important musicians were there because they couldn't go to Europe, because of the war—[Ossip] Gabrilowitsch, Stokowski, and Ornstein. So it was a very interesting thing from a musical standpoint. I began to learn about the American way in which music was produced and all that. And it's there that Stokowski was quite friendly.

What happened was that after having studied a good deal, as much as I could about Hindu music particularly, in 1925 I started a new idea of having a series of publications for which I used the name Hamsat Publications, dedicated to the new American civilization. The idea was to have a quarterly magazine and publish three books a year dealing with ideas, or even novels if there were any, anything that would try to establish certain fundamental principles for a new country.

People had not the slightest idea what I was talking about! When I spoke of American civilization, they said, “What American civilization? What's that?” “Well, there is civilization; you go from barbarism to civilization. It's not one thing or another.” And the idea that European culture as a whole could be ended was absolutely foreign. Spengler's book *The Decline of the West* had not been translated yet. I thought I'd better try to concentrate on writing one book. So I happened to meet Mrs. [Alfred A.] Knopf. I told her about the idea, and she said, “Well, it's very interesting. Why don't you write a book and show us?”

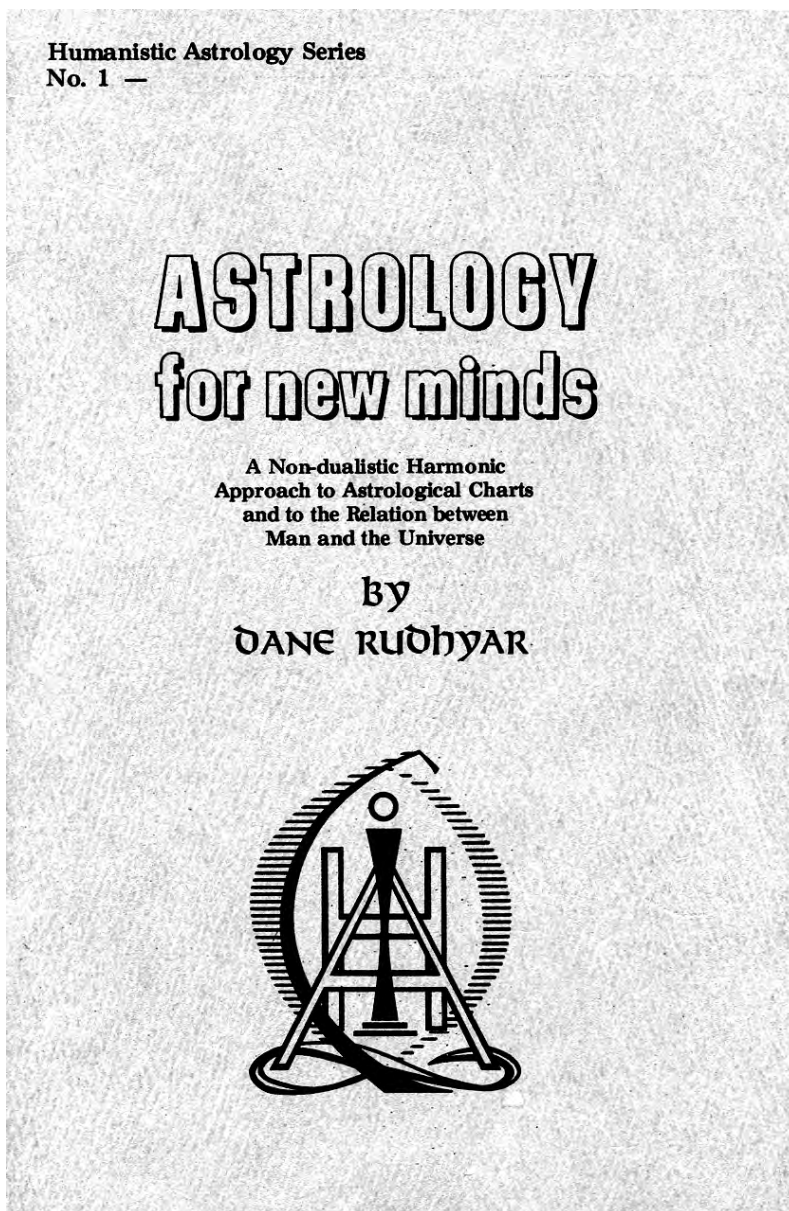
We certainly will look at it.” So I passed my time in the public libraries and in about three or four months while I was in New York in that spring of 1925, I wrote the book which at first was called *Rediscovery of Music*. I showed it to Mrs. Knopf, who said, “Oh, no, that’s not what I meant. Nobody would read it.” I brought too much of the spiritual or oriental idea and magic and all that. Then I wrote *The Rebirth of Hindu Music* [1928], which took some of the ideas in my big book, but focused it on trying to show what had happened to Hindu musicians, how they had become influenced by Western things and forgot all their scales and all those things like that.

From the beginning, I realized that for me music was sound, that the idea of making music intellectually, or following laws of development which had been invented in Europe in the seventeenth or eighteenth century meant absolutely nothing. My feeling was that music was a direct expression of life, or as in India, a dealing with life energy, life forces, nature spirit, time of the day, and so forth . . . then, more and more, in raga music, with human emotions and feelings. I felt connected with the romantic ideal of music as being a manifestation or an expression of a kind of speech or language of the psyche—the soul—which was able to say in an irrational way things which could not be said rationally by speech.

In the case of Varèse—Varèse was essentially a materialist. He had absolutely no sense of spiritual forces or things like that, what you call spirit, or I call intellect. He couldn’t stand it in the country, he could only live in cities, and he liked the noise of the cities. In that sense he was just exactly the opposite of me. He refused to admit it, but it really started with the futurists. He didn’t want to be connected with them because they were supposedly disintegrative and were destroying the thing, but that’s not absolutely true. That’s partly true, but with Varèse, all his music is extremely destructive. It’s magnificent in some respects. But it is to some extent *diabolique*.

Varèse was terribly depressed because he wasn’t being performed and because he was only a composer. That’s all that existed in his life. You see, music was never that for me. It was all a ritualistic thing, and the music was supposed to be the cosmic energy, the cosmic force. Well, I realized that it was impossible, and I didn’t know how to do it, and there was no instrument to do what I wanted, and no orchestra would want to do it. It would have used a large orchestra. At that time, there was no percussion particularly. That’s one of the main things that Varèse did, bring the percussionists in. The way he brought it I don’t think was particularly good, either. It’s too scattered, too piecemeal. The whole thing was to have energy, to have forces which were

[To view this image, refer to
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Cover of Dane Rudhyar's book *Astrology for New Minds*, 1969

resonant, like thunder or like wind, which couldn't be made by ordinary instruments, and yet it had to be an instrumental thing and not a mathematical thing, like electronic music is. It is not something intellectual that you say, "There have to be so many vibrations per second," but you are dealing with the energy itself. I realized that it was absolutely impossible. I didn't have the technique, and I had no instrument to do it.

It seemed utterly impossible for me to have things performed with orchestra—I had no contacts at all. The only contact I had was with Stokowski, and it proved to be nothing—you couldn't get anybody in California doing anything. But I was definitely set on California. I had a close friend there, and I was going almost every year for three or four months during the winter. I wrote poetry a good deal all those years. I have several books of poems, and if I wanted to, I could write a very beautiful poetic style. I used to read it aloud and people thought it was wonderful. I was even chanting and doing those kinds of things which, at that time, were done in Germany in the Expressionistic Movement, but in America were not known at all.

I had no chance to get in contact with the powers who handled recognition in the musical world. I didn't have any money at all. The Depression came and it was absolutely impossible to get anything in music. I accidentally got an opportunity to do something along astrological lines, and I realized that there was an opportunity to do something that I wasn't able to do in music, and so just by itself it took off. I got involved in writing many articles every month—and books.

I was moving a great deal, and we didn't have money, and I had quite a great deal of problems in my personal life. I had no piano. And there was no opportunity that I could see. When I had opportunity, like one summer in New Mexico, I was writing my first big book on psychology-astrology, and somebody had allowed me to stay in their ranch while they were away during that summer. I had a beautiful grand piano and a big hall, and I did compose a little, as much as I had time. But I had no chance to finish it or orchestrate it, because it took too long, and I had absolutely no idea what I would do with it.

There is a book of mine, the *Astrology of Personality*, and in the first two chapters, I have the yin and the yang approach to life, showing that most of the Western world has run into the yang approach, where you are forcing your will upon life.⁷³ Yin allows life to express, allows the universe to sing to you. And you don't oppose anything to it. You guide it, but you must allow life to lead you.

Charles Seeger (1886 – 1979)

Charles Seeger's place as one of the early modernists rests not with his music, which was composed early and destroyed in a fire, but with his open-minded and perceptive ideas on the connections between music, history, politics, linguistics, and life. If he is known to the public at all, it is as the father of the folk artists Pete, Mike, and Peggy Seeger and husband to Ruth Crawford. In the concert music world, Seeger is known for his early experimental work in rhythmic possibilities and as the teacher of Henry Cowell. He was a founder and active participant in the American Musicological Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the International Association of Music Librarians. For many years Seeger was a presence on college campuses and at academic conferences. He was an attractive figure—tall and slim, with a cultured manner of speech and an aristocratic demeanor that was softened by sparkling blues eyes and a quick smile. His pleasing personality and bright mind were applied to various areas of the music profession, but it was his relentless curiosity about music and its role in society that set him apart. At a time when a musician was expected to stay on a straight and narrow path, Seeger's interests were wide ranging.

Seeger began his career as a composer and conductor, but he became interested in musicology, and in the question of how such an academic discipline might relate to people and to contemporary life. One of the first scholars to recognize the value of folk and non-Western musics, Seeger was prophetic when in 1966 he said, "I think our whole view of European music in another ten or fifteen years is going to be modified. When we get at the ethnomusicology of the history of European music, whether you call it pop or folk or whatever, it's going to be fascinating."⁷⁴

As a young man just returned from studies in Europe, Seeger taught at the University of California in Berkeley, where he presented the first classes in musicology and ethnomusicology in America. It was during this time that Henry Cowell was his private student. Seeger's freethinking mind was a good match for the young Cowell's innate sense of experimentalism.

Leaving California for New York in the 1920s, Seeger met and joined with other New York intellectuals in championing the cause of workers. After he and his first wife, Constance Edson, traveled to small towns in the South, playing music for poor people who had never heard a concert, Seeger realized the potential for music as a tool for reaching the people. As an active member of the Communist-sponsored Composers Collective, Seeger wrote articles under the pseudonym of Carl Sands and attempted to apply classical rules to his composition of protest songs. He taught at the Institute of Musical Art (1921–1933) and at the New School for Social Research (1931–1935).

Throughout difficult periods, such as the Great Depression, when Seeger struggled to keep his family alive, he maintained a princely exterior. He came to Washington, where under Roosevelt's New Deal, he worked as musical adviser in

the Resettlement Administration of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) (1935–1938), as director of the Inter-American Music Center (1938–1941), and for the Pan-American Union (1941–1945). During this time, Seeger became one of the most effective figures in the urban folk music revival. He and his second wife, Ruth Crawford, joined with the Lomax family to collect American folk songs and preserve them as field studies. They also made arrangements that could be performed by children and adults, including the Seeger progeny, who had grown up hearing traditional folk music at home.⁷⁵ Pete Seeger, in particular, has become an enormously popular performer and an effective promoter of cultural change by means of folk song.

Those who knew Charles Seeger need not be reminded of his extraordinary qualities and accomplishments. But recent changes in attitudes have affected Seeger's reputation. Just as Horatio Parker, a composer of stature, is recalled as the Yale professor who did not recognize the genius of Charles Ives, so Seeger is cited as the

Memories of Seeger

At age ninety Seeger spoke to classes in American music at Yale. Still energetic and enthusiastic, he drove to the Yale campus and proceeded to delight students seventy years younger, who were astonished to hear this lively nonagenarian describe the deplorable state of music in the American West in the early 1900s. He spoke about Henry Cowell and Carl Ruggles as young men from the vantage point of someone who knew them both well. Seeger announced at the start, "I can't hear a thing, so the rules are that I talk and you listen." Long after class was officially over and on into the evening, Seeger was still talking, and the students were listening. He made diagrams to explain his complicated theories, which few understood, but his enthusiasm was boundless and his personality altogether irresistible.

Picture a small-town birthday party in rural nineteenth-century America and you will have an idea of Seeger's ninetieth at his country place in Connecticut. Perhaps it was the folk music that was played and sung informally throughout the day that gave off a sense of timelessness. There was an old-fashioned aura about the children and the adults, too. In dress and attitude they could have been from any-time in America's history. The floor was the favorite place to sit, and guitars and banjos were strewn about everywhere, picked up and played casually whenever someone was moved to do so. Folk songs of all kinds were sung by family and friends, and once in a while a burst of folk dancing exploded on the lawn. Charlie Seeger, smiling and handsome, presided over all.

—V.P.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Charles Seeger, ca. 1965

husband who did not encourage the compositional career of his wife and former student Ruth Crawford. For decades, her primary role was as wife and mother; more recently Crawford's growing reputation as a major twentieth-century composer, along with the feminist movement and the development of gender studies, have changed value judgments. A recent biography of Ruth Crawford by Judith Tick is perceptive in examining the complicated factors in the Crawford-Seeger relationship.⁷⁶

Seeger was an active and early participant in modern music activities. His papers, articles, and books are important documents in the historiography of twentieth-century musical ideas; his ethnomusicological writings are particularly influential. Seeger's complex and difficult writings, and his place in early-twentieth century modernism, will be better appreciated as historians examine the period in greater depth.⁷⁷



CHARLES SEEGER

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 16 March 1970, San Marino, California;
and video interview with Perlis, 10 July 1977, Bridgewater, Connecticut

I went to Harvard because it was the alternative to going to business with my father, which I didn't want to do. My brother and I were to be businessmen. My sister was to marry a titled Englishman. My father was an amateur of the arts. He had a very nice hand at sketching. He could write a nice

sonnet. He could even write poetry in French. And he was an amateur musician and left some very nice little songs. But those were things that no gentleman would try to earn a living from. When I told him I wanted to be a musician he said, "But gentlemen aren't musicians." So my alternative was to go to Harvard. The same way with my brother, who turned out to be a poet, and my sister, who turned out to be a painter and didn't marry the titled Englishman.

I had not the slightest intention of doing any studying at Harvard. But when I opened the catalogue, I discovered there were courses on music. I remember there was rather a nice fellow sitting next to me, and I said, "I'm going to take every one of them." He said, "I am too." But we settled that we would not take the course on history of music, "because that was just talking about music, and what's the use of talking about music? Music that's over twenty or thirty years old is not worth bothering about." So we went through with the young romantics of the time, and the teachers didn't teach us much.

Finally when it came up to my graduation, I submitted an overture for orchestra. We all went abroad, and we studied (supposedly) in Germany. I had a ridiculous experience over there. I wanted to study orchestration, and I took my overture score to the man at the Munich Conservatory, and he said, "I have nothing to teach you. You're all right. You can go ahead." There were lots of things I could have learned about the orchestra, but I was leaning toward Strauss, and I think that he rejected Strauss and Mahler, being more or less an old-fashioned person. What I was especially interested in, though, not being much of a pianist or an instrumentalist, was becoming a conductor. So I studied conducting with a man who promised me that if I'd stay with him for six months, he could get me a job in an opera house, and sure enough, he got me a job in the municipal opera house in Cologne.

After a while, I came back and started a professional life in New York. I accompanied singers and violinists and that sort of thing. I met my first wife, Constance Edson, who was a first-rate violinist, a pupil of Franz Kneisel. We hitched up together and went off and gave concerts around the summer places. Constance came of very distinguished Philadelphia and French families. Well, one day when we were sitting in our little apartment, we had a ring at the doorbell and there was a very dignified old man in a frock coat who said he was the president of the University of California. He came in and we gave him some tea. He told me that he had a position as professor of music that he had to fill, and my name had been recommended. The result was that I came out to Berkeley with my goods and chattels. Our first son was about to be born. It was 1912.

I was to give a course on the history of music, and I knew nothing about it. I'd never opened a book on the history of music. I considered it beneath my notice. Well, I thought I could just get up and talk, you know. I never had any hesitation about talking, even about something I didn't know anything about. You can have no idea of the primitive atmosphere of Berkeley and San Francisco in 1912! When I got up before a group of the leading musicians in San Francisco and played Opus 74 of Scriabin, which I happened to have by heart, they thought I was improvising. They wouldn't believe that that was written. Schoenberg's name was unknown until the Sokoloff Quartet gave a concert of the First Quartet.

So things went on, and I worked very hard that first year boning up on music with what books I could order from the East—there was no library to speak of—only a couple of old German histories in the library: [Emil] Naumann and [Hugo] Riemann. I didn't need harmony books, but I needed the history of harmony because I didn't know anything about it. And so I made my way, and things went very well. I had a very nice course in music and gave the first course in musicology in '17 and '18. By that time I had gotten involved in almost every subject in the university. I discovered that I couldn't talk about the history of music unless I knew something about history. I read these history books, and I said, "I can't believe them." Somehow or other, I had gotten through my skin a feeling of what history was, and I didn't find it in the histories of music—any of them—even the German ones. So I looked up the professor of history out there, who was right in the middle then of evolving his theory of the processes of history. It was just what I wanted. So I went to his seminar. Then I realized that I couldn't talk logically about anything because I didn't know anything about logic. So I took a seminar on logic, and one on Kant and one on symbolic logic, and of course I couldn't make head or tail out of them because I didn't do the preparation for them, but I got the general feeling that something was queer about the relationship of language and music. They were saying things about the world that I couldn't accept. They were saying things about music that I couldn't accept, and they were saying things about philosophy and logic that I couldn't accept.

One day we were at a meeting of young faculty members and graduate students, and we began talking about immortality. Oh, we knew all about immortality! We just had it down pat—a lot of new ideas, you know, never thought of before. But there was a man off in the corner who spoke up and said, "They haven't said anything that makes any sense at all. They're damned fools who think they're alive in the twentieth century. They're up in an ivory tower and

they don't even know where they are." He was a young professor of economics and a grand person, and of course we accepted the challenge when he said, "You come off with me, I'll show you something."

So the next weekend he took us off into the hop fields and some of the fruit orchards to talk with the pickers, IWWs [Industrial Workers of the World], and poor migratory workers. Well, I had been brought up in Mexico and I had seen poverty of the Mexican Indians where the little children rolled around in the dirt with the pigs and the chickens, and they died like flies. You see, Father was an importing and exporting merchant, had an office in New York and Mexico, and we moved to Mexico for a few years. I was brought up by my father with the understanding that 70 percent of the human race were just damned fools, half savages, didn't know how to take care of themselves, and they simply had to be managed by the 10 percent who had some sense. And the remaining 20 percent, well, they could serve as lieutenants of the 10 percent. And of course the Seegers were in the 10 percent. Our cook had twelve children, and she lost all but two of them. You couldn't do a darned thing about it.

I got out in the hop fields and saw almost every toddler working out in the fields, and the children looked just like my babies. They were fair haired, blue eyes, and what skin you could see through the dirt was Anglo-Saxon or German or French. Well, it was too much for me, and so he started giving us a little of an idea of the nature of economics.

Well, we worked ourselves so far away from our colleagues that we were getting ourselves into a pretty hot situation, and when the war came on, I was a conscientious objector. When the old president who hired me retired, the acting president was a Britisher and he was not very friendly to anybody who wouldn't fight for freedom. And when my colleagues discovered that I was requiring Marxism to be read, I really got a bad reputation. But you see, as the result of all this looking into the other academic disciplines, I realized that musicology was a little bit of dirt road compared to the great broad highways that they had laid out. So then I began to look at my own work, and I realized that I liked my music, and it moved me very much; but practically, I couldn't see what I was going to do in the light of Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky, Scriabin, and some of the experiments that were being made by Henry Cowell, who was a pupil of mine there for three and a half years. Music that moved me I had no respect for, I couldn't admire. What I admired, I couldn't be moved by.

I could write more dissonant music than Schoenberg was writing at the time, because I developed a new counterpoint in which you prepared and

resolved consonance, not dissonance, and the first-species counterpoint was all dissonance—and I had a whole new series of schemes. Henry Cowell went through it, and the others did too. He was the only one that made anything out of it, though. I was writing music in 1916 that was practically 1960. I started learning polymeters. Did you ever hear of Henry Cowell's rhythmicon? I outlined Henry Cowell's rhythmicon in the class there, only he did it in a very clever way because he got together with Leon Theremin, and they did it with light-sensitive tubes.⁷⁸ What I did it with was a phonograph disk this big, with one click around in the central circle, two clicks in the next one, three in the next, up to sixteen. So we learned to do two against three, three against two, very freely—two, three, and four against five, and five against six. I never went on beyond that. Henry Cowell claims he did, but he wasn't accurate. So this music was not only dissonant tonally and rhythmically, but it was also dissonant in form. Most of the twelve-tone music doesn't pay much attention to phraseology, but I was very insistent on phraseology.

I had just received Ives's *114 Songs* when Henry Cowell came to see me, and I showed them to Henry then along with some Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and other things. We discussed them at length. Well, shortly afterward I was in touch with Ives, mostly through his wife. I avoided meeting him because I couldn't feel that I could be honest with him. I couldn't stand before that man and say I admire your music, but it doesn't move me. Some things do a little bit—*The Housatonic at Stockbridge*; it's a lovely slow movement. And some of the songs. If I thought that Ives could take it, I could talk perceptually with him. I could talk with Henry conceptually; Henry had a very good intellect. He could understand any conceptual mazes that I could spin for him. But I didn't feel that Ives could and that he'd be hurt because he had had faith in me. So he began sending me his compositions, and I had a great big wad of them.

I went east for a sabbatical and didn't go back west. I found myself in very bad health, went to the doctor, and he said I wouldn't live long. I said, "What can I do about it?" He said, "There's nothing you can do. You're shot to pieces." And so I decided I'd just give up. I couldn't find any way to continue being a composer, and I was no musicologist because I couldn't write. So I threw the whole thing over and decided with my wife that we would go off and give good music to the people of America. (I still labored under the ideal of good music in the early twenties.) To do this I built one of the first automobile trailers in the world, and I pulled it with a Model T Ford with a four-speed

transmission. It took me about a year and a half to build it, and we packed off with the three children. Pete was a year and a half. We started off in November to go to California where we thought we'd live, although we had separated from the university.

We got down to North Carolina, outside of Pinehurst, where we had some letters of introduction and could give concerts, and we parked off there with the poor white trash in the sand hills by a mill. They ground pecans for the neighborhood, and it was really quite wonderful. I took a little harmonium along, one of those collapsible ones, and we would go around and play in poor little schools—you could see the dirt through the planks in the floor—and little churches, and in the log cabins of some of the people in the neighborhood. Then I would dress up in my black tie, and my wife would put on a pretty dress, and we would go in and play at Pinehurst for a hundred dollars and keep ourselves going.

We'd sit down before a pine knot fire—no candles, no lamps. Reading from pine knots, I'll tell you, was quite a job, except I knew the things pretty well. Then after we had finished and took a bit of rest, the town folks would bring out their fiddles and guitars and banjos and play for us. Well, it was an eye-opener. They actually sang and played their music. Now, that was the early twenties, and it was lovely to listen to. And I realized that that folk music that I had thought was dead seven years before wasn't dead.

Southerners who never heard of Beethoven or Bach, who heard very little Broadway music at that time—it was something to see them with the tears rolling down their faces when they're singing some of those hymns. Ives would have loved to have seen this, because that kind of hymn singing had died out in New England long before he came on the scene. I took part occasionally in some shape-note singing in the forties, but not the highly emotional kind. By that time it was a little bit more self-contained, and they were showing off before the city folks. But I think it had begun to die out as a real white soul music—that's what it is.

Well, by the end of that year, off in the trailer, living outdoors—we had nine inches of snow one time—we went off on this trip all with colds, and we came back and you couldn't give us a cold, we were so healthy. We got back to New York, but we didn't have enough business ability to keep it on. We could have gone all through the United States that way if we could have just gotten a minimum of income to keep ourselves going. I didn't have much more than about eighty-five dollars a month then, and it wasn't enough to pay for a growing family. But wouldn't it have been a lovely life, to go all through the country?

We went back to work. We had a job offered to us at the Institute of Musical Art, which was the old Juilliard School. My wife taught violin, and I gave lectures and taught the first class in musicianship in the country. It was very different from what they call musicianship now. After my first year there, I went to Frank Damrosch, who was head, and said, "Dr. Damrosch, we're turning out a lot of awfully good young people here. But you know it's amazing that there are some things that are lost between the classrooms." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I've discovered that some of them play an *appoggiatura* in Mozart 'ta-dum,' and in Bach they do turns on the beat." He said, "Oh, we'll have to do something about this. What other things happen?" I went through a list of the things. Now, believe it or not, they were graduating students who didn't know how to play two against three. Well, by the time I got finished, Damrosch said, "I can't believe this." I said, "All right, select a couple of people and I'll do a little test." He came up and was absolutely shocked. Well, they let me outline a course on general musicianship. I gave that for ten years, and I think it was worthwhile.

Another thing that I occupied myself with during the twenties was that I had to give a course on mythology, epic and romantic poetry. And I said to Damrosch, "But I don't know anything about it." His answer: "But you read." So I went down and dug in, and what I learned from that course occupied me for quite a few years of reading down at the New York Public Library. And I never regretted it.

By the end of the twenties I was ready to live again. Meanwhile, I didn't even know who was president of the United States, except by cartoons that I'd sometimes see in the newspaper. I didn't read the newspaper, I didn't vote, I didn't do a damned thing. I gave up all my subscriptions to radical magazines—didn't read a thing on sociology or anthropology or politics or anything else. When it came around '29 and there was a nice big Depression, then that old poverty that I had seen on the hop ranches and the fruit fields was right on the streets of New York. A lovely woman trying to sell apples—you could see she'd had a gentle bringing up, and was suffering on the cold street corner—oh, the winter was terrible there. And dozens of men sleeping wrapped up in burlap, covered with snow, in the streets, in the doorways. It was really bad. Well, I got back in the labor movement again. Couldn't stay out.

Meanwhile, my marriage had gone on the rocks. My wife couldn't follow me in this, and one or two other things happened so that I broke loose. See, what I had wanted to do back in the twenties was to make music that the IWWs could sing. But I couldn't do it. I had the [IWW's] *Little Red Songbook*,

of course, and used to go in and give talks to the IWW. You can see how my wife, who was a rather conservative, fragile person, couldn't take that sort of thing. When I divorced my first wife, I was fired from the institute promptly because she was a very good friend of Frank Damrosch. I had a pretty hard time in the Depression. I began teaching at the New School. I was wondering how I was going to get through the winters. I gave up composition except just when I was teaching. I still had pupils in composition up to the middle thirties. Ruth [Crawford] was my best pupil. Know her quartet? Well, the third and fourth movements were exercises for her studies in composition. Of course, she gave them her inimitable touch. I wouldn't have done them that way.

By the time the Depression came, I was invited to go and address a group of young professional musicians who were devoted to writing music for the labor movement. Henry Cowell took me around, and I lectured on the "dictatorship of the linguistic"—making fun, of course, of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Well, they were very nice about it, and they said, "Of course we don't agree with what you said, but it is very interesting." In other words, they wanted to get me in. So I joined.

That was the Composers Collective, and we met from '33, '34, '35, every week, wintertime, composing songs for the labor movement. It was

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Charles Seeger with family, Washington, D.C., ca. 1937. Left to right: Ruth Crawford Seeger, Mike Seeger, Peggy Seeger, and Charles Seeger

Communist-controlled. I never say who else was in it. When I die, I'll leave with Pete the names of the people. But I can say this, that we had a competition for a May Day song in '34. The words were submitted to a committee first, and were published in the old *New Masses*, and the committee was appointed to receive settings of the [Alfred Hayes] poem "Into the Streets May First!" I was chairman of the meeting which went over the final song. Of course, Aaron Copland won the prize. He wrote a beautiful song. It really was a splendid thing. And we all agreed. We criticized everybody's contribution, and they criticized themselves—true communist style—but as far as I know, there was only one Communist member there. The other twenty-three—Marc Blitzstein was one of them—everybody knew that Copland won, so I can mention Copland, and Blitzstein is dead—Henry Cowell was out by this time. He was in California, I think. Also, he wasn't too interested. So finally it came to me, and I criticized my piece: "You know, I'll agree that mine is just about the worst of the whole lot, and everybody knows that Copland's song is the best, but do you think it will ever be sung on the picket line?" Well, Aaron was very nice, and he said, "No, I don't suppose it will be." He'd made some freak modulations, some big skips of sevenths, some dissonances, key changes all over the place. I concentrated on rounds and had great fun with it. Hanns Eisler came over at that time and his songs were sung around, some of them very beautiful. And "Aunt" Molly Jackson wandered in one day—I think Alan Lomax introduced her—he wasn't part of the collective because he didn't compose—wasn't a professional musician—so Molly sat right around the piano with us all.⁷⁹

Just about that time Tom Benton [Thomas Hart Benton] had painted a series of murals at the New School, and had quite a collection of early commercial records of American folk music, and naturally he showed them to me. I especially liked Doc Boggs singing "Pretty Polly" and "The Danville Girls," so I made copies of those. We had an old disk recorder at the New School and I could make copies. And at the same time I found George Pullen Jackson's book *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* and a couple of folk song books. Cecil Sharp's came out about that time, and I realized that I didn't know anything about the music of America, and here and I was supposed to be a musician living in America and beginning to be a musicologist.⁸⁰

We married in '32, Ruth and I. We lived in Greenwich Village. Ruth had piano students, and I was still at the New School. By '35 we had two babies—we never were sure how we would get through a winter. Then a telephone call came in one night saying that I had been recommended to take the position of music specialist in the Resettlement Administration in Washington. I was to

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, left, with Louise and Hanns Eisler, 1930s

put three hundred musicians in three hundred resettlement communities. Take poor poverty-stricken refugees from the cities, you see, and put them back on good land, teach them how to plant, how to rotate crops, and put them together in communities that would be friendly and cooperate with each other: sell cooperatively, buy cooperatively, have medical services, and that sort of thing. Well, you can imagine what a job that would be, to get a city musician off in the sticks of west Florida. I got ten in, I think, before we were liquidated by Congress. I went over to the Federal Music Project and tried to do the same thing there, but it was too late. So I had a temporary job making the index for the Archive of American Folk Song. And then I was very active in the State Department's inter-American committees—we organized ourselves so well that after the meeting was over we got friends to continue our organization. I read a paper on the importance of folk and popular music in inter-American relations, pointing out that you could sell all the Copland, Harris, Thomson, Ives you wanted down there to the well-to-do, and it wouldn't have much of any effect. If you wanted to really make music sell to South America, you've got to reach the people. The Germans and Italians had been down there for quite a long time, telling the ruling families in Latin America, "They're just a bunch of barbarians up there in North America. They have no literature, no philoso-

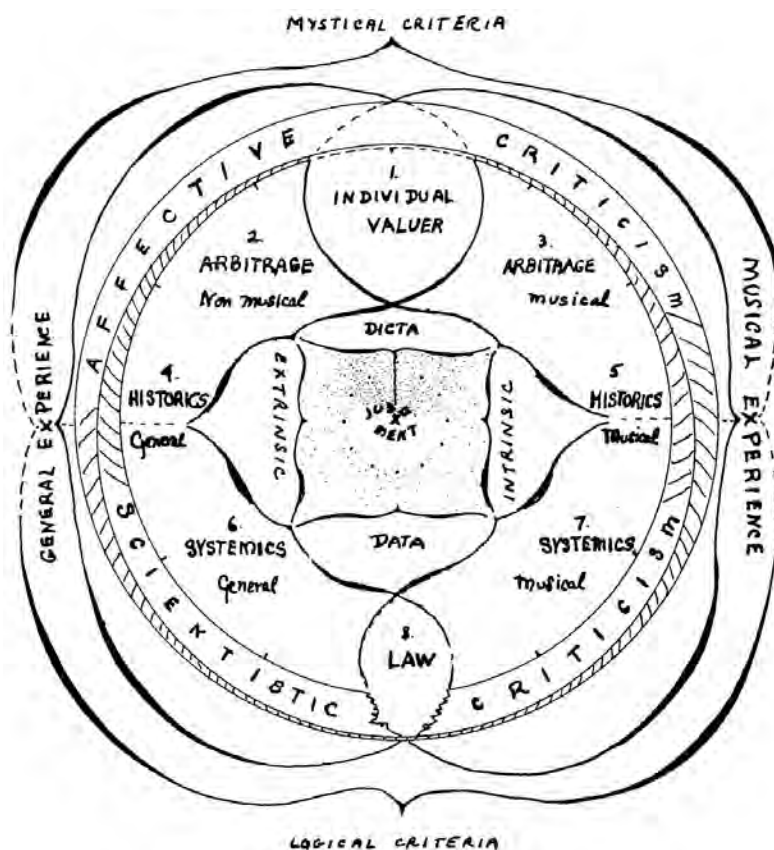
phy, no music, no painting. They just have jazz." So it was my job with the Pan-American Union to show Latin America that we had music. In order to get Ives and Copland and Thomson and all the others down there, I had to get their music known. And it worked very well. I went out to music organizations in the country and talked up the importance of making friends down there.

The idea that one could connect music with society had worked through the thirties and forties up into the fifties, when I realized that I'd done all I could to connect music and culture and society: first through making of music for the labor movement, second in the emergency agencies of government under the New Deal, and then on the international level.

Oh, I haven't talked about the Musicological Society! In 1916 I was invited to attend a meeting of the old ISM [International Society for Musicology] branch in New York, and I went there. It reached '29, and I went to [Otto] Kinkeldey, who was down at the New York Public Library at the time, and I said, "Don't you think it's time we get together?" And he said, "Well, what do you think we could do?" And I said, "My suggestion would be that we make a New York musicological society which would be strictly systematic. You could see Kinkeldey kind of swallowing—but he had a good systematic mind too. So we got together with five people. You know the five—Kinkeldey, myself, Henry Cowell (of all people, who prides himself on not being a musicologist), Joseph Yasser, and Joseph Schillinger.

Well, I got myself on the raw nerves of the historians in New York by refusing historical papers and that sort of thing. But Harold Spivacke came back from Europe in the spring of '34 and became our secretary, and came to me one day and said, "You know, I think the time has come for us to start the national society." I said, "I'm sure the time is here, but you know I can't do it." He said, "Yes, I know you can't, but would you let me try?" I said, "For God's sake, go ahead." In about ten days he came around and said, "I've got it all sewed up." "Well," I said, "Any conditions?" He said, "Yes, one condition. Seeger takes a back seat." I said, "Seeger will take a back seat. He won't even be present at the organizing meeting if you want—I'll get up and walk out. I won't even be a member. But get the thing going." "Oh," he said, "you don't have to go to that extreme." So we met and we formed the American Musicological Society.

Musicology for me in those days was something that I had to either make help music or protect music from. I rather had an idea that the protection of music against language was the more arduous task. I was a little more doubtful about helping it, because I had ruined my own composition by talk-



A theoretical diagram by Charles Seeger from a 1977 essay, "Sources of Evidence and Criteria for Judgement in the Critique of Music"

ing about it too much and not knowing how to talk about it, and I didn't know that anybody knew how to talk about music. But I thought I could say how you shouldn't talk about music, and I'm still a little bit of that persuasion.

Ruth's death in '53 left me with four young children and retirement from a paying job. There's another tragedy—when I moved from Washington, the house that Ruth and I had lived in went up in flames. I was just in a state of mind where I said, "Well, I've got to start off a new life." All my Berkeley stuff had burned up in the big fire there. I had my orchestra overture and the sonata and about eighteen songs, but my scores for the masques in Berkeley, the quartet, and everything else were all burned. My early musicological notes—all wiped out. Reams of correspondence. It was just too much. I couldn't take it. That's when I declared a new life.

I married an old childhood sweetheart, but it broke up fast. I went back to what had interested me most to start with—music’s relationship to society, and the bringing together of the various factions in musicology. Have you noticed that American musicologists can’t sing or play a damn thing! Music is primarily something you make! I am convinced that as ethnomusicology makes more and more clear the vital function of music in non-Western societies, quite a different view is going to be had of the music of Haydn and Mozart and Beethoven, which was made for the courts of the noble and the salons of the well-to-do.

Mantle Hood invited me to serve on the faculty of the Institute of Ethnomusicology at UCLA—a research position. I decided to pursue an earlier interest: the melograph—that’s my patented name for it. It’s a device which traces an oscillographic curve to transcribe music objectively. Oh, my gosh, you’ve got to see it before you go! I published several graphs: “Barbara Allen,” an African ceremonial song, and an Irish song.⁸¹

After almost ten years at the institute, I didn’t mind moving on. I have found that a drastic move is a good thing. From Connecticut I can use the Yale library, or Brown, or Wesleyan. Since I got back east, I see Pete and the family more. You know, they all sing: John in the Harvard Glee Club, and Charles always sang. Peter showed up one day with a ukulele and drove us all to distraction when he was singing Broadway tunes. One time I took him to Asheville and introduced him to the five-string banjo, and he fell in love with it. I saw more of the younger children. You know, the three I had the most to do with in their early days are the three of my seven who became musicians. But I get most from the young people—the grandchildren—they stand right up to me and say so when they disagree. It stimulates me enormously.

Henry Cowell (1897 – 1965)

Henry Cowell epitomized the American maverick with his early radical and sensational compositions, innovative ideas, and interest in non-Western cultures. Cowell was born in Menlo Park, California, and little in his youth and upbringing was conventional. His parents were freethinking bohemian writers. After their divorce in 1903, he lived in poverty with his mother. He had almost no formal schooling. After third grade his education consisted of extensive reading and discussions with his mother. Nevertheless, his keen intelligence, prodigious natural musical talent, and original mind impressed all those with whom he came into contact. His mother fell ill when he was only a teenager, and he supported the family by collecting and selling wildflowers, herding cows, and performing yard and janitorial work. In 1910 he was discovered by Louis Terman, a Stanford professor who about the same time helped develop the Stanford-Binet IQ tests. Terman was fascinated by this unwashed youth with an adult vocabulary and extensive knowledge of California flora, and he studied him into adulthood.⁸²

Henry Cowell was exposed to an eclectic mix of music from an early age. He heard Irish and English music from his parents and Asian melodies from his neighbors. His mother couldn't afford to take him to the opera house but managed to get him to Chinese opera.⁸³ From childhood, Henry Cowell respected and learned from the traditions of non-European cultures. In 1913, when he was still a teenager, Cowell had the good fortune to study with Charles Seeger, whose open-minded attitude was a perfect match for the young man's lively and inquiring spirit.

“Loveliness impossible to convey . . .”

He was beautiful beyond the ordinary, with an indescribable spiritual quality of loveliness impossible to convey in verse or to be caught in a photograph. When he was about six years of age I was told that he had been pronounced, by a member of the Sketch Club, the most beautiful child in San Francisco. He was photographed by four different art photographers. One, especially, had him in many poses and fairly covered her walls with reproductions. I believe they were all lost in the great fire following the earthquake.

—Clarissa Dixon, Cowell's mother

“Material for Biography,” 1914, Henry Cowell Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; also quoted in Boziwick, “Henry Cowell at the New York Public Library”

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Henry Cowell, November 1902, San Francisco

Cowell's unfettered imagination produced remarkable innovations in piano technique as well as music theory. As early as 1911 Cowell began to experiment with tone clusters on the piano. Clusters are chords built of seconds and played by the clenched fist, palm, or forearm. His composition "The Tides of Manaunaun" (ca. 1912) is his earliest surviving work using clusters. In this and many other early cluster pieces, a modal melody is accompanied with very specifically defined dissonant chords. Clusters were bold: both the physical gestures used to make them and the resulting sounds were sensational. Modernists embraced this remarkable new resonance for the piano, sometimes attributing to it spiritual qualities. Dane Rudhyar believed that clusters were invented "to give the sense of the cosmic things, of the rising of the matters stirred by those rather simple chords and melodies."⁸⁴ In pieces such as "Sinister Resonance" (1930), Cowell had the radical idea of performing on the inside of the piano using techniques perfected by string players: plucking pizzicato, muting strings, and sounding harmonics. In his eerie "The Banshee," the per-

former scrapes the piano strings to produce a wailing sound. The delicate “Aeolian Harp” is performed by silently depressing chords at the keyboard, then strumming the strings to let the chords quietly resonate. Henry Cowell is considered the inventor of the string piano, an ordinary grand piano on which these techniques are used.

Charles Seeger encouraged Cowell to think deeply about the theoretical basis of his work. The result was *New Musical Resources*, a radical work in music theory that Cowell wrote between 1916 and 1919 and revised for publication in 1929. The book’s forward-thinking ideas and observations are still relevant and provocative. Cowell includes a suggestion for rhythmic notation using variously shaped noteheads to indicate rhythms divided into thirds, fifths, sevenths, and so on—up to fifteenths. His contemplation of a method to order rhythmic progressions anticipates by decades the efforts to serialize rhythm proposed by Stockhausen, Babbitt, and Boulez. Cowell’s chapter on chord formation includes a justification of secundal harmony (clusters) based on the overtone series.

Cowell was fascinated with the relationship between rhythm and harmony. He studied a pair of sirens and noted, “If they are tuned in the relationship of 3:2, they will sound the *interval* of a perfect fifth; if they are both slowed down, keeping the same 3:2 relationship, they arrive at a *rhythm* of 3:2, heard as gentle bumps but also visible in tiny puffs of air through the holes of the sirens . . . proving that these ratios express a single physical relationship which is heard as rhythm when slow and as pitch when fast.”⁸⁵ This physical relationship between rhythm and harmony, as well as Seeger’s concept of dissonant counterpoint, formed the basis of two of Cowell’s most complex works, *Quartet Romantic* (1917) and *Quartet Euphometric* (1919), often called the “rhythm-harmony quartets.” Cowell further explored this concept when he invented, together with Leon Theremin, the rhythmicon, an instrument capable of playing up to sixteen simultaneous rhythms with corresponding harmonies. Nicolas Slonimsky elaborated,

In 1931 Cowell, annoyed by the wistful realization that no matter what notation we may decree, human players will still be human—that is, inaccurate, physiologically limited, rhythmically crippled, and unwilling to reform—hit upon the idea of an instrument which would faithfully produce all kinds of rhythms and cross-rhythms. . . . The rhythmicon can play triplets against quintuplets . . . with the corresponding frequency of vibrations. In other words, quintuplets are of necessity sounded on the fifth harmonic, non-uplets on the ninth harmonic, and so on.⁸⁶

By the early 1920s Cowell had created a sensation with performances in California and New York. A reviewer of a 1922 Greenwich Village performance of “Dynamic Motion” reported, “Three women lay in a dead faint in the aisle and no less than ten men had refreshed themselves from the left hip.”⁸⁷ Cowell had also

begun to make the acquaintance of other modernists, including Ruggles and Ornstein. He met Dane Rudhyar at Halcyon, a California Theosophical center. (It was at Halcyon that Cowell had earlier met the mystical poet John Varian, who introduced Cowell to Irish mythology. A number of Cowell's early piano works, including "The Tides of Manaunaun," "The Voice of Lir," and "The Banshee," were based on Irish legends.) Cowell made his first tour through Europe in 1923 and made a successful New York Carnegie Hall debut in 1924. He accepted a position at New York's New School for Social Research in 1928. His popular course Music of the World's Peoples was offered well before non-Western music was considered a respectable academic discipline.

In this period, when Cowell's career was flourishing, he managed to divert some of his time and energy to help the cause of new music and promote other composers' works. In 1925 he founded the New Music Society, a California concert series which presented unusual and experimental music. In 1927 he began *New Music*, a quarterly publication offering innovative and experimental scores that were unacceptable to more conventional publishers. Through *New Music*, Cowell published some of the first available scores of such composers as Charles Ives, Ruth Crawford, Carl Ruggles, Dane Rudhyar, John Becker, Colin McPhee, and Wallingford Riegger. Eventually, *New Music* grew to publish an additional orchestral series, a special edition, and *New Music Quarterly Recordings*. A tireless advocate of the works of other composers, Cowell joined Varèse, Salzedo, Ruggles, and the Mexican composer Carlos Chávez, in 1927 to form the Pan American Association of Composers, an organization founded to present new music throughout the Americas. Cowell directed the organization from 1929 to 1933.

Cowell's diverse musical activities were brought to an abrupt halt in 1936, when he was arrested on a morals charge (for homosexual behavior) and imprisoned at San Quentin. The details about Cowell's arrest and imprisonment are not clear; controversy and contradictions abound and can sometimes be found in the oral histories included in this volume. Cowell did not discuss the subject publicly after his release in 1940. He was pardoned in 1942. Even while imprisoned, Cowell maintained his characteristic optimism, good cheer, and productivity: he taught music to inmates, organized a band, and wrote approximately sixty compositions.

In 1941 Cowell married Sidney Robertson, a bright and energetic ethnomusicologist. The couple worked together in a wide range of musical activities: they co-wrote the first biography on Charles Ives and traveled widely, studying and recording music.⁸⁸ Their recordings were broadcast and eventually were among those released as *Music of the World's Peoples* on the Folkways label.

Cowell is particularly celebrated for his early groundbreaking piano works, but his compositional output continued steadily. His later works, such as the two Concertos for Koto and Orchestra, the *Madras Symphony*, *Ongaku*, and *Persian Set*,

" . . . a polemic against people who were stupid about using their ears . . . "

Henry had been asked to do a book on Charles Ives and asked if I would help him. I always said yes to these requests. This must have been about 1944.

He used to type very hard early in the morning. The typewriter had very small, only uppercase, type and very narrow space between the lines, so that even if you double-spaced, it was a little hard to read. And Henry would never dream of wasting paper by double-spacing. There was never any spacing between sentences, and there was practically never any paragraphing. He used some thin, yellow duplicate copy sheets, tissue-paper practically, which would have been hard to read if you'd written only on one side with this odd type. But Henry did the first twenty pages on both sides of the page. It was as nearly impossible to read as anything I've ever seen, because the ribbon was rather faint, and with this paper the pressure showed through, so you had little indentations of other letters as you were trying to read.

Apparently when he sat down to think about Ives, he wrote a polemic against people who were stupid about using their ears. He used as examples things that I recognized from his background with the old gentleman who taught him the violin and thought that anything later than Spohr was damaging to the young. Occasionally, he got onto some of the people who had said unfriendly things about Ives's music, but on the whole he was relieving his own resentment, which he had never expressed. He always said that people were entitled to their opinion. He thought it was useless to argue and didn't attack people personally. But he could gather his forces of indignation in defense of somebody else, in this case Ives, initially: pages and pages and pages of aggravation at battles long since won, often at people long since dead.

I started to read this and realized that it was absolutely useless. So I set it aside and I started over again with a story that Ives had told Henry about his father in the Civil War, and General Grant not being able to recognize more than two tunes: one was "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and the other wasn't. And I went on from there. The yellow sheets came back east with us, and they lay on my conscience. I hadn't told Henry I wasn't using them, and I didn't know what to do about it.

Then came the time that I started having mini-breakdowns: I would wake up in the morning and I couldn't command myself to raise my hand, hold my head up, or get out of bed. At the time I was very conscientious about trying to make up to Henry for everything that had ever gone wrong in his life. He was delighted to have me do this. But eventually I discovered that you can't fill up another person's life with your own. You can't use yourself only for somebody else because you simply empty yourself and there's nothing left to give.

A long time later, when I was trying to work on the book, I found these sheets in the attic, and again, I tried to read them. I had such an attack of indignation at Henry, for having so little awareness or consideration of anybody else that he would expect anybody to *read* this, let alone work from it, that I simply tore them up and burned them. Later, of course, I was sorry. I was thinking about Ives at the moment and was fairly certain that the sheets would not have been any use for a book about Ives. Of course it was very revealing about *Henry*, but at the moment this wasn't what I was thinking about.

—Sidney Robertson Cowell
from self-interviews,

18 October 1974 to 3 February 1975,
Henry Cowell Collection, New York Public Library

sometimes incorporated instruments or musical styles he had discovered in his travels. His interest in the music of the early American composer William Billings and shape-note hymns resulted in eighteen Hymn and Fuguing Tune compositions, written between 1944 and 1964.⁸⁹ Their instrumentation varies from solo keyboard to chorus and orchestra; the last one is written for the unlikely combination of soprano and contrabass saxophone.

In addition to his theoretical book and Ives biography, Cowell edited *American Composers on American Music*. Originally published in 1933, the book includes articles by or about many of the figures we now consider to have defined the era: Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, Edgard Varèse, Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger, George Gershwin, and even the up-and-coming Aaron Copland, Henry Brant, and Roger Sessions. In addition to the books, Cowell wrote approximately two hundred articles. Many were for important music publications, including *Modern Music* and *Musical Quarterly*, but individual articles appeared in such unlikely periodicals as *House Beautiful* and *Irish Review*.

Cowell was also a gifted composition teacher. His students—as diverse as his musical interests—included John Cage, Lou Harrison, George Gershwin, and Burt Bacharach. Cowell will be remembered not only for his large body of varied music compositions, his books and articles, and his early interest in non-Western music but for his substantial work to promote contemporary American music. Cage said, “Henry Cowell was for many years the open sesame for new music in America,” and Harrison called him “the general information booth for all of American music.”⁹⁰ In addition to Cowell’s personal testimony below are reminiscences from his teacher, *New Music* colleagues, wife, and students.



HENRY COWELL

From interviews with John Edmunds, 1959; and with Beate Gordon for the
Columbia University Oral History Research Office, 1962 and 1963;
and from a Cowell tribute on National Public Radio⁹¹

I remember being with my parents when I was about five years old, and we stopped and waited for a streetcar in Berkeley, California. There was a man digging a ditch, and he overheard my father and mother talking about writing. He chipped in and proved to be a person that obviously had read a great deal and had astounding ideas and great clarity of speech. And this was Jack London. So my father invited him, and he came to see us. He was a great friend of the family, and I remember very well playing with his children while the parents talked, and thinking of Jack London as being most kindly toward children, being very benign, liking children and being well understood by his own children. I was immediately drawn and attracted to him.

My mother sang folk music, which she didn't take pride in at all at that time, although now it would be considered very interesting indeed. She had learned Kentucky and Tennessee mountain tunes, and I heard those as a child. My father had brought with him Irish folk tunes from Ireland, so I heard those as a small child. I remember living in San Francisco, right near the Oriental district, and my friends were Japanese, Chinese, and Tahitian. When I was between seven and ten, I hummed Japanese, Chinese, and Tahitian tunes just as normally as I hummed the British tunes from my mother, Irish tunes from my father, and classical melodies of Haydn and Mozart from my old Royal College teacher. And between all of them, I think that I got an idea of music in which the Orient and the Occident were not separated, but all fused into one and the same thing. It just seemed like normal music. I would like to point out that Harry Partch as well as John Cage, Lou Harrison, and myself, all have roots in the West. And obviously, what happened to me at this time, happened to a certain extent also with Harrison and Cage. They imbibed this, I think, quite unconsciously—they don't self-consciously go out and say, "I will now use a Chinese-type scale." What happens is that they hear Chinese music all the time, and this is part of their environment, and so it happens to be a part of their music. Here America has a special point, because the music of the Orient has played not nearly as big a part in the development of music

in Europe. In this country, it seems to me that our best composers—and I do think that Lou Harrison, for instance, is certainly among those—have succeeded quite naturally, and without conscious strain of any sort, in putting together the cultures of different peoples as they come together in this country.

I gave up the violin at the age of eight, after having studied it with a cranky old English teacher. He was seventy-five and I was five, and he wouldn't let me hear any modernistic music like Schubert or Schumann at all. He was old enough to think of Schumann as being a perfectly horrible modernist. He didn't allow me to hear any such nonsense: Haydn and Mozart and early Beethoven, but nothing beyond this to harm the sensitivity of a child. I was playing little concerts around San Francisco and the Bay region when I was seven. I gave it up because my parents thought it was making me nervous, and I suppose that they were quite right. When my parents gave away the violin, I did not then have a musical instrument. At this time I thought very strongly to myself that I wanted to be a musician and was determined to be one. I thought: what kind of a musician can you be without any musical instruments? I thought: you can be a composer, for a composer thinks sound in his mind. I already knew how to write the sounds down, from my violin lessons. So I sat for just exactly one hour every day, while my playmates went and practiced the piano for an hour—from four to five, I remember—and at 5:01 I was on the street playing along with everybody else. But from four to five, I sat at the desk and thought musical sounds, practiced being a composer. When I sat at the desk, it wasn't to write compositions so much as it was to hear sounds in my mind in order to prepare myself to write compositions. For instance, I'd think of a melody. I'd think of it as though sung by a soprano, then by a contralto, then as played by a violin, as played by an oboe, and so on. Then, when I was only ten years old, I went through what really is a crucial step for a composer, and that is to think chordally—to think several tones at once. The secret of this is to hear the chord as a unit. You don't say, "I'm now listening to three tones at once," you say, "I'm listening to a sound; this is one sound made by three tones at once; what is that sound?" And you have to be able to think it. Then the hurdle is over, and you can hear multiple sounds as units.

My mother was horribly frightened about the [1906] earthquake, and she took me to visit relatives in Kansas and Oklahoma. They sang lots of folk songs, and I first became acquainted with so-called shape-note hymns at this time. These are written down so that the shape of the note tells you how to

sing it, instead of where it is on lines and spaces. It had an influence in my future, because now I have written a great many Hymn and Fuguing Tunes, which are based on shape-note varieties of tune and chords. Although I make these myself, this was the style of music that I knew as a child.

When I was fifteen years old I was invited to write music for an Irish play, the theatrical music which would introduce the home and the deep tides of Manaunaun, the god of the sea. I had to write some music that would put you in the mood of the deep tides, as well as the waves of the sea. This was rather a big job for a fifteen-year-old boy. I tried a couple of low octaves in a certain rhythm. They sounded just a little too definite, so then I tried a couple of chords, which were better than the bare octaves in the low tidal rhythm, but this wasn't quite enough. Then, I had the idea of having all thirteen of the lowest tones of the piano played together at the same time, but since I didn't have thirteen fingers in the left hand, I played this with the flat of the hand, being very careful to get all of the notes exactly equal and to have what I con-

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Caricature of Henry Cowell, *Punch* magazine, 1930s

sidered a reasonable tone quality there. In other words, I was inventing a new musical sound later to be called tone clusters.

I was going to explain about the composition training—my parents were both romantic, and they believed in inspiration very fully. The general thought was that you couldn't compose unless you were inspired, and if you were inspired you didn't need to have composition training. So I didn't get over this for quite a while, but when I was sixteen, then I began to have lessons in composition, in harmony and counterpoint and so on. I had at least eight years of formal training.

I was staying in a famous musical private home in London, just prior to playing there in 1923, and I didn't know that Bartók was also a houseguest. I went down to practice, about 7 A.M., and I made, oh, the most awful noises, for which I am famous. And Bartók didn't know what was going on. He came down in a bathrobe, and listened to me practice, and became absolutely engrossed in this music. So our friendship was really based on music, rather than on anything else, but we got along very well personally. I expressed some disappointment. I said, "I've just played in Paris, but you can't just go in and expect anybody of real importance to be there. Nobody at my concert amounted to anything." He said, "Oh, this must be rearranged at once; you must go right

back to Paris and I will arrange a concert at which everybody will be there.” He did. He himself went to Paris a day earlier than he had anticipated. He got together all the people, such as Ravel and [Manuel] de Falla and [Arthur] Honegger and [Darius] Milhaud, all the people that really counted for anything in the way of creative music in Paris. Then they came because Bartók invited them and said, “This is going to be good.”

So then in 1926 I went to Budapest, on Bartók’s invitation, and I was with him every day for eleven days, while he played to me nearly every record that he had made of Romanian and Hungarian folk music. I simply spent the day there listening to recordings and talking over these exciting things—modern music, which still was so young in those days. As a matter of fact, I was very proud, because he was already very well known, and I was just a young boy. He wrote me a letter asking permission to use these so-called tone clusters which are now called secundal harmonies. I said, “By all means, do this. I haven’t asked Beethoven about using ordinary chords either, I just use them, once they’re made public.” But I was very flattered, of course, when this happened to me—and also when Alban Berg did the same thing in Vienna. He didn’t write a letter, but he personally asked for permission, asked if I’d mind because my name was so associated with this type of chord.

My wife is a specialist in folk music, and has become one of the best-known such specialists that we have in this country. She recorded all over the South. Then later on she found that there’s lots of folk music also in the North, and so she became the first person to go through the North. She recorded lumberjack songs in Wisconsin and Minnesota. In the WPA days, she had for two years a project of her own: she sent collectors out all over the state of California, and they have migrant workers and they had folk music from all over the United States. She has a number of albums. She has, for instance, the shape-note hymn singing that I spoke about before. She recorded it in Tennessee, and that album is also available.

The nature of melody is something that we know so little about. A melody, of course, is a progress of single tones one after the other. And while it used to be said that you have to have “a pleasing succession of tones,” I read in one dictionary, now you find that nobody is displeased by any succession of tones, so this has to be cast out as part of the description. Another that I read said it had to be an “orderly” succession of tones. And as far as I’m concerned, I can see young people striving desperately to make disorder in a succession of

tones without being in the least able to succeed, because it's almost impossible to be disorganized with an organic scale system such as we have here. The diatonic modes are, in general, the most interesting to me, and the human voice, I think, is the custodian of melody. I find that people are rather loath to move. They're somewhat lazy with the vocal apparatus, and therefore they consider it more melodious to go a small distance than a long distance with the voice. Any melody going along the scale is a great melody for a lazy man because he only moves a little at a time. If you want a real thrill, then try to move your vocal apparatus *and* your emotions with it to something *over* an octave—let us say you go from C to the D-flat a ninth above. If you can really do this and feel it, then you get a terrific wallop in the feeling from your melody, because you had to do something so energetic in order to feel this melody, that it gives you an unbounded feeling of confidence and skill.

I am very interested in all new developments in music, and serial music or twelve-tone music I find usually is so far removed from people's music that I regard it as a wonderful mental exercise, but not as being the future in music. I disagree totally with the people who think that all music has to be written in this technique. I feel more that it would be well if some of the people who study this music now would learn more about diatonic technique, and study the music of India, where you have thousands of scales, diatonic, all of them—actually more different varieties than are possible with the twelve-tone row the way it's usually used.

I'm very sympathetic in a way to aleatoric music. Of course, I am taking no chances myself! I think it will undoubtedly lead to something. I have been quite friendly to this sort of thing, and they credit me with having started some of it. For example, my *Mosaic Quartet* has five little movements, and they are to be played over again, but according to the choice of the player, so that each player will play it differently, and the players have the choice of making the form.

I find myself being a friend of music, and this means that I am a friend of *all* music. It means that I like every direction I've ever heard that music has taken at the present time. I warmly respond to all these directions. Nevertheless, I am forced to appreciate some of the following facts: simple and natural response to music on the part of large audiences demands a great simplicity of style. Sophisticated composers have grown farther and farther away from this style to a point where it would appear that the large audiences are being driven

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Henry Cowell playing the shakuhachi for Edgard Varèse, ca. 1944

into popular music instead of serious music, because serious music written now has so little to offer the auditor who has a moderate education. There's a great separation there, and it's partly because composers always feel that they have to strive forward, an attitude in which I share. It seems to me that it would be very, very difficult for anybody that I can think of right now to beat Mozart and Beethoven at their own game. Therefore, some other game has to be thought about.

Now, in contradistinction to all this is an avenue which offers almost endless possibilities for new developments in music; you have the vast world of the people who don't belong in the small, Western-cultivated musical countries with their history. Formerly, and erroneously, it was thought that this was primitive music, and people felt, in what seemed to me to be the height of egotism, that all such music was headed in the direction of our own music. This, I think, is fallacious. I think that if we head in the direction of their music in some respects, we'll be doing ourselves an awful lot of good. And I would like to point out, for instance, some of the music is older, has a more continuous tradition, and some of the music is much more personal, interesting, and varied in some respects than ours.

Remembering Cowell

*Charles Seeger • Gerald Strang • Herman Langer
Sidney Cowell • Lou Harrison • John Cage*

Henry Cowell studied with Charles Seeger when Seeger taught at the University of California at Berkeley.



CHARLES SEEGER

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 16 March 1970, Malibu Beach, California

The most memorable event of the fall of 1913 was a call one day from a man who told me his name was Harry Cowell, who had a son, aged fifteen, that he wanted to have take serious lessons in composition from the best teacher he could find in the Bay area. Harry Cowell brought along his

[To view this image, refer to
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son Henry, who was a very pretty and engaging young man of fifteen, scarcely more than a boy, who sat down at the piano and put on the rack [his] Opus 108. I was duly impressed. Then he started to work with fists, forearms, and elbows on a little upright piano that I had. I was delighted with the man, asked him if he knew anything about contemporary music, and he didn't; so I showed him some of the early Schoenberg, Opus 11, Opus 19; the Opus 74 of Scriabin; and some early work of Stravinsky. We immediately hit it off, and Harry decided that the person for Henry to study with in the Bay region was me.

Henry's and my sessions with modern music began at about 12 or 1 o'clock and lasted sometimes to 1 o'clock at night. I remember one night, it lasted all night long and we wound up at a hot dog stand in Oakland. There were no phonograph records at that time, you have to remember; what scores were available were in my library. Henry was an excellent musician, a born musician. He had had some lessons on the violin, some lessons on the piano, and that's about all. He was my first brilliant student.

His father had left his mother when he was quite young. Harry Cowell, the father, came of illustrious lineage in England and Ireland, connected with nobility on one side. Henry's grandfather had inherited a big estate in Ireland, but his immediate family had lost most of the money, and Henry's father had become a wanderer. He was a dilettante, something of a poet, something of a writer, and had wandered from job to job. He was a tennis expert, but he never could keep anything going very long, so that Henry was brought up in pretty terrible poverty. At the time that he came to me, he was living with his invalid mother in Menlo Park in a little cottage. Professor [Samuel S.] Seward of Stanford and some other people had become interested in Henry and got together enough money to pay his railroad fare and living for him and his mother while he studied at Berkeley.

Henry had had six weeks of schooling.⁹² At the end of six weeks in the first grade, he decided he didn't like school, and he never went back. His mother taught him. He read a great deal, and he was pretty busy taking care of his invalid mother, tending pigs, and collecting orchids [to sell]. I think there's an orchid named after him.

He was an unwashed little specimen. I don't think his clothes ever went to the cleaner. In fact, one time the girls in the Music Department came to me and said they didn't like to speak about it, but couldn't I do something about Henry's taking a bath? I didn't seem to have any results. "Well," they said, "will you leave it to us?" I said, "Yes, okay, if you can do anything." There was a bathroom upstairs in the Music Department, and since the furnace was

sometimes put on, there was hot water. So they got some towels and a cake of soap. They took him upstairs and pointed to the bathtub and said, “Henry, take a bath.” Well, he came out all washed.

He stayed three and a half years with me taking all the music courses, coaching some of the students, and was finally drafted in the army in the First World War. In the army he was put into the kitchen, and it was pretty rough. I was able to get Henry transferred to a band, where he had not only practice in conducting but in learning instruments.

After he’d been studying with me for a couple of years, he brought me a symphony. It had a rather nice scherzo, which had one note in it I thought really should be changed. I’d never asked Henry to change a note. That was not my function. My function was to develop his ease, speed, versatility, and daring in composition. So I suggested, “You ought to change that note. Instead of an A-flat it should be a B-flat.” He wouldn’t do it, which was what I expected. He was a good autodidact. In fact, I’ve found that my best pupils have to be autodidacts. If they’re not, they don’t interest me. About thirty years afterward, Henry came to me one day and he said, “You know, Charlie, that note you wanted me to change in that scherzo of mine—you were right.” I never felt so much that I was wrong.

During the period of Cowell’s imprisonment, Gerald Strang (1908–1983), a fellow California composer, took over the operation of the New Music Society.



GERALD STRANG

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, March 1975, Long Beach, California

I met him in '29 or '30, and he used to come over to my parents' place in Berkeley. We would have experimental sessions in which we would bang pot lids and frying pans on the piano, and we would try all sorts of strange methods of producing sound from the piano—a lot of that experimentation which he was doing. And then, after he started the New Music Society, I got involved as a volunteer, doing the things that one does in those—everything from selling tickets or ushering to conducting rehearsals.

In 1935, in the spring, Henry Cowell had invited Schoenberg to come to San Francisco and conduct a performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* and the *Kammersymphonie*. I got involved in the rehearsals and got acquainted with

the Schoenbergs and discovered that he [Schoenberg] was going to have some scholarships available. So I immediately applied for one of those, a summer scholarship. Later he went to Sam Goldwyn and got me some additional scholarship money so I could stay.

So we came to Los Angeles. And that was when Henry got into trouble. As soon as I heard about that, I dashed up to San Francisco to find out what I could do, and we got to talking about what was going to happen to *New Music*. When Henry was finally sent to San Quentin, he simply signed over the whole thing to me—lock, stock, and barrel. There was never any incorporation or any formal organization to the thing. It was just simply done by Henry Cowell and a bunch of volunteers. And so in order that I could handle the business side, Henry simply deeded all his interest in the *New Music* enterprise over to me. I had a paper which made me the sole owner and proprietor of the *New Music* edition and all its properties and prerequisites. Otto Luening and a couple of other people at Bennington took over the operation of the recording activities. The printing of the magazine had always been done on the Pacific Coast by the Langingers, who shortly before had come to Los Angeles and become the Golden West Music Press. That was when I learned—because Henry had never talked about it—that the angel behind the *New Music* edition was Charles Ives. I was very much surprised to discover that he was sending a regular contribution. At that time, 1935, he was contributing a thousand dollars a year, which sounds like nothing nowadays, but which made it possible to operate. It later increased to twelve hundred dollars and, I think before I dropped out of it, fifteen hundred dollars. Ives used to, each year in January, send a bunch of predated checks, you see.

On the other hand, it wasn't all that expensive, because the Langer family—there were three boys who had come over from Vienna and who ran Golden West Music Press—they did all the engraving and the printing. Herman Langer was the principal engraver. I think they were interested in it not so much from any real commitment to contemporary music as simply on the basis that it was an awfully good idea to be publishing American composers who couldn't get published anywhere else. I think they were devoted more to the idea than to the music. They were in no position to subsidize anything, because they were themselves refugees here. They operated strictly on a shoestring. Their earliest operations were conducted with one of those old presses, in which you had a lithographic stone that was a yard in each direction and weighed half a ton. If you look at some of those early books, they were beauti-

fully done. Now Herman himself was an extremely skillful engraver. One of the finest engravers that I've ever known, in terms of the layout of the page.

When Henry Cowell was in San Quentin, we continued to carry on a certain amount of correspondence, so I kept him aware of what was being done. I suppose we would exchange a letter or so a month, and periodically, when I was able to get up there, I also went to visit him in San Quentin. I know Olive, his stepmother, used to visit him. And there were a few people that did, but not very many. I think if one looked up the records, you'd find that practically all of his musical friends just sort of vanished. And I suppose that's par for the course. The correspondence I had with Ives never mentioned Henry. Henry was just a subject that was skirted politely and not brought up any more than was necessary.

Henry was a very stoic sort of character. With his elfin wit and all of his other personal peculiarities, he took the whole thing somehow very calmly. He didn't get excited; he didn't seem to resent anything. He seemed to make the best of it. He took his initial period in the jute factory without any complaints. Eventually he started teaching. He was posted in the band and did arrangements and all that sort of thing. He quite docilely did whatever was necessary to fit into the prison routine. And I never heard anything from him in the way of comments about the treatments of homos in the prison or any difficulty with the guards or with the other prisoners. Now there may have been incidents that I don't know about. But he took it all in a very straightforward sort of manner.

He apparently got along fairly well with at least some of the prisoners. There was one rather strange set of occurrences that took place. There was a young man of German extraction who claimed to be a descendant of some German baron or count. He was paroled, and he had to have a job. Henry thought very highly of him; apparently he had a lot of cultural knowledge and interest, and apparently they had good discussions, and so he wrote me and asked if there was any way in which I could use him. I was able to use him for such matters as mailing, chores, and the routines of running a publishing house. So this gave him a job in the sense that the parole board required. But it turned out that Henry's confidence was misplaced, and he ran off with the petty cash. He was eventually picked up and, as a parole violator, returned to San Quentin. Henry was, I think, likely to be overconfident, and he had a lot of capacity for believing in people. That was one example.

Herman Langinger (1908–1979), an Austrian émigré, worked for a prestigious New York engraver, where he met Ives and worked on the score of the Fourth Symphony. In 1928 Langinger left New York for San Francisco to start a business of his own, the Golden West Music Press. When Langinger, by then a master engraver, joined the small group working with Cowell in the New Music Society, he became a major asset to the organization. His surprising enthusiasm for experimental music and his willingness to work with difficult and unusual scores set him apart from many European émigré musicians. *New Music*, a quarterly publication, was only a small part of Langinger's business, but it was a part he particularly enjoyed. Langinger worked with Cowell and engraved some of the most experimental pieces for publication. Among them were Varèse's *Ionisation* and pieces by Ruggles, Harris, and Schoenberg. When Cowell was sent to prison and *New Music* suddenly lost its leadership, Langinger and Gerald Strang, who had been working closely with Cowell, were left to manage. Loyally they tried to keep the organization alive. The interview with Langinger is a reminder that oral history interviews can reveal different versions of the same event.



HERMAN LANGINGER

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, March 1975,
Los Angeles, California

Henry Cowell wrote me a letter from San Quentin: "There is a very fine flute player who can be released from the prison." He was there on forgery, a flute player from the Los Angeles Philharmonic. "Is there a chance that you can find him a job?" Now mind you, he was forging checks. So, I got together with Gerald Strang—we were the only two now. I said, "Gerald, here's the letter, what do you think? Let's offer him a job." He said, "Fine, let's do it." When he was released he came here, and the first thing we introduced him to was our checkbook.

Well, we were rich at that time. *New Music* had \$150 in the bank—I went to the bank with him—Gerald was busy, and I had his signature put on our checkbook. So he is a full-fledged treasurer. Well, things went along beautifully for a few weeks. Then suddenly, POOF. He didn't show up. The police came finally to check what he did here, and they brought back the things they found in his possession. He went to Berkeley and forged checks there, but he never touched one cent of *New Music*.

Cowell explained to me things about the morals charge—why he didn't come out and fight the case. It had to do with vicious propaganda about him. When he came back from a three-year tour, he brought back a lot of Russian

music that he recorded on disks—real Soviet music, Russian folk songs. He was a liberal man that today nobody would pay any attention to. He was not—I'm real positive—a homosexual. I think I'm the only one that he expressed himself to.

I heard all the new music, not only from Russia. The Hearst newspapers notified him not to use any propaganda, and he ignored them because he said, "Music is not propaganda. Music is an international language. We all love the same thing." They threatened him, and finally they came to interview him.

He had a little shack in Menlo Park—a little house—and in the back he built a swimming pool. The boys in the town helped him because that was the very first time that anybody ever had a swimming pool. He used to go swimming with them. They were all in the nude—Henry Cowell and the boys, no girls.

The "Lost" New Music Papers

Herman Langer was interviewed at his Golden West Press office in Los Angeles. Afterward, he proudly revealed the papers that had not been looked into for years. One glance was enough to convince me to change plane reservations and spend a few days making an inventory. It was a heady (if dusty) experience. The envelopes varied widely in content, and several had corrected proofs and autograph scores, among them the first page of Varèse's Ionisation (in color!) and manuscripts by Cowell. The collection also contained letters from Ives, Ruggles, Varèse, Chávez, and others. Herman was convinced that he must consider a more secure home for these valuable materials. He said, "Yes, you are right! Suppose I die tomorrow!"

It was not "tomorrow" but a few months later when a call came from Herman's assistant to say that Herman had suffered a fatal heart attack. In the interim, the Yale Library had made a bid for the collection, but Herman had considered it too low and decided to wait. As soon as it seemed appropriate, I inquired about the New Music collection. Somehow, it had disappeared!

Herman had a complicated personal life that involved a wife and another woman. Difficulties regarding property and inheritance followed his death, and ownership of his estate was contested. As a result, the New Music papers were taken outside the country by one of the parties in order to ensure ownership. Offers have been made by several libraries to acquire the documents. Each attempt has failed, and these unique materials from Henry Cowell's New Music papers are deteriorating; some have been misplaced; eventually they may be lost forever.

—V.P.

So, they came to interview him—in other words give him final notice—from the *Examiner*. They found a picture of those kids, and they stole it. That broke his heart because he was afraid that they might publish that. In those days if a child, eight, ten years old, is stamped as a homosexual, the whole city would crucify him. So, he pleaded with them not to do it. “I’ll do anything you want.” They said, “Okay, we’re going to accuse you of being homosexual.” And he said, “Go ahead.”

So I said, “Henry, do you have a lawyer?” He said no. “Don’t you want one?” He said, “No, I don’t.” I said, “What’s going to happen, they’re liable to really give you the works.” He said, “I’m risking my freedom against maybe twenty-five innocent boys. They did absolutely nothing. I made them feel like this is their home. They came from school, they dashed over to take a swim. There was nothing wrong.” And this is how they put him away.

He did develop a good correspondence course for the prisoners. He developed a music department. It was terrific. He used to give huge concerts outdoors. Not only the prisoners went there, but the public. There was one fellow, a young fellow, who was a very fine pianist. He was the only one next to Henry that could play his music, with the clusters and the forearm and all that. Henry was composing for the concerts. I don’t know what ever happened to that music.

Sidney Robertson Cowell (1903–1995) made extensive tape-recorded memoirs that were intended to be a reference for Henry Cowell’s future biographers. These tapes include previously unavailable information about Henry Cowell’s arrest, which maintain his innocence, directly contradicting previously published accounts.⁹³ Clearly, Cowell’s spouse would have access to particularly intimate information that might be unavailable to others; however, she may also have a motive to supply a biased report. Sidney Cowell’s testimony does not necessarily prove Cowell innocent beyond doubt, but it does add another perspective, which deepens a mystery that may never be solved.



SIDNEY COWELL

From self-conducted interviews, 18 October 1974 to 3 February 1975⁹⁴

He let the children dig a swimming pool in the back of his place. These were boys between ten and fifteen. Henry visualized this as country life: he thought of children swimming in the old swimming hole, and it never occurred to him to say anything about bathing suits. In those days men

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Henry and Sidney Robertson Cowell on their wedding day,
27 September 1941

and boys wore a kind of armless jersey that went up over the shoulders. He never thought about bathing suits at all until there were some complaints in the neighborhood. They said they didn't want to walk by with their little girls down that road when the swimming was going on. So Henry did the logical and absolutely damaging thing: he built a fence.

There was a moment—I think in the spring of 1935—when a couple of boys who were older than the others took to coming swimming. The fellows who'd been around there a lot rather resented and also disapproved of them. Henry on one occasion did what he very often did: he took everybody camping. They went around to everybody's house and gathered up blankets and sweaters and food. As many people as his car would hold, they would go off to the beach at Oceano, or up in the Redwoods, or as far occasionally as Yosemite, when they stayed several days. On one of these trips to Yosemite it snowed, and they didn't have enough blankets. So they piled all their blankets together and all

heaped up. He said there were five or six boys and himself, and among them were these two older boys.

After this night that they were so cold, they decided to go home. Henry dropped off the younger ones, and it just happened that the older ones stayed put longer. Henry had a red Stutz that he bought used. A Stutz was a very elegant car, and the boys had painted it for him, polished the brass lamps, and whatnot. As he dropped them off one of them said to him, "We've decided we'd like your car. Why don't you give us the car?" Henry didn't take it seriously. He said, "I need it myself." And this fellow said, "Well, I don't think you need it as much as I do." Henry was very surprised. He thought there was something the matter with the boy's mind, because he was so pressing and so ugly about this. Finally, he tossed it off as a joke and said, "In this world you have to earn your own cars, and I use this one. This is part of my business equipment." And this fellow said, "Well, I want this car and no other. If you don't give it to me, you know what I can say after last night, and there'll be nobody to contradict me. I can say anything I like, and I will, unless you give me this car." Well, Henry just laughed this off and dismissed it from his mind. This was a little over a year before he was arrested.

A year later the boys came by. They didn't spend much time around the place, and they weren't made too welcome at any time, even though Henry didn't take their remark seriously. One of them came back and repeated this threat, and again Henry tossed it off. This particular boy was an orphan; his much older half-sister was his guardian, and he lived with her. It was she who brought the complaint to the officers a few days later.

Then the boy told some of Henry's younger friends that he'd "got Cowell," and Cowell was going to be arrested. The boys dashed to warn Henry and were in the house when the police officers came in the early evening. This lent color to all the suspicions that Henry had a group of boys gathered around that he was demoralizing. The boys were sent home very roughly and were very upset.

In the course of talking about his relationship with these various boys, Henry said that when they were swimming they sometimes played a kind of sexual tag. He was not aware that there was anything else going on until afterward, when he realized that he should have noticed that there were a couple of pairs of boys who tended to disappear behind the house and come back. He indicated that at the point at which any kind of sexual interest hinted at pleasure, he turned his back on it. This was because of his mother's attitude: she felt that sex was indecent and told him he must be very careful to have nothing to do with girls because they took your time and made demands on you. To the end

of his life, any demand on Henry was something he resented and was very rude about if it came from a female, even a little small girl, even one of my nieces. If they asked him for something he was immediately stiff and unpleasant. But with boys he was always perfectly natural and very cooperative and helpful.

Henry, as he grew into energetic, vigorous, young manhood, couldn't eliminate sex entirely. Somewhere along the line he got the idea that sexual relief was necessary for your health but that pleasure in sex was a real sin. So he was blocked in any connection between his feeling life and his physical life. He mentioned he was carrying on a love affair about the time of his arrest, but he had decided to move away from all these relationships with males into a life with more females in it, because he wanted to marry and have children. He explained that he was more interested in men than women, more attracted to men than women, but he could never maintain a relationship when he began to feel any pleasure in it. The thing that brought him to the decision to break off gradually with his adult male lover was, he said, "pleasure began to enter into it and so of course I couldn't continue." I thought this was very revealing.

At any rate, Henry said that he was not guilty, but he pled guilty on the advice of the county constable, one of two men who came out to arrest him. They did the old business of one of them being rough and the other being pleasant. The man who played the kindly role said, "If you plead guilty, there will just be a hearing and you won't have to have a trial. If you don't plead guilty, all these youngsters in the community will be questioned and will be expected to be witnesses. I'm sure you don't want to put them through that." Well, of course Henry didn't, particularly after the very brutal interrogation he was put through. So he wrote out a confession that night.

There are things in the confession that puzzle me, but I thoroughly believe that Henry was not a person to exploit young boys. I don't think his tastes ran that way, and I don't think he would have considered that proper. It wasn't until I went out to get a pardon for him and had to talk to all the people involved in the original case that I discovered that the authorities in San Mateo County had come to the conclusion that he was innocent and that all the information that they could get from the youngsters and the community bore this out.

Henry never seemed to question the kindness of the paternal police officer. He didn't realize that this was a game. He never mentioned it if he later discovered it, or perhaps read in a detective story that this was a common ploy. It obviously worked with him. He told me that one of his great concerns immediately was the disturbance that would be created in the minds of all the parents of the children who had frequented his place. There might have been

twenty children, sometimes two or three from the same family, from that general area. He wanted to reassure the parents, so this police officer said he'd be happy to do it. So Henry gave him a list of the names and addresses of the parents whom he wanted to reassure. He asked this officer to call them and assure them that in spite of the publicity, they should not fear that the children would be brought into this. This doesn't seem to me too logical, but it was something that Henry felt he could do to help the situation, and so he did it. Of course, none of them need have been named because they were all under age. Henry thought that a reporter had gone by this officer's desk, had seen this list, and had copied it without permission. I think this list may have been leaked by the police.

Henry's refusal to have an attorney came from the experience of a local farm family where he took his meals: after a railroad accident they had found that lawyers were people who took your money and then did nothing for you. So he was absolutely obdurate about legal assistance. His written explanation of bisexuality as an adult was confused with the accusation involving local boys and taken as a confession. The guilty plea that Henry made on the advice of the arresting officer was made to protect neighborhood youngsters, and he fully expected to be able to retract it later. Unfortunately, the law doesn't work that way.

Sidney Cowell's letter to Vivian Perlis of 3 May 1977 (excerpts):

Dear Mrs. Perlis:

I wanted to explain that my energetic contradiction of the idea Gerald Strang and Hermann [sic] Langer expressed to you in interviews (to the effect that Henry Cowell was the victim of some sort of anti-Communist frame-up) was due to exasperation at having one more piece of folklore to refute. Many such things I let pass, but this is perhaps worth a statement from me.

Two main points: The dates are wrong. HC was arrested in 1936. The anti-Communist activity in California only hottened up in 1937 at the time of the General Strike in San Francisco, and it was directed against waterfront organizers and conspicuous and vocal radicals, many of them, like Ella Winter and Lincoln Steffens, avowed members of the C.P. [Communist Party]. HC's trip to the USSR in 1929 had been entirely a-political but in general he seems to have thought "music for the masses" was a good thing as it produced lots of folksong collecting! He found the USSR composers' world surprisingly controlled and decided in his own mind firmly against dictators, apparently as early as 1930. He had in California and New York (inherited largely from his mother), a number of gentle, elderly and confused but non-violent syndicalist and anarchist friends, disapproved by the Marx-

ists of the Thirties in the US as insufficiently radical and activist. But his mind was certainly not much on politics.

The other point that satisfies me about any possibility of his having been the victim of a political frame-up based on alleged Communist activities is that if this had formed part of the background I could not have avoided knowing it, and it was never even remotely suggested. By accident of timing I was involved in the 3rd application for parole that finally succeeded. And after we married I went to California to ask for a pardon. This required interviews with and letters to the Governor from everyone involved in the original case. I was surprised by the general “all is forgiven, we are happy to help” attitude. I was told openly that the extreme sentence and the failures of the first requests for parole were “political”; but this had nothing to do with Communism, but with the desire of a member of the State Board of Prison Terms and Paroles to run for Lieutenant Governor in 1940; a horrendous sex murder in Los Angeles had made him afraid of the women’s club vote, and Henry’s refusal to be blackmailed into paying for “helpful publicity” had resulted in fantastic attacks on everyone concerned every time his name came up. So everybody was nervous in a political sense, all right. But nothing to do with Communism. HC’s trip to the USSR in 1929 was widely known, often mentioned in his lectures and I was surprised that this was never used against him anywhere so far as I knew—even in RED CHANNELS where he was named about 1950.

Since interview transcripts have long lives, perhaps these statements from me should be filed with them? Strang and Langinger just misunderstood the meaning of the word “political.”

Regards and thanks,
Sidney Cowell

Lou Harrison (1917–2003) studied with Cowell and shared his teacher’s open-mindedness and interest in non-Western music.



LOU HARRISON

From interviews with Vivian Perlis, 24 March 1970, Aptos, California;
and with Vincent Plush, 16 May 1983, Aptos, California; and from
Cowell tribute on National Public Radio⁹⁵

Whenever Cowell gave a concert I was there, I often held the pedal in the “Aeolian Harp.”⁹⁶ Well, I just loved it, absolutely loved it, and whenever I could see him, I did. He was very, very kind. He gave me a lesson every week, at least, and this was all for free, you know.

Olive Cowell, she's marvelous. She's a grand lady, a really grand lady. She likes to be called "the wife of Henry Cowell's father." She doesn't like to be called "stepmother," I don't think. She was a teacher at San Francisco State College when Henry's own father, Harry, was also teaching there. Henry's father was an Irish aristocrat who when he had to go to work found he could play tennis, and so he taught tennis. Olive was an expert in international relationships. They built the first modern house, practically, in San Francisco—a beautiful work, by the architect Irving Morrow, who was architect of the Golden Gate Bridge. She's one of the few women I'd ever known anywhere who has maintained the old-fashioned salon. Visiting artists are there and visiting intellectuals, so that you meet everybody. I met my first dancers for whom I started to work. Composers—well, Varèse was one of them, and Henry of course. When Henry was in the region he always stayed there, that was his headquarters, and he would give concerts for friends there, and I was invited. Schoenberg was there. There was always some music. I often played there.

Henry Cowell arranged, as part of the New Music Society, a concert of the works of Schoenberg to be done in the chamber hall of the complex of the opera house. It included the "Waldtaube's Lied" from the *Gurrelieder*; it included the chamber symphony, which was played twice, and almost all of *Pierrot Lunaire*, too. I don't remember what else, but those were the big thrills.

I was attending the New Music Society concerts, too. I remember going to Steinway Hall in San Francisco, and these were pretty far-out concerts for the period. They were attended by small but very knowing groups—supporters of contemporary music. In those days it was always called ultramodern.

Two of my piano pieces, the "Prelude" and "Sarabande," Henry Cowell published.⁹⁷ Those are my first published works, and Schoenberg liked them when I brought them to him later. I remember one point in New York, when I was writing a twelve-tone piece, Henry Cowell was very upset about that. He said, "Oh, make up your own system. Make it an eleven-tone piece or a seven-tone piece, or make up a whole new system!"

So his approach to music, both as composition and as talk, was that there were lots of humanistic ways of viewing it and of doing it. It was wonderfully American in the sense that it was the backyard putterer, or the garage putterer, at the same time carrying with it a weight of knowledge that was enormous. Almost anything could be backed up, but in good cheer. This was what was delightful about it.

This attitude is true in his music. It covers so wide a range of achievement and of methods and of play. Actually, Henry stood for play in the very finest sense. Again from him I got the idea that we are really wild animals, you know. We've never been tamed by anyone. When we are growing up as children, we play intently. Then, when we grow up, we do the same thing, but we call it civilization. Henry had that idea too. I got it from him, in fact, that sensation—that it's at once play, and perfectly serious play because the moment you take away play, there's no more art.

John Cage (1912–1992), another Cowell student, became the best-known figure in the American experimental tradition.



JOHN CAGE

From comments made to Perlis's American Studies Class, 27 April 1976, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut; and from Cowell tribute on National Public Radio⁹⁸

I think that when one thought of Henry there was the tendency to smile rather than to look sad. His openness of mind was cheering, and yet it was almost inherent in him and from a very early age. I don't know how old he was when he began playing the piano with his arms and with his fists, but it needed a very open-minded person to do that. And he did it. It must have been when he was something like twelve or thirteen. Wasn't it? And nobody taught him to do it. He was, so to speak, born with this lively, adventurous, cheerful mind.

Certainly my own prepared piano is unthinkable without the example of his string piano. My prepared piano pieces seem to be simply a variation of his string piano. The essential difference was that his activity with regard to strings was to move objects or his hands on them, or he'd move a darning egg, that round piece of wood, up and down the strings to produce sliding harmonics. My preparations allow you, once having put them in the piano, to keep your hands on the keyboard. Cowell's so-called experimental or avant-garde pieces were all closely connected with major and minor scales. The tunes of those pieces, which sounded unusual, were very centered back home where they could be most accepted. Do you see? A piece of music of his that had unusual aspects would have them fused with aspects that were very, very well known.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Postcard reproducing segment of Henry Cowell's "Exultation," which includes tone clusters in the bass clef

He clearly made connections where connections hadn't been made, so that he gave us the example again of fructifying information by means of not obviously connected information. I think Wittgenstein in philosophy did this, too, when he said the meaning of something was not fixed, but is in the use that we give it. So that if, for instance, spaghetti is used not to eat but to decorate a room, then its meaning changes. Henry had that kind of straightforward seeing of things and the straightforward faith that things could be other than what we conventionally thought they were.

Cowell had a magazine in the twenties and continued through the thirties. At one time, I was the editor when it stopped publishing music that wasn't being published by ordinary publishers. That was his idea that regardless how he felt about it—if some composers wouldn't be published by an ordinary publisher, then he was very quick to do so. He published very early music of Ives, of Ruggles, of Varèse and many others.

I went to Richard Buhlig, who was the first to play the Opus 11 of Schoenberg. He was living at the time in Los Angeles, and even though he didn't teach composition, he agreed to teach me composition at my request. And after a while he said that he couldn't teach me anything more, and that I should send some pieces that I had written to Henry Cowell for publication in the *New Music* edition. I did that, and Cowell wrote back that he didn't think I had found myself, that he wouldn't publish the pieces, but that he would

present them in the concert of the New Music Society in San Francisco. The reason he didn't think I had found myself was, he said, because my music was too much like the music of Schoenberg. He suggested that I study with him. And I had been going in a direction so that I was willing to do it. Cowell offered to give me a scholarship at the New School, where he gave classes in Oriental music and in modern harmony. His teaching of modern harmony was that there was no sense in having chords that were just triadic, but that you could have—as Schoenberg did have in the *Kammersymphonie*—chords based on fourths. You could have seconds and sevenths coming to the clusters of Henry Cowell.

Henry always gave the impression that he was really more interested in other people's music even than in his own. And he did a great deal of teaching. But toward the end of his life Henry Cowell became not as interested in other people's music as he was in his own music. He became anxious to add to the body of his work—and it's enormous. I'm sure if it were examined, continually surprising and interesting, because he had such a really open mind, not only in the context of his own culture, but with regard to other cultures. He's one of our most prolific composers. He wrote so many fascinating pieces at the beginning. And his interest in music of other cultures predates our present concern for world music. His energy and relevance was marvelous especially in the string quartets just recently published—the *United String Quartet* and another one that was considered really too advanced to write, and which now seems quite reasonable.⁹⁹ I think people have even performed it, where the rhythms are so complicated in terms of cross rhythms—sevens against thirteens against elevens and so forth. In the early thirties it took seventy-five rehearsals to put on Varèse's *Ionisation*, and now, without any preparation whatsoever, people come out of the cornfields in Illinois and can play *Ionisation* with two rehearsals!

I'm indebted to Henry for his work primarily, but besides that, his enthusiasm. You might almost call it an unbiased enthusiasm about music in general. Not only all modern music was to his liking, but all folk music was to his liking. Music of all cultures was to his liking. In fact, I don't recall ever hearing anything with him that he didn't like. His excitement about music knew no bounds.



[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

FOUR

On the Jazz Age and George Gershwin



World War I affected every phase of American life and culture. The arts were curtailed, concert halls and museums closed—all attention was directed toward the war effort. Modern music had barely taken hold and was difficult for audiences in the best of times; it was the first to go. The early modernists were scattered, and the few who continued to compose did so with little support.¹ The mood of the people was not sympathetic to the unpredictable sounds and unfamiliar forms of modern music. What the public craved was entertainment—a good dance tune, romantic ballad, or Charlie Chaplin movie. Irving Berlin’s “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” was enormously popular, and George M. Cohan’s “Over There” was the patriotic hit of the day. As the fighting escalated and the casualties mounted, the horrors of warfare became a reality, and the atmosphere at home changed from benign patriotism to grim anxiety. When peace came, a great wave of relief swept the country, and the somber mood changed to a state of euphoric celebration. The positive attitude following the armistice was boosted by the economy, which had escalated during the war. Vacations became part of working people’s lives; the wealthy dressed in expensive clothes and built grand country houses in Newport and the Berkshires; elaborate balls and parties were given by a population whose wealth grew steadily without taxes. Despite the pervasive optimism, the quality of life had changed. Gone was the innocence, the gentle pace, and the traditions of prewar times. Life became fast and carefree, and jazz set the pace. The poet Edna

St. Vincent Millay, the epitome of the free spirit of the times, drew vast audiences with her dramatic readings:

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light!"²

The candles burned at both ends through the Prohibition twenties, until the prolonged party suddenly ended on the day of the stock market crash.

Early jazz was lively, ebullient, and sensual. It appealed to the young and to the wealthy, who danced the shimmy and Charleston to the irresistible music of jazz bands. Jazz was everywhere—Harlem, Chicago, New Orleans, and Kansas City. It was played by small combos that introduced some of the great artists of the century, such as Jelly Roll Morton, King Oliver, and Louis Armstrong and vocalists Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. It could be heard over the air via the exciting new technology of radio, which broadcast the Duke Ellington Orchestra "live" from the Cotton Club and the weekly radio programs of *Music by Gershwin*, sponsored by the laxative Feen-a-mint. Jazz gained further appeal from its "bad" heritage—just bad enough to be tantalizing! Newspapers declared it to blame for "a serious moral crisis" and "a burgeoning youth revolt." Added to the fun was the sense of being off-limits. Prohibition became law in 1920, and a year later the New York State Legislature passed a law giving it the right to censor dances. The new jazz dances spawned freer styles of dressing. A columnist in the *New York University News* wrote, "It is an alarming situation when our 20th Century debutante comes out arrayed like a South Sea Island savage." Paris had dictated the length of skirts to American women for decades; now American jazz changed the dress code and caused an international dance craze with pieces such as "Coal Black Mammy" and "Livery Stable Blues."

Jazz's infectious beat was so contagious that it spread to concert music. From the time of its birth—date unknown but place indisputably America—jazz provided the rhythmic vitality that Gershwin and Copland (and others) were quick to recognize as a sure way of sounding American. Their "symphonic jazz" compositions bridged the gap between concert and popular music. For a brief time, until the sobering effect of the Great Depression, jazz reigned supreme in the clubs *and* the concert halls. No wonder F. Scott Fitzgerald, the writer most closely connected to the period, called it the Jazz Age.

The composer who personified the spirit of the times most vividly was George Gershwin (1898—1937). His life paralleled the carefree but brief Jazz Age. He lived it to the fullest, as though he knew his time would be limited. Handsome, stylish, intense, self-assured, and fast-moving, Gershwin mirrored the glamorous and exciting Roaring Twenties. He was a brilliant and prolific composer, fabulous pianist,

terrific dancer, talented painter, astute art collector, and accomplished sportsman. Gershwin's genius is beyond explanation. His parents were an unexceptional couple, without particular talent or interest in the arts. Morris Gershwin's greatest claim to fame was that he moved his family twenty-eight times. Inexplicably, Morris and Rose produced exceptional progeny: their eldest son, Ira, became one of the great lyricists of American musical theater; another son, Arthur, was musical, if measured by standards other than George and Ira; and Frankie, the "kid sister," could sing and dance with above-average skill. They became better than amateur painters, and all but George, who died at age thirty-eight, lived long lives.

Constantly in motion, George Gershwin went a long way in a short time: from a neighborhood kid good at roller skating and swimming, he soon discovered his musical gifts and became one of the best musicians in town. Impatient to begin his career, he left the High School of Commerce during his second year. At sixteen he worked by plugging songs by other musicians at publishing houses on Tin Pan Alley, first at Remick's, then at T. B. Harms Company. The musician Max Dreyfus, who managed Harms, quickly recognized Gershwin's talent and gave the young composer an opportunity to write his own tunes.³ George supplemented his income by making piano rolls; by 1930 he had made more than one hundred (many survive under various names). Gershwin worked intermittently as a theater rehearsal pianist and as accompanist for popular singers, such as Louise Dresser and Nora Bayes. With "Swanee," a tune Gershwin wrote with the lyricist Irving Caesar in about fifteen minutes, George had his first big break: the entertainer Al Jolson heard the lively two-step and incorporated the tune into his show *Sinbad*. Al Jolson's unique rendition, in blackface, and the recording that followed, made the song a big hit and brought fame and fortune to George Gershwin. Suddenly, he was a celebrated songwriter, recognized by the entire entertainment business.

Gershwin began to pull away from Tin Pan Alley toward the theater. Irving Berlin said: "We were all pretty good songwriters, but Gershwin was something else. He was a composer."⁴ At age twenty, his first full score for a musical, *La-La-Lucille!* was behind him, and the *George White's Scandals* were ahead.⁵ Still moving fast, Gershwin accomplished within a few years what took others decades. Broadway was ready to change from old-fashioned operetta imitations to high-spirited, up-to-date scores. Taking his lead from his hero, Jerome Kern, Gershwin was soon writing works for musical theater.⁶ Many of the most admired and enduring Gershwin songs are from long-forgotten shows.

Paradoxically, in the liberated and carefree twenties, entertainment and fine art rarely mixed. Only a few daring individuals attempted to cross the lines. One was the influential critic Carl Van Vechten, who was convinced that America's art music should grow from its popular culture. He admired Gershwin; in fact, it was Van Vechten who wrote the first article on Gershwin for a major magazine, *Vanity Fair*.⁷ Van Vechten suggested to soprano Eva Gauthier (1885–1958) that she include jazz,

“ . . . a red-letter date in American music history . . . ”

Gershwin's first appearance in 1923 was a red-letter date in American music history, for it was then that he and I gave the program which established jazz as a genuinely American musical contribution. . . . The young George Gershwin made history when he appeared as my accompanist and as composer. The program listed songs by Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Walter Donaldson, and Gershwin . . . on the same program with compositions by Hindemith, Bartók, Schoenberg, Milhaud. . . . The success of this recital prompted Gershwin to switch from Broadway to the concert hall.

—Eva Gauthier

from “The Roaring Twenties,” *Musical Courier*,
February 1955, 42–44

particularly Gershwin, in one of her recitals. Gauthier presented her “Recital of Ancient and Modern Music for Voice” on 1 November 1923 at Aeolian Hall.

Gauthier's recital was a prelude to Paul Whiteman's more famous Experiment in Modern Music a few months later. Whiteman, a popular and influential band-leader, was a passionate supporter of what the critic Virgil Thomson called “high-brow jazz” and planned his experiment to bring this music to the public. He was better known than Gauthier and was a skilled entrepreneur who knew how to publicize an event. For several weeks before his Experiment in Modern Music (12 February 1924), Whiteman invited influential people in the arts to “rehearsal/luncheons.” They listened, socialized, and discussed such topics as “What is American music?” and “What makes music modern?” (questions still being asked decades later). When the time came, Whiteman made sure all the right people were invited to his Experiment in Aeolian Hall.

Gershwin and Whiteman were not strangers. Whiteman had conducted the recording of Gershwin's “I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise” in 1922 and also championed the composer's first attempt at opera, *Blue Monday* (later *135th Street*), written for the *Scandals of 1922*.⁸ It followed that Whiteman invited Gershwin to compose a piece for his upcoming concert. George had barely six weeks to write *Rhapsody in Blue*, frequently composing on trains between New York and Boston, where he was working on a new show, *Sweet Little Devil*. Van Vechten saw the composer in Boston at a rehearsal for a repeat of Gauthier's concert. He said, “On that day, about four weeks before the composition [*Rhapsody in Blue*] was actually produced, he had only made a few preliminary sketches; he had not yet even found the now famous *andantino* theme! . . . At the first rehearsal of the program for the con-

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the print version of this title.]

Album cover of re-creation by Maurice Peress of Paul Whiteman's 1924
concert *Experiment in Modern Music*, with art by Miguel Covarrubias

cert, the score was not yet ready." At subsequent rehearsals, Van Vechten became convinced that the *Rhapsody* was "the finest piece of serious music that had ever come out of America; moreover, that Gershwin had composed the most effective concerto for piano that anybody had written since Tchaikovsky's B-flat minor."⁹

Whiteman's *Experiment in Modern Music* included various short pieces played by his Palais Royal Orchestra, a dance orchestra of a size between a jazz band and a full symphonic ensemble. Whiteman's aim was to demonstrate that American popular music could be at home in the concert hall. In the printed program, the conductor explained "The Why of This Experiment: the Whiteman orchestra was the first organization to especially score each selection and to play it according to the score. . . . Eventually there may evolve an American school which will equal those of foreign origin." The pieces on the program were listed under headings: "The True Form of Jazz," for example, was represented by "Yes, We Have No Bananas," "Livery Stable Blues," and "Mama Loves Papa." Zez Confrey played his ubiquitous "Kitten on the Keys" and other novelty pieces.¹⁰ By the time Gershwin

took his place at the piano, the audience had grown restless with the program, but the moment the clarinetist Ross Gorman lit into the famous glissando that opens *Rhapsody in Blue*, the hall came alive—the audience sensed they were witnessing a historic event. Here was Gershwin's first, best—and most controversial—orchestral piece. Not only was there disagreement about the place of jazz in the concert hall, but Ferde Grofé's orchestrations elicited accusations that the composer did not possess the expertise to orchestrate his own music and that he did not know how to deal with larger musical forms. The fact is that Whiteman wanted all pieces, except for Victor Herbert's, to be scored by Grofé, who understood the complicated mechanics of Whiteman's orchestra. Furthermore, Gershwin was so pressed for time that he needed Grofé's assistance.¹¹

The premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue* has been called one of the most memorable musical occasions of the decade. The piece was described by the composer simply as “full of outdoor pep.” Its overwhelming popularity made Gershwin and Whiteman international celebrities. Gershwin was the first American musician to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine (25 July 1925). As for Whiteman, the self-proclaimed King of Jazz had proved a point: “Does it matter what we label it, if it lives and brings new beauty into life?” History has confirmed what Whiteman prophesied in 1926: “Jazz will be an American institution.”¹²

“Symphonic jazz” did not originate with Gershwin. Jazz was freely incorporated into works by such European composers as Stravinsky, Ernst Krenek, and Darius Milhaud, and by Americans George Antheil, John Alden Carpenter, Louis Gruenberg, William Grant Still, and Aaron Copland. Gershwin was different from these conservatory-trained composers, however, in that he came from the popular-music world. The cultural critic Edmund Wilson recognized the distinction, writing that “Mr. George Gershwin, parallel with his regular business of turning out musical comedies, has proceeded with his assault on the concert hall from the direction of Broadway.”¹³ Gershwin's influences were not German or French but American: the ragtime piano greats Luckey Roberts and James P. Johnson; the composer-conductor James Reese Europe; and the songwriters Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and Vincent Youmans.¹⁴

Rhapsody in Blue was the beginning of Gershwin's career as a “serious” composer. Rather than substituting the concert hall for the popular stage, however, Gershwin chose to work in both. During 1924, in addition to repeat performances of the *Rhapsody*, he opened three shows on Broadway. One was *Lady, Be Good*, which featured Fred and Adele Astaire and included “Fascinatin' Rhythm,” a song soon heard everywhere. The show was the outstanding event of the Broadway season and marked the deepening of Gershwin's friendship with the Astaires.

Gershwin bought a five-story house at 316 West 103rd Street, and moved his entire family there from an apartment on 110th Street. A taste for good clothes and fine art seemed to come naturally. He was often pictured with famous people at

"An American folk music . . ."

Jazz I regard as an American folk music; not the only one, but a very powerful one which is probably in the blood and feeling of the American people more than any other style of folk music. I believe that it can be made the basis of serious symphonic works of lasting value in the hands of a composer with talent for both jazz and symphonic music.

—George Gershwin
from *American Composers on American Music*,
ed. Henry Cowell

fashionable places in white tie and tails, playing the piano late into the night at gala parties, or dancing with the Astaires. Gershwin enjoyed being a celebrity and appearing at the best parties in town, but the image was misleading. According to his family, Gershwin was lonely. He needed people around him constantly, but Gershwin's genius seemed to set him apart. Those who knew him well found him somewhat detached except when at the keyboard. He had few colleagues in the world of modern or concert music: the groups supporting new music were not open to Gershwin, nor was he closely in touch with jazz artists. He objected to being called a "jazz composer." Like Duke Ellington, he claimed that the word *jazz* covered too wide a range to be meaningful. He would point out that many of his songs were not at all jazzy, or even syncopated. Because Gershwin was impossible to categorize (he called himself a "modern romantic"), it was easier for the concert world to ignore him than to explain him. Songwriters were puzzled at his turn to the concert stage; composers and critics were intolerant of his Tin Pan Alley connections.

Walter Damrosch, the conservative conductor of the New York Symphony, commissioned and conducted Gershwin's Concerto in F in 1925 and *An American in Paris* in 1928.¹⁵ But the questions lingered. Gershwin told Isaac Goldberg, his friend and first biographer, "It was seriously questioned whether I had done my own orchestration. The general attitude seemed to be, how could a Tin Pan Alleyite know anything about harmonic progressions, orchestral timbres, longer forms? I replied with a copy of the orchestration in my own manuscript. I can understand the skepticism of the time; I did not resent it; it amused me, in fact."¹⁶ The press went so far as to suggest that Bill Daly had actually composed Gershwin's concert music. Daly responded: "The fact is that I have never written one note of any of his compositions, or so much as orchestrated one whole bar of his symphonic works."¹⁷ Gershwin listened attentively to criticism, but he continued to incorporate jazz idioms into

traditional concert forms. The Concerto in F was followed by *An American in Paris*, *Cuban Overture*, *Second Rhapsody*, the piano Preludes, and finally *Porgy and Bess*.¹⁸

Gershwin's concert music continued to have a polarizing effect on critics: Carl Van Vechten and Gilbert Seldes were admirers, while the most powerful critic on modern music, Paul Rosenfeld, found little of value in Gershwin's music.¹⁹ The magazine *Modern Music* carried a few Gershwin articles.²⁰ When the "Jazz Age" faded with the Depression, many expected that Gershwin would fade with it. Instead, his popularity grew until he became "the most exportable American composer in the world," according to Virgil Thomson. Thomson was severely critical of *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1925 but praised it ten years later as "the most successful orchestral piece ever launched by any American composer . . . a thoroughly professional job executed by a man who knew how to put over a direct musical idea and who had a direct musical idea to put over." In the same article, Thomson expressed disappointment with Gershwin's next pieces, the Concerto in F and *An American in Paris*. He wrote, "They did not, however, alter Mr. Gershwin's prestige. He remained through everything America's official White Hope."²¹

The critic Samuel Chotzinoff, a Gershwin supporter, claimed that his man was pushed out by Aaron Copland, who was recognized as the leader of young American composers in Manhattan. Copland did not include Gershwin in his list of "America's Young Men of Promise" in *Modern Music* in 1926.²² Later, in his book, *Our New Music* of 1941, Copland listed about thirty-five composers who made up the music scene in the twenties. Again, Gershwin was not included. Despite striking similarities in their backgrounds and careers, Gershwin and Copland found little in common the few times they met. "We moved in very different circles," Copland said.²³ Gershwin was from Tin Pan Alley, Copland from the studio of Nadia Boulanger. Whereas Gershwin wanted to be accepted by the concert world, Copland wished for Gershwin's popular success and financial independence.

Adverse criticism led Gershwin on an unending search for composition lessons. He bought a book on orchestration and studied with a number of teachers, usually for a short period of time with each: Charles Hambitzer, Edward Kilenyi, and Rubin Goldmark.²⁴ In the summer of 1922 Gershwin attended Columbia University, where he registered for courses on nineteenth-century Romanticism and elementary orchestration. He also studied briefly with Artur Bodansky, Henry Cowell, Wallingford Riegger, and Lajos Serly. Eva Gauthier introduced Gershwin to Maurice Ravel when the famous French composer visited America for the first time in 1928. Ravel refused Gershwin's request for lessons but gave him a letter of introduction to Nadia Boulanger. During Gershwin's visit to Paris in 1928, he met with Boulanger; she also refused to teach him. Boulanger told Gershwin, "I can teach you nothing."²⁵ Did she mean he already knew it all, or that she considered him unteachable? While in Paris, Gershwin visited Sylvia Beach's famous bookstore, Shakespeare and Com-

pany. Beach reported, "Gershwin . . . had a subscription but was not among the serious artistic crowd." Gershwin was included on her list of musical customers, along with Antheil, Copland, Varèse, Satie, Poulenc, and Milhaud.²⁶ After returning from Europe, Gershwin continued his studies. At one time or another, he approached Stravinsky, Varèse, Bloch, Schoenberg, and Toch. Finally, he arranged for lessons with Joseph Schillinger in New York, with whom he studied intermittently for four years beginning in 1932.

Gershwin was interested in modernism: he subscribed to Henry Cowell's *New Music* editions, admired Hindemith, heard the futurist music of Leo Ornstein, was interested in Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* and saw *Wozzeck* and came to know the older composer.²⁷ Gershwin struck up an unlikely friendship with Arnold Schoenberg; they played tennis together in California when the younger composer was working on *Shall We Dance* and other film scores. Gershwin heard all four Schoenberg quartets in concert and subsequently helped finance a private recording of them by the Kolisch Quartet.²⁸ Realizing the ephemeral nature of most popular songs, Gershwin wanted to create works of a more permanent nature. In an attempt to add substance to his songs, Gershwin made more demanding arrangements than the normal sheet music variety and published eighteen of them in his *Song Book*.²⁹ In the introduction to that collection Gershwin wrote, "When the publishers asked me to gather a group of my songs for publication, I took up the idea enthusiastically, because I thought that this might be a means of prolonging their life. . . . Some [of the transcriptions] are very difficult; they have been put in for those good pianists, of whom there is a growing number, who enjoy popular music but who rebel at the too-simple arrangements issued by the publishers with the average pianist in view."³⁰ At the end of his life, Gershwin was composing a string quartet, gathering ideas for a symphony, talking with DuBose Heyward about working on another opera, and contemplating a ballet for Vera Zorina.³¹

The Gershwin biographer Edward Jablonski points out that *Porgy and Bess* was a logical outgrowth of earlier Gershwin musicals, especially the political satire *Let 'em Eat Cake*. Jablonski writes: "If the word 'operetta' implies little opera, then *Let 'em Eat Cake* is a remarkable collection of eight little operas. It marks George Gershwin on the threshold of opera with an authentic American accent."³² An idea for an adaptation of a Yiddish play, *The Dybbuk*, fizzled following discussions for a production at the Metropolitan Opera.³³ *Porgy and Bess* holds a unique place, not only in the Gershwin catalogue, but in the operatic canon. Gershwin's search for a powerful emotional content led him to the humble inhabitants of "Catfish Row," who live in the American South under primitive conditions. With characteristic self-confidence, he composed music based on jazz, insisted on an all-African-American cast, and cited an obscure dialect called Gullah, which is still spoken on some islands off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina. Gershwin traveled to Folly Island

“ . . . he would give his right arm if he could.”

I remember my mother saying to me, “Why don’t you write some pop tunes, dear. You know, they will tide you over.” I simply told her, “I don’t have any talent for that.” And I don’t. I think people mistake writing popular songs with some kind of lower-grade ability. Obviously, George Gershwin had something which we don’t, and so does Stephen Sondheim. What they have is quite unique and quite special and cannot be imitated even by the likes of Leonard Bernstein, although he would give his right arm if he could.

—Steve Reich
from OHAM interview with Ev Grimes,
15–16 December 1986, New York City

and lived there for several months to observe the inhabitants and the sounds of their music and language.

Porgy and Bess has a complicated history. It is derived from a novel, *Porgy*, by DuBose Heyward, which had been inspired by the real story of a poor cripple in Charleston. Gershwin read the novel as early as 1926 and wrote to Heyward, who agreed to collaborate on a *Porgy* libretto. Dorothy and DuBose Heyward turned the novel into a play in 1927. Work on the libretto, which was based on the play, began in 1933. Most of the work was accomplished through the mail. Sections of the libretto would arrive from the Heywards in Charleston; the Gershwins worked in New York, reversing their usual method of writing music before the words. Credits for the lyrics were divided between Ira Gershwin and the Heywards. The opening took place in Boston in 1935, produced by the Theatre Guild, followed by the New York premiere at the Alvin Theatre on 10 October 1935. The original cast included Todd Duncan as Porgy, Anne Brown as Bess, Ruby Elzy as Serena, and John Bubbles playing Sportin’ Life. Gershwin’s friend Kay Swift persuaded Condé Nast to give a gala opening night celebration for four hundred. It was a spectacular party, but news of the mixed reviews dampened the celebration. The composer Richard Rodgers felt that Gershwin should not have presented *Porgy* as an opera. “The recitative device was an unfamiliar and difficult one for Broadway audiences,” he wrote. “It was when Cheryl Crawford revived it later as a musical play that it gained such overwhelming success and universal acceptance.”³⁴ Virgil Thomson was ambivalent but not disparaging. Ever admiring of Gershwin’s melodic gifts, he wrote, “One can see through *Porgy* that Gershwin has not and never did have any power of sustained musical development. . . . With a libretto that should never have been accepted on

a subject that should never have been chosen, a man who should never have attempted it has written a work that is of some power and importance.”³⁵ Critics, as well as other composers and opera lovers, claimed that *Porgy* would not last. “It is not in his ‘larger’ works that George will live,” wrote Frederick Jacobi in 1937; “it is in the great number of his songs, almost every one of which is a gem in its own way.”³⁶ *Porgy and Bess* had 124 performances and a brief tour.

Revivals of *Porgy and Bess* followed Gershwin’s death, including those by Merle Armitage in California and Cheryl Crawford in New York in 1942–1943, a production that went on an extended tour of forty-seven cities. In 1942 an orchestral suite was culled from the opera by Robert Russell Bennett. Reactions to *Porgy and Bess* have varied with cultural and social changes. It has been criticized by those who consider the opera’s characterizations of African Americans to be little more than crude stereotypes. Cori Ellison wrote in the *New York Times*, “Since the checkered performance history of *Porgy and Bess* runs parallel to the civil rights movement, it may provide a telling diagnostic on the covert racial politics of the classical music world.”³⁷ Through its successes and failures, *Porgy and Bess* has survived, due to Gershwin’s glorious melodies and vivid rhythms. The world has come to realize what George Gershwin knew all along: that he could, and did, create a great American opera.

The accusation that Gershwin’s symphonic works “stole” from jazz can be reversed: jazz players use Gershwin songs constantly as a basis for their own improvisations. “Summertime” has continued in popularity and inspiration for incalculable numbers of composers and improvisers. “I Got Rhythm” has gone even farther to become a standard set of chord changes known to all jazz players. Duke Ellington adapted it as “Cotton Tail” for his big band in the forties and Dizzy Gillespie translated it into his famous bebop hit “Salt Peanuts.” Thelonious Monk used it, as

“One of the true, authentic geniuses American music has produced . . .”

He [Gershwin] is not only unfashionable and underrated; he is hardly ever even discussed. The name just doesn’t come up, The Higher Criticism does not permit that name to enter the category of Significant Composers. Of course, Gershwin’s songs have become part of our language. . . . [He is] one of the true, authentic geniuses American music has produced. Time and history may even show him to be the truest and most authentic to his time and place.

—Leonard Bernstein

from Charles Schwartz, *Gershwin: His Life and Music*

“Music that feeds the soul . . .”

Nineteen thirty-two was Gershwin’s *Cuban Overture*. He had gone to Havana and bought all these instruments and brought them back. Nobody knew which was which, so he drew little drawings of which one was a *guiro*, another a *cabasa*, others which are the *maracas*. Right on the title page are cute little drawings by him, because he knew that the players wouldn’t know which one was which. Gershwin had fluency, much greater than either [Richard] Rodgers or Cole Porter. Every note’s a struggle with those guys. I got to see the manuscripts. While every note was hard for Porter, Gershwin dashed across the page.

He wrote music for us. Verdi was a great craftsman, a wonderful orchestrator, a fantastic contrapuntalist. He could also write tunes for this guy to sing while he was repairing a motor—we don’t have that link anymore in our music. Gershwin was successful in that way. He did both things, pop and art music. Well, I want to bring that back in some kind of way for me. I miss that sense of getting out something that really feeds the soul. Our whole postmodern attitude has been against that. People need it. I need it. We’re starving. We have everything, and we have nothing.

—William Bolcom

from OHAM interview with Ev Grimes,
7 April 1988, Saratoga Springs, New York

did the Happenings, who recorded a pop version of the tune. Even the enigmatic Miles Davis played and recorded Gershwin on the album *George Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess*. Miles wrote: “‘I Loves You Porgy’ was the hardest tune I ever had to play in my life because I had to make the trumpet sound and phrase just like a human voice.”³⁸ Other performers who used Gershwin tunes include Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Gil Evans, Ella Fitzgerald, Herbie Hancock, Billie Holiday, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Janis Joplin, Charlie Parker, Marcus Roberts, and Sun Ra. Later in life, Ira Gershwin expressed surprise that so many Gershwin songs written for Broadway shows in the twenties and thirties were still being performed.

Gershwin’s idiosyncratic mix of popular and classical styles was an early challenge to the long-standing rigid categorizations of American music. Gershwin the songwriter and theater and film composer was revered and loved; Gershwin the composer of concert music and opera has had belated recognition. Centenary events (1998) offered further opportunity for the reevaluation of the Gershwins’ position in American culture.³⁹ Gershwin and America came of age together during the turbulence and excitement of the early twentieth century. A Gershwin song is the most vivid reminder of a young and carefree time in our nation’s history.

On Gershwin's Death

At the news of his death, Gershwin's extended family—the music, theater, and film worlds—were devastated. The author John O'Hara expressed their shock and disbelief: "George Gershwin died on July 11, 1937. But I don't have to believe it if I don't want to." As for George's immediate family, they never really did believe it. When his sister Frankie spoke of her brother, she said, "All these years after the tragedy, we still wonder why we are all here, while George, the genius among us, died so young."

Family

Frances Gershwin Godowsky • *Kate Wolpin*
Arthur Gershwin • *English Strunsky*

Frances "Frankie" Gershwin Godowsky (1906–1998) was the youngest of the Gershwin children and the only girl. She was a talented singer and dancer and one of the first to introduce George and Ira's songs to the public. Frankie gave up a career in the theater when she married and had a family with Leopold Godowsky II, son of the celebrated concert pianist. Their marriage brought together two outstanding musical families from the disparate worlds of concert and theater music. Godowsky put aside his plans to pursue a career as a concert violinist after he co-invented Kodachrome, the technology behind color photography. Many decades later, Frankie began to perform her brothers' music again, and in 1975 she released an album, *Frances Sings for George and Ira*.



FRANCES GERSHWIN GODOWSKY

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 3 June 1983, New York City; WQXR special "The Sound of Gershwin," moderated by Jacques Fray, 19 May 1960, New York City; and "Gershwin Remembered" from *Wall to Wall Gershwin*, moderated by Perlis, 24 March 1990, Symphony Space, New York City

When my father came to this country, his name was Gershovitz, and the judge said to him, "You don't want to go around with a name like that. How about Gershvin?" But then I think it was an uncle, my father's brother, who said, "Let's make it Gershwin." It wasn't George who decided that. So it became Gershwin instead of Gershvin, which I think is rather nicer.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

George Gershwin, 1937

I had three brothers who were born within four years of each other, and then years later I came along. I was a kid sister. By the time I was growing up, they were already on their way, so that I was almost like an only child. George at sixteen was playing at Remick's, and people would say, "If you want to hear a song played well, have Gershwin play it for you." Ira was doing other things—he was at City College. My mother wanted him to be a doctor, but the first time he dissected a frog, he fainted. My mother was very much against George doing what he was doing, because she thought, "What kind of a living can you make from music?" But nothing stopped him. She wanted George to

be a lawyer. He would have made a very good lawyer because he had a very good mind. Ira was always the more intellectual one—he's the one who was reading Shakespeare when he was eleven and twelve. He always had an interest in literature and in words.

Mother was a strong personality. She came from Russia, where they didn't permit too much, but she had a great deal of creativeness of her own. She could take a piece of fabric, put it on the table, cut it out, and make a coat for me. But she didn't speak English too well. She was very conscious of that and tried to take lessons, but it was very difficult at her age to absorb. But she was quite a person in her own right. George was close to mother in the sense that he was rather conventional. This was his mother, and he thought she adored him. She was a woman who really should have been of this day, having her own career. She was interested just in what she wanted to do, and really didn't pay much attention to any of us. She was a very lucky woman that my brothers had their goals and knew what they wanted to do.

My father was a very gentle, very sweet man who was dominated by her and the whole family, although we all went our own ways. My father went into many different businesses. He had restaurants, but he was a very poor businessman. Everyone used to go to the cash register and take what they wanted. He was a very forgiving person. So far as I remember, we never were impoverished. For instance, they scraped enough money for me to go to summer camp. People would always say we were so poor, but we really weren't. I remember as far back as when I was a little girl that we always had a maid who might come in a couple of days a week to clean up.

My brother Arthur played by ear. His rhythm wasn't that great. I used to tease him, because he loved to play "Fascinatin' Rhythm," but he always left out a beat somewhere, and I'd say, "Arthur, you skipped a beat there." And every time he said, "Look, I've gotten over it." He was really very funny—he was the funny one of the family. And even though he'd say things sometimes that weren't funny, you'd have to laugh. He had something about him that was a natural comedian. He was the neglected one, because the two brothers were doing so well. They'd introduce him and people would say, "Are you Gershwin?" and he'd say, "Yes, I'm the unknown Gershwin." My father had humor too, a lot of humor.

In the back of my mind, I vaguely remember a piano coming through a window. It was an upright piano—and my mother only got it because it was the style at that time to have pianos. She thought that Ira would be the one,

because he was the oldest boy. Ira started taking some lessons, but George sat down at the piano and just played away. Ira gave up, and I didn't know until later that George used to go to a friend's who had a piano, and he would play things by ear. So when he came home, we were all amazed that he could play songs. From then on, he took some lessons from a teacher who charged him fifty cents a lesson, but in a few weeks George outplayed her. At Remick's, he was paid a small salary to play songs for the people who were in vaudeville. He began to realize that he had something more than just playing the piano.

I went to school, and I'd bring my report card home—nobody was interested. I used to sign my own name to the report card—we were paid no attention to, really. How we grew up to be nice human beings, I don't know. We never were very close, because first of all, she paid no attention to me, and second of all, her values were very different than mine—money was very important to her, and it wasn't that important to me. I was a little more like my father.

I don't know where it all came from—Ira's writing, for instance. I don't know if it's appreciated as much as it should be, but I think his lyrics have a simplicity about them and a certain originality that is very charming. He worked very hard. If someone said to me, "You have to write lyrics or music," with a gun at my back, I'd say, "I'm going to write music, because from my experience in growing up with them, I found Ira struggled much more than George. He would go over a word—he'd spend all evening or all night—he used to sleep during the day and wake up during the night. George used to be after him, because he could write songs so quickly. "Ira, you're not ready with this. When are we going to have this lyric?"

When George was writing *Rhapsody in Blue*, we lived on 110th Street, just off Amsterdam Avenue. Then we moved to a house on 103rd Street. George hadn't made that much money yet, but he had enough so that he could buy that house. It was his, and I think Ira contributed something toward it too, because Ira had already started working with George. We all lived together in that house. Occasionally, George would take a studio on 101st Street in a hotel, where he'd work so as not to be distracted. I'd come home, let's say, at eleven o'clock at night, and see people standing around the room watching the Ping-Pong table, everybody very serious, and most of the time I didn't know half the people. I'd go up to the second floor, and there my mother would be entertaining some friends; and I'd go up to the third floor and Ira and Leonore were entertaining their friends; Arthur and I lived on the fourth; and George would be on the fifth floor with his people. There were wonderful parties that George

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

gave, and I, being a timid, modest, shy girl, used to sit in the corner, never talk to anybody, and watch all these people, like the famous actor John Gilbert—all the cream of European theater and movies who would come to the house. We'd have them in this big library of my mother's. George had two pianos there. It was a very big room, and everybody would play—there was a man named Bill Daly, who was George's closest friend, a conductor. He and George used to play serious music. They used to get together and play two-piano or four-hand things.

That's when George began taking an interest in how I did his songs. He loved the way I danced. He would come home from a Fred Astaire movie and show me some steps, and he'd use his arms so wonderfully—He was so graceful. If he danced ballroom dancing, he'd try to trick me with the rhythms. We'd have a lot of fun.

George had a girlfriend who was mad for him and who was trying to marry him; we met at Lindy's one night when I was with a man who wanted to marry me, and George said, "Let's all have dinner together." And we did, and at the end of the dinner, George said, "Why don't you two go ahead and I'll take Frankie home?" And on the way home, I said, "George, you're leaving for Europe in three weeks. You want to get rid of this girl and I'd like to get rid of this man. Why don't you take me along? I won't be in your way at all."

When we got to London, Noël Coward came up to see George. He was opening a show, and he said to George, "Would you like to come to the opening with your sister?" And so I went with George, never expecting to be any part of his life there at all. There was a big party given afterward, and he took me with him. The next day in the paper in the social column they said, "Everyone wondered who the attractive girl was with George." And they found out it was his sister. George was really very nice and very easygoing. He got a little spoiled with people making so much fuss over him when he started coming out into the world and doing some shows.

When we were in Paris [1928], they'd all play poker every night, and I didn't play poker, and Leo [Godowsky] would say to me, "Come on, let's go down and have a drink." And I thought that he just didn't like to play poker. It never occurred to me that he liked me. He had to leave soon after that for New York. I was having such a good time, I forgot all about him.

At a party of [social columnist] Elsa Maxwell's, she had a marvelous crowd there at somebody's big home—of course George played the piano. People said, "George, how about your sister doing some songs?" I made a very big

"I was very much impressed with her . . ."

In the early twenties I studied composition with Rubin Goldmark, and George [Gershwin] studied with him at the same time. I found out that George had a sister whom I met, I think, at the Whiteman concert when the *Rhapsody in Blue* was played in Aeolian Hall in 1924. I was very much impressed with her when she sang George's songs—and her whole personality. When I went to Paris, George, Ira, Ira's wife Leonore, Frankie, my father and mother, and I were together a great deal. They would play poker, and I'd take Frankie out—that's when George was writing *An American in Paris*, which we all went through from its birth.

—Leopold Godowsky II
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
4 September 1970, Westport, Connecticut

success with these songs when I used to sing for people with George playing. I never was shy about that. I just enjoyed what I was doing because it was the one thing I felt that I could do to hold people's attention. It was like a Cinderella story. From being nothing at home, suddenly to have some attention paid. It was one of the highlights of my life. Elsa Maxwell said to Cole Porter, "You have to hear Frankie sing George's songs, because I've never heard anybody do them quite like that." The very next day he came up to our apartment in Paris and said, "George, I'd like your sister to be in my revue." George didn't want that at all. He said, "No, we're leaving for Germany tomorrow, and she's coming along with us." I had nothing to say, you see. I was so grateful just that George took me. I don't think I would have spoken against what he wished anyway. So Cole Porter said, "Well, look, I arranged an audition tonight with the producer. Let her just come to that." Well, I had the audition, and the producer wanted me in this revue with the [Fred] Waring Pennsylvanians and some other people, a couple of them quite well known. George relented. He said, "Well, all right. I'm going to go to Germany for a week, but I'll be back." You know—his little sister, he had to protect her. Cole Porter put on a revue and had me do a number of Gershwin songs, and I did some dancing. I remember I had a whole chorus behind me, and wore a high hat and a tuxedo. I was taught a routine, but my routine looked very different from what the other girls did, because I had my own style of dancing. The evening was a great success.

They wanted me to continue, but George wouldn't allow it. So I was there for just about two weeks, and then he said, "We're going home," and that was it.

I began going around with Leo, who was a very strong personality. He insisted that I marry him and we'd move up to Rochester. He had no money—he wanted to be a concert artist—but he knew he had to have some money to get married. And when the Eastman Kodak Company became very interested in the patents he and Leopold Mannes were taking out, they invited both of the men up there to finish their invention, which was Kodachrome. Leo said, "You know, we have to get married." I said, "It's impossible. Tomorrow [2 November 1930] my parents are leaving for Florida at about six." I said, "Tomorrow's Sunday, you couldn't possibly get a license, and you couldn't possibly get a ring." He said, "You leave it to me." I remember getting up and putting on an old dress, never thinking it was going to happen. We looked in the phone book under "Reverends" with Jewish names, and we found one. Leo told him, "Look, we want to get married this afternoon. My future in-laws are leaving at six for a train to Florida, and it has to be done today." When the rabbi heard the names of Gershwin and Godowsky—he evidently knew about them and about the music—he got all excited.

Everybody was meeting at Ira's apartment [33 Riverside Drive]. George and Ira had adjoining penthouse apartments then, so that you could come up one elevator, and then walk over to Ira's apartment, or vice versa. My aunt was there, my grandmother, different members of the family, to see my mother and father off to Florida. So it was like a little party—Kay Swift was there, and she brought my mother an orchid, and here I came in this old dress, and my mother took the orchid that Kay had brought and put it on my dress, so I was a little dressed up. And then it all happened in Ira's apartment—George came in from his apartment; he just walked across with his bathrobe on, his pajamas, and a long cigar in his mouth, and he sat down and was fooling around at the piano. Then the rabbi came to George's apartment by mistake. Suddenly the French doors opened into Ira's apartment, and in walked this little rabbi. Everybody started kissing everybody, and George or Ira opened some champagne. There was my father with his gold watch in his hand while the ceremony was going on. The rabbi was using all kinds of musical terms like harmony and rhythm—and my father said to my mother, "Rose, we're going to be late for that train." It's all he was concerned about—not that I was getting married, but that they were going to miss the train. When the ceremony was over George played the "Wedding March." Then we all rushed down to the train station to see my par-

ents off. Bertram Taylor was giving a big farewell party for George and Ira, who were leaving for California in a few days. Taylor was a multimillionaire and had a big duplex apartment on Park Avenue. We got into evening clothes and went to the party. George went around—and Ira too—“My sister just got married”—and so it was a bit like a reception.

The following summer, Leo and I moved to Rochester. We drove there. We went up to see my mother on the way. When we got to Saratoga, she didn’t want me to leave. You know, we were just married, and she said, “Let Leo drive alone to Rochester.” I didn’t want to leave him, and she was very resentful of that. She was only thinking of herself, not considering that I had just gotten married a couple of months before.

George and Kay Swift—she was mad for him. In fact, she divorced [James] Warburg, really hoping George would marry her. But George was never in love with her. He was very flattered by Mrs. Warburg—George was flattered by things like that. He was a little more like my mother that way, in that he was impressed by people with money. He had a lot of friends in all circles, but Kay was a very good musician and a good composer. They had a lot in common, and she just adored him. There were a lot of women—even Kitty Carlisle—I remember when she went around with George. She tells people that George wanted to marry her, but the only woman he ever really cared about, it seemed to me, was Paulette Goddard. She was very attractive, and she was very clever and vivacious. That’s the only time I saw him really have a crush on a woman as a woman. He’d say, “This might be a good wife for me,” or “That might be a good wife for me.” But he never really gave himself to anyone. He went around with a lot of women, but he never got married, although he was the first one in the family to talk about marriage. He wanted a home with beautiful things in it. He loved glass and beautiful dishes, and he loved paintings. He said, “I want to have a home.” Somehow it never happened.

George respected serious music, and he loved to play it. He’d go to symphonies and he’d go to opera. He was very broad-minded that way. After he wrote *Rhapsody in Blue*, they began to respect him more. As he said to us in 1937, he wanted to do more serious things for American music, for American opera.

My favorite piece is the Concerto. I’m surprised that it isn’t played more because it’s a work that attracts people. They all love it. It’s of its time, you know. The only music I remember very well is when George was writing *Porgy and Bess*. I was in Rochester, but I’d come in weekends very often. I saw the desk that he had made. He was very proudly showing me all the compart-

ments and all the different parts of it. I saw him orchestrating, and I just was so impressed that he could do that. He was so talented—he could do anything. He'd play tennis very well, he would dance well, he played golf well. He was a multitalented person.

His features weren't very good, yet he was handsome. He had lovely eyes—they had a quality about them. He had wonderful coloring. He had very black hair and he always had just a little bit of color in the whiteness of his skin, and he had very good teeth. And he had charm. When he'd come into a room, you felt his presence, whereas Ira was always quiet and retiring. George had a dynamic personality, and he had confidence in himself. He'd already been a success, and he liked what he did. People would say he was so vain. Well, it seemed to me ridiculous to call him vain. If a person does something they like, why can't they say it? If he wrote something, he'd say, "I want you to hear something I've written that I like very much." So people would think, "Isn't he conceited?" He was wonderful about criticism. If he was criticized badly in the paper, he didn't get upset with the critic. He'd say, "Maybe there's something to it. I'll have to try it out and see for myself." He never got angry at anyone who criticized him. Ira would do the same thing. They collaborated. George would criticize Ira on some lyrics, and Ira would criticize George on some music. But he was very willing to take it, which I always admired. He had an honesty about him that was very refreshing.

When I saw George in 1937, Leo and I were in California then. George seemed already to have changed some. He started asking us about ourselves, which he never did before. It was always what *he* was doing, you see. And he said to Leo, "How's your work coming along?" And he asked about the children. George looked marvelous—he had a gymnastic teacher who would run and do things with him. He said to me and to Leo, "You know, I'm really only out here to make some money so that I don't have to think about it. Then I want to do an American symphony, I want to do opera, I'd like to do chamber music. I don't feel I've touched the surface." We left in January, and I never saw him again. I didn't even know he was sick. I was in Vienna when I got a cable from Ira. They didn't know that it was a tumor; they thought he was having a nervous breakdown. In those days they didn't know enough about discovering brain tumors, unless it was very obvious. They examined him in back of his eyes, and it showed none of the symptoms of a brain tumor. His tumor was right behind his ear. They were afraid to give him a spinal test, because it was very painful. But I don't think anything would have helped. His tumor was in

such a position that he might have been a vegetable after that, you know. Or blind, or something. And he was such a vital person, he had so much energy and such force that it would have been terrible if that had happened.

George wasn't a happy person. He didn't understand why he couldn't get out of life what he wanted, which was a companion. Somehow there may be something in our background that did that to him. He was delighted with what he did—he loved his work—but otherwise he wasn't happy. He felt so much music in him, so much creativeness that he never gave any thought to it. He wanted more from life, in a personal way, but he didn't get it.

"Aunt Kate" (dates unknown) was about fifteen years younger than her sister, Rose Gershwin. Kate was born between the two generations and felt closer to the Gershwin children than to her own siblings. Kate Wolpin was just old enough to babysit for Ira, George, Arthur, and Frankie when they were very young.



KATE WOLPIN

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 30 January 1986,
Pompano Beach, Florida

My name is Kate Wolpin. I'm a sister of Rose Gershwin, the mother of George and Ira Gershwin and also Frances Godowsky and another brother, Arthur. Our parents came from Russia. My father was a man who worked for important people in the fur business, so he was allowed a bit more freedom than other Jewish people. My maiden name was Bruskin. My sister and I were close, but there's quite a difference in age—about fifteen years. I don't know exactly, because Rose didn't tell her age, and I didn't tell my age. Rose and Morris were married, and I was a little flower girl at the wedding.

My sister moved to Second Avenue, and we lived right around the corner. I was very close to all of them. George had a friend by the name of Max Rosen [formerly Maxie Rosensweig]. He was a violinist and he gave a little concert at Cooper Union. I knew all those kids. We were at the concert—myself, my sister, and Ira. Ira was going to take piano lessons, but George went to the piano and said, "I expect to be as good as he [Max Rosen] is at the violin. And even better. I'm going to try." George started to play popular music himself without studying, and then he started composing a little bit, and then he figured he ought to take lessons. He took a few lessons from me and then from

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Ira, George, and Arthur Gershwin as boys, with cousin Rose Lagowitz, in
Brighton Beach, 1912

a friend of ours. He said to his mother, “Mom, if I could read the notes I could play better than she does.”

The parents worried more about Ira, who wanted to become a newspaperman. He went to City College and worked on a paper. Rose wanted him to become a doctor, so he went to Columbia and took chemistry, but that wasn’t for him. When George started to write music, Ira sort of put down a few words, and it went on from there.

George was very outgoing. He was a wild little boy. He was the one that used to get punished by the father. Ira was always very quiet and loving. He wasn't shy about his writing, but he wasn't outgoing like George. George was very sporty as he grew up. A very fine dancer, and he'd sit down at the piano and sing. Although his voice wasn't much, everybody was hypnotized by this man. He was really something very unusual.

I must tell you one thing about him that stood out with me. George was the kind of person, if he talked to you at all, like I am talking to you right now, when you left him, you felt ten feet tall. He made you feel so important unto yourself—and that was a gift that so few people in this world have. He made everybody he cared for feel good about themselves. Ira, on the other hand, was very loving. You just had to love him. Good-natured, sweet, had nice things to say to you—but George was dynamic. I didn't love him any more than I did Ira. These two boys were part of me. Every time I went to California I came to Ira as though I had seen him yesterday, and every time he sent me a book, he wrote in it, "To my favorite aunt."

My sister was a very attractive woman. She wasn't tall, but she looked tall, because she had that nice figure. She was more of a business type than Morris. She helped out when he went in business. She always dressed very well, and George was proud of her. She was ambitious, a more ambitious mother than I. She wanted her children to be something. She took the credit for George's music, but she wasn't musical. The father was more musical. He sang a little bit, and he played music on a comb covered with tissue paper. Have you ever seen that? My sister wanted Frankie to become something important, so she took dancing lessons. She danced and sang George's numbers—not that she had such a good voice, but she knew how to put them over. I got very close to Frankie.

The boys carried that house on 103rd Street. And from then on, everything came through George and Ira. Particularly George. It is amazing what he did, without really knowing music. Some of his friends, who were very fine pianists, were jealous of him. They said, "Look, I've studied for years, and I have a degree, and along comes George, who knows nothing about music, and look at him!" But then they would play his music at concerts.

George was close to the family. When my younger son was born, it was Passover, and we had the Seder. George came over, and the baby was in a crib alongside the bed. George said to the nurse, "I want to go and see my aunt."

But the nurse said, "I don't think anybody's allowed in." George said, "I would like to see the baby. I've never seen a newborn baby." And he just walked in, looked in the crib, and said to me, "I can't believe this little thing is going to grow up to be a man."

Every time he went to Europe, I had to be there. Every opening he had, I was there. There was no performance without me. Not that I was that important, but he thought that I was part of the family. He was going to Europe, and we were all going to see him off. My mother was with me—she lived with me when my father passed away—and they came up to see their Grandma. They called her Bubby. George said, "Bubby, are you coming to the boat?" And she said, "No." "Why?" he said. She said, "Well, I haven't got my new hat on." So he says, "Grandma, Bubby, if you don't come, I'm not going to Europe."

Once we were walking on Broadway and we were talking. One thing led to another, and he was seeing Jascha Heifetz's sister [Pauline]. Beautiful girl, and a pianist. She used to play George's music as well as he did. I said, "Why don't you marry her? She plays your music, you have so much in common." He said, "I care for her, but I can't marry her. It wouldn't last, because I like to go out and dance more than one person should do. When I want to work, she wants to go out. Sometimes I work until all hours of the morning, if I feel that way, if I get an inspiration." So she married the critic [Samuel] Chotzinoff. George was disappointed. We were all disappointed. She was married and that was that. But he did say to me once, "Kate, I'd like to get married if I could have a marriage like yours, but there is no such thing as love and devotion." So he never got married, and it was just too bad. Every time he did see somebody that he thought would be nice, my sister thought it wasn't good enough. She had a lot of influence on him. But I think he wouldn't have been influenced, if he really wanted to marry someone. Kay Swift was married to this millionaire [James Warburg] and had children with him. They were legally separated. The fact that she was older than George didn't bother her.

When Ira said he was going to marry Leonore, my sister wasn't crazy about meeting with her. He married her anyway. He cared about her. George got along with Leonore, but he said to me that every woman, particularly without children, should do something. If you're not talented, you do other things, but you don't just do nothing. He told me that.

George had a long face and white teeth and dark eyes. He had nice hair, but he was very sensitive about starting to lose his hair at a very early age. Tall, dark and handsome, you might say. His features weren't handsome, but he

was a very attractive man. He dressed very well. He lived luxuriously. The penthouse was all modern. At that time, they called it “futuristic.” He had the best of everything. He had a man who stayed with him until he died, who had a place in his house. George was very good to him. That man would never leave him—he became one of the family, and his wife helped with the house.

George was devoted to his father. He died of leukemia, and George said to him, “Papa, I would give everything in the world if I could do something for you to get well.” I was in the hospital at the time with him. George sent for medication to that big hospital in Maryland, and for special doctors. He had built a mausoleum, and his father was the first one buried there. As I recall, George was the second.

George was sick, and at the time living with Ira and Leonore in California in a rented house, because they were working on a movie. The doctor said George was working too hard and it told on him. We knew he was sick; Ira called and said she [Rose] better come right out. So my sister said to me, “What good would I do if I went? I probably would even be in the way.” The funeral that George had was as if he was a king. They stopped all the traffic on Fifth Avenue, and on the way to the cemetery, the police were all over, so there’d be no interruptions.⁴⁰ It was very beautiful, but it brings back very sad thoughts.

Arthur Gershwin (1900–1981), the youngest of the brothers, was also musical. He was not a professional musician or in the theater, but as a boy he played violin. He soon quit because, as he said jokingly, “George could sit down at the piano, but I had to stand up to play the violin.” He played piano by ear and developed his own unconventional style. Arthur Gershwin became a stockbroker, not indulging his desire to compose songs until his eighties.



ARTHUR GERSHWIN

From interview with Robert Kimball and Alfred Simon, 30 November 1972

George was dynamic even as a kid. He had a great personality. I used to be George’s pal. As kids, I went around with him more than Ira did. We used to go to ball games and all the fights together. No, George never picked on me. Maybe my shoulders were too strong. We lived in Coney Island. I remember when Ira swam from Coney Island to Brighton Beach. Ira

was a great swimmer, and George was a great swimmer. And George was a heluva golfer. I played golf left-handed all my life, and he tried to make a right-handed player out of me. That killed my golf [laughter]. But I used to go around with him and keep score.

When he was a kid, I know George didn't practice too much. I think he did in four years what others would do in twenty. That's a fact. He was getting fifteen dollars a week in a little country resort, in a trio in the Catskills somewhere. Then he worked as a pianist at Fox's City Theater. I know he played for Louise Dresser. He must have been only fifteen or sixteen when he went with Remick. George did a show in the old Ziegfeld Theater on 42nd Street. Gee, that's going back so far. Yeah, that was before *La, La Lucille*.

There were some big theatrical people with him all the time. I went upstairs with Flo Ziegfeld, George and myself, and we sat around. I was with him at the Ziegfeld Theater. I saw him teaching Marilyn Miller and Jack Donahue. I saw him teaching *them* a few steps.

I used to play piano—a couple of fingers, you know. It just came natural. I play tenths, I transpose, and I never took a lesson in my whole life. George listened to my tunes and played them on the Feenamint program.

English Strunsky (1908–2003) was the brother of Leonore, who was married to Ira Gershwin. A retired businessman, “Engie” stayed close to his sister and brother-in-law until the end of their lives.



ENGLISH STRUNSKY

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 10 June 2000,
San Francisco

At this time, I only know three people who knew George Gershwin. That is Kitty Carlisle Hart, my wife Lucy, and me. Today, George would be 101. A short time ago, when the Gershwin Room opened at the Library of Congress in Washington, somebody asked me how long I had known George and Ira. I said I really didn't have any idea, but I do remember them very vividly from when I was about thirteen on. I was exactly ten years younger than George.

You have to remember that those were different days. After all, I'm talking about when George was twenty-eight. Now, by that time he had written *Lady, Be Good*, and he was well known. Ira was just starting. For a couple

of years, Ira did not use his own name when writing lyrics; he used Arthur Francis, which was his younger brother and his younger sister's name, because he didn't want to trade on the fact that George was well known at that time. After a couple of years, everybody knew that Arthur Francis was Ira Gershwin, so he dropped using that.

It was in 1933 that I bought a factory in a small town in New Jersey, and our business was to make tomato juice, ketchup, chili sauce, and some other food products. One day shortly after I had bought it, I was visiting Ira, and he was asking me all about my new business. And finally he asked me where I got the tomatoes, and I explained that in the spring of the year I went to the

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local farmers. And Ira said: "But Engie, why are you saying to-MAY-toes? You always said to-MAH-toes." I said: "Ira, if I said to-MAH-toes to my farmers, they wouldn't know what I was talking about. I had to learn to say to-MAY-toes." At which point he said: "Oh, you're just like your sister. I say [either] EE-ther, but she has to say EYE-ther." Well, sometime later, he used that conversation in a song which so many people are familiar with.⁴¹

Lucy and I were on a line to see a Woody Allen movie, and we were waiting to buy our tickets, and the word *Aphrodite* was in the title, and I mentioned it. Lucy said: "Is it Aphro-DIE-tee or Aphro-DEE-tee?" I said: "It's not Aphro-DEE-tee, I'm sure." But of course, you know, your wife never takes for granted that what you say is true, and she turned to a woman standing right back of us and said: "Is it Aphro-DIE-tee or Aphro-DEE-tee?" And the woman simply shrugged her shoulders and said: "To-MAY-toes, to-MAH-toes." I think Ira has had a very definite influence on the English language. After all, when you hear [sings]: "'S Wonderful, 'S Marvelous" or "It Ain't Necessarily So," you know exactly where it came from.

I was visiting Lee and Ira at one point in Beverly Hills, and I had heard that a new restaurant had opened, and knowing that Ira loved good food, I asked him if he had been there and what it was like. He said: "I haven't eaten there because I called a number of times but couldn't get a reservation. They're terribly busy." So I went into the next room and called the restaurant and came back and said, "Ira, we've got a reservation for this evening at eight o'clock for six people." He said: "We have? How the devil did you ever get that? I called. I couldn't get it." I said: "It was very simple. When I called, I said, I want a reservation for Mr. Ira Gershwin, and immediately they gave me a reservation." I said: "Ira, the trouble is, you don't use your name often enough." He was extremely modest. George always had to be the center of attention. Ira always wanted to sit in the background and not be up there at all.

When I spent most time with George was in 1927. I was on vacation from school, and Lee and George and Ira had taken a house in Ossining, New York. They were working on *Strike Up the Band*. They thought that if they went out to the country, there would be peace and quiet, and they could do a lot of work. But George found that the peace and quiet of the country was not for him, so he started going into New York, and since they started working at eleven o'clock at night anyway, and here I was—George hated to be alone—so I was elected to drive into New York and back with him.

Remember—I was eighteen; he was twenty-eight. What did we talk about? George wanted to know what going to college was like. He couldn't

quite realize why you would go to a small town, live in one room in a dormitory, go to classes all day, and be happy doing that. He never finished high school. And then George began telling me about his life and existence, and particularly about his sexual activities. It seems that he had quite a sexual appetite, apparently very attractive to women, and in every show there were a number of chorus girls who felt it might be a good idea to go to bed with the composer; maybe they could get out of the chorus into a better part. In any case, we had long conversations about that. George was in two circles. Society, the so-called Four Hundred, took George up, and he loved that, too, you see.

I have to tell you about another situation when George came back from Paris. You have to understand what it was like in those days. You didn't get on an airplane and be in Europe in eight hours. It took five days on the best ships. And when someone came back, a lot of their friends and family went down to the pier to greet them. And George said: "Everyone come up to the house on 103rd Street, because I've written something new that I want to play for you." So we all went up to George's apartment, and he called me into the next room and said: "Engie, I want you to do something for me." He gave me a board that had three horns on it. They were apparently the kind of horns used in Paris in the taxis. They had big black bulbs at the end, and you had to squeeze it, and it made a horrible honk. He said: "When I nod my head to the left, blow the top horn three times; and when I nod my head straight down, the middle horn; and when I nod my head to the right, the bottom horn three times." Well, he played *An American in Paris* for us for the first time, and in a small way, I added to it by blowing the horns for him. I'm not a musician! That's why he said he had to nod his head to give me the cue as to when to blow the horns.

One instance that always amused me was when Leonore hired a new housekeeper, and after a week or two, she came to Lee and said: "Mrs. Gershwin, doesn't Mr. Gershwin ever go out to work? I see him sitting at his desk tapping a pencil and humming to himself, but doesn't he ever go out to work?"

I had some contact with the Gillette Safety Razor Company, and at one time they called me because they were running a series of advertisements, using celebrities and well-known people to tell how good the blades were. They asked me if I could get George to come up and endorse their razor blades. I asked George if he would do that, and that there was a fee of five hundred dollars involved. Now, five hundred dollars today may not be a lot of money, but in those days it was a great deal. He thought about it for a while, and then said to me: "Okay, I'll do it, on one condition." I said: "What's the condition, George?" He said: "The condition is that nobody gets more money than I do."

I was always invited to every opening, so I saw every opening on Broadway, from *Lady, Be Good* to *Tiptoes* to all of them. Those were the best times of the musical theater—not only the Gershwins, but others—the twenties and thirties—musical theater in New York was just wonderful.

I was amused when George and [the pianist] Oscar Levant had to go to Chicago. In those days there weren't airplanes, so they took a drawing room on a train. As they went into the drawing room, George threw his suitcase on the lower berth and indicated to Oscar that he should take the upper berth. Well, Oscar Levant was no shy, retiring flower, and he questioned why George should take for granted that he should have the lower berth, at which point George looked at him and said: "Oscar, you have to understand: The upper berth is for talent, but the lower berth is for genius."

I remember, too, being at George's apartment with Oscar Levant, and they played *Rhapsody in Blue* on two pianos. I can't even explain how wonderful that was. Can you imagine the two of them playing *Rhapsody in Blue*?! At any time there was an excuse, George would go to the piano and play many of his old songs, and those he was working on, and those that were going to be in the next musical comedy that wasn't going to open for three months—by the time it did open, all his friends knew the whole score. Just give him a piano, and he performed all the time. George was a genius, and he wasn't shy about recognizing that he was.

At 33 Riverside Drive, George had the west penthouse, and Ira had the east penthouse. There was no reason to close off the walk between the two, so one could walk into George's apartment or into Ira's. They were that close. Then when they moved, they moved to East 72nd Street and Lexington Avenue, and George lived on the south side of the street, Ira lived on the north side of the street. That's pretty close. I think George's apartment on East 72nd Street had something like thirteen rooms in it. It had a special room where he did his exercises, but one thing it did not have: it did not have a guest room. Of course, he had guests who stayed over, but he didn't have a guest room.

This was a story that George told me about being in Paris. George had a very delicate stomach. It seems to me that he lived on oatmeal and once in a while some stewed prunes. But he was in Paris with an American friend, and he had a great desire to have some smoked salmon. They went into a restaurant, and he tried to explain what he wanted. They had a lot of trouble—he knew the word *poisson* for fish, and *rouge* for red, and so he said: "Red fish." And oh, they understood exactly what he wanted. So he waited quite a while, and they

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Letter, George Gershwin to Rosamond Walling Tirana, 19 January 1929. As part of his signature, Gershwin added his initials, two Gs on a treble clef.

brought him a boiled lobster, which, of course, he couldn't eat at all. Lee played a rather important part in that she was a great hostess. Everybody congregated at Lee and Ira's. There was wonderful food all the time.

George was being psychoanalyzed. They always felt there wasn't anything physically wrong. As I recall, he had every physical test except one, which at that time was very difficult and very dangerous. When finally he did go through that test and they saw a brain tumor, they wanted a particular doctor who was out fishing in Chesapeake Bay. Through the White House, they sent

the coast guard and got him to come in. He flew with his staff to Newark, but then he spoke to Beverly Hills, and they said they couldn't wait even the eight hours it was then taking to get to Beverly Hills. So they operated, and apparently saw it was completely hopeless. George died the next day.

Colleagues and Friends

Irving Caesar • Kay Swift • Burton Lane • Morton Gould • Alfred Simon

The lyricist Irving Caesar (1895–1996) was a well-known figure in show business in the twenties and thirties. Gershwin, a boyhood friend, was an early collaborator. They gained success with the song “Swanee.” Later, Caesar worked for the Ford Motor Company and began writing lyrics for his own pleasure. Among his most popular songs are “Tea for Two,” and “I Want to Be Happy.”



IRVING CAESAR

From interview with Robert Kimball and Alfred Simon, New York City

George was a much-sought-after accompanist. They all loved to have George play the new songs. It's like a salesman exposing the inventory. The songs were inventory. Although George came from the East Side as I did, I didn't meet him on the East Side; I met him around Remick's. We got to like each other because I'm quite musical, although I don't play the piano. Very often I'd pretend that I had ideas for songs just so he'd sit down and try to translate them into some musical theme. Occasionally, the idea lends itself, and a song emerges! The first song we wrote was called “You-oo Just You.” We got a \$500 advance from the managing director of Remick at the time. We thought that was a lot of money in 1916. Eventually Vivienne Segal sang it in the Century [Theater] in the show *Miss 1917*. Soon after that we wrote “I Was So Young (You Were So Beautiful).” It became a hit of sorts. It brought us to the attention of the publishers, everyone in the industry. However, by that time George was signed up by Max Dreyfus. I was signed up a little later. We found most publishers accessible to us.

Of course “Swanee” happens to be, I think, George's outstanding song. It's his only blockbuster. You know I do personal appearances, and when I sing “Swanee” the audience starts singing with me at once. The same thing would

happen if I did it in France, or in England. We wrote “Swanee” in about fifteen minutes or less. So it was sheer inspiration, you know. You could write very fast with George. You see, George wrote with chords. I might say that his chordation [*sic*] came first, and his chordation was so interesting that out of this came the melody. That was not a perfect way of composing, as you know. The right way to compose, I think, is to stay away from the piano. We were rather brokenhearted, of course, that “Swanee” wasn’t a commercial success. But we had faith in it and kept nagging the publisher to plug it. That didn’t help much. However, one day Al Jolson, playing at the Winter Garden, gave a midnight party after the show. I was away at the time. George was invited by Buddy DeSylva, with whom he wrote songs, and Buddy was a great pal of Jolson’s. At that party George played “Swanee.” Jolson at once adopted it and introduced it within three or four days. And the rest is history. It never stopped being a hit since then, almost worldwide. It was Jolson really who made “Swanee” a hit. If he hadn’t gone into it with the great warmth he had for it, it probably would never have happened. Sometimes songs, like everything else, need a certain person—like a perfect cast for a show. Then we wrote other songs for Jolson. They didn’t become hits, but he sang them—songs like “Yankee Doodle Blues.”

When we wrote “Swanee,” George was rehearsal pianist for *The Ziegfeld Follies*. In the period he and I wrote “Swanee,” I thought it would be a good idea to write a one-step following the wake of “Hindustan,” which was a raging sensation. Then soon after, Ira, who up to that time was working as a cashier in a Turkish bath, began writing lyrics, and naturally they urged him to get into the thing. George picked up with Ira and that was the end of his collaboration with me, but I was lucky. [The songwriter Vincent] Youmans came along and we wrote *No, No, Nanette*. That’s about as far as my songwriting career with George went. I guess we have—oh, I don’t know—a dozen songs.

George was very sweet, and he was quite sensitive. But of course he was, and this is forgivable—he was self-centered about his music. He had great faith and great confidence, and that was as it should be. There was nothing modest about him. I don’t mean that he was overbearing, but he had self-confidence. There were times when he seemed almost passive, except when he sat down to the piano. He wouldn’t project himself as I did when we were together to try to sell something, you understand. He was just a little bit withdrawn. There had always been ten composers for one lyric writer. And therefore George welcomed me around him because he wanted his tunes wedded to words. I’ve got

one song with George that's still in manuscript. I gave it to Ira. It's the best song I've ever written, I think. "A Good Little Tune." It's a great song. I updated the lyric about two or three years ago. One of these days, when I get the right spot for it, it'll be done.

There was no one who could move you as George would. He would *invent* little passing figures, interludes and intervals, and so forth. Oh, once he got to the piano he was a master. Same thing with women! I used to chide him on it very often. I'd say, he fools around but never gets down to cases.

It's very difficult to put your finger on Gershwin's talent because it was such a unique talent. He blazed a trail of his own. You just cannot in all honesty put him in with what we consider the classic composers. He was in a class by himself! Isn't that enough?

The composer and pianist Kay Swift (1897–1993) was close to George Gershwin, personally and professionally. Her own works include several hit songs and musicals, among them "Can't We Be Friends?" and "Fine and Dandy."



KAY SWIFT

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 5 May 1975,
New York City

I didn't meet George to know him well until 1926, when he came back from Europe and was in New York, and then he wrote *Oh Kay*. His *Cuban Overture* is my favorite piece. It begins right in the middle of the phrase. I can remember when it was first played, and George conducted it himself. It's not a foolproof piece—something can be done to make it so, but it can't now, because the composer would have to be here. I was there when he wrote it and orchestrated it, every bit of it. And also that was true of *An American in Paris*, at which I was present; in fact he finished the orchestration in Connecticut at a place that my then-husband and I owned, and we lent to him. George stayed there alone and finished the orchestration. I remember he put the date on it there.

George was very slim, quick, and his Jewishness was expressed by his big nose. He had a vivacious, quick walk, terrific glowing eyes that were reflective of every mood. He moved in a very graceful, dancing way, like perhaps

a jazz phrase. He danced well at social dancing, and I went dancing with him a lot of times. He used to tap-dance waiting for elevators. And it was at that time, he did sometimes carry a stick. I think Fred Astaire must have done it, too. He would do a tap dance using the stick. It made a most interesting, percussive rhythm. He improvised tap steps. I think Fred Astaire is a very good example of one phase of Gershwin's music, and it was evidenced in a case which Fred himself mentions. He had a step, which I always think of as the Astaire step. It was a sort of walk around with a great leap. Just a series of strides, forward strides. And Gershwin said, "Why don't you continue that and make it your exit?" And he did—and that was it—a combination of Astaire and Gershwin, really. I thought that Astaire and Gershwin were particularly one in music and dance. The dance expressed the music so well.

At my house I had parties where I'd have a little band, perhaps four pieces, and people would dance, but if George played, everything stopped—everybody watched. I had two pianos and we had great fun playing. It was wonderful, very stimulating. I played also with Oscar Levant. I have always been irritated by a phrase of Oscar Levant's, whom I liked enormously; a man I have found so nice, so warm. But he once said, "An evening with Gershwin is a Gershwin evening." All right, so why not? Why should we listen to something else? Why should Gershwin not play his own music? When he played, it was magnificent. I've seen him sit at the piano and people would rush to the piano; they couldn't even sit on a couch and be a little distant. They had to stand there and watch him. It was extraordinary; it really was. I've never seen anything like it. That was a rare experience. I'm very lucky to have been around when he was there.

I spent many an evening with him, reading two-piano music of Brahms or Bach or variations of Schumann. He was a fantastic sight reader, far better than I; and he would gallop along in the tempo prescribed by the markings without exception—*vivace* or *presto*. Gershwin was a great admirer of composers, both in the classic and popular vein. He played those *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* of Brahms, and we played Bach for two pianos, things by Ravel for two pianos, arrangements of the orchestral works, and Debussy. I think the popular image of Gershwin is a sort of self-taught genius that came out of nowhere and went on to write things, but he wasn't. He studied the masters and loved it, so charged up by them, as all of us musicians are. The public doesn't have that image of him.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Kay Swift and George Gershwin, Greenwich, Connecticut, ca. 1931

He was second to no one in his appreciation of Irving Berlin. Once I said something about "Berlin's great, but not nearly what you are." He said, "Oh, now come on, you don't know all Berlin as I do." He sat down and played one hour straight of Berlin with music and lyrics and said, "Now, are you convinced I know his tunes?" And he felt that way about Cole Porter. He admired Kern more than I do, because I love the unpredictable so. Irving Berlin spoke glowingly of George's work. And George went all out for Irving Berlin, Porter, and Coward, whom he admired, because his words and music were so wedded.

George was very patient. It was curious because he was so wild and so driving, yet patient too. He felt as I always have, that music is music, and it doesn't matter what phase it happens to be in, just as it doesn't matter if one speaks French, Spanish, English, German, Russian; it's what one says that matters. I think he believed that very strongly, and so do I. If someone wanted him to do a piece for this or that, he did it. I think he liked the deadlines, much as I.

He and Ira were unusually passive in the case of a dominating personality such as a producer or director who might say, "We can't use that song." And out would go a favorite tune. "We can't use it because it slows up the action"; and George would be ready to hit the ceiling. "All right, there goes my favorite song." But he'd write another one to replace the other. It was remarkable.

He wanted to learn, he was avid, he was like a machine, like a sponge sapping up information, gathering it. He took lessons, and I went to all his lessons with Joseph Schillinger. Themes of Gershwin, which he would mark up, were said by this teacher to be much too much. "Don't use all this, you could use it later, just use half this, then use it in inversion, and use it in different intervals, use a fourth up instead of a fifth or third." It was stimulating. I was muscling in on it—two for the price of one! I really got the benefit. George was always taking lessons. He wasn't a bit arrogant, you know; he was very dutiful.

[He left] just lead sheets in his notebooks, and Ira and I did fifty-two of them after his death. Then we did ten more and there are still more that I've got to do. I worked on the film *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* with Ira, and that uses the notebooks that George left. We arranged and adapted and cut and added to the score for that.⁴² It was very rewarding; I enjoyed it. Ira's a dream to work with. He's so perceptive. George always found him enormously stimulating, and so did I. He's a dear man, a wonderful man. I think they complemented each other in a splendid way.

Gershwin was generous to talented young musicians, often including them in his popular radio show *Music by Gershwin*. By the 1980s only a few of them survived: Burton Lane, Morton Gould, and Al Simon. Burton Lane (1912–1997) became a successful composer of musical theater and film scores. He is best known for *Finnian's Rainbow* and *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*.



BURTON LANE

From “Gershwin Remembered,” from *Wall to Wall Gershwin*,
moderated by Perlis, 24 March 1990, New York City

My mother knew Rose Gershwin. Mrs. Gershwin thought I played piano like George. She invited me, an aspiring fifteen-year-old pianist, to the house to meet her famous son. George asked me to play. I did “S Wonderful,” but I was so nervous I played it much too fast. George’s playing was expert. He could improvise in any key. He had a sense of humor in his music and in his playing, and that was a tremendous influence on me.

I felt welcome at the Gershwin house—there were always many people coming and going. You went into the house, and the first thing you saw was a Ping-Pong table. I was a good player, so I played Ping-Pong with Oscar Levant and beat him. I never saw a personality change so quickly. He got so angry that I let him win the second game, and we became friends.

George thought I could use some lessons and suggested I study—privately. In his generosity, George even arranged an audition for me with Walter Damrosch. I didn’t know what I should play there. I remember playing an arrangement of “S Wonderful” and two classical pieces. Damrosch offered me a scholarship if I would give up playing popular music. I went back and told George this, and he said, “Oh, that’s a lot of nonsense.”

I met Ira, with whom I worked with later, and Frankie, who had a tremendous influence on me. I was always shy about singing my own songs. Frankie said, “I don’t know why you don’t sing! You have a very pleasant voice. Listen to George. He doesn’t have a voice, but he sings a song very well.” I was impressed with this. It was Frankie who got me rid of my shyness. I had to fight to do this.

When the family sat in a box at Carnegie Hall for the debut of Gershwin’s *Second Rhapsody*, I was invited to join them. George came on the sec-

ond half of the program. During intermission, we went backstage. George was standing there. When he saw me, he said, “Burt, are you nervous?” And I said, “Why should I be nervous? You’re doing the playing!”

Morton Gould (1913–1996) was a prolific and versatile composer and administrator, notably president of ASCAP. He was a precocious musician who began his career early enough to have known George Gershwin.

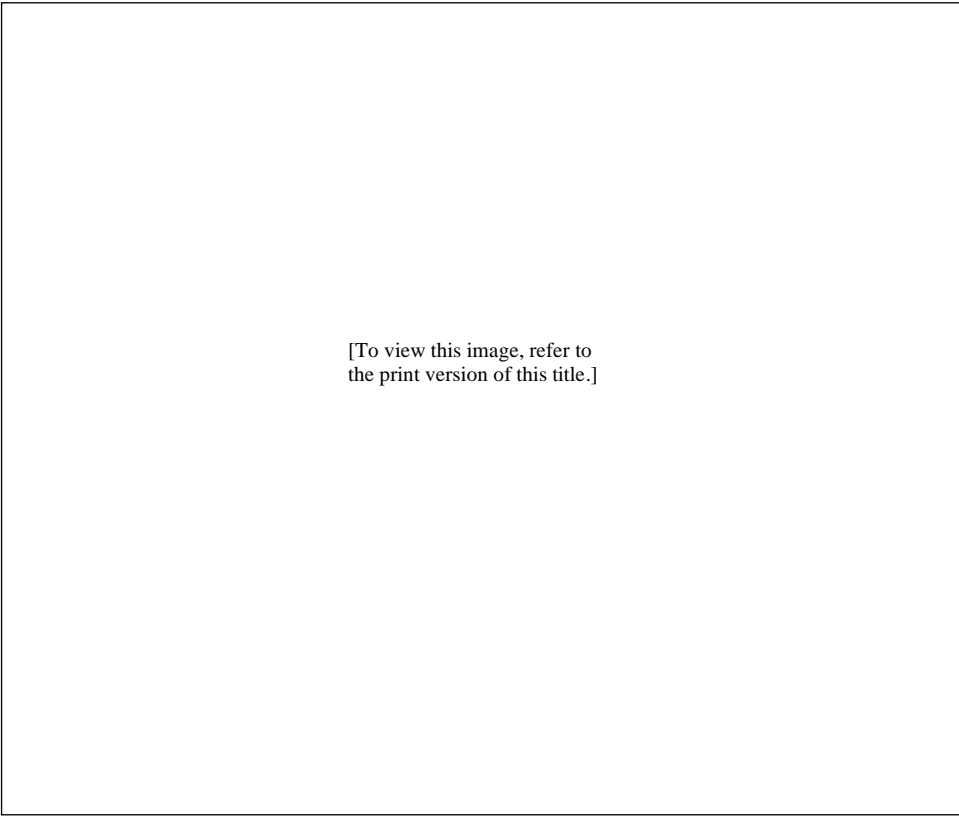


MORTON GOULD

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 10 May 1974, New York City;
and “Gershwin Remembered,” from *Wall to Wall Gershwin*,
moderated by Perlis, 24 March 1990, New York City

I think I met him at one of the parties—social events where you could find everybody—George and Ira Gershwin, Jerry Kern, people from Hollywood, theater and society people. I remember names like Woolworth and Ford being bounced around. Somewhere in my files I have a letter that George wrote to Eva Gauthier, who at that time was a very famous singer. She would do so-called “serious art songs” and in the same program some Gershwin or Kern songs. George wrote this very lovely letter to her, talking about this young musician—I was sixteen or seventeen and needed work. He asked if she had anything for me to do, said I was a good pianist and gifted composer and a promising talent. So he was most generous; I think he did this for other people, too.

I visited George in his apartment, and he had a stand-up writing desk for *Porgy and Bess*. He was very proud of it. He invented it and had it built especially for him. He could write standing up. He was showing me part of *Porgy* as he was writing it. He showed me all the difficult passages. When I say he showed it to me—he would show it to the elevator operator! I was much younger, a serious student—grim and all that, and here was this effervescent genius. He once said to me, “I want you to listen to this—there are three voices going at the same time,” and he demonstrated it. I was playing piano at the first reading of *Porgy* when George conducted it to see how it sounded. And that was the first time I heard the songs. I was amazed, because I had been shown the complicated passages, and suddenly here were these wonderful



[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

George Gershwin, first page of “Gone, Gone, Gone,” *Porgy and Bess*, act I, scene 2, autograph short score

songs coming out. I was so busy reading and playing that I didn’t realize, especially at my age at that time, that I was participating in an historic event.

We were leaving a dinner together and were the last ones out. George took my arm and said, “Wait a minute.” He held us back. On the dining room table was a bowl of ice cream balls—different flavors and colors—that had been served for dessert. So George said to me “Do you like ice cream?” I said “Yes,” and he said, “Come with me. I want to finish off this bowl, and I want you to do it with me so in case anybody comes in, they won’t think that I’m a hog.” So we started to eat the ice cream. A maid came in and went out. She thought everybody had left. George said to her, “*He* likes ice cream.”

George was outgoing, extroverted in the best sense of the word. He also had warmth and exuberance. He was somebody whose genius was not only recognized, but who was really loved as a person, as a human being.

Alfred Simon (1907–1991), ten years younger than Gershwin, was a pianist and composer, writer on musical theater subjects, and broadcaster. Among his publications is the informative and attractive book *The Gershwins*, co-written with Robert Kimball. Al Simon was director of light music at WQXR, radio station of the *New York Times*.



ALFRED SIMON

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 10 May 1974, New York City

I met Gershwin through my older brother, Richard, the Simon of Simon and Schuster, who played golf with Gershwin. When I was out of work in 1931, my brother suggested I ask George if he could use me as rehearsal pianist. So I went to the Music Box Theatre, where *Of Thee I Sing* was rehearsing, and asked him. He said they already had a pianist, but if I would like to sit in and watch what went on, I might learn a lot, which I did. They asked me to pinch-hit for the pianist who was playing the dance rehearsals. I was put to work playing for George Murphy. It was tremendously exciting, and George Gershwin was so charming and understanding. He knew it was my first experience. I played those four dance tunes hour by hour by hour. Luckily I could transpose, so it wasn't quite as dull as it might have been. George occasionally would come over to that theater. He would be standing in the orchestra pit when I was playing, right in back of me. If I hit a wrong note, he'd say, "No—that should be an A-flat," or whatever. But he was always gentle about it. He never got impatient. He knew that he was my hero. Other times, George would sit in the orchestra quietly taking notes, going into conferences with George Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, who wrote the book. The show was beautifully laid out—score, book, and everything. There were very few changes between the time it left New York for Boston and the time it came back to New York for its regular run.

In those days, the musical was not thought of as a significant part of Americana. That *Of Thee I Sing* won the first Pulitzer Prize awarded to a musical in the drama category really awakened people to the fact that it's an important form. George was very proud of what he did. He knew he was breaking new ground with the shows. I had been very fond of operetta, but I was growing away from it to the kind of thing Gershwin, Kern, and Rodgers were doing. I saw *Porgy and Bess* twice during its first run of 124 performances. How many operas run that many performances in one season?

On Sunday afternoons, George, Ira, and Leonore had open houses. I was there shortly before *Strike Up the Band* opened on Broadway. They went through the entire score for three different sets of people, beginning at two, maybe, and then again at four, and again about five-thirty. George and Ira sang together. If there were duets, they would each take parts.

George loved to play for people. He always had a basic way of playing, but each time he would add something, or change it. Once Gershwin asked me to play some of my music for him. It was an embarrassing experience; I was rigid with fright. Gershwin was polite.

I heard about Gershwin being very sick, and I heard Walter Winchell on the radio announce Gershwin's death. They brought the body back east, and I went to the funeral. In 1957 I went to visit Ira in California, spending an evening with him. He is a charming and thoughtful sweet guy, and brilliant, of course. He still remembers lyrics. One time I was playing "Do It Again," a song which he didn't even write, and he corrected me on a chord! He has a good musical ear.

Bess and Porgy

Anne Wiggins Brown • Todd Duncan

Anne Wiggins Brown (1912–) studied voice at Juilliard. As Gershwin's first "Bess," she was the only Bess he ever knew. Anne Brown married a Norwegian and moved to Norway, where she has lived for many years. She has staged many productions of *Porgy and Bess* in Norway and other European countries.



ANNE WIGGINS BROWN

From interview with Carl Friedner, 21 May 1987, Bergen, Norway

I met George Gershwin when he was looking for black singers for his new opera. I wrote to him, and after a few days he responded by inviting me to sing for him. I discovered that Gershwin was a charming man, and I could understand why women would be taken in by him. He was vital and had a sense of humor and enthusiasm. He loved his own music and played it everywhere.

People only remember me for *Porgy and Bess*. Of course, it was my first big role. I had hardly left the Juilliard School of Music as a student there when

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Cast of *Porgy and Bess* at the Boston tryout before the Broadway opening,
1935. Todd Duncan center left

I sang Bess for the first time. Gershwin had come as far as “Summertime”—the song that is one of the most popular and most well known of all Gershwin’s melodies. I was so taken by “Summertime” that I plagued the poor man during the whole time I knew him to find another place in the opera where Bess would sing “Summertime,” and so he did. He changed the music he had written for the third act, and put “Summertime” in there, in order to let Bess, and Anne Brown, sing this song. It’s Clara who sings it in the first act, and it is sung three times before we come to the third act.

I am not what they call “white,” although my skin is very light. I have staged the opera in Norway and in seven different cities in France. I had become an expatriate and moved to Norway for two reasons: it was my husband’s home; and I was fed up with racial prejudice in America.

I’d say *Porgy* is very American. Gershwin had parents who had come from Russia, both of them, but I think he was the composer who most of all had brought about a quality and a mood that was really true American. He used a lot of impulses and themes and musical harmonies of the black people, but the music is still his own.

Porgy is an opera about mankind, and that's what has made it classical. If you consider all the operas written by Mascagni, Puccini, or Verdi, they all are the tragedy and problems of man and so on. Those are always the operas that are the most popular ones. And his melodies! They are appealing, and you can sing them after you've heard them just a few times.

Todd Duncan (1903–1998) was the first vocalist to portray the role of Porgy. He became head of the Music Department at Howard University and was well known as a recitalist of classical vocal literature.



TODD DUNCAN

From interview with Berthe Schuchat, Autumn 1976, Washington, D.C., aired on NPR (a program that was awarded Best Cultural Documentary of 1976 by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting); with short excerpts from interview with John King, 3 June 1986, Connecticut

I got my bachelor's degree and then my master's in New York at Columbia, studying with very famous voice teachers—I studied Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and Wolf, and all that, and I also studied opera quite extensively, though there was no place for a young Negro artist at that time in opera. However, my original success on Broadway was in opera. It was a two-night stand in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. That was 1934, to be exact. Through that, Olin Downes told George Gershwin there was a young Negro baritone he'd better hear. And he was talking about me—because at that time I received very fine reviews from all the papers in New York. And that is the reason why I met George Gershwin. Abbie Mitchell got the role of Clara before I got Porgy, and she told him there was a young baritone down here, teaching in Washington, D.C.

He asked me would I come and sing for him. Strangely enough, he had heard a hundred Negro baritones over a year. He had gone across the country, looking for what he wanted. He said they all sang "Shortnin' Bread" or "Ol' Man River" or Negro spirituals. Well, I sang an old Italian aria. He looked up at me and said: "This is strange. Why are you singing this?" I said: "Because I love it." And so he said, "Well, would you sing ten bars of that again?" And I said, "Yes." And he said: "Look straight in my eye as you sing it." And I did. I looked straight at him and sang it. We got through ten measures—that's all—and he looked up at me and said: "Will you be my Porgy?" And it was as

simple as that—here comes this Negro auditioning for a Jew singing an old Italian aria. But he heard what he wanted. Now, the ironic thing is that when he asked, “Will you be my Porgy?” I said to him: “Well, I’ve got to hear your music first. I don’t know your music.” He laughed. He said: “I think we can arrange that.” I had a number of suggestions, and he took them all! The last forty-six pages of the opera were written especially for my voice.

I wish to tell you that in the original cast, one-half of them were conservatory graduates. All of the leads—Anne Brown was from Juilliard, and our Serena [Ruby Elzy] was also from Juilliard, and Jake [Edward Matthews] was from Boston Conservatory of Music. They were highly trained singers. Anne Brown had written a letter to Gershwin and asked for an audition and got the part of Bess. She was very young. He was so impressed with her performance that he changed the name of the opera from *Porgy* to *Porgy and Bess*. I think it was a good change. George said to me: “Todd, we have Romeo and Juliet and Tristan and Isolde, and now we’re going to have Porgy and Bess.” He had a twinkle in his eye, and he was very proud of the fact that he was giving to the world an operatic duo. Anne Brown had a beautiful voice and sang divinely. She was such a lady. It was very difficult for Anne to let go. And I used to say: “Anne, it’s not you. You’re an actress. Let go.” I remember [the director Rouben] Mamoulian had a rather difficult time with her on that. She sang it beautifully. Anne sang with us about a year, and then she left to go on concert tour and to Europe.

John Bubbles? He was really an enigma. Bubbles didn’t put on any airs. He was who he was. But he was really raw genius. He would come in high. He had been drinking or taking some kind of dope or something way back then. I’m kind of old-fashioned, and I just hated him. And yet when I got out on the stage with him, he was so electrifying that I forgot that I hated him. I found that I was playing to whatever he was doing. He was just wonderful in the part. He had magnetism, charisma—I don’t know all the words that I can give him. But before the show and after the show and during intermissions, he was horrible. He was the only one in the whole cast who couldn’t read music, couldn’t read anything. They’d beat it out, and once you’d beat it out for him, he got it.

It took me about five weeks to learn how to crawl and live with some kind of quality by crawling, because in crawling across the stage on my knees, I found that it took my breath away. So I had to learn to do that. The main thing that I did with Porgy is I kept him a happy man. Since he was physically not all there, I saw to it that spiritually he was 200 percent there, 210 percent.

I tried to keep a happy face and uplift, and the spirit of God in my every expression. That's what I did, and that's the way I sang, "Bess, You Is My Woman Now." That's the way I sang "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'"—with joy and hope and love.

I caught myself doing a lot of research. I went down to South Carolina. I went with Gershwin. I had never been in South Carolina. I hadn't been down south. You could hardly understand them. So George says: "Well, let's go." I said: "When?" "Well, we'll spend a weekend down there." I stayed with a wonderful family, a Negro family, a doctor and his wife. I don't remember their names. Gershwin wanted to stay there, too, but he didn't. You know, the races were too far apart then. They didn't want him, but Gershwin wanted to stay there because he didn't have any of that in him. And I couldn't stay at the white hotel. He went into the churches and all the little places. It was a wonderful experience, a beautiful life.

After we'd been rehearsing for about two or three weeks, every day Lawrence Tibbett was in the theater. I just felt so elated and so grateful—how is it that this great baritone, who was a god to me—I just felt so honored that he came. And I became so angry and hurt six weeks after we opened in Boston. Here comes out the RCA recordings of excerpts from *Porgy* with Lawrence Tibbett and Helen Jepson. That's why he came, to hear me sing it every day. I don't feel bitter. He was a great name. And the name of Todd Duncan wouldn't have sold any records then. I understand the business now. But I didn't then, and I felt that was so unethical. But I can tell you now, forty-one years later, that my records have sold a hundred times more than Tibbett's. I know because I got the royalties [laughter] for twenty-five years. It seems rough at the time, and I tell any young artist that they will have many heartaches and many disappointments, but if you stick with it, you won't lose.

George said to me that the people wouldn't come because they thought it was opera, and the opera people wouldn't come to see it because they didn't think it was opera. Together with a kind of mishmash of criticism—well, you know New Yorkers. I cannot remember any remorse or hatred or sadness on the part of Anne Brown or Sportin' Life or myself or any of us at that time. I think, to be honest with you, it's because we got so much praise from everywhere else. I really mean to tell you it doesn't bother me. All I can say is bless their hearts, both Mr. [Olin] Downes and Mr. [Brooks] Atkinson—how wrong they were! And I can say forty-one years later that *Porgy and Bess* still lives. Where are they?

There was a wonderful opening night party, of course—all the trimmings. I remember [Leopold] Godowsky, the great composer and pianist. I sat at

his table, and I just felt so glorious. And I remember Josephine Baker had arrived from Paris that day, and she was at the party. I remember how beautiful—I thought she looked like a bronze goddess, and all the men were hanging around her. And there seemed to be dozens of male servants. You couldn't keep a glass in your hand, and there was another glass with champagne in it. I wasn't accustomed to that. And then you went into another room. There were about twenty tables, four at a table. We were expecting Garbo that night. She was at the performance; she came from the West Coast, but she never arrived. I remember all of the celebrities—people you'd read about. It was elegant. George sat at the piano, and he played for one solid hour. You couldn't stop him, the only one that performed. Nobody in the *Porgy and Bess* cast but one, and guess who it was—Bubbles. He was scintillating. He danced, he sang, he pantomimed—and those people just went nuts. And I will have you know that he was a perfect gentleman.

When we came to the National Theater here [Washington], it was 1935. I said to my wife: "We must have a nice party for the cast." So we had the so-called crème de la crème at our home. We had a large house then. There are nine apartments in that house now, so you know how large it was. All the members of the cast wore dinner jackets. Not Bubbles. He had on full dress, with white gloves and everything. I don't think he had on spats that night, but when he came, he brought a cane, top hat, and he was so beautiful. The prince himself couldn't have been more a gentleman. He was the entertainer, and he made my party. He was Jekyll and Hyde, but always delicious. John Bubbles lived in another world. He *was* Sportin' Life.

I read in the program of the Houston Opera of what had not been done, and at long last we're doing what George Gershwin intended, and we made opera out of it, and it has dignity. Whereas I liked the production, the stuff they put back in—that "Buzzard Song" isn't worth a damn. I know all about it. I sang it. I created it. I sang it for three straight nights up in Boston. And it's back in now. It slowed up the story. He got no applause, and I'm sorry. It was just sandwiched in, and it was excess baggage.

The *Porgy and Bess* with Leontyne Price and William Warfield [1955]—I just hated that. I loved Leontyne Price, but I hated the whole idea of that show. It was such a fast, jazzy, niggery show. I couldn't stand it. All of the dignity had been taken out of *Porgy and Bess*. When they were here, the directors came out to my house and the man that put all that money in it begged me: "Will you go to Europe with it and will you do it?" I said: "No." He asked me why. I said: "Because your production is so fast and so jazzy that it hasn't got

time for a cripple to crawl." I thought it was cheapening the Negro. I thought it was cheapening my race. And it was a blackface buffoonery. That's what I thought. I know that *our* performance hadn't done that.

When I was in Copenhagen—it was about three or four years after the war—it might have been '49, '50—about like that. I had two concerts in Copenhagen, and I was traveling through, and the intendant came to me and said: "Mr. Duncan, would you do *Porgy and Bess* with us at the Royal Opera?" I said: "I can't do it. I've forgotten it, and that's over in my life, and I'm doing concerts. First, I'm going down to the southern part of France, in the sun, and just rest." He said, "Would you listen to a story that I have to tell you that is true?" And I said: "Well, yes, I will." He says: "During the war, we were hauled in by the Gestapo. They came into our little country, and they closed everything. But they did not close the opera. They did not close the symphony. They wanted more music. They wanted us to do new performances and new operas, and they just allocated more money than we'd ever spent on opera." He says: "There were four new operas that we created, and one was *Porgy and Bess*, and the reason we did it is to show how we hated Nazism, because it was to be performed by Negroes and written by a Jew, and we knew that they would veto it, that we couldn't do it." And he said: "They put their mark on it that we could do it. We spent more money on *Porgy and Bess* than on anything. We did all kinds of research. We sent people to America to get special Negro wigs, the real thing. We did the performance, and there were two hundred Nazis there. The Gestapo was there, of course. They enjoyed the first act. Oh, how they enjoyed it. In the beginning of the second act, it came to them this is written by a Jew and performed by Negroes. With their goose step they got up and walked out. And they sent word we could never perform it again. And we said: "Well, we're sold out for the next two performances." And they allowed us to do the next two performances." He kept on, "Well, they did forty more underground performances of it during the war, and the Germans the next day would find out that it was done last night, but they never knew when it was going to be done. The Royal Opera was dark on the outside. We did it not knowing whether they would blow up our opera house or whether they'd kill us. We didn't care." I said: "Is that really true?" He said, "Every word of it is true." I said: "I'll relearn the role, and I'll do it."

Well, I did it. And I knew that I wasn't going to like it. I said: "Oh, white people can't do this opera," I said to him. They gave me one dress rehearsal, and these white faces—when I went out in my goat cart and saw all those Ne-

groes, I couldn't believe my eyes. They had done something to make their noses broader. They were all colors—beautiful dark skin I couldn't believe it. Not only that, but they had the Negro flavor. And, bless their hearts, they were just so wonderful that I couldn't stand it, and I cried and said, "How can they do that?" I had learned to do "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" in Danish. They sang in Danish, and I sang in English except the duet. But guess what she did. See, we rehearsed it in English and then sang it in Danish. On the night of the performance, I sang to her in Danish, and she sang to me in English!

The Royal Opera is three hundred years old, and they don't allow encores. At the reception afterward, the intendant got up and said: "This is the third time in three hundred years that something has happened. The first time was with Caruso, the second time was the basso from Russia, Chaliapin, and now tonight with Todd Duncan." The audience stopped the show after "Plenty o' Nuttin'." I had to sing that whole banjo song a second time. See, they don't allow any encores, but the show couldn't go on.

They've done it in Germany. I have friends who've written me, and I have young Porgys who have written me and asked me for advice. It's been done everywhere. I've decided it will always live. I appeared nine times in Lewisohn Stadium. There were two times we had such an overflow that they made a second performance. It was wonderful—under the stars up there. As I look back, I think I took them for granted. I think I just took it in stride. One doesn't know—we take our health for granted, and beautiful things like that—those were great days.

The last time I saw George Gershwin, he and I were sitting at five o'clock in the morning, drinking coffee in his parlor. I stayed with him, yes, oh yes—in Beverly Hills. I remember the house so well. I had performed that night at the Philharmonic in Los Angeles. He conducted part of it, and Alexander Smallens had conducted the other part. I'll never forget *that* party. That's the greatest party I ever went to. Lord, he got the little piano out, while people were eating, and he played. Everybody sang. Now, that's the night I met Greta Garbo. She said, "You are vunderful. You are truly vunderful." That's all she said. I tell you, I ate it up [laughter].

George Gershwin and I used to talk like this. He'd say, "You're more Jewish than I am, Todd." I said: "Yes, and you're more Negro than I am." There was a kinship. Oh, there was a kinship.



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FIVE

With a French Accent

Nadia Boulanger



Considering the terrible destruction and staggering loss of life in France during World War I, it is amazing that within five or six years Paris became the center of artistic life. The most celebrated literary and artistic figures could be seen there: James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, or F. Scott Fitzgerald at Sylvia Beach's popular bookstore, Shakespeare and Company; André Gide and Marcel Proust at Adrienne Monnier's La Maison des Amis des Livres; Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas on the Boulevard St. Germaine; Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, and Sergei Diaghilev in the galleries of Montparnasse; Darius Milhaud and Igor Stravinsky at Café de Flore or Les Deux Magots. It was the time of Tristan Tzara, Marcel Duchamp, and the Dada movement, of surrealism, futurism, and ultra-modernism. Exciting new works were introduced at the ballet and by the Concerts Koussevitzky. Composers experimented with mechanical music makers, especially the player piano, and with the use of noise. The climax was George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique*, which made a very big sound with airplane propellers, eight pianos, a player piano, and a wide range of percussion instruments. Students came to Paris in droves to take it all in.

The French considered Americans uneducated and naïve about the arts. The contrast between French and American culture was demonstrated by the popular postwar tune "How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Paree)?" The French were patronizing toward American efforts in the cultivated arts, but they were enthralled with American popular music: rag-

time and Dixieland jazz enlivened Parisian nightlife, and dances originating in America were irresistible. Most adored of all were American movie stars—when Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford arrived in Paris in 1921, French fans went wild with excitement.

Grateful for America's help during the war, the French developed a paternal attitude toward the uncultured Americans. Even during the worst chaos and destruction, the French operated a school to teach American soldiers how to play military band music. It was directed by the pianist Francis Casadesus, in cooperation with American conductor Walter Damrosch and General John J. Pershing. After the war, Casadesus and Damrosch came up with another plan: a school of fine arts and music in one of France's grandest castles, the Palace of Fontainebleau. It was a handsome gesture from the French government.

When Aaron Copland came to the Conservatoire américain at the Palace of Fontainebleau for its first summer session of 1921, he heard about a young Frenchwoman, Nadia Boulanger, who later became his teacher and subsequently the mentor to generations of musicians. Even before the first summer session at Fontainebleau, young Americans had discovered this brilliant teacher. Melville Smith, a young American musician in Paris, introduced Virgil Thomson to Nadia Boulanger in 1920. The two men and a third, Herbert Elwell, took organ lessons and attended her classes. Boulanger was thirty-three and had been earning her living teaching harmony and counterpoint since she was seventeen. Fifteen years earlier, before the young American men found her, Boulanger taught her very first American student—the pianist and composer Marion Bauer (1887–1955). Boulanger gave lessons in theory and analysis in exchange for English lessons from Bauer.

Nadia Boulanger had grown up in a musical household in Paris. Her father and grandfather had taught at the Conservatoire, and she was educated there herself. Among her teachers was Gabriel Fauré, who became a powerful influence on her life and music. Nadia and her younger sister Lili were very close and appeared together everywhere. Both were talented, but it was Lili who showed greater promise as a composer. When Nadia won second place in the Grand Prix de Rome in 1908, her reputation began to grow. However, it was Lili who became the first woman to win the Premier Grand Prix de Rome in 1913. Five years later, Lili died at age twenty-four, and Nadia vowed to honor her sister's memory by dedicating the rest of her life to music.

In the early years of the century, only two professions were open to women—nursing and teaching. Otherwise, in Europe, as in the States, work for pay was considered inappropriate for a woman of good family. Nadia Boulanger naturally chose to teach music. She did so with almost missionary zeal, working as much as she could while supporting her mother and taking care of Lili, who was seriously ill for a long time. During the war years, when it was difficult to find students, Nadia offered lessons at half price. At Lili's death in 1918, Nadia was already past thirty. Ac-

cording to the social convention in France, an unmarried woman older than twenty-five was a spinster; clearly, Nadia Boulanger would remain single. Years later, when the magazine *Femina* questioned her about whether the traditional female role of wife and mother could successfully be combined with an artistic career, her response was negative: "From the day when a woman wants to fulfill her true role of mother and spouse, it is impossible for her also to fulfill her role as artist, writer, or musician."¹ Her choice had been made.

By the twenties, Nadia Boulanger was widely admired as organist, conductor, teacher, and theorist. She had won the respect of the most celebrated musicians and intellectuals of the time. She taught at the *École normale de musique* in Paris and at the *Conservatoire américain* at the Palace of Fontainebleau from the year of its opening in the summer of 1921. Studying with her meant much more than music lessons: it placed the student in the center of the richest artistic life in the world—Paris in the twenties. Nadia Boulanger knew everybody, and they knew her. When she saw fit, she could make the right contacts for a talented student.

Most American students began their studies in France at the *Conservatoire américain*, where they could familiarize themselves with the language and with the country in a relaxed and beautiful setting. Fontainebleau was useful as a stepping-stone to Paris, where Boulanger's apartment at 36 rue Ballu became known to legions of students who came for lessons and for the opportunity to meet and mingle with the celebrated artistic figures of the times. For many years, inevitably, when musicians got together, anecdotes were exchanged about the famous Wednesday afternoons on the rue Ballu. First, Boulanger held a *déchiffrage* when a new piece would be sight-read at the piano. Discussion would follow, and afterward visitors came for tea. Students might joke about the modest repast served with the small glasses of aperitif, but they were impressed and inspired to be at the very center of the music world. As Copland relayed in amazement, "Why, I even met [Camille] Saint-Saëns there! And just catching sight of Stravinsky was the thrill of a lifetime. One could see his most recent scores, still in manuscript, on her piano."² Boulanger introduced her students to the music of the modernists, Ravel and Debussy, Fauré, Stravinsky, and Satie, and to the early music of Monteverdi and Machaut. Thomson pointed out that American composers "came home orchestrating out of Berlioz rather than out of Wagner."³

Nadia Boulanger was received by royalty, and the highest honors were bestowed in recognition of her achievements. Although the French press persisted in referring to her as *la femme compositeur*, surprisingly, the feminist movement never claimed her. Perhaps it was the greatest of compliments that she was not so categorized. Nadia Boulanger was undeniably one of the most influential music teachers of the century—male or female. She was a unique phenomenon—a French woman, not a composer by profession, who became one of the most significant forces in shaping the direction of twentieth-century music.

Women's Work

In the early part of the century, business and professional positions were for men only. A talented young woman might enter the music teaching profession, guiding other girls to sing or play the piano for family or friends. A stage career automatically canceled the possibility of a respectable marriage. A serious young woman such as Harmony Twichell, daughter of a minister, had a nursing career and spent two hardworking years in the Chicago slums ministering to the poor before marrying Charles Ives. Once a good marriage was made, the wife was expected to work as a volunteer toward the betterment of society. "Good works" for the church or for educational and artistic organizations were appropriate. Whether Amy Beach or Ruth Crawford Seeger, a wife did the housework first, and then pursued her talents.

Taboos were rarely lifted, and then only for exceptional talents or major celebrities: "Gertrude [Stein]'s celebrity is still great," said Virgil Thomson. "She's been dead now for nearly forty years, and anything about her is still capable of making the front page of the *New York Times*. . . . She was strong enough to demand the rights of a man and the privileges of a woman." Nadia Boulanger was also exempt from the usual restrictions. In 1908 she made her debut as conductor—an activity almost totally closed to women—and continued to earn the respect of men throughout her career. If she bullied females and catered to males, as Thomson accused, she made it clear to everyone that all lessons were expected to be paid for.

It was possible for a capable female to hold a position comparable to today's professional career woman, but without compensation. The boards of artistic and educational organizations were, in large part, directed and nurtured by women volunteers, who provided the "man" power for museums, symphonies, choral groups, and libraries. Virgil Thomson noted, "These well-to-do mostly Jewish ladies were highly cultivated and supported music." In the movement for modern music, two leaders were Claire Reis and Minna Lederman. Claire Reis, executive director of the League of Composers, was the force behind many activities relating to performance of contemporary music in New York City for twenty-five years. Minna Lederman, editor of *Modern Music*, the league's publication, was so highly regarded by the composers who wrote for the excellent magazine that even such accomplished writers as Virgil Thomson and Elliott Carter admired her expertise. Reis asserted she was interested in working seriously, but not necessarily for pay: "In those days if a girl did not need to earn money . . . she shouldn't be earning money. [My colleagues, who were] modern liberal women, were adamant that girls should not work for money. Today, two generations later, every girl looks for professional work."

A few wealthy patrons, such as Alma Wertheim and Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, indulged their interests in music by funding organizations and subsidizing individual composers. In a time before government and private foundation grants, composers depended on the generosity of such patrons.

quotes from OHAM original and acquired interviews: Virgil Thomson with David Dubal, ca. 1987, American Arts Project broadcast; Thomson with Perlis, 6 June 1979, New York City; Claire Reis with Perlis, January 1976 to January 1977, New York City



NADIA BOULANGER (1887–1979)

From interview with Vivian Perlis, 2 June 1976, Paris

I am not interested [for] people to know what I do or do not. I am interested to understand the student. And that is difficult [enough] to occupy one life. I adore doing it! I adore seeing the great progress the very gifted do, or small progress. But some change, if only they are ready to express themselves. I am good when I give a lesson. I talk with the student, or listen to the student—bring people to be themselves. You remember what say Stravinsky? “If everything would be permitted to me, I would feel lost in this abyss of freedom.” So we have all through education, through religion, through art, through everything, we have limits. And it is in the limits that we must find our freedom.

The great gift is a demonstration of God. If you remember, Tintoretto said, “Beautiful colors are not to be bought at the Rialto.” What has been given to me to think is so deep, is so authentic, that I am grateful, I thank the Lord, and I am there, with my incapacity to really express it. Except that I can explain to a child grammar. I can make him see. I can be exacting for the quality of the effort he will make to progress, not to become great, but to be a little more himself, a little better, a little more understanding. And he will have fulfilled all his duty and all his place when he has found the way to do a little more. But the real value is not in our hands.

You must be aware, that more the student is gifted, more you must be careful not to invade his self. The teacher who becomes influencing the student is, I think, very dangerous. One must respect the personality of the other, and the other must submit to what makes life possible: order, rigor, and freedom. To let him develop was my great concern when, very long time ago, Cop-

Mademoiselle at Ninety

"Come at seven," Nadia Boulanger wrote. I was to interview her in Paris on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday. Did she mean 7 A.M. or P.M.? A call to Annette Dieudonné, her assistant, confirmed 7 P.M. "Only one half hour, please. Mademoiselle is not well," she said. Thirty-six rue Ballu—the tiny elevator rattling up to the old-fashioned apartment—it was exactly as her students had described. In the entry room were religious tributes to Boulanger's father and to her beloved sister, Lili. Beaded curtains hung at the door to the dimly lit inner room, dominated by the large organ and two grand pianos. If it were not for a deep voice coming from the left, I would not have seen the small figure at the end of a sofa. "I am sorry, but I cannot speak with you after all. I am tired beyond words." After expressing sympathy, I said, "I bring you greetings from Aaron Copland." The voice from the sofa became stronger, "Aaaah Copland! I remember when, long time ago . . ." I quickly clicked on the tape recorder, then off and on again as Mademoiselle alternated from "Au revoir, I have nothing to say . . ." to talking spiritedly about Elliott Carter and others. Later, when a few of her former students listened to the tape, they laughed and exclaimed, "That's pure Boulanger!"

About twenty minutes into the interview, Mademoiselle said, "You know, I was not to talk with you. I will tell you why I do—because you are ardent about what you do. I am interested in what you do." Here was the clue I had hoped to find to Boulanger's success as teacher: if a student was genuinely engagé, Mademoiselle would give everything she had, even past concern for her own well-being. I left rue Ballu with an invitation to hear Mademoiselle's current fourteen-year-old student the following evening.

The New York Times of 11 November 1977 honored Nadia Boulanger on her ninetieth birthday with an article based on a tribute from Copland and my interview. The editor suggested that Mademoiselle's accented speech must be corrected. I insisted that it not, and we finally agreed that Boulanger's words must sound like her.

My visit with Nadia Boulanger was memorable, yet she remained a distant figure until the summers of 1995 and 1996, when I had the occasion to work through the contents of her library at the Palace of Fontainebleau. The library's materials are used by students and faculty of the Conservatoire américain. Among the hundreds of photocopies were found three autograph Copland scores, which have since been acquired by the Library of Congress. (When the young Copland saw the "NB" that Boulanger had carefully labeled in each of her books, he assumed they had been the property of Napoléon Bonaparte!) While working in that historic place, one could hear below the tall windows the clip-clop of horses and the splash

of fountains in the gardens. The presence of Nadia Boulanger was most strongly felt in this library of working materials, amid her papers, books, and years of correspondence from devoted students.

The library's history is kept alive by residents of Fontainebleau who relate the following story: During World War II, the German army occupied the town, took over the palace, and sent most of the people to the surrounding countryside. The Germans, wanting to use the library space, threw the collection into the courtyard for disposal. During the night, a few women from the town carted the books and papers away for safekeeping until after the war, when they were returned to the palace. This little-known library holds a treasure of historical materials that documents the unique story of the Conservatoire américain and of Nadia Boulanger.

—V.P.

land was my student. I hope, I *hope* that I did never disturb him. Because then it is no more be a teacher; is to be a tyrant. Because it brings nothing. If the student asks me, "Is this what you want?" I will always say, "No, I want nothing. I want to answer your questions; I will know what you think about what you do." The place of the teacher depends on what is the student. The same time as Copland, Melville Smith, Herbert Elwell. Thomson was here at the same time with me. Piston. And since have come generation after generation. What is fascinating is to see youngsters develop—to have seen the long development of Copland, and the growing of people as [Igor] Markevich, as Jean Françaix, as Mademoiselle [Marcelle] de Manziarly, as Mademoiselle Dieudonné.⁴

Copland is such faithful human being that we knew in 1921, and we have not remained one year without to have one connection or another, but always something. He is today as warm as he was when he was a youngster. He is generous. He is nice. Koussevitzky loved him. One day I said, "Will you—are you ready to write a work which must be finished the beginning of September? Then I have an opportunity to have you heard in New York and in Boston." And on the day, the score was there—and a score which remains very important in his work.⁵ Oh, one saw immediately.

Today, we had this in class: the *Ernste Gesänge* from Brahms. And I said, "What is your reaction before such a text?" So moving, so important, and so difficult to understand. Because either you will see that there is only despair, or if you understand that in spite of the despair produced by the life of everyday, what dominates is the great light which makes life wonderful, even when

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Nadia Boulanger with students, Fontainebleau, ca. 1922. Left to right:
Zo Elliott, Harrison Kerr, Boulanger, Aaron Copland, and Melville Smith.

it is very hard. And so sometimes we are too weak to overcome it, when we lose somebody we held dearer—much more than you are to yourself—you are weakened, you are brokenhearted. But you appreciate, still, life, and you find that it's a marvelous adventure, if sometimes very hard. And the *Ernste Gesänge* can be read as a stream of despair, or in spite of everything, the everyday, so hard, so unimportant—what comes ahead is so important. But the real expression of life brings us back nearer what is great, what is good. And I have, or everybody has, suffered enough from parts of life which have been extraordinarily sad and trying, and nevertheless have kept this vital power alive.

And we have had in the class the second volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* for the whole year. And is twenty-four times the same thing, and twenty-four times a different thing. Employing the language, conventional, but being original at each page. And there we enter in the great mystery. Because is a great mystery. We can establish logically all the degrees of education, which make grammar, calculation, numbers—all that we can. But we are so lazy. I have earned my living since I was seventeen, so I could not do more. But I have done no Latin, no Greek. I suffer very much not to talk Russian. My mother was Russian; I adored her. But I don't talk Russian. I have discovered myself that, if for ten years I learned one word a week, I would talk Russian. Have I done it? No. And so I say we don't pay real attention. And I really pretend to have paid attention during my long life. But is not true, because I suffer not to talk Russian. And nobody has prevented me. I could not learn in two years, but

one word a week—everybody can do that. I have worked very much in my life, but would I have died because I learned one word a week? I can't believe it.

I owe my mother everything. But what I ought to say about what she did: to live for us, to help everything for us, that I can't express. It's all what I am and all what I am not. But if I'd seen more clearly that she could make me do everything, I would have learned Russian, and I did not. And so I say to my students, "Pay attention." Do what you do with great attention. I had first my mother, who was not a musician professional, as witness. Because she could not be satisfied with less than the most one can do. And she did not care if it was a success at school or not. "Have you done all what you could?" *That* was her principle.

I would say each in his way, my teachers were letting me believe that I was free. Perhaps they found I was horrible, because I was so independent. But they never gave me this feeling. And naturally, the great influence of Fauré remains. And there is the most mysterious thing. Because if you say to me, "In what was it mysterious? In what was it so great?" I don't know. He gave us a kind of attention which was an obligation to struggle, obligation to say, obligation to do. No great theory of art, no great method. We never spoke of his music, never played a note of his music in class.

I received so much help, so much affection from my family, from my teachers. And naturally, the great influence in my life was the one of my sister Lili. Because when she was born, I had the impression I had been honored by a responsibility that I must guide, protect her. She was six years younger than I. Very soon she was such an unbelievable personality that she became my guide. I would not move nor do one thing, without to have her reaction. And she was—well, it's no use to talk of that—but someone so great, so pure, so inaccessible to any kind of temptation. She led her inner life in the memory of her father, who died when she was six years old. And at six years, she was marked forever. She knew what was so, and she knew that she would have loved to live in his memory when she wrote her great psalm, the *De Profundis*. She wrote it when she did not even know if she would become a composer. But the first theme was in the memory of father. And naturally, that is of such an importance. She had only twenty-four years to express herself. When she was already so sick, she said, "Well, be aware that when your students will enter near you, they will have the age I have when I quit you." And so she knew that she was to die.

You are always interested to see the development of life. You may follow or not. You may agree or not. But you like to know what's going on. It is

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Nadia and Lili Boulanger on the occasion of Lili's Prix de Rome, 36 rue Ballu, Paris, 1913.

" . . . I had my little year of favoritism . . . "

I went to the concert where they played her sister's music. I saw the photographs all over the place, this sister that died, about twenty years old. As we stood in line, I got near Nadia, and I just exploded into tears. Everybody heard it, too. I was a little girl, and I just sniffed my head out. Nadia was delighted by that; she loved when anybody broke down. All that year she would stroke my hands and look at me. She was very moved by that. If anybody broke down, that was her favorite pupil for the time. So I had my little year of favoritism, but then the next year another girl did it, and I was just plain me.

—Suzanne Bloch
from interview with Van Cleve,
6–7 July 1997, New York City

surprising when somebody has found something new. But when somebody has spoken as everybody, so did Schubert, so did Mozart, they speak to everybody. That plunges me in the depths of the greatest mystery. I know many things which must be said about Stravinsky; I cannot say it well enough. But I dare—well, even admit—that I could write.

I have made my living teaching music since I was seventeen years. And then this question is unfortunately a question which we have not all realized—a society where life of the spirit counts; no, is life of money. And so that is always discouraging. And you cannot avoid it. Everybody is obliged to earn his bread. But that you associate the idea of finding the way to eat and the way to teach—they are two questions absolutely separate. Absolutely separate.

Now I am tired beyond words. And why I make this communication with you? I can see you are intelligent, you are ardent, you are interested in what you do. And is why. But it must stop, not only because I've been sick, but because I am unable to explain anything. I cannot explain love, I cannot explain music, I cannot explain art. I feel it, but I cannot explain it. I can explain the means employed to do what we do. I can explain that to have shoes that must go to my feet, they must be in good leather. And I order my shoes in London, because I want to be at home in my shoes. So they are made on order. But is not because I want to have beautiful shoes; I want to have shoes agreeing with my feet. And so, too, whatever is the activity of the one, the other. If I have a bad shoemaker, I will always be bad in the shoes.

I am fortunate to have kept what I promised. And I am sorry to be only who I am. And so that, what I would like to be able to formulate in words, simply is not my kingdom. You know, the words of St. Paul remain always true, whatever we are, if we are practicing religion or not: “Even if you have hope and faith, if you have no love, you have seen nothing.”

Students

David Diamond • Philip Glass • Quincy Jones

The composer David Diamond (1915–) studied with Boulanger from 1937 to 1939.



DAVID DIAMOND

From OHAM interview with Ev Grimes, 25 May 1988, New York City

Copland suggested I look Boulanger up while in Paris, and that’s what I did. I didn’t work with her that summer (1936) because I couldn’t afford to go to Fontainebleau. Then she told me, “But my dear, you must come next year, and I will arrange for a scholarship for you.” So I went in the summer of ’37. It still is one of the great things that happened to me.

Boulanger had a severity about her, an austerity even. I liked the way clothes fit her, those black dresses. In the summer, she would allow herself a paisley dress. She had some lovely clothes—Lanvin dresses. She looked elegant. There was no doubt I was attracted. Beautiful hands. That right foot, like Garbo’s. She was a strong maternal figure to me.

The lesson would begin and you could see she was hearing every note. She would never go down with her fingers to the keyboard. Then you’d see the face, and she’d say “Zis. Zis.” And then she would play it and look at me and say, “From you, the way you are, I expect something more. Much more.” She could tell from my face I was puzzled. She would say, “Why is this a B-flat? It’s not *juste*, it’s not well-heard.” “But Mademoiselle, why was it all right for Bach in the *Goldberg Variations*?” She said, “Ah, but that’s Bach. We allow the great geniuses all those transgressions. But you, my dear, you cannot do what you want yet. You must do what the ear tells you it must do, but you must know why you do it.”

I wrote my whole Quintet for flute, string trio, and piano that summer, which was commissioned by the League of Composers. I did that with her, and she was very pleased about it. It is dedicated to Aaron. I was with her the

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Nadia Boulanger

following summer and in Paris the full year of 1938–39. And then she helped me get my first Guggenheim.

Sometimes the lessons would be at seven A.M.; sometimes at nine at night. They sometimes went over three hours. Sometimes there was no supper. I remember one night, it was now seven-thirty. It began at five-thirty. She stopped, and I heard her fussing in the kitchen. I heard Mademoiselle Dieudonné. I smelled this wonderful perfume of tomato soup coming out. It was a fresh tomato soup; and we had that with wonderful French bread, cheese—we had sliced pineapple, oranges, kumquats, and coffee. And then we went right back.

When she arranged the scholarship for Fontainebleau in '37, there was no fare to get back. Now, in '37 I hadn't a penny. Boulanger took off at the end of the summer for her place in Gargenville. I called her there, and she

called back hours later talking about arranging for my lesson times. But I wanted to talk to her about how I'm getting home. I was so dumbstruck, I said, "But Mademoiselle, I have to go home, don't I? I thought it was for the summer." She said, "My dear, when I make an effort to find time for you to study, why are you talking about going home?" I said, "Well, Mademoiselle, I have no money." There was a long silence. Afterward I wound up with a terrible—well, some thought it was a kind of nervous breakdown. I finally borrowed enough to get home.

There was no real break in our friendship until '58. The real misunderstanding with Nadia was an unfortunate occurrence. I wrote her quite a letter when I got back to Florence. Her reply was: she would not allow me to break a friendship by writing the kind of letter that I did. She regrets that I am still such an unhappy man, but that I'm always to remember how fond she is of me, how much she believes in my music, and that she hopes one day I will find peace. Now, you can't get angry at a letter like that. But an explanation for her behavior—no. So in other words, Nadia rides again; certainly she won out there.

Several generations of composers studied with Nadia Boulanger; among them was Philip Glass (1937–), who attended her school for two years beginning in 1964 on a Fulbright fellowship.



PHILIP GLASS

From OHAM interview with Ev Grimes, 17 June 1989, New York City

You took three classes with her a week. One was a private class, the second was the class you took with Mademoiselle Dieudonné—it was also a private class—and then, there was a third which was called the Wednesday class, which was a general class of all her students there at the time. They were people of all ages because people who lived in Paris continued to stay with her all of their lives. And that class had a project for the year—such as all the Mozart piano concertos, or the first book of [Bach's] Preludes and Fugues—every year it would be a different project devoted to analysis of that large extended work. So I took a private lesson with her, a Wednesday class with her, then she had the Black Thursday class—that was a special class. That was where you were asked to come—you couldn't request it—and she

put together six or eight students. The class would begin at nine o'clock and would go till noon, and you rarely accomplished the subject. She never used the standard clefs when she could help it. You were expected to know all seven clefs fluently. There would be a melody written in tenor clef, and she would say, "Well, before we get to the main subject of what we're going to do today, let's warm up by doing the harmony for this." Of course, that was, in fact, the main subject. We never got to anything else. So at first she would say, "Come here." So the student would sit down, and he would play and she would say, "Oh, that's completely wrong. How can you even think of doing it that way?" Go to the next person—he would play the harmony of the first note, until finally we found exactly the disposition of the voices the way she wanted them. Then we would go to connecting that note to the second note. This took three hours to do, and finally we had realized a four-part harmony exactly the way she wanted it, and then she would say, "Well, I really thought this would only take a few minutes." Then she would whip out the Beethoven Piano Sonata No. 2 and point to the slow movement and say, "You see?" Basically all she had wanted us to do was to simply do the exact harmony that Beethoven had done. That's all. Well, of course, had we known that piece, we might have been able to do it, but she always picked a piece that no one knew, or she found something so obscure it could be anything. She had a different project for every class. I guess I don't have to tell you why we called them the Black Thursday classes! We would leave the class, we would sit in the café across the street, no one would say anything, we would have our coffee or a beer, and we would part until we got together the next week. It was totally demoralizing in one way. We all knew that we were either her best students or her worst students, and no one knew which ones we were.

The class with Dieudonné was mainly solfège, score reading and the basic musicianship book by Hindemith [*Elementary Training for Musicians*]. If you can get through that book, you've gotten through everything. I got through the book. It takes about a year to do the book with Dieudonné. The second year you do it, she adds exercises to the exercises that are already there. She expected you to clap, to sing, and to tap your feet in three different rhythms. That was what you ended up doing, if you could—or you learned to do it. I spent at least two hours a day working on her exercises. Boulanger had other exercises, too. The day began with a Bach chorale—every week I had to bring a Bach chorale to my lesson. It was an open score, which means it was in four parts. That wasn't so hard—that no longer was a problem by then. You had to be able to sing any part and play the other three. Another little exercise of hers

was she would write down a tenor part. She would say, “Okay, sing a soprano part that goes with the tenor part.” So we all had to listen because this would not be written down. Then the next person would have to sing the alto part that would fit in; then the last person, lucky person—lucky and not lucky—because if you had been paying attention, the bass part really wasn’t that hard to figure out, but you had to remember the other three parts.

As I say, my day began with a chorale and by the end of the week, I had completely mastered the chorale. I could sing any part and play any of the other three parts without any problem at all because she often didn’t ask to hear it, and she would say, “And did you learn your chorale this week,” and I would say, “Yes, would you like to hear it?” And often she would say no, but sometimes she would say yes. So you didn’t know when you would have to perform—you always had to have it ready. The chorale was the warm-up—you got through that. Then the next thing you had to do—she had devised an exercise where from any note you would sing a cadence. You had to sing the four parts from the bottom up and go through that. It could take a while to do this. You’d already spent an hour getting warmed up, and then you started your counter-point exercises, and they had to be done perfectly.

I was thrown out of classes when I had a mistake. She would just tell me to leave. I’ve literally been thrown out of my private lesson for having a mistake, and that was your lesson for the week, and you didn’t want to miss that lesson. So you didn’t make any mistakes. How do you not make mistakes? I finally figured out how to do it. What I did is I would write out the exercise, and then I would write above every note the intervals to the notes involved. I never had any mistakes in my harmony after that. However, she never made any comment about it. She never said, “Well, I was wondering whether you would figure that out,” or “That’s a clever way to do it,” or “Well, you really don’t need to do it that way.” She said nothing. I brought it in with all the numbers on there. My harmony exercises looked like calculations, like advanced arithmetic. She looked at it—she said nothing. She could catch mistakes very quickly—she could glance at a page and find a mistake. So pages that would take me hours to prepare would be checked in matters of seconds, literally.

By that time, it was already the late morning. I had begun at seven. I was also expected to learn one piece a week. Usually, one of the Bach preludes. I wasn’t a very good pianist at that time, but I was supposed to analyze and learn how to play one prelude a week. These two ladies kept you busy all day long. So I didn’t write any music those two years, and I didn’t really mind—I had written so much music by then it didn’t really matter. I did write *some* music, but not

at the rate I used to write. I wrote a string quartet, I wrote a couple pieces—not much. There was no time to show her that music. The lessons were full.

She didn't really teach composition. It was only at the very end of my lessons with her that I actually began to understand what she was teaching. You see, I had thought she was teaching technique—she wasn't—she was teaching style. Style is a special case of technique. You were meant to find out for yourself that technique forms the basis of style—that from her point of view there's no point in teaching style without a technical basis. In other words, there *is* no style without technique.

I left after that. I was twenty-seven, and I was sick of school. You can imagine years of that kind of drilling that I described to you. You just don't write carelessly, and you don't write notes that don't belong. One of the things that's characteristic of my music today is that almost every note—I would say, in fact, every note—has a place in the music. There are no notes that don't belong—they are always the notes that I need.

Quincy Jones (1933–), a talented and versatile musician, composer, and producer, has had an extraordinarily successful career. He established a reputation as a trumpet player in Lionel Hampton's band and with Dizzy Gillespie. During this time he also worked as a record producer, eventually becoming the first African-American vice president of a white-owned record label, Mercury Records. His work as an impresario continues with multimedia programming, including motion pictures, television, and his own record label, Qwest. Jones studied with Boulanger from 1956 to 1959.



QUINCY JONES

From press conference with Carl Friedner, 19 May 1994,
Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm

Nadia Boulanger said that it would behoove you to explore all types of music because there are only twelve notes, and they are the same twelve notes that *you* have to use, too. It would be a wise move for you to understand what they do, be it African polyrhythms, or African chants, or Bartók, or Stockhausen, or Charlie Parker, or Bessie Smith, or Sarah Vaughan—just the full gamut. Ray Charles told me the same thing when I was a kid in Seattle. I never forgot that. I know many people who play jazz look askance upon some types of music, but I never felt that way as long as it is good.

[To view this image, refer to
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SIX

From the Boulangerie



A surprising number of major musical figures were born at the turn of the century. Virgil Thomson was four in 1900—he looked much the same at eighty-four. Told by his family that he was better than anyone else, young Virgil believed it and behaved accordingly all his long life. Roger Sessions was also four in 1900, perhaps a shy and serious child; Henry Cowell at three was showing signs of precocious genius; George and Ira Gershwin, toddlers of two and four, were already collaborating; Edward Kennedy (Duke) Ellington at eight months was treated as royalty by his parents in Washington, D.C.; and Roy Harris was happily trailing after his father in the Oklahoma potato fields. In American music alone, the major figures born in or around 1900 included George Antheil, Louis Armstrong, Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Ruth Crawford, Otto Luening, Colin McPhee, and Harry Partch. Of this rich crop of future composers, several were among the first American students of Nadia Boulanger.

Boulanger was the catalyst for relationships between young American composers in Paris. If they did not meet at Shakespeare and Company, at the American Center, or through mutual friends, they were sure to find each other, sooner or later, at one of Boulanger's famous Wednesday teas. One of the most important of these associations was between Virgil Thomson and Aaron Copland. Thomson, four years Copland's senior, was already established in Paris when the younger man arrived fresh from a summer at Fontainebleau. As an expatriate living in Paris, Thomson corresponded with his American colleagues and made periodic trips to

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Nadia Boulanger with three former students at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1962. Left to right: Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Boulanger, and Walter Piston

the States. He was aware that it was important to maintain positive contacts at home. He sensed, as did Nadia Boulanger, that it was his generation of composers, who matured in the twenties with an extraordinary burst of creative energy, that would bring America to a position of prominence on the world scene.

Copland and Thomson recommended Boulanger to other young Americans, and the word about this exceptional teacher spread rapidly. She gave American composers the confidence to explore their native talents instead of copying foreign models. In contrast to most Europeans, she believed that the New World was the direction for twentieth-century music. Her students called her *Mademoiselle*, and they became known as the *Boulangerie*. This group included not only composers but musicologists and performers. Her requisites were simple: hard work and total commitment. Students admired her exceptional musical gifts, although some were not totally convinced of her methods. As time went on, a few early admirers, such as Virgil Thomson and Roger Sessions, considered her ideas old-fashioned. Nevertheless, she was undoubtedly a powerful influence on American music. As Thomson commented, “Every town in America has two things—a five-and-dime and a Boulanger pupil.”¹

Virgil Thomson (1896 – 1989)

Virgil Thomson fell in love with Paris, but he never rejected his hometown, Kansas City, Missouri. He grew up proud of being from a family that had stood with the Confederacy during the Civil War. As a boy, he played organ and learned the hymns at the Calvary Baptist Church. Around Kansas City, he heard a lot of ragtime and other popular tunes. Living was an art that included good food and drink, intelligent conversation, and enjoyment of high culture. Thomson's lifelong fascination with food and its preparation began when his mother taught him to make Jeff Davis pie from a recipe that had been in the family for years. Generations of Thomsons in Missouri made for strong family ties that were maintained throughout his life.

The "Great War" interrupted Thomson's plans to go directly to college. He insisted on enlisting and seemed determined to get into the fight, perhaps to prove himself as a man. He explained, "You wanted to be part of what so many were experiencing, to try yourself out, to prove your endurance. You certainly did not want the war to end without your having been through something."² He never saw action or went to the front, but years later he insisted that the uncomfortable and demanding conditions endured as a soldier were among his most vivid and treasured memories.

The spirit of Kansas City accompanied Thomson to Harvard (class of 1922), where it served him well in the civilized milieu of Cambridge. In 1922 he met Maurice Grosser, a promising young painter, who joined Thomson in his Paris apartment in 1925 and lived with him thereafter.³ Thomson traveled with the Harvard Glee Club to Paris, and the city suited him so well that he eventually became an expatriate. In typically wry humor, he quipped, "If you are going to be a starving composer, it might as well be where the food is good!" Before long, he was socializing with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Darius Milhaud and Francis Poulenc, Ezra Pound and James Joyce. Only when the Germans entered Paris in 1940 did Virgil Thomson return to the States. Even after his move to New York City, where he lived as a permanent resident in the colorful Chelsea Hotel, he kept his apartment on the quai Voltaire for fifty years.

When Thomson received his Paine Fellowship from Harvard in 1921, he joined Melville Smith, who introduced him to Nadia Boulanger. Soon they met other young American musicians, among them Aaron Copland and Theodore "Teddy" Chanler. As Americans far from home, they frequented the bookstore Shakespeare and Company and became friendly with another American composer, George Antheil, who lived in a room above the store. They visited one another's apartments, and Copland and Thomson appeared as performers of their own pieces on a few concert programs arranged by Boulanger.

Thomson's relationship with Boulanger was cordial, although she did not encourage him as she did Copland. He said, "Her attentive efforts to lead me in

the directions of Fauré and Mahler were not successful. We were in accord about Sebastian Bach and Stravinsky. She did not care for Satie or Milhaud, whom I admired. We disagreed radically on many matters of musical taste and opinion.”⁴ Thomson, Gertrude Stein, and others, such as the critic and writer Carl Van Vechten, believed Erik Satie was the key to a twentieth-century music esthetic. They praised him for deflating the Wagnerian postromanticism and egomania of that time. Thomson found Satie’s childlike directness touching and applied the style to his own music—Thomson’s scores were filled with open fourths, fifths, and octaves. The simplicity of Satie, whom he saw frequently in the early years in Paris, was a strong influence. Thomson said, “Satie is the only composer whose works can be enjoyed and appreciated without any knowledge of the history of music. They are as simple, as straightforward, as devastating as the remarks of a child.”⁵ And Copland said, “While everyone else was trying to be as striking and complex as possible, Virgil was doing exactly the opposite. He was trying to be disarmingly simple, relaxed—and as Satie himself said, ‘not trying to outdo anybody.’”⁶

Despite their differences, Thomson credits Boulanger as one of his influential teachers: “Nadia made me understand that writing music was like writing a letter. All you had to do was to say what you had to say clearly and stop.”⁷ Although Thomson wrote glowingly about Boulanger later in his autobiography, in the twenties he became increasingly critical of her methods and intentions. He called his *Sonata da Chiesa*, which was pivotal in his oeuvre, a “graduation piece” from his Boulanger studies, or, as he put it, “The Battle of Boulanger.” He argued with Copland about whether their young friend Paul Bowles should study with Mademoiselle. Thomson was dead set against it; Copland insisted that there was no one better. (In fact, Bowles did not study with her.)

Another disagreement with Boulanger concerned Thomson’s professed lack of interest in nationalism: “You’re American, huh? It comes out American—or it doesn’t.”⁸ Yet Thomson incorporated Western tunes in his music. His film scores for *The River* (1937) and *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) both preceded Copland’s first film efforts.⁹ His ballet *Filling Station* (1937) was one of the first ballets on an American subject.

Thomson, still residing in Paris, could not attend the first Copland-Sessions Concert (22 April 1928, New York City), which included his “Five Phrases of the Songs of Solomon” for soprano and percussion. He returned to the United States later that year. Copland had urged him to submit his *Symphony on a Hymn Tune* to Koussevitzky, and somewhat to his surprise, it was turned down cold. The second Copland-Sessions Concert, early in 1929, featured Thomson’s “Capital, Capitals” for four male singers and piano. Stein’s abstract wordplay and Thomson’s unadorned musical style were roundly criticized in the press, but it was considered the liveliest piece in the concert. After returning to Paris, Thomson made certain his name was not forgotten; his articles were printed in various American magazines,

including *Modern Music*, the League of Composers' publication. Copland had introduced Thomson to its editor, Minna Lederman, who immediately recognized a real writer. His first major article for her was a portrait of Copland. Essentially positive, it was meant to cause a stir from the first sentence on: "Aaron Copland's music is American in rhythm, Jewish in melody, eclectic in all the rest."¹⁰ Copland's Jewish origins were mentioned several more times. Copland was not pleased, but he was not confrontational, and peace prevailed. Before long, Thomson was a regular contributor to *Modern Music*, sending articles from Paris. Lederman said, "The second decade of the magazine was more or less influenced by Virgil Thomson. I think his style influenced a great number of Americans writing for us."¹¹

Thomson and Copland have been called "sparring partners." Indeed, in personality, lifestyle, and musical ideas, there were marked differences between them. As they became two of the leading American composers of the century, they were always aware of each other in the context of the musical scene—who got which commission and for how much, and who was first to present something new. They were not always directly in touch with each other, but they had mutual friends who kept them au courant—particularly Minna Lederman and, for a while, Nadia Boulanger. Thomson would wonder why Copland's music was more popular and ask half-jokingly, "How come, no matter what I did, Aaron always managed to get higher fees and bigger commissions?" Copland would respond with a chuckle, "Virgil's got a lawyer hidden in him somewhere. He adores fighting over clauses and knows the copyright laws inside out."¹² Virgil once complained to Minna Lederman, "You treat Aaron like a prince." "Well," Lederman responded, "he's certainly not imperial, but in his manner, in his way of dealing with the world, yes, indeed he is a prince."¹³

"Sweetie Pie—you come!"

When Virgil agreed to participate in OHAM, a few major oral histories were in midstream. A highly qualified and knowledgeable person was chosen to interview Thomson. During the first session, he fell asleep; in the second, he was rude. Finally, in despair, the interviewer said she could not possibly continue. At a postconcert reception, I went to talk to him: "Virgil, I thought you agreed to be part of the oral history program?" He leaned over, reached up, tweaked my cheek, and croaked, "Sweetie Pie—you come!" Of course, I should never have sent someone else to interview Virgil Thomson when he knew I was working with Aaron Copland and William Schuman.

—V.P.

Thomson composed orchestral pieces, incidental and film music, chamber music, and close to 150 musical portraits of friends and acquaintances, but his great strength was in setting words. From early on, with the song settings of Stein's "Susie Asado" (1926) and "Capital, Capitals" (1927), it was clear that Thomson knew words and how to use them, alone and with music—English words, not the customary Italian, German, or French. He did so in a way that seemed perfectly natural and truthful. Thomson's operas were more successful than Copland's, and he knew his way around the theater. His collaboration with Gertrude Stein, another instinctive manipulator of words, was fortuitous—they seemed made for each other. His music was little noticed until his work with Stein. Copland remembers hearing Thomson play some of *Four Saints in Three Acts* in Paris in 1928: "The effect was startling. It never occurred to me for an instant that anybody would ever actually put it on the stage!"¹⁴ Thomson said, "I have some songs; I don't know how good they are. But the operas are very good, and as characteristic of me as Copland's ballets are of him. Gertrude's texts were made just for me."¹⁵ In 1929 Carl Van Vechten arranged for a reading of *Four Saints* in his home and invited patrons, publishers, and others in the arts. The public premiere at the Wadsworth Atheneum's new Avery Memorial Hall in Hartford, Connecticut (1934), was a musical and social event that made Thomson famous. With an African-American cast, strange text, and unique music, *Four Saints in Three Acts* became a cause célèbre. Thomson remarked:

My good friend [A. Everett] Chick Austin was in the process of opening a new hall in the museum. He thought it would be a wonderful idea to open it with an opera. He let me do it my own way—the Negro cast and all the sets and costumes by Florine Stettheimer, who had never worked in the theater before, but who I admired as a painter. He trusted me the same way Gertrude trusted me and I trusted her. Don't forget, *Four Saints* was a first for everybody. It was Gertrude's first opera. It was my first opera. It was John Houseman's first job in the theater. It was Freddy Ashton's first opera choreography and directing. It was the first modern opera to be produced in a museum. Everything was first about it—and like first things often do, it works.¹⁶

Frederick Ashton was choreographer, and the set was made of cellophane with flowers, seashells, and other unusual elements. The composer John Cage, a friend of Thomson's, said, "This score stands apart from his previous Stein settings in that it defies analysis. No attempt to grasp *Four Saints* will take hold of it. To enjoy it, one must leap into that irrational world from which it sprang, the world in which the matter-of-fact and the irrational are one. . . . As with successfully married couples, one wonders what either partner would be like without the other. Divorced from [the text], the music would surely lose something of its strength."¹⁷

Four Saints had sixty performances in one year in New York and Chicago, in addition to broadcasts and a recording. Almost twenty years went by between

Saints and the second collaboration of Thomson and Stein. *The Mother of Us All* (1947) was about the American suffragist Susan B. Anthony and was produced in the year of Stein's death, following a four-year estrangement between the poet and the composer.¹⁸

Thomson was clever and entertaining; imperious and demanding; sometimes downright mean. He gained a reputation for being racially prejudiced and anti-Semitic, because of quips such as renaming the League of Composers "The League of Jewish Composers." His absolute honesty and predilection to say exactly what he thought was disarming and often misunderstood. Thomson had a strong ego and spoke with such authority in his inimitable high-pitched voice that nobody would think of contradicting him, even when he was demonstrably wrong.

The widely contrasting cultures of Kansas City and Paris resulted in the unusual mix that was Virgil Thomson. His tonal and naïve-sounding music was not taken seriously by other composers—few realized its subtle sophistication. Thomson felt more fully understood by visual artists than by other musicians. Not known as an innovator, he said, "I haven't invented anything. Well, yes, maybe I have. I haven't created the career of Philip Glass, but as he pointed out to me, I was doing minimalist music fifty years before he did. I also pointed out to him, as a joke, that he'd had considerable success at writing operas in Sanskrit, and I'd done perfectly well writing operas in Gertrude Stein."¹⁹

After returning to New York when the Nazis occupied Paris, Thomson replaced the highly respected Lawrence Gilman as music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*. Thomson's criticisms were literate, succinct, and insightful, "I knew how to write," he said, "and I knew music. I enjoyed it, and they enjoyed it. We had a good time."²⁰ There is more to his writings than that—Thomson expressed honest opinions fearlessly and brilliantly, backed up by a superior intelligence. His cutting wit and breezy style went straight as an arrow to the subject. He was in a position of power and knew it. Thomson could go for the kill when there was some personal reason to do so, and he was not hesitant about furthering his own causes. Nevertheless, Virgil Thomson was arguably the best music critic America has ever known.



VIRGIL THOMSON

From OHAM interviews with Vivian Perlis,
28 September 1977 to 23 June 1978, New York City

My family goes back 375 years in America. On both sides of the family we were what you might call frightfully posh; that is to say, big land and slave owners—they founded colleges and belonged to the Baptist Church and ran it. But when they lost their fortune in slaves through

Remembering Virgil Thomson

Superb writer, important composer, gourmet, Thomson was a powerful arbiter of musical tastes for decades. With a short round body, topped with a large head that incorporated twinkling eyes and a sly grin, Thomson has been described as resembling a Buddha, or conversely, a Kewpie doll. His apartment at the Chelsea Hotel was legendary, as were the exceptional meals prepared there. How did those wonderful roast lamb dinners come from the tiny kitchen that Thomson could barely squeeze into? And how did the apartment manage to look elegant when his favorite shopping place was the five-and-dime? Once, when Stravinsky came for dinner, he noticed the plates and asked, "Wedgwood?" "No," Thomson answered, "Woolworth."

*In 1979 Thomson donated his papers to the Yale Music Library. In connection with the gift, the composer taught a course on the relationship between words and music (see Virgil Thomson, *Music with Words* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989] and tape recordings of the classes, OHAM archives). Thomson was eighty-four at the time, but he worked regularly with each student, and when they met as a class, he played and sang sections from his works—for example, "Pigeons on the grass, alas" from *Four Saints in Three Acts*. When Beinecke Library mounted an exhibit in honor of the Thomson Collection, he was pleased, and determined to include a dinner at Yale's well-known dining club Mory's, which he was convinced served the best Welsh rarebit and finnan haddie. Thomson noticed a few women students in the restaurant and commented, "Look at those girls trying to be boys!" Before the concert in his honor, the composer, who was quite deaf, gave strict instructions: "Wake me if I sleep more than three minutes, or I will embarrass everyone by waking suddenly, dropping things and speaking in a loud voice." That was Virgil Thomson—but so was the brilliant speaker with the beguiling smile who charmed everyone at a Yale dinner in his honor.*

At ninety, Thomson began to plan every detail of his memorial service. It took place on what would have been his ninety-third birthday at what he had gleefully called "The Cathedral of St. John the too-too Divine." Virgil Thomson died as he hoped: at home in his sleep, and in time to make all the editions of the Sunday New York Times. Leonard Bernstein said, "Losing Virgil is like losing an American city." A few months after the memorial, an auction of the furnishings from his Chelsea Hotel apartment was held. Some of his friends were appalled but amused at the bids for the five-and-dime purchases. Minna Lederman said, "That old table everyone's dying for is the one Virgil took off a pile of junk at my house before it went to the dump. It sold at auction for \$6,500!" In 1996 friends gathered at the Chelsea to commemorate the Thomson centenary. Virgil would have liked it: friends milled

around in the arty lobby of the bohemian residential hotel, and strangers strolled in wondering what was happening. Food was served from a favorite Spanish restaurant next door, a few words were spoken, and a plaque was attached to his very own column just outside the front door.

—V.P.

emancipation, little by little, having nobody to work the land, they became impoverished. We still thought we were aristocrats, you know. We still thought we were better than anybody else. Off in the country and back in Kentucky, there were cousins and great-aunts and so forth that managed to live in a pretty good semblance of high style. Lots of hospitality around and lots of good cooking. All that—parties and so on—is my Kentucky inheritance. But my father's people, who came from Virginia, were also slave owners and Southern Baptists, and they always took people home from church for lunch on Sunday. Southern hospitality and country hospitality was a fact that I was brought up with. Oh, yes. I was precocious, good-looking, and bright. My parents loved me for all these things and for being their man-child. With all the admiration around, I held the stage. I arrived at my school years self-confident, cocky, and brash. In September 1902 without kindergarten or parental presence, I entered first grade—wholly unafraid and ready for anything.

Well, Paris and Kansas City both had a highly corrupt political background and a rather elaborate religious superstructure. Whether it was Catholic or Southern Baptist, it's all the same thing. I was brought up in a believing and practicing family, and I was taken to church as a child. By the time I was thirteen, I began playing the organ in other churches. So I've always been surrounded by liturgical affairs and liturgical music. I'm no Jesus freak. The Christianity element never took on me. But I love the whole layout of it. You see, it's like theater. I'm at home in the backstage of religion, like in the choir room or the vestry, in the same way that I'm at home backstage in the theater. I don't really enjoy being a customer out front. I'm an old clown, so I like public appearances. I feel at home on stages, in front of cameras.

Southerners all made music, you know. My father did not make music; he had no ear for it. But my mother could play the piano, and my sister could sing a bit. She is eleven years older than I am. I had an aunt who played extremely well. There were different musicians around, and there was music,

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Virgil Thomson, 1928

and everybody played ragtime. And there was playing and singing in the home, too, because with no gramophones or radio the young people—what I call the mating age; that is to say, sixteen to twenty-four—when they got together they would all stand around the piano while somebody played, and they would sing popular songs. Every so often they'd roll up the rugs and dance. And I had to learn to play the popular dance music of the time in steady rhythm; otherwise they'd complain. As a matter of fact, that's why they had Harry Truman around, because he could play the piano. Not that they disliked him, but that was his particular utility. Missouri has a special mentality, and you can see that in Harry Truman, Mark Twain, or any of the characteristic Missouri people.

Naturally, no family really wants to envisage professionalism in the arts, because they want something to make money or a reputation—something like law or medicine or banking. But I made a kind of showdown when I was about fourteen, and then they never interfered. They understood me, and I understood them. There's always a few years there when you think your family doesn't understand you, and then you discover they did all the time. The bond with my mother was of sentiment: she could touch my feelings. The bond with my father was one of mutual respect, but you know fathers and sons can't really talk very well. But I have no fault to find with that. I think I was very lucky I had good parents. In the long run, I suppose the leading character in all this family setup was my mother, who, although she never showed it, was a driving character: she drove herself, her husband, and her children, and they never knew it; she never knew it. It was all covered up with this beautiful Kentucky tat. And she made fun about things and so forth. But it was urgent in the generation that has gone down financially to try to rebuild if you can, you see. I am a self-driver too—plenty. I never was afraid of anybody and never hesitated to take what I considered to be the just and noble side. That's again all those Confederates with their lost cause.

Rebellion was what was used against us in the Civil War. We didn't even admit that we were rebels. When I say "we," I mean this whole family background—they didn't think they were rebels. They thought they were merely defending what was right and just. That's the only kind of rebellion that counts. Rebellion after you've absorbed it all—my heavens, that's just decorative.

When you are a child and play the piano, you are automatically a sissy. Ives had that. And, boy, did he play baseball and football and everything to try to compensate! You see that you are bright. You are always at the top of the

class. You also were small, and there were great big boys, but it's all right. It's all right to be small; it's all right to be big. You all live.

They considered me musically talented. Prodigy is not a word that was around the family much. But you had talent and you worked at it and you got to be quite good. But I was talented in other ways too, not for painting or anything like that—my sister was—but I always got all A's. It was easy, and that's how I picked up quite a lot of education. Also, the public schools and the high schools in those days were quite different from what they are now.

I was always involved in music, and I used to play for singers, you see, and then I played organ with choirs. I was on the inside. When I was young I taught at Harvard, but I didn't really like institutional teaching much. I had known people who had been east. I'd spent practically half of my time in the service in New York, moving around among sophisticated people, intellectual people, and I read a lot of books. Oh, I knew my way around!

Later I taught a year or a half year here and there as visiting professor. The American composer is a university teacher. That has conditioned him in a number of ways which are possibly beneficial and in some ways maybe not. Being surrounded constantly by the university, the whole music thing tends to get oververbalized, because a university is built around a library. A university consists of transmitting from one generation to another that which can be or is written down, because if it isn't written down, it's lost. So the library is the repository of all knowledge, and the idea of the library, the presence of the library, and the history of the art and all the rest of it dominates the music department. University or not, you can write anything you damn please.

So I decided that I was going to keep out of the institutional teaching, and I did keep out of it. Then, when I was old, I would do a little bit of it as an adventure. It's all right. Private lessons, fine. You can have fun telling bright students what you know. My most successful pupil, of course, was Ned Rorem. He worked for me when he was quite young. He was my musical secretary, did a lot of copying, for which I paid him with orchestration lessons. That was fine. I've got a few students in Boston now, and I give them orchestration and teach the mysteries of the words-and-music game.

The French kids, or the Germans or the Italians, for that matter—anywhere where the musical tradition is old and the critical tradition well established—the youngsters don't need criticism, but they need training. That's where you can get them very early and train them. They are criticized by their mother. Any French or German kid who writes a piece knows per-

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Virgil Thomson, sketches for film music for *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936), including quotation of folk tune “Old Paint”

“ . . . the most articulate musician who’s ever walked the street.”

It was 1943–44 when I left Curtis [Institute of Music] and went to New York City. Virgil had offered me a job. “I’ll give you a job as my copyist which means you work four hours a day five days a week at my house.” In exchange he gave me twenty dollars a week and orchestration lessons. He taught me the craft of orchestration, which is not the same thing as the art of composition. Virgil, then as now, was the most articulate musician who’s ever walked the street. I can remember every single word he said, and he didn’t repeat himself. I think he’s the greatest commentator on music ever—the most lucid, the most original, readable, intelligent—and his comments come from the inside out. He’s a composer commenting on music. His biases are from the composer’s standpoint, not the performer’s. And that’s absolutely right. He was then the most powerful critic in America and certainly the best critic.

Virgil conducted his business from his bed—with a telephone. He wrote his Sunday articles, and I eavesdropped on all of his conversations with the great and near-great while I was copying his music in the next room. He became to some extent a friend at that time. But he’s one of the few people who still intimidates me a little bit, and I still feel that I have to do my best, and if I do something bad, he’s going to scold me. But one could have a worse teacher than Virgil Thomson. He’s a good friend to this day.

Virgil’s music, I thought when I first saw it at the age of nineteen, was just a bunch of childish nonsense, and I still think so. Once I wrote a long assessment of his opera *Lord Byron* [1964]. Virgil was not thrilled, and he wouldn’t speak to me for about two years—he was shocked by it. He’s a very cool number, and he has all the answers. I wouldn’t have thought he was vulnerable at that point. I tried to recement our friendship, and finally it’s happened. I’ll never do that again. I value what I’ve gotten from him too much to go around saying other things in print. But for the record, I still think his music is utterly meaningless, devoid of anything that music should have as far as I’m concerned—in other words, a certain sensuality. When people tell me they love Virgil’s music, I feel the same as I do when they say they love Elliott Carter’s music—I don’t believe them. The operas certainly have lasting power. But they are not great because of the music, and they’re not great because of the words; they are great because of the words and the music. There’s something that happens between Stein and Thomson that works. Nobody else can do it, and there it is. I’m not moved by the music, but it’s very appealing in the context of those words.

—Ned Rorem

from OHAM interview with Martha Oneppo,
25 October 1983, New Haven, Connecticut

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Virgil Thomson with Ned Rorem, New York City, early 1960s

fectly well what he's done. In America when one writes a piece, he hasn't the vaguest idea of what he's done because there has never been a constant presence of criticism and self-awareness around here.

I knew perfectly well from having taught that you tell your students something three times, and by that time you believe it yourself, and you go on with that. Your mind becomes corseted with opinion, and you have no freedom of thought. As Gertrude Stein said so simply: "If you remember the history of your art while you are working, your work comes out dead. If you can keep your mind on what you are writing about, then it comes out live." Well, it's as simple as that, really as simple as that. But there is a place in your education when you've been taught to analyze all the time and to defend by analysis everything you've done, when it takes a year or two to break through that analytic conditioning.

You see, composition isn't something you decide. Composition is something you have a compulsion about. You can decide that you're going to learn to play the piano because that requires a method and work, and you can decide that you are going to master the techniques of composition. But you cannot decide that you are going to be a composer because the inspiration or the development may not occur. The Boulanger theory—and in general the European

theory—is that all musicians should have the same preparation: knowledge of the compositional techniques, ability to perform well on some instrument. You do not have to have read too much about the history of music, no. There's a lot of time for that. And anyway, the history of music changes about every twenty-five years. I think the young people can be spared a good deal of that if you can keep the musicologists out of their hair, because even if you are going to be a musicologist, you are much better off learning to play some instrument and to really understand the audibles in the overtone system and the historic ways of handling multiple voices.

I did what I did by instinct—that is to say, to leave that life, as at the same time I left the life of the professional organist; there also you are surrounded by other people's music—and went off to Europe without any money. I had a compulsion to do it that way. Nobody ever obliged me to do anything after I got grown up.

I went to Paris in 1921 as a student, and I don't feel I compromised anything by staying. I couldn't get any good work done here, and what am I in business for except to do good work? And by good work I mean work that pleases me.

Paris seemed to me like my hometown. I wouldn't go so far as to say that today Kansas City reminds me of Paris, but I think everybody's hometown is found in some kind of duplicate in Paris. Early on in Paris, Melville Smith, a wonderful musician, discovered Nadia Boulanger—actually before Aaron and I did, by several months. I went through the routines of strict counterpoint with Nadia, and I brought batches of exercises every time, and then whatever I had composed. You see, I was already twenty-five years old when I went there—with some of the younger people, I think she would suggest a kind of thing to write. Nadia's criticism is not necessarily verbal. She can verbalize very easily if she needs to, but the mere fact of her sitting right there beside you, reading your music and understanding it, turning to you and saying: "This is very nice" or "I don't think this quite sounds the way you wish it to" means that she is on the inside of the piece. By the time she gets through, she'll say, "a lovely idea," or "I have nothing to say about it." She said that to me once. Another time I'd done a very elaborate piece, and we'd worked on it together. When we finally got through, she said: "Well, it certainly is not the kind of music that I would write if I were going to write music, but I must say it's thoroughly successful." Artistically successful, she means—it comes off. It didn't matter so much what she said. When you're young, it's not easy to understand your own work. You have to have somebody understand it for you.

This was a musical communion matter, and you knew perfectly well that she knew what was in your piece, and you understood it that way too. It was the kind of understanding that takes place when people play duets or string quartets. They're in the same groove.

When you are young, you have enormous gratitude to your instructors who teach you something, and what she really did—and this is particularly effective with the foreign pupils—was to enable you to understand your own music. You see, Nadia's gift, beyond the ordinary gifts of first-class ear and first-class musical training—she can do all the things. Beyond that, the particular genius is criticism. She takes one look at a piece and instantly she knows what's in it—not only how it sounds, but what it means. Her ability to understand musical thought and expression is virtually infallible. I learned quite early, if I was in trouble, if there was a difficult passage, not to let her make suggestions, because her suggestions would be something out of the conservatory or organist's routine, absolutely corny and standard procedure. I remember a particular passage. She had a suggestion. I tried it. I never could like it, and so I never would do it. She wanted to have it played in Paris. Nobody ever understood why I wouldn't let that piece be played. She never understood. There was a little passage of about six measures that I didn't like. Then a couple of years ago I got it out and, all fresh, I made it my way, and it works, so it got printed and it gets played—an organ piece of some length. But I waited—what?—over fifty years before I did anything about it because I couldn't think of what to do. And she had kind of blanked me out on it by making a suggestion. For the most part, she doesn't make suggestions, and it's better. If you can make the student find his own solution, of course that's the thing.

The piece that opened the whole door to me was that Organ Symphony Aaron wrote for her. I would have liked to have written that, I thought that this was the voice of America in our generation. It spoke in the same way that Kerouac did thirty years later. Nadia thought that America was ready to take off musically. She was quite right. She could feel it.

I work wherever I live, wherever I happen to be. When I was younger, I used to do a great deal of writing while I was visiting people or sometimes even on railway trains. If I was living in Paris, I didn't want to be stuck there with my piano. I could go off on a trip to the country or even to Italy or anywhere I could afford to go and take my work with me, so I learned quite easily to work without an instrument. On a trip to Spain—oh, about '25 or '26—I sketched a whole fourth movement for my *Symphony on a Hymn Tune*,

which had been awaiting that for over two years. That doesn't oblige you not to check or proofread on an instrument. Memory may play you tricks. I am not sure it didn't occasionally play tricks on Beethoven—the fact that he hadn't heard for a long time—but nothing hindered the development of his musical thought, which grew in a very elaborate fashion in his older and deaf years. There have been a lot of deaf composers, you know. A composer who starts hearing his work performed when he is still young—oh, by five or more years of that kind of experience, he gets an auditory image of what the instruments are like, separately and together, and balances that you can't really make up out of a book or out of your own mind. Of course, nowadays I don't hear correctly, being partly deaf, the instruments do me no good because what I hear when I play the piano is not what I've written down—intervals are false. My creative process is carried out now without benefit of test. I no longer experience the intervallic phenomenon or the harmonic ones. That whole experience I'm sorry about because I liked it.

The way I write? Well, I like to write in pencil. I like always to be able to change my mind. I am very American about that. When I say “sketch,” I mean if I write a symphony or an act of an opera, the pencil thing is what I call a sketch. I write down in pencil how it's going to be, and from there I could go straight to ink, filling in a little bit, because sometimes you work fast and make a little note of what you are going to fill in—like writing in full orchestration. You don't stop for that. If your ideas are coming, anything that saves time is good. You don't want to be held up by mechanics. I have continued all my life to write words in pencil longhand because I can do it easier and faster than I could type. I learned to type when I was very young, and then I never used it.

I always have a few sizable sheets of cardboard to put music paper on, and you can hold it up on your knees in bed or in a chair. When I used to visit my family in the summertime when I was in college, my mother had, for sewing purposes, something which she called her lapboard. Did you ever see one? I didn't have to have a room with a table. I could just use that.

I like to make the piece flow from the beginning. It hangs together much better that way than if you think of a fine finale—and how you are going to get there, huh? It's much easier in a continuous flow to cut passages where your inspiration is a little weak or where you repeated yourself unnecessarily. It's much easier to cut than to add. Anyway, I like to begin at the beginning and go straight on.

Sometimes you have a length given. In writing for films, you practically always have a series of lengths because the film has been cut before you make the music. In that case, the length is given. There tends to be something like that very often in working for the ballet because the choreographer may say, with regard to the *pas de deux*, for instance—which is likely to be the center of any ballet—“I can make this last five minutes, but much beyond that I might have to repeat myself.” But if you are writing music out of your imagination, then you have no such limits, and you can make it any length that it feels like coming out. I usually let them alone to see what they are going to do, and I can tell several pages ahead when an end is coming—the end of a movement or the end of a whole piece. You can feel it kind of summing up or doing whatever it is that things do before they end.

You can't manipulate. The best you can do is to take dictation. Now you have to manipulate in certain passages for the kind of music that requires a calculation for formal or conventional reasons. You can't write a fugue without previously constructing subjects and countersubjects in such a manner that they can be put together upside down and in any position you wish. That you have to figure out, and the twelve-tone composers all have to figure out a viable row. You don't just hit on a row by accident, you know. It has to be a row of which the order as expressed by numbers is capable of interesting manipulation. There are plenty of occasions in music when you have to calculate, and of course orchestration is practically all calculating. But the final situation that you try for—or hope for, rather—is one in which you write it down as it comes to you very rapidly, and those are likely to be the most inspired passages, yes.

I am not a theologian. It might be the Holy Ghost [laughter]. It might be unconscious memory of all the music you ever heard in your life. In any case, it's something a little deeper than the surface of your mind, and if you can put the surface of your mind at rest and let the deeper parts come up spontaneously, then you get a deeper and more vivid result. Any poet knows that, and any composer knows that. If it could be figured out how to make art interesting and successful by thought, that could have been discovered centuries ago, and anybody could write a hit tune.

Everybody, I think, has to learn his own best working methods. I think it's likely to be between the ages of twenty-five and thirty that one learns those things, and you learn from finding out what you have done well and also—you talk to your friends. People don't have the same kind of working methods, and

they don't have the same kind of lives. The reason, I think, why artists of all kinds are most at home in great art centers is because there they see other artists all the time and find out what the various methods of work are, what kind of food life, exercise life, sex life, reading life, boozing or not boozing, drugs or not drugs—you have to find out for yourself what is a good creative hygiene, and sometimes people find that certain times of day are congenial. Many people, especially when they are young, like to work at night. The night working rarely survives forty, but a great deal of it does go on before that. I like to work in the morning and sometimes in the afternoon—and not so often at night, although it has happened you go out and have dinner with friends and come home and you are busy working on some long piece, and you find yourself refreshed and start doing a little bit, but it's rare in my hygiene that I work at night.

I have to feel good and to be at rest. When I was younger, I found that I worked awfully well in bed. As they say in France, the nervous system is only in repose in bed. But nowadays I don't work so much in bed. But I wait for the moment when I sort of automatically reach for a pencil. If it doesn't come, you're out of luck. But you have to keep waiting, and if it keeps not coming, then you give up the profession.

Poets and painters have a very different hygiene from us. Music takes a sufficient amount of time that it's awfully hard to get into trouble. You not only take the time to write down scores and all, but musicians are practically all performing musicians—you go to rehearsals and you play music and you give concerts. All that takes a lot of time in the day, running around town, so that music is a busy affair. The painters are not so busy. They wait till the light is good, and they sometimes paint till the light goes bad. In a dark city like Paris or San Francisco, the light is really good from about ten to three in the wintertime, and that's long enough for anybody to work till the light goes bad. Then they either make love to their model or quarrel with their wife, or go out to the café. But having worked that day, they have a perfectly clear conscience, so they are cheerful and jolly. The gay bohemian life always follows the painters because they are good for the evening. Musicians are not bohemian. They give a lesson or play a concert or copy some music or something. You don't see quite so many of them around in the evening. They live good middle-class lives for the most part. The poets and the literary people are all around, picking up atmosphere or quarreling.

The gentleman-composer—that is to say the fellow who has enough money not to work except at his music—has trouble getting his music around because the errands of his ordinary life don't take him out where the other composers are, so he stays home and wonders why his music doesn't get performed. It's because he is not really a part of the music world. Elliott [Carter] has always been around. Elliott never performed, but he has done lots of reviewing in his time. He makes it a point to go to everything. Besides which Helen [Carter] is an awfully good business manager, and she sees that he gets around, and they have people at the house and all that. Elliott thinks of the same audience Roger Sessions thinks of—the international modern-music audience. But Elliott's better at writing for it.

A specific assignment satisfies everything: if somebody offers you X thousand dollars to write a symphony—oh, I learned a long time ago—I say: “Well, I'll see if I can get an idea about that and I'll let you know.” I usually don't accept any advance until I find myself with a good idea starting. Then I say: “Okay, you can pay me half down now because it's going.” If it's theater, you have the idea given, you see, so there's no trouble there. The plot is there, the story is there, the words are there, and all you really have to find out is what the production is going to be like: Is this going to be a skimpy production or a sumptuous production? And you mustn't make sumptuous music for a skimpy production or skimpy music for a sumptuous one. It all has to follow a little bit the director's general concept.

I like working with all forms of show business, and I've worked with theater, the opera, films, ballet least of all. When I was younger, I thought ballet was quite wonderful—I believe young people always do—but I've outgrown my interest in the ballet. I think ballet has rather outgrown any possibility of serious interest in it, anyway. It's an enormous and gigantic business now. I saw Diaghilev's ballets in Kansas City in 1916, including Vaslav Nijinsky. The Germans didn't write ballet much. Ballet has always been a French affair, French and Franco-Russian. And there have been times when the Italians composed and made ballets. They haven't done so for, oh, a century or more. In America, my *Filling Station* of 1937 for Lincoln Kirstein's troupe was the first successful ballet score by my generation. Actually, Aaron had written a ballet for Ruth Page in Chicago several years before, [*Hear Ye! Hear Ye!*], but it didn't work very well. He did a very successful one, *Billy the Kid*, the year after *Filling Station*.

Some choreographers can hear music a bit. Some of them are real musicians, like Balanchine, and others have a very acute sense of musical style—Freddy Ashton, for example. I don't think Martha Graham ever had an enormous musical sense, but she works closely enough with her composers to manage to get a score which needn't interfere with her too much. The first ten or more years of her professional life, her scores were all written by her husband [Louis Horst] and to order. She could have so many measures of this and a bang-bang there and a foot on the ground there. Eventually somebody got it through her head that you don't get good music that way. Music has to be a little different from what's going on on the stage, and so being ambitious, she started ordering scores from composers. She could manage to postpone the definitive form of the dance until she had the music. She could work in the mind and around with it, but she wouldn't let the dance really crystallize until the music was there.

I love collaboration, but I love to collaborate with people that I like and understand. I've had some difficult experiences with people that I liked and trusted simply because they were having trouble with their work. Pare Lorentz, for instance, for making movies, was always very hard to work with, simply because he was inexperienced. He had to think everything out, and he had to worry about it because he wanted to get everything right. Pare was serious about film and music, but *Plow* [*The Plow That Broke the Plains*] and *The River* were the first films he ever made, and he was still feeling his way. The score for *Plow* still seems to me alive and reasonably fresh—written in 1936 when scored symphonic music for films was only five or six years old. I just got a book or two of cowboy tunes and found what I needed. In *The River* I used old hymn tunes. I played Pare the material from the folk tune books that I planned to use for *Plow* and got his approval. After the film was cut, I composed my musical sections to the timings and played them for him on the piano in front of a projection of the film. Then I orchestrated it, and it was recorded. For the concert versions, I don't rewrite the movie music. I just take excerpts long enough and play them as a suite. I've done about nine documentaries and only one fiction film, *The Goddess*. I like the documentary ones best.

I worked with [Robert] Bob Flaherty on *Louisiana Story*, and afterward he'd say: "I had to do an awful lot of trusting because you played all that music so perfectly terribly on the piano, I can hardly tell a thing about it." But he could tell quite enough to know that—at one particular passage, he said: "I don't think this works right like that." I said: "You are quite right. We can

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Virgil Thomson outside the Hotel Chelsea, his home in New York City, 1976

do it over,” which I did. It’s like a dress fitting, you know. Flaherty was the best man on a mix I ever worked with. We got a beautiful soundtrack. That score won me the first Pulitzer given to music for a film.

I like working for films. Even the most elaborately rehearsed orchestra or opera company is still improvisatory, whereas the film can be completely planned, corrected, and polished. You have to get the lighting right; you have to talk to people over and over; the speech must be right—everything has to be right. The film is a medium in which you can correct indefinitely, you see. In the thirties, the best composers wrote for film—Russian, English, French. A few good Americans, including Aaron and myself, have too. And George Antheil. It doesn’t go much further than that.

I don’t feel like a layman. I feel like a professional, and professionals are naturally interested in things that happen or could happen. And it doesn’t make the slightest bit of difference to me whether innovative music finds right off an enthusiastic public. The world is full of music that pretends to be

contemporary. They pretend it's a novelty, but it isn't. Give it twenty-five years and it'll all shake down anyway. It either is in accepted repertory or is out of accepted repertory.

There is no audience for electronic music. It's been in existence now for easily thirty years, and they've never turned up a public for it. They put it out over the radio, but, of course, everything is electronic over the radio. Even in Europe, where they do more experimental things than we do, they tend to put those electronic compositions on at midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning or off hours. They make them available. And the government-owned radio stations, of course, are theoretically available to all taxpayers. Any legitimate composer should be able to go into a radio station, even a foreigner. Foreigners go into the Italian, French, or German electronic studios or are even invited, and are given engineering help and all sorts of things. Not too many people play around with it anymore, and, you know, this isn't children's fun and games. But it sounds so terrible because it all comes over a loudspeaker, and the lack of limitation with regard to scales and intervals is a great disadvantage. It's like trying to make serious sculpture out of putty. You can do anything; consequently, nothing has any urgency. You can concoct electronic imitations of all musical instruments, but you can't invent a musical instrument by doing it that way because there is no necessary reason for any particular combination of overtones to have been chosen.

Anybody can use anything he wants to, but the twelve-tone period is a very strange one in the history of music. Every time I've tried serialism, I've found it deadening. There is no audience for it anymore. There never was. It was in the composers' minds that there might be. If Schoenberg and his two pupils, Berg and Webern, had not been such wonderful musicians so that some kind of expressive thing came through from time to time, the serial business would never have got anywhere.

The most interesting thing to me about chance operations is—and this, I think, was John Cage's discovery—that if you have a sophisticated method of chance like the Chinese dice game, you get extremely interesting results as mathematicians do with numbers. And actually, the combinations that come out through sophisticated chance games can be virtually identical with or undistinguishable from multiple rows, and multiple rows turned out to be so very complex and unrewarding to handle that they were early abandoned. Nobody does them anymore. It's too difficult. And anyway, no rows have any more value than the urgency underneath their adoption.

There is no point in reciting the story of my long friendship with Cage. We were very close friends, and we never openly had a break of any kind, but we kind of drifted apart at the time of, or subsequent to, rather, the writing of that book [*Virgil Thomson*, by Kathleen Hoover and John Cage, 1959]. I have no reproaches with regard to it. As a matter of fact, it was very elaborately and loyally put together. I still use the catalogue of works that he did because he is a marvelous bibliographer, and he very carefully analyzed musically every scrap of musical paper or manuscript. Oh, he went into the whole thing elaborately, and he liked the music. He was very fond of my music, and it isn't the same kind of music as his. And I liked his, which isn't the same as mine. But let's leave all that for subsequent historians. That's not for the parties involved to bring up.

There are some pretty good American operas. I think since they are in the American language you can include Menotti's operas. But there is not enough for a repertory. We've never taught them in schools and colleges. We were put through the symphonic and string quartet routines, and the music appreciation courses have been almost entirely involved with symphonic music and not theatrical music, so when the youngsters come out of even the best colleges with good music departments, you can't let them go on a paper and review music. I used to find when they would try to come and work for me that it takes two or three years just watching opera before they understand what it's all about. These people know all the Beethoven symphonies, let's say three or maybe five of Mozart, all of Brahms, batches of Tchaikovsky and Richard Strauss symphonic music, and if they are twenty-century-minded, they know Debussy and Ravel and Prokofiev and Stravinsky. They have never seen *Carmen* or looked at the score of *La Traviata*. They don't know what the problems of expressivity are, and they've never been explained the nature of open form. They only know the closed forms. Audiences were that way too in regard to *Four Saints*—the work is extremely hermetic, and it's hard to give a specific meaning to it, sentence by sentence. At the same time, audiences were perfectly furious that they could not hear exactly what was being spoken in song, because they did not wish to accept that to the built-in obscurity of the text there should be added the accidental obscurity of poor enunciation. Many singers are not very cooperative. In my case, it's the singers' fault if they don't do it right—because I showed them, and then if they don't, that means they're intoxicated with the sound of their own voice. I always liked Noël Coward's advice to young actors—"Just speak clearly and don't bump into people."

[1927 Mar 26]

27 RUE DE FLEURUS

My dear Virgil,

Arny does not eat lunch so I guess
it will be Wednesday dinner 7.30, that will
suit you or well will it not. As I have lots
of ideas and even some specimens. I have begun
Beginning of Studies for an Opera to be sung.
I think it should be late eighteenth century or
early nineteenth century sounds. Four sounds
in three acts. And others. Make it pentatonic. In
bells and gongs. All yours and then add this.
We must invent them. but my friend you come I
will show you a little bit and we will talk more ~~as comes over~~,
Always
yrs etc.

a

Correspondence between Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson regarding ideas for an opera,
early 1927

1927

20, rue de Berne
Friday

Dear Gertrude

I shall be delighted
to come on Wednesday. Reading
lately in encyclopedia about
saints. Teresa + Ignatius
Loyola might make a good
Spanish pair. I fancy
best plan would be fictitious
names, using as much of real
character and history as suits
the needs, but avoiding the
pretence of historical drama.

Love
Vigil

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Saint Ignatius (Edward Matthews) serenades Saint Teresa (Beatrice Robinson Wayne) in the original production of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, act I.
Hartford Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, 1934

Gertrude chose her own saints, and the other one, *The Mother of Us All*, is about American nineteenth-century political history. The details, naturally, she had to invent, but in both cases she made a sort of heroine who was a projection of herself; that is to say, a strong-minded woman. St. Teresa of Ávila and Susan B. Anthony, a suffragette. Gertrude had brains. She also had charm. In her funny way, she was rather a beauty. She looked like a Roman emperor, a miniature—she was only about five feet tall. Gertrude and I were close friends for twenty years, and we worked together and admired each other. It was a very rewarding friendship for me—and I believe it was for her.

We don't have a category of librettist in this country. I asked several poets for a libretto—Robert Lowell and [Robert Penn] "Red" Warren. They would all say "yes" but not do anything about it. I found a play [*Lord Byron*] by Jack Larsen that I liked very much. *Byron* has a plot that can be easily followed. I thought it would be nice to have something that made straightforward sense for a change. He mixed lines of Byron's poetry skillfully with his own so that the whole play was saturated in Byron's own language. Byron is a colossal subject. I like the way it came out. I think it's a good opera.

I came from Europe in the fall of 1940. I didn't have money and wasn't going to be earning any, so I came home. I took a job as music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* and stayed there until I had nothing more to say—fourteen years. I had not any experience at all with newspaper routines, but you learn those overnight. I've always been a fast writer. I had no trouble meeting deadlines—I like them. If you know how much time you've got, then you know what you can do. I think music reviewing should be a serious musical job. You must try not to be a victim of your power or start throwing your weight. Whenever I wrote about music, I was writing about my own profession and speaking from a responsible point of view. I wasn't teaching music appreciation not knowing anything about it. I was explaining music as I knew it and believed it to be my duty. All living musicians, including critics, are part of one great band or conspiracy for the defense of musical faith and its propagation. They are always treading on each other's toes, but they all have membership in the professional world of music. Their quarrels are family quarrels.

I can write quite easily, almost without correcting, except what you correct as you go along. Perhaps the only time I made extra drafts of things was on the biographical book [*Virgil Thomson*, 1966], because you don't know how to write about yourself. You have to find an attitude, and it takes some trial. I think there are about three versions of that. But otherwise I write straight off. I don't say I don't correct, but I don't do much making another version of things. I sort of know how I am going to start from the word go. I let it go where it goes.

I am not a careless writer. As I say, I don't mind correcting indefinitely and finding a better word or a more courteous way of saying something, but the main draft goes straight through. There is no point in getting angry to colleagues. Those are the people that you are going to live with all your life, whether you like their music or not, and liking it or not is the least interesting thing you can say about it. The most interesting thing you can do is to describe it because your attitude will come through automatically in your choice of words. You know as well as I do that in writing it's a willingness to tamper and correct until you get it acceptable to yourself, and you try it out on people—I have not been the least bit afraid of editorial help. I like it. You find out (I tell this to students all the time) you not only have to say what you mean, you have to be willing to mean what you have said.

Maurice [Grosser] always says—but this works in French just as well as it does in English—that the remarkably interesting thing about my writing or speaking is the extent, variety, and precision of vocabulary. Certain writers

have very large vocabularies and others very small ones. James Joyce had probably the largest vocabulary since Milton, and Milton probably had a larger vocabulary than Shakespeare.

When you are doing something that you know you are doing and have confidence in, it doesn't make any difference how much trouble it is. When women have babies they can expect nine months of quite a lot of trouble,

" . . . this is what Virgil Thomson said . . . "

Between Thomson and Copland, criticism of each other's music could be brutally honest, but it was softened by a touch of humor. Thomson described Copland and his "pals" in the League of Composers as the "up-and-at-'em commando unit." Copland countered by calling Virgil "one smart cookie," or with this adaptation of *Lincoln Portrait*, which he read at a birthday party in Thomson's honor:

He was born in Missouri, raised in Kansas City, and lived in Paris, France.

And this is what he said: This is what Virgil Thomson said: "I have never known an artist of any kind who didn't do better work when he got properly paid for it. Royalties and fees are to any composer a sweetly solemn thought." Always beware of ex-composers. Their one aim in life is to discourage the writing of music!

When standing erect he is five feet four inches tall. And this is what he said:

He said "A concert is a meal. It is a feast, a ham sandwich, a chocolate sundae, nourishment to be absorbed with pleasure and digested by unconscious processes."

Our friend Virgil is a quiet man.

Virgil is a quiet and a civilized man. But when he wrote of composer economics, this is what he said:

"The composer who lives by composing is a rare animal. No money is any better or any worse than any other money."

Virgil Thomson, best all-round music critic of these United States, is everlasting in the memory of those he criticized.

For on the battleground at Carnegie Hall, this is what he might have said:

He might have said: "That from these honored musicians we take increased devotion to that art for which they give the last full measure of devotion."

We here highly resolve that these artists shall not have performed in vain, and that this nation shall have a new burst of music and that encomiums *of* Virgil Thomson—*by* Virgil Thomson—and *for* Virgil Thomson—shall not perish from the earth.

6

200 Paris, France.

and lived in Illinois.

And this is what he said:

This is what Abe Lincoln said: *Virgil T Said!*

L'istesso tempo

"I have never known an artist of any kind, who didn't do better work when he got properly paid for it."

"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present."

Royalties and fees are to any composer a sweetly solemn thought."

The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our

simile

210

case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.

We must disenthral ourselves and then we shall save our country."

Always beware of ex-composers. Their one aim in life is to discourage the writing of music!

especially in the first two or three, huh? I think any composer knows after the first time he's ever written a work that communicates that he is going to have a baby and not an elephant. If you've learned that you have the power of communication, then your life is simple because you are like a pregnant woman or you are like an athlete: you have to do your practice, keep your health, keep your inspiration, keep your intellectual contents and your energies, and above all keep relaxed, because it can't come through unless you are relaxed.

You could look back with nostalgia to anything. I've always had nostalgia about difficult situations—say, in World War I, the dust storms in Oklahoma, and living in a temperature of ten below zero in tents. It challenged everybody and is something to be remembered. You are nostalgic for when you are young and wanted to do and be all sorts of things. Eventually, you settle for what you get.

Aaron Copland (1900 – 1990)

Where did Nadia Boulanger get a sense of what was “American”? She had never been to the States and was hardly the type to hang out in jazz clubs late into the night. Yet she was convinced that there was something different about American music. She heard that difference in the earliest pieces by a gawky young Jewish boy from Brooklyn, New York. From the start, Boulanger sensed that Aaron Copland had special qualities. Her sensitive ear caught a rhythmic energy in the few works he had written before coming to France. Boulanger’s belief in Copland’s talents began at the Conservatoire américain at the Palace of Fontainebleau in 1921 and never wavered throughout both their long lives.

Through Nadia Boulanger and Rubin Goldmark, his former teacher in Manhattan, Copland received a musical education that was essentially European. While working on his autobiography, sixty years after his studies with Goldmark, Copland examined six exercise books he had used during his lessons. “That’s his handwriting,” Copland exclaimed: “Avoid parallel fourths! Do not let the voices be more than an octave apart! Avoid unisons and octaves as much as possible!” Copland explained, “You realize that I did a lot of that stuff with a tongue in cheek. I did it because I thought I had to in order to get a required technique. He said it was necessary, so I took his word for it. And maybe it did have its value.”²¹ Goldmark was so determined that his students have proper formal training that he refused to allow Copland to leave for France until he mastered classical sonata form. Boulanger went even further in requiring her students to study traditional techniques of European composition, such as solfège and score reading.

In addition to teaching the craft of composition, Boulanger considered the well-being of her students her responsibility. She urged them to broaden their in-

“ . . . look what he brings me!”

I used to meet Copland at lessons with Goldmark. I had my lesson after his. Goldmark would tell me, “I can get so angry. Here’s this very, very talented fellow, extremely musical and gifted. I want him to write exercises, so I give him fugues. Look what he brings me!” Copland was bringing very advanced things. Although he was old-fashioned, Goldmark didn’t object so much to the style Copland was writing, but that he did it for exercises rather than for composition. He wanted him to do the exercises to get the routine, the training.

—Leopold Godowsky II
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
12 February 1980, Westport, Connecticut

terests to include literature and the other arts. Her correspondence files in the library of Fontainebleau hold a quantity of letters to and from students with whom she maintained affectionate relationships that extended to spouses and children. It was Mademoiselle's wish to encourage the individual interests of her students. With Copland, it was his leaning toward experimental music—he could share this with his teacher, instead of keeping it to himself, as he had with Goldmark. Copland described his study with Boulanger as “the decisive musical experience of my life. She inspired me with confidence in my own creative powers.”²²

Copland's three years of study with Boulanger, surrounded by the worldly atmosphere of Paris in the twenties, opened the door to the international world of the arts for Copland. He was not a revolutionary, intent on throwing over tradition. While eager to move on, he was respectful of the achievements of the great composers of the past. Not only was his education European, so were his influences. When asked who he considered the greatest composer, he would invariably name Bach. He admired Brahms, and as a very young man even attempted a reduction of the Second Symphony. He also arranged several Chopin preludes for cello and piano. Under Boulanger's tutelage, Copland adopted Fauré and Stravinsky as favorites; in fact, he based an early piece for string quartet on the letters of Fauré's name.²³ When writing a major work, Copland would begin by studying established pieces in the genre. The writer Gerald Sykes, who lived with Copland during the composition of the Piano Variations, said: “Aaron was terribly systematic in his preparation for this piano piece. He brought tons of music with him and began by playing works from as far back as the fifteenth century, then on to pieces by Mozart, Haydn, and others. As time went on, Aaron moved into works by Brahms and Schumann. He developed an affection for Liszt. Meanwhile, he was making notes for the Piano Variations.”²⁴

For Copland, who never attended college, the Paris years from 1921 to 1924 were characterized by an intensity comparable to that experienced by others during their college years. France made a deep impression; writers, painters, and musicians had gravitated to Paris. Copland's roommate and lifelong friend Harold Clurman said that when people would ask about Paris in the twenties, he would reply, “We were very serious about the arts, but we had a lot of fun too, going around to places like Sylvia Beach's bookstore and catching glimpses of famous writers and seeing the composers and poets in the cafés and restaurants. When people ask, ‘What was Joyce like?’ or Pound, or Satie, I have to laugh, thinking of us two green-horn kids. Twenty years old we were!”²⁵ No wonder Copland stayed in France three years instead of one, as originally intended. And how fortunate that his parents agreed to pay his way, not on a grand scale, but enough to manage, even if it meant that he and Clurman lived without heat or much comfort. As with many other young men at the time, Copland fell in love with Paris, not so passionately that he became an expatriate, but with an enduring fondness. His New York accent and his

frequent use of American slang expressions—“Gee Lucifer,” “Holy Moses,” “swell,” and “golly”—were sprinkled with French phrases. One might be greeted at the door of his home with: “*Bonjour!* Gosh, you came all the way here to see me!” And lunch always ended with a breezy “*au travail.*”

For many years, and from wherever he was in the world, Copland sent every new piece to his former teacher. She would thank him, often with effusive praise for the music, occasionally offering criticism or suggestions. Copland listened respectfully but rarely made changes recommended by others—even Boulanger. Copland worked patiently and slowly—he described himself as “a work-a-year man.” He might leave a piece and return to it several times to ensure that its final form satisfied him.²⁶ The Copland catalogue is not large; however, as conductor Leonard Slatkin pointed out, most composers have highs and lows, but with Copland, everything is of the highest quality.

Looking back, Copland would describe his good fortune by saying simply, “I’m a lucky guy.” He meant that he was in the right place at the right time—finding Nadia Boulanger at Fontainebleau and meeting the great Russian conductor Serge Koussevitzky just as he was about to assume the position as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The timing coincided exactly with Copland’s return to the States. Copland’s first commitment upon his return from France in 1924 was the piece he had promised Koussevitzky before they left Paris. The Symphony for Organ and Orchestra was premiered in New York and Boston early in 1925. It caused a stir and made Copland’s name known in the world of concert music. He was the one to watch—some called him a “wild-eyed modernist”; others thought of him as the leading young American composer. The critic Paul Rosenfeld, who supported Copland when others were scathingly critical, described him in his twenties—“a slim, be-glassed, shy and still self-assured young fellow with the aspect of a benevolent and scholastic grasshopper.”²⁷

While Copland was in Europe, it gradually became clear to him that there was concert music with a French sound and a German sound, and he began to think, “Why not an American sound?” Copland realized that jazz was quintessentially American, and he knew that it was the most direct way of projecting an American sensibility. His decision to use jazz idioms in symphonic works was not original; others had done so before him—Stravinsky, Milhaud, Gershwin. Copland began by incorporating jazz into such concert pieces as *Music for the Theatre* (1925) and the Piano Concerto (1926), both commissioned and premiered by Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Copland then turned to a different style of composition, but jazz and polyrhythms were always in his music, even the most abstract works, such as the Piano Variations (1930) and the Short Symphony (1932–1933). These hard-hitting, uncompromising, and difficult pieces were so admired that they ensured Copland’s position as the leader in the movement for modern music. Ned Rorem said, “Aaron Copland wasn’t the only one, but he was the chief one whose

SA der NSDAP
Standarte 124
Abt. A. 16 Br. B. No. 2383
Betr: Keinesfalls erlaubte
musikalische Werke.
Bezug: o.V.
Anlagen: -0-

Ravensburg, den 2. November 1935

Sturmabn. I/124
II/124
III/124
MZ u. SZ 124

Nachstehende Abschrift über verbotene musikalische
Werke zur Kenntnisnahme und unbedingten Einhaltung übersandt.

Abschrift!

Der Präsident
der Reichskulturkammer

1. Sept. 1935

Betr: Keinesfalls erlaubte musikalische Werke.

Werke nachstehender Komponisten sind ab sofort nicht
mehr in irgendwelche Spielfolgen deutscher Rundfunksender oder
Theaterinstitute aufzunehmen:

Abraham, Paul	Bissler, Hanna	Achron, Josef
Alwin (eigentlich Pinkus), K.	Antheil, George	Barnas, Jessay
Becker, Conrad	Benatzky, Ralph	Benjamin, Arthur
Berens, Henry	Berg, Alban	Berte, Emil
Bloom, Ernst	Bröcher, Gustav	Casella, A.
Castellucio, Fedesco	Copland, Aaron	Dessau, Bernhard
Dessau, Paul	Elkus, Alb., Israel	Erwin, Ralph
Eysler, Edmund	Fall, Richard	Feinberg, Samuel
Fitelberg, Jerzy	Franchetti, Alberto	Franco, Sam
Frenkel, Stefan	Fried, Oskar	Friedheim, Artur
Gal, Hans	Geiger, Jay	Geiger, Max
Gern, K.	Gilbert, Jean	Gilbert, Robert
Dobrowen, Jessay	Dresden, Sam	Dushkin, S.
Goldmark, Rubin	Goldschmidt, Adalbert v.	Goldschmidt, Berthold
Golysehoff, Jof	Gross, Wilhelm	Trünberg, Louis
Grünfeld, Alfred	Gunsbourg, Raoul	Guttmann, Artur
Hauer, Jos. Matthias	Herrnried, Robert	Heymann, Hans
Hirsch, Hugo	Hirschberg, Walter	Hollaender, Friedrich
Holländer, Gustav	Holländer, Viktor	Horenstein, Jascha
Horwitz, Karl	Istel, Edgar	Jacobi, Wolfgang
Jarno, Georg	Jennitz, Alexander	Jokl, Georg
Kanitz, Ernst	Kaskel, Karl von	Katz, Erich
Klemperer, Oskar	Klemperer, Otto	Krein, Alex
Krein, Grigori	Wolfsch, Julius	Gressin, Michael
Godowsky, Maximilian Leop.	Goetzl, Anselm	Lara, Jaidore de
Lazarus, Gustav	Leichentritt, Hugo	Lilien, Kurt
Lopatnikow, Nikolai	Mandl, Richard	Migot, George
Misch, Ludwig	Moritz, Edward	Nadel, Arno
Ornstein, Leo	Rathaus, Karol	Satie, Erik
Schalit, Heinrich	Schitomirski, Alexand.	Schnabel, Artur
Schattenholz, Leo	Schramm, Paul	Schulhoff, Erwin
Stein, Erwin	Sulzbach	Szenkar, Eugen
Uthmann, Gustav-Adolf	Vogel, Wladimir	Weigl, Karl
Weill, Kurt	Weinberger, Jaromir	Weiner, Leo
Weprik, Alex	Winternitz, Arnold	Wolfsch, Julius
Krein, Grigori	Krenek, Ernst	Kuttewitzky, Serge
Wolfsch, Julius	Zadora, Michael	Zolotarew, W.

gez. Hinkel

Geschäftsführer der Reichskulturkammer in Sonderauftrag
(Stempel - Reichskulturkammer)

F.F.R.d.A.
gez: Unterschrift.
Sturmhauptführer.

Der Führer der Standarte 124:

u. d. F.

Verw.-O./Truppführer.

Letter from the Nazi Party to the president of the Office of Culture, Ravensburg, Germany, listing "degenerate" artists, 1935. Copland's name appears in the middle column.

new works we were all avid to hear. There hasn't been another man since then from whom all young composers await each new endeavor with bated breath."²⁸

In the late thirties and forties, Copland recognized the potential of American folk song to achieve a distinctive national sound. He turned to composing in a style that incorporated folk tunes with the aim of reaching a larger audience, such as the cowboy ballets *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*, as well as *Appalachian Spring*. These works, and the patriotic pieces *Fanfare for the Common Man* and *Lincoln Portrait*, made Copland a musical hero to the American public. He was perfect for the part: modest and humble in his origins, confident and elegant in his plain way, splendidly talented, a fine spokesman and writer, and a self-made success. Ironically, in 1935 Copland's name appeared in Nazi letters banning composers of "degenerate art." The list of composers whose musical works were "under no circumstances permitted" included 112 musicians, among them Antheil, Berg, Bloch, Casella, Copland, Dessau, Goldmark, Jacobi, Klemperer, Krenek, Ornstein, Satie, Schnabel, and Weill.

What became known as the American sound in concert music derived from Copland's style. He composed film scores that have become prototypes for generations of film composers, and a wide range of music, from solo pieces to large symphonic works. His musical signature became as widely known and as distinctive as his personality. However, Copland was never entirely happy about what he consid-

" . . . treating me as though I was a real composer . . . "

Copland never held a university position but he taught at Tanglewood for twenty-five years. Among his many well-known students was the composer Jacob Druckman.

Copland was really the most amazing teacher. When I first went up to Tanglewood to study with him, I thought of Copland as representing particularly a kind of neo-classic Americana, which he certainly was in those years, and I thought he would be unsympathetic to other kinds of music, but it was not the case at all. He was very erudite, and he was able to criticize twelve-tone composers as well as somebody working closer to his own style. He was an extraordinary teacher. I hear from people that Copland keeps mentioning my name and introducing me places. He was supportive in the sense of being interested in what I was doing and treating me as though I was a real composer, which was perhaps even more necessary than opening doors for me.

—Jacob Druckman

from OHAM interview with Joan Thompson,
16 November 1978, New York City

“That much generosity of spirit . . .”

I was at Copland’s house one weekend, and Sunday morning he suddenly was in a suit and out the door—then he came back late and didn’t say anything—so I didn’t ask. And it turned out, his sister had died, and he had gone to the funeral. But that was his style. After I got to know him at Tanglewood that summer, I would go up and spend a weekend. I would play music for him, and we’d talk, and he had a wonderful couple who would cook for him. He was a lot of fun. The geniality he had in front of five thousand people, the way he talked or conducted—that was the way he was in private. He didn’t get catty. He didn’t like to gossip. He was in private very open about being a gay man. He joked about it. It was perfectly natural. In the period I knew him, he did not have any lovers or boyfriends around—that had all happened before. So I don’t know that part of his life which was probably much more intense and emotional. But from the time I knew him he seemed to be on his own. You know, it is really amazing that most of the great American composers have been gay men. It’s never brought out. In fact, I think people are ashamed of it, but it is true. Aaron had a number of lovers, and I guess he decided that being alone was enough. He always had cute guys around, and it was fun.

The way I met him was kind of interesting. A friend said, “Why don’t you send your music to Copland.” I said, “What would be the point?” I had never met him. But I did. I sent a tape. And nothing happened. Six months later I got a commission from the Fromm Foundation and was invited to go to Tanglewood. This was an enormous thing for someone like me, an unknown, to get. I got to Tanglewood and met Aaron Copland, and we became friends. In the course of the twenty years I’d known him, he never said that he had anything to do with that first commission. It just seemed to drop out of heaven. And that was very much Copland’s way. Things would drop in my lap occasionally—a conductor would do a score, totally inappropriately: I was too unknown to have that conductor be interested—where I am sure he said a word. He didn’t make you pay for it one way or another, the way most other composers inadvertently do. It was wonderful, the coincidence of that much talent and that much generosity of spirit.

—David Del Tredici

quoted from radio documentary *Will the Real Aaron Copland Please Take a Bow*,
broadcast 12 November 2003, BBC radio 3, acquired Mark Lowther

ered an overemphasis of the Americana aspect of his work, or with titles bestowed on him such as Dean of American Music, President of American Composers, and even Virgil Thomson's sly version, Mother of Us All. Copland wanted people to recognize his broader reach and hoped that someday the more abstract works he referred to as his "neglected children" would come into the repertory.

In the 1950s Copland's colleagues, including an early biographer, Arthur Berger, preferred the abstract works, especially the Piano Variations, and considered his ballets and film scores lightweight. Copland protested to Berger about dividing his works into popular and serious. Copland's friend Leonard Bernstein agreed with him; as early as 1938 he responded to charges that *El Salón México* was "light": "That angers me terrifically. I wish these people could see that a composer is just as *serious* when he writes a work, even if the piece is not defeatist (that Worker word again) and *Weltschmerz*-y and misanthropic and long. Light piece, indeed. I tremble when I think of producing something like the Salon."²⁹

The conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, who knows Copland's music well, points to the presence of Copland's musical personality in all of his works: "The same musical gestures that can only be Copland, are in *El Salón México* and the Piano Variations."³⁰

Following World War II, the mood of the country changed. Few composers were interested in folk songs or patriotic pieces. The Cold War had its chilling effect on the arts. Abstraction took center stage in the visual arts; its counterpart in music was serialism. The effect on Copland is difficult to measure. His own assessment was that the twelve-tone method freshened his palate and enabled him to change, not only with the times but "within myself." What is not debatable is the unfortunate effect of the new aesthetic on the popularity of tonal composers; in the eyes of colleagues and younger composers, they were considered *passé*. Copland was a prime victim. He continued to compose through the 1960s, but his compositional creativity gradually waned, while his conducting career escalated. Conducting brought many pleasures: the joy in sharing music with performers, as well as the excitement of travel. Conducting engagements increased during the seventies and continued until the early eighties. When asked why he no longer composed, Copland would respond honestly, "The ideas stopped coming," or "Other people retire at age seventy-five; why not a composer?"

Copland was the first of the "good citizen" composers, setting an example to others by helping composer colleagues and improving the status of contemporary American music. Copland is well known for his work to establish composers' rights. American composers needed someone to direct public attention to their talents, and Copland, a born leader, was that person. Among the groups he participated in, usually as president, founder, or director, were Cos Cob Press, Copland-Sessions Concerts, Young Composers Group, League of Composers, American Composers

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

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Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland corresponded for fifty years. At first, the salutations were formal, but as their friendship deepened, Dear Aaron/Dear Leonard was replaced by: Young Charmer!, Old Charmer, Dear Philharmoniker, Judgenose, Aaron Liebchen, Aaron wisest of men, Lensk, and Aaron foremost of men. Shown here is an early note from Copland to Bernstein, ca. 1938, and a later one from Bernstein to Copland, 1978.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Alliance (ACA), American Music Center (AMC), Yaddo, MacDowell Colony, American Academy of Arts and Letters, Koussevitzky Foundation, and many more.

Copland's dedication to the cause of American music continues after his death: his estate was left to the music world, with instructions that a fund be created with a board of directors initially chosen by him to support contemporary American music. Copland would be surprised and delighted to know that the Aaron Copland Fund for Music distributes more than a million dollars a year to new music activities, large and small, across the country. Copland's home in Peekskill, New York, is owned and successfully managed by a dedicated group of musicians and Westchester County residents. It is set against a hillside, with a distant view of the Hudson River, and is used primarily as a retreat for composers, known as Copland House. Copland would be pleased to know that music is still being composed in his studio.

Remembering Copland

Copland admired the oral history project and book on Charles Ives; he considered its multilevel view of a composer a unique method for biography. When OHAM was founded, he readily agreed to be one its first major interviewees. Copland took the interviews seriously and set time aside for them. As genial as he was, he was not an easy person to interview: his responses were directly to the point; he would not ornament for the sake of making conversation; and he did not gossip about other musicians (although he enjoyed hearing gossip from others). Copland preferred to talk in general terms about his music, never in analytic jargon, and he would joke when faced with a theorist's strict analysis of a piece, saying, "Did I write that?" Scores and sketches of his pieces would stimulate him to turn to the piano (which he could do directly from his desk), and make specific comments on the material.

The extensive interviews made with Copland in 1975 and '76 were intended for the archive; there was no plan for a biographical project. But in 1977, when Copland saw the lengthy transcripts of his oral history, he said, "That looks like the basis of the autobiography I always intended to write but never got around to." We began to organize the interviews with a view toward publication. The transcripts were far from finished products—a great deal of written documentation was yet to be examined, and additional interviews had to be made with friends and collaborators. I had access to all materials, including correspondence, sketches, and manuscripts. The collection was in a small basement room flanked by the washing machine and dryer. I could hear Copland at the piano in the studio above, occasion-

ally breaking into one of his songs—"Going to Heaven" was a favorite, and the folk song "I Bought Me a Cat." He would always clap twice before the end phrase of each stanza—"and the cat said fiddle-eye-fee." Invariably, he would break into delighted laughter at himself. "I sang in the chorus at Boys' High, you know," he would explain. Copland's papers were so copious that the book project, originally planned as a single volume, became two: *Copland: 1900 Through 1942*, was published in 1984; *Copland Since 1943* followed in 1989.

Copland has been described as circumspect about his personal life and private about partners and friends, but it was clear that to a homosexual man with no immediate family, friends were especially important. One of the closest was Harold Clurman. From Paris years on, Copland and Clurman were never out of touch. Clurman was an extrovert and a "ladies' man" who told his troubles to his friend and sought advice from him. Leonard Bernstein commented, "That he and Harold Clurman were roommates in Paris is one of the incredible facts about Aaron. And they loved each other so! When I talked to Harold about Aaron, his face would light up. But can you imagine two less likely roommates? They were such different kinds of people." "Lenny" himself could not have been a more different personality than Copland, yet the correspondence between the two reveals affection, trust, and respect deeper than has been previously known. Their relationship lasted without a break from 1937 until Bernstein's death—less than two months before Copland's—in 1990.

Another close friend and colleague was Minna Lederman, who noted: "Aaron likes things to go along agreeably. He has a self-preserving sense of not wasting himself." Copland was reserved, but not always, nor to everyone. Ned Rorem pointed out, "People are inclined to sanctify him, as though he had no temperament or sexual urges at all! I have seen Aaron elated; I have seen him depressed, dark, near tears. He never really talked about his personal life, except elusively."

When a celebrated person chooses to keep his personal life private, it is assumed such a life does not exist. It is perhaps a surprise to hear Schoenberg's children refer to him as Daddy, or to discover love letters between young Harmony and Charles Ives. Similar reactions would come from intimate letters between Copland and Victor Kraft, showing a playful, loving, even silly Copland, or to Rosamond "Peggy" Bernier, "the only woman I might have married." In letters, Copland addressed her as "Darling Peggley" and in November 1970: "Can it possibly be more than thirty years since we first met? . . . It warms me just to think of you and I love you dearly . . . Aaron."

Copland suffered from a mild memory loss that worsened in his late seventies. One day, he returned from his habitual walk to the mailbox, shaking his head and holding a report from a doctor who had been recommended by Bernstein. The report followed a recent examination. Copland said, "It doesn't sound good," handing

When I think of you I get philosophic-minded.
No, you don't seem like a 'bore' to me. You never
are. But I am pretty well convinced that I'm not good
for you. (I get a lump in my throat as I write it.)
It's a body blow to my pride to think that our being together
all these years has not been constructive from your angle.
That's been one of life's major surprises - and that's why
I get philosophic-minded when I think of you. I
naturally had the illusion that I could bring nothing
but good to our relationship. Now we both see that
you have to go it alone, - or better still, with a girl
to help you. It's as simple as that. Fortunately it
isn't the case or I'd ~~get~~ ^{be} sentimental!

Excerpt from letter, Aaron Copland to Victor Kraft, 2 June 1950

the paper to David Walker, his assistant. The diagnosis was "diffuse cerebral atrophy."
(The term Alzheimer's Disease was not in common use at the time.)

Copland did not discuss his life as a homosexual, nor did he choose to include the subject in his autobiography. But he often mentioned "living with Victor" and with others at various times. It is important to remember that Copland's early years predated the sexual revolution and gay rights. He was confident in who he was, and he lived a normal but discreet life. When faced with Bernstein's more flamboyant behavior, Copland was embarrassed, but the most he would say in criticism was "There's only one Lenny!"

In an interview, Bernstein expressed his admiration for Copland's early acceptance of his homosexual identity: "Fifty, sixty years, let's say half a century before 'coming out,' Aaron came out in the sense that 'I am what I am.' He came out to himself. He made a decision that lasted his whole life, which has to do with truth, plainness—think how brave that is!" Another colleague, the composer Arthur Berger, explained that so many composers were homosexual that they did not feel outside the norm but inside a kind of special society. And the composer William Schuman described the slight but unmistakable change of atmosphere when he entered a room of composer friends with his wife: "It was the rest of us who felt left out," he said.

Copland's later life was filled with one musical success and glamorous event after another. He received not only virtually every honor in the music world but tributes that were normally given to heroes and world leaders. He was presented with the coveted Medal of Freedom in 1964, a Kennedy Center Honor in 1979, and the highest award that can be made to a civilian, the Congressional Gold Medal, in

1986. During the 1979 Kennedy Center Honors, an official car complete with an attractive female Marine in full uniform transported Copland and guests to the White House. Copland, elegant in his formal attire, was searching anxiously through his pockets. When asked if he needed help, he replied seriously: "Well, I always heard one must have a social security card to get into the White House." The Marine turned to him with a smile: "Mr. Copland, I don't think you will need it tonight."

Another special tribute was a Presidential Medal of the Arts, awarded annually to artists and patrons who have made exceptional contributions to the arts in America. In 1986 I was Copland's representative for the event. Preceding a luncheon at the White House, those accepting awards were briefed, and the floor was marked to indicate exactly where the president and participants were to stand. Among the honorees was the short-story writer Eudora Welty. At lunch, First Lady Nancy Reagan talked about the memoirs she was planning, and another guest whispered, "two mil advance." Nancy Reagan turned to the author and said, "Yes, and now, Miss

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Welty, I must learn how to write!" Luckily, the soup was served at that moment, and Welty simply responded, "My, this soup is good! It has curry and apple—it's lovely, don't you think?" End of discussion.

The president stood in the wrong place when the presentations were made, rehearsal and floor markings notwithstanding. The medal, enclosed in a wooden box, was heavy, and the elderly honorees staggered backward as they were handed it. The choreographer Agnes de Mille, always feisty and independent, valiantly accepted her box from a wheelchair. Later, back in Peekskill, Copland enjoyed a detailed report about the event. He looked at the medal and said with a grin, "What am I to do with this one!?" He playfully placed it around the neck of his large, beautiful Great Dane—named Nadja.

Birthdays were often the occasions for Copland festivals. Copland took them in stride, saying, "If they are playing concerts of all me, I'm all for it"; sometimes, when the events were celebrated before his actual birthday, he said laughingly, "Don't rush me! Don't rush me!" One of the last gala Copland birthday tributes was his eighty-fifth, planned as a reunion at Tanglewood by Bernstein. The composer Daron Hagen was with Copland and friends as he approached the Shed at Tanglewood. As he walked down the aisle, the audience of about twelve thousand rose spontaneously like a tidal wave, and then a tremendous crash of applause followed. Hagen reports that Copland shed tears that day.

The memorial for Leonard Bernstein at Carnegie Hall took place on 14 November 1990: an unforgettable and moving tribute. The fourteenth of November was always a significant date for Bernstein. It was Copland's birthday, and the day on which Bernstein met him in 1937. He never forgot a Copland birthday from then on. Coincidentally, it was also the date when Bernstein took Bruno Walter's place at the New York Philharmonic in 1943. The entire world knew Leonard Bernstein had died—all but his friend, Aaron Copland. It had been decided that the older composer should not be told. On that day, Copland was home alone, surrounded by drawings made by children from the local schools. He sat in front of the studio window where he could see the sun fading over the river. He accepted my flowers with a smile and his characteristic surprised expression. "For me? Oh, how nice!" Since there was no birthday cake, a nurse found an apple pie at a local shop; we inserted a candle and sang "Happy Birthday, dear Aaron." Somewhere within, Copland knew this small party was especially for him.

—V.P.

quotations from conversations or OHAM interviews with Perlis:
Bernstein, 22 September 1983, Fairfield, Connecticut; Lederman, 17 September 1908, New York City;
Rorem, 21 January 1987, New Haven, Connecticut

[To view this image, refer to
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Aaron Copland, Vivian Perlis, and Copland's dog Nadja, Peekskill, New York, ca. 1988



AARON COPLAND

From audio and video interviews with Vivian Perlis,
23 December 1975 to 24 June 1978, Peekskill, New York

I have never been a very good sailor, and the voyage to France lasted for seven days. It seemed forever. On the way over, I got friendly with a guy called Marcel Duchamp. He was always reading his book in a deck chair. He never looked out over the ocean and never seemed interested in the other passengers. We were seated at the same dining table, and he seemed to take an interest in me. I was going to France for the first time, and he had spent a couple of years in America, and he was rather solicitous. He was a little older than I was. I remember when we got off the boat he rode in a taxi with me to the hotel [Hotel Savoy, rue de Vaugirard], and I saw him a couple of times after that. In later years I spoke to his wife and said: "Did Marcel ever connect me with the student he befriended on the boat?" "Oh, yes," she said, "Sure, he did."

My day of arrival in France: it was very early in the morning. The whole ship had to get up at about 5 A.M. to be ready to get off the boat at 8 A.M., and everybody in tourist class was hanging over the deck to get the first glimpse of France, just beginning to rise from the sea out of the fog. And there was Duchamp in the back, sitting in his deck chair, playing chess with himself; that was his great hobby. I was terribly impressed by his independence of mind.

I went to Fontainebleau, and I wasn't interested in harmony at all. It was old stuff to me. I had done counterpoint and composition with Rubin Goldmark for four years. I really went to the school because I was scared of going to France all alone. It seemed like a more sensible way of introducing myself to French musical life, being with a bunch of Americans at the palace in Fontainebleau. It didn't matter whether the teaching was good or poor from my standpoint. It was just better than going to Paris all by myself, not knowing anybody.

At Fontainebleau I was handed over to the head composition teacher of the Paris Conservatoire, Paul Vidal, and he turned out to be another version of Mr. Goldmark. He was a solidly trained, conservative man, known to the musical world in Paris as one of the top composers of the day—certainly one of the top teachers of the day—but he had nothing to tell me that was of interest.³¹

It's perfectly possible that I might never have had any contact with Boulanger if it wasn't for the enthusiasm of the gal who sat next to me at lunch, Miss Djina Ostrowska, who kept urging me to come and visit Mademoiselle

[To view this image, refer to
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Aaron Copland with landlady, Fontainebleau, France, July 1921

Boulanger's harmony class. I said: "Well, you know, I've had four years of harmony. I am not interested in harmony classes." And she said: "Just go and see how she does it." So I allowed myself to be persuaded. I don't remember what Boulanger was doing, harmonically speaking, that was so striking. It was more the sense of warmth of the personality that was very striking—and the sense of involvement in the subject—that made it seem much more lively than I ever thought harmony could be—a sudden excitement about it all, and how it was the basis of everything when you really thought about it.

It took a lot of battling to convince myself that I ought to study composition with her, because the idea was just too revolutionary. I couldn't think of a single composer in the history of music who had ever studied composition with a woman teacher, and I thought it would sound rather strange to write home and say that I had found a French woman that I was going to study with.

She must have been only thirty-four when I began studying with her. But she seemed like a middle-aged woman. It never occurred to me she was thirty-four. I thought she was forty-five—that's the air she had. Her sister had died in 1918, a few years before I arrived on the scene. It was a great tragedy. Nadia came of a musical family, a very musical milieu. Her sister had been the first woman in French history to win the Prix de Rome, and the father was a professor of singing at the Conservatoire. So she was right in the middle of everything by birth, you might say. Yet at that time she didn't have the position that she now has. There weren't that many people aware of her, but the local musical world—those with more avant-garde taste—were certainly aware of her.

Her mother was always very present in the apartment. She was a very strong-minded Russian woman, not the sort of mother who just faded out of the picture. They used to converse in Russian. I don't know how good Nadia's Russian was, but it served for simple conversation. The mother was very different by temperament from Nadia. Nadia is rather prim. Her mother was very outspoken, rather Rabelaisian, I thought, at times. She was a very healthy woman, full of vim and vigor. She liked to shock Nadia, it seemed to me, instead of the other way around.

It was more than the student-teacher relationship with Nadia. On the other hand, there is always a certain reserve with a French lady who is older than you are. She always had a sort of tone about her. You didn't pat her on the back—it wasn't that kind of thing. But she was very warm and friendly. I think in later years she became much more schoolmarmish than she was in the early twenties. She was very rough on people that she thought were not talented and made no bones about telling them so. There must have been some very unhappy scenes in that room at times. She was very honest—sometimes people thought brutally honest. I never saw that side of her at work.

I think part of the fascination was the openness of mind that Nadia seemed to have toward anything that might be presented to her—and at the same time having pretty firm ideas of right and wrong in musical terms. But still wide open—you could convince her of something else if you really wanted to try hard enough and were good enough. She had that sense of being in touch with all the latest developments and being open-minded about them, and that was very refreshing to me.

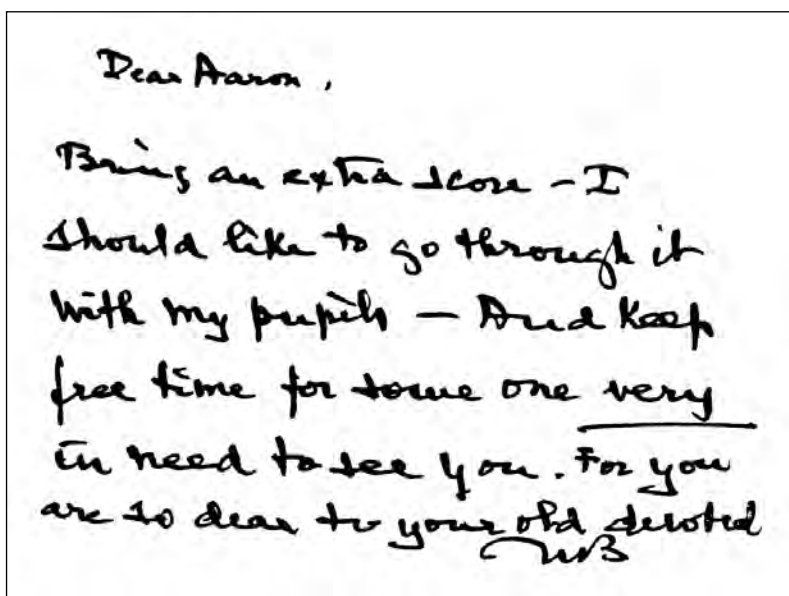
I was rather flattered that when Mademoiselle Boulanger invited a group of her students to come to the other side of Paris and have tea at her home, she included me. I was getting special attention. So I went. One had

the feeling in her Paris studio, being her student, that you were sitting in the center of the musical life of Paris in 1921. You weren't just studying a thing that had happened in the past. It was happening around you. Nadia had these Wednesday afternoon so-called *déchiffage* classes, where she read over new things at the piano and they'd be discussed or enthused about or dismissed. You'd find the latest scores of Stravinsky on her piano (still in manuscript) or those of Milhaud, or Honegger, and you felt you were living right in the midst of the live musical happenings in Paris in 1921. That made a big impression on me, and it was exactly what I wanted, of course. After two hours or more of this, she always had tea served. At the tea the musical greats came—I remember meeting Roussel there and Stravinsky. The group of Les Six—Poulenc was there, and I even shook hands with Saint-Saëns. I remember him very vividly. He seemed quite lively for so elderly a gentleman. He played the piano very well. Unfortunately, he died two months after I met him.

Nadia was intellectually a superior woman. She read heavy books, so to speak. She was a real intellect, so you had the warmth of the personality, the musical knowledge, and the civilized atmosphere in which we were living—the historical atmosphere—and it all really added up. It was the twenties in Paris, so there was much more than music going on, and we were perfectly aware of that. I used to see literary personalities in the *quartier* where we lived, in Montparnasse and Raspail. I saw André Gide; I saw Jean Cocteau; Hemingway was around; but James Joyce made the biggest impression. He didn't hang around cafés so much, but I used to see him at Sylvia Beach's bookshop. That part of the contact was enormously significant for me. Paris, from the standpoint of Brooklyn, seemed to be where all the new things were happening in music. It wasn't Germany anymore—it was France. And then to walk into it so easily during my first few months there was very lively-making.

I performed "The Cat and the Mouse" at the school of music at Fontainebleau, and then the concert was repeated in Paris. It was a modest concert, but they managed to get some of the more important personalities in the Paris musical world to come; among them was the publisher Monsieur Durand. That's how he happened to hear the piece. I sold it for about twenty-five bucks. I would have done it for nothing, I was so delighted, not only to be published—I had never had anything published—but by Debussy's publisher and Ravel's publisher! That's what made it exciting.

I cannot imagine what I would have done in Paris those three years if I hadn't met Nadia. In fact, I can't imagine my entire career if I hadn't met her.



Dear Aaron ,
 Bring an extra score - I
 should like to go through it
 with my pupils - And keep
 free time for some one very
 in need to see you . For you
 are so dear to your old devoted
 NB

Note from Nadia Boulanger to Aaron Copland, April 1952

She took me to visit Koussevitzky when he was appointed as the new conductor of the Boston Symphony. I remember Nadia said: "You must meet him, because he can be of great help to you." So she took me to see him. He was named in 1923 for the season of 1924, which exactly coincided with the time I came back to the States, so it couldn't have been better from my standpoint. I played that early ballet, *Grohg*, for him, and he was very enthusiastic.

When Nadia was invited to come to Boston and act as organ soloist in his first season, she asked me to write a work for her. I remember when she suggested that I do this work. "Do you really think I can do it?" was my reaction. I didn't know anything about the organ. I never played the organ at all, and I had never heard a note of my own orchestration. She was going to play this with the Boston Orchestra and the New York Symphony of Walter Damrosch, so two major performances were at stake. It was very tempting, but scary. "You can do it, you can do it." That was always her reaction. I wasn't terribly sympathetic to the sound of an organ, actually. But I was confident that if I wrote music that could be played on an organ, she would take care of the actual registration needed. I would just have to tell her what I was hoping I'd hear. The rhythmic side of the music seemed to take her attention, especially the middle movement of the Organ Symphony, which has the sort of jazzy rhythms that you don't usually connect with the organ. It seemed much more

striking to her than to me. To me, they were just rhythms that I thought up, and they seemed perfectly natural. But she seemed to think that they were quite specially of American origin, which they probably were.

I especially recall the very first rehearsal in New York. I remember being late. There was something the matter with the subway coming from Brooklyn to New York, and I was in an absolute fit, thinking I was going to miss the whole thing. Finally the subway came, and I remember dashing from Times Square to Aeolian Hall, which was on 43rd Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. I was in such a hurry to get into the hall that instead of trying to go to the stage entrance, I yanked open the door of the main hall and suddenly got a blast of my own orchestration. It was the Scherzo, or the last movement, something very brilliant and glamorous sounding, and I was absolutely overwhelmed. I'll never forget that. It sounded so *glorious* to me! It sounded absolutely grander than I could have imagined. I am always glad I didn't hear the start of the piece because that's very quiet and unassuming.

Before the Boston performance, the Symphony for Organ and Orchestra had its premiere as planned on 11 January 1925 with the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Damrosch at Aeolian Hall. Damrosch's modern music was Wagner—he thought of me as a wild-eyed modernist. There was one particularly startling chord in Mr. Damrosch's mind. At one point he stopped the orchestra in the middle of rehearsal and turned to me, saying, "Copland, does that have to be like that?" And I said, "Yes, Mr. Damrosch, it has to be like that" [laughter].

This was Nadia Boulanger's American debut, and she was very warmly received by the press and the audience. Perhaps Nadia had planned the order of the program, for my piece was placed prominently, second from the end, after the audience had been won over. At its conclusion, there was considerable applause, and when Mr. Damrosch pointed to the upper box where I was seated, I rose to bow. As things quieted down, Mr. Damrosch advanced to the footlights and to everyone's surprise, addressed the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I am sure you will agree that if a gifted young man can write a symphony like this at twenty-three"—and here he paused dramatically, leaving the audience to expect a proclamation of a new musical genius—then continued, "within five years he will be ready to commit murder!" It was a joke, of course, and I laughed along with the audience; but it was also Damrosch's way of smoothing the ruffled feathers of his conservative Sunday afternoon ladies faced with modern American music.

The Boston performance of the *Organ Symphony* was not far off. Koussevitzky invited me to come up a week in advance to go over the score. Damrosch and Koussevitzky had both taken my composition on Boulanger's word, but the difference between the two conductors was striking. I was astounded at the attention Koussevitzky gave to the work. The kind of enthusiasm with which he surrounded any performance of my new work was the really exciting thing of the event for me. It wasn't just like an ordinary premiere; it was the event of the week. I often spent the entire week as a guest at his house in Boston, and he created an atmosphere which implied that there was nothing else of importance at that concert except my new piece. That was an incredibly fortunate thing for me because it made the introduction of each new piece seem like a musical event. It wasn't just a new piece; it was another of the great moments of that particular season. That kind of enthusiasm I've never met anywhere else before or since. Perhaps Leonard Bernstein could create something of the same excitement. But Koussevitzky took this attitude that you are the coming thing, and every piece you write is going to create excitement. Two years before, he had gone through the whole period in Paris, introducing each new piece of Stravinsky's, and he carried that over to Boston. And of course, that's very exciting for a young composer, to have an orchestra like that at his command.

But the really exciting thing about the event was that I had won over a real friend in Koussevitzky. Apparently, he had been very favorably inclined toward me after a visit or two at his Paris apartment. But that was really the first piece that he conducted, and from then on he was back of me 100 percent. During my student years—1921 to 1924 in Paris—his concerts were big events of the spring and fall season. At those concerts, he introduced new pieces by Stravinsky and Milhaud and the *Group of Six*, but I don't remember his playing any American music. In fact, in those days he didn't know he was going to be invited to be conductor of the Boston Symphony, so he had no reason particularly to stress American music. My memory of those days would seem to indicate that American music was not exactly in his purview.

We got bad criticism from the Boston press. There was a very conventional and proper Bostonian critic who we knew in advance wasn't going to like it. But Koussevitzky just took it in his stride, a sort of "we'll show 'em" kind of attitude. He knew in advance that his rather conservative audience wasn't going to like a piece based on jazz materials, that they would be somewhat shocked by the musical style. But it didn't faze him. On the contrary, he was rather

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Aaron Copland with Serge Koussevitzky, Tanglewood, 1940s

pleased at being part of the avant-garde and introducing new things he believed in, which he knew the audience wasn't quite ready to accept. He had a very realistic attitude toward it all. It wasn't easy. It was a struggle, but that was part of the fun. If everybody had loved it right from the start, there wouldn't have been any struggle. My parents were a little disturbed. I particularly remember after the performance of my Piano Concerto the headline in the paper was: "COPLAND'S LATEST POOR STUFF," and I remember my father being particularly upset by that "POOR STUFF." He didn't know music, of course, but he certainly knew what poor stuff was, being a merchant. He said to me, "After all, these fellows are *paid* for their opinion. They must know *something* about music." And I'd say to him, "Don't bother about what they say. If you write music that's a bit far out, you're sure to get roasted in the paper." People forget now that when I began in the twenties, I was considered to be a wild-eyed radical in musical terms. I got consistently razzed in the newspaper.

Koussevitzky used me as an “American connection” with the younger guys—Sessions, Piston. Well, he knew Piston because he was on the scene in Boston. I think when Roy Harris came on the scene, that was a sense of sponsorship. I didn’t bring too many people around. There weren’t that many on that plane, and some seemed too conventional to me.

Koussevitzky treated me like a young colleague whom he was very definitely interested in—and when I say interested, not only in the music that you might write but also how you were going to make a living while writing it—how you could free yourself from a job so that you’d have the time to devote to this composition that he was waiting for. That also was very exciting: he was *waiting* for it. This was a passionate interest of his, which made it all that much more exciting. I cannot imagine my career without those two—Boulanger and Koussevitzky.

He approached my rhythms like a European musician would approach jazz rhythms that he didn’t feel or didn’t have in his bones. But he was very good with Russian rhythmic materials, so it was a question of his adapting himself. Through the rehearsal period, every night we’d get together upstairs in his studio room. I’d bang out some of the rhythms on the piano, go over them carefully with him, so that it wasn’t a casual introduction of a new piece.

I went to play the Piano Concerto at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic [July 1928]. It was conducted by a well-known British conductor, Albert Coates. The shocking thing about the Piano Concerto was the use of jazz in a serious context. I remember that at the end of the rehearsal, the entire orchestra hissed me, showing their disapproval of what they were being asked to play: a serious musician—a symphony orchestra—being asked to play honky-tonk jazz. I remember Albert Coates being shocked by the men and saying: “Boys, boys, what are you doing? He is one of your own! HE IS ONE OF YOUR OWN!”

I tend to take everything in my stride. My feeling was: “Of course they wouldn’t like this; this is too far-out for them. But they’ll see!” No, I never went home weeping or worrying. It didn’t make future performances any easier, of course. But, after all, I am a slow writer, and if I do a thing I am generally pretty convinced that that’s what I wanted to do. So nobody is going to come around and tell me: “Oh, you made a big mistake.” They could do that, but it wouldn’t be very convincing for me.

You have to be pretty convinced about what you are doing, otherwise there are many, many reasons for not doing it—no financial gain, no good

criticism in the papers the next morning. You really have to be brave in that sense, and really the bravery comes from the conviction. If you are absolutely sure this is what you want to do and it's meaningful to you, then you just assume it's going to take time before other people get around to understanding and appreciating it. That's been the history of new efforts in music. People don't fall in love with a new thing. If they do, it's a rare event.

I was of course preoccupied with the idea of adding to the great history of serious music something with an American accent, and jazz seemed to be a comparatively simple way of introducing the American note in an authentic way. I simply wanted to use it with more sophistication and in a longer form. It was an easy way to be American—quickly American—in a way that the world could recognize as American.

The jazz boys always were able to write short songs, but to write a piece that lasts seventeen minutes is more of a problem. Then it builds up to a somewhat more serious musical expression. I realized that I was writing something that would probably shock the ordinary symphony goers because they thought, "Oh, jazz is all right in its place, but my heavens, what is it doing in Carnegie Hall or Symphony Hall?" It's out of its natural milieu. It had that effect. It was like playing it in church, in the middle of a service. It just seemed all out of key to them, as if I—and my music—had no place there.

I didn't want to write anything obviously jazzy. But certainly jazzy rhythms would be a part of the whole scene of American rhythms. But the particular, literal relation to jazz materials that I had used in *Music for the Theatre* and in the Piano Concerto had more or less exhausted my interest in that. I began to feel you couldn't reduce all American music to jazz rhythms, that there were other kinds of rhythms one might use which also make a piece seem American rhythmically.

Naturally, when I was writing jazz-derived music, I was thinking about the "American-ness" of music. I was very aware, of course, of the American note in literature, especially after I came back from Paris. I suppose the closest thing in music we had would be MacDowell. Some of the MacDowell pieces have a kind of simplicity about them, a certain charm that can be called American. But we knew nothing of Ives, just barely the name.

We were very rhythm conscious in the twenties. Stravinsky was partly responsible. He was writing rhythms that were not familiar, and the jazz thing was very present in our minds, and these two things were enough to make you think about rhythms in a fresh kind of way. *Polyrhythm* was a magic word—

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Autograph page from Aaron Copland's *Music for the Theatre*, unpublished piano four-hands arrangement by the composer

having more than one rhythm at the same time—juxtaposing them, mixing them could be very fascinating because it gave the whole piece a rhythmic life that you wouldn't find in Chopin or elsewhere.

I was much more sympathetic to Stravinsky than to Schoenberg. The trouble with Schoenberg from my standpoint was that though I realized that the twelve-tone thing was an important development, the feeling behind the music still seemed to be that old German *Weltschmerz*-y, superromantic kind of expression, which was exactly what we were trying to get away from. The nature of the music he was writing wasn't so sympathetic as the Stravinsky music, although one always realized he was a big shot. There was no doubt about that.

My Piano Quartet is rather twelve-toney. It was more the idea that by lending oneself to the twelve semitones rather than the diatonic scale, you'd dream up tunes and new harmonies, and enlarge your possibilities. But I was intent on staying away from that romantic afflatus that twelve-tone music seemed always to have. I would say that the twelve-tone method was simply a stimulus because it set me thinking down a road I otherwise would never have thought of going down. It has its own vistas and it had attraction because of that. It produced results in harmony that you wouldn't have thought of if you weren't thinking twelve-tone-wise. You wouldn't repeat a note till you've gone through the others—that has a certain limitation, but it also tends to make you think differently about the structure of your melodic material. That was a very valuable asset in my mind.

The Boston Symphony was an excellent orchestra, so I felt very lucky. The other great help was the League of Composers in New York, and the concerts that they gave. Of course, I had the great advantage that by 1924 the modern music society scene in New York was much better than in 1918, let's say. The two rival societies [League of Composers and International Composers' Guild] were really vying for new pieces of Stravinsky and Schoenberg—who would be the first to introduce them.

I remember one of the great excitements was that the day after the performance of the pieces, *Passacaglia* and "The Cat and the Mouse"—Paul Rosenfeld called me up to tell me how much he liked them. I'd read him for a number of years in the *Dial*, so I was very excited about that; to get an okay from Paul Rosenfeld seemed like the top. It didn't matter what the *Times* said, but from Paul Rosenfeld it did, because he *knew*.

It was through Paul Rosenfeld that I happened to fall into the arms of the League of Composers. He knew the league crowd. He also knew Varèse, but maybe I wouldn't have seemed avant-garde enough in my music at that time to him. At any rate you couldn't be friends with both. Inevitably, you were taken up either by the one or the other organization. Varèse was the big shot then, and you couldn't approach him that easily, and he didn't seem interested. So there was never any question about whether I should have my first performances with Varèse. I never had the chance to work with him, so I can't say how I might have felt in that camp.

The magazine *Modern Music* started in 1924. It only came out quarterly, four times a year, and it seemed like a very precious instrument for keeping one aware of what was going on. Minna Lederman depended on me a

" . . . we had hit a lodestar."

Minna Lederman (1896–1995) was the highly respected editor of the League of Composers' periodical, Modern Music.

The magazine came about this way: A few months after I joined the board, one member said, "Let's have a magazine!" We were all being inundated with marvelous publications from Europe, *Die Musik*, *La Revue musicale*, avant-garde magazines from France, Germany, and Italy—all of these were covering contemporary music, contemporary art in general. This, mind you, was ten years after the Armory show of paintings here in New York and ten years after the production of *Le Sacre du printemps* in Paris. Still there was an abysmal ignorance in this country, and we seemed to be unable to breach that barrier. So, we had a magazine in a few months: the *League of Composers' Review*. There it was with all its failures and all its clumsiness. We had brought out a magazine devoted to contemporary music, with marvelous reproductions of portraits of composers by Picasso. It was an instant success with, of all places, the press. The press, which had been unable to bring itself to give the concerts of contemporary music an adequate, even a respectable review, suddenly was enamored of the exotic articles that appeared in the magazine. There was a love affair between the magazine and the press all its life. Thus the magazine took a great leap forward. We realized, to our astonishment, that we had hit a lodestar.

—Minna Lederman Daniel
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
21 March 1979, New York City

great deal for actual names of new people who might write articles. We were very close in that sense. I didn't work closely with Minna on *Modern Music* magazine in the sense of telling her what to do. I was a kind of silent partner until I was approached about things. She would call up and ask my advice on specific topics or projects. I may have suggested a writer from time to time, or a subject for an article; but I didn't take a leading role or try to show the direction the magazine ought to take—not consciously, at any rate. I felt very close to it—I used to wait for each issue to come out and see what was being discussed. It made the whole scene more lively, and it has supplied us with a history of those times

I don't think it ever occurred to me to make a career all on my own. It seemed more important somehow to make our mark as a group. I'm sort of a friendly guy, and so it was natural for me to look around for pals, not being the lonely artist at home in his room and then trying to get his works played. I always thought of it as being a group effort to put on the map a younger

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generation of Americans who were going to make more noise than the older ones and were going to accomplish more and were more ready to make their mark. And everything followed from that. By the time I came along, there seemed a reason to start a movement that was more directly concerned with introducing the young American composers' works and letting Schoenberg take care of himself. And that was the origin, of course, of the Copland-Sessions Concerts, and of the Yaddo Festivals and the rest of the things that I got involved in. The idea of joining the League of Composers was not entirely satisfactory because they did a lot of foreign music at that time, and we wanted to emphasize the American aspect of new music. I suppose I was a ringleader in that, gathering people around me. And of course we had been inspired by the example of Varèse. The only thing that we did that was different was emphasize the American music aspect.

I don't remember where I met Roger Sessions originally. It seems to me he studied with Nadia for a while, though I don't think he likes the idea now. We were pals, not so much that we saw so much of each other—I don't think we were living in the same town—but we had a natural sympathy of interests and ideas. We were aware of all the newer guys around that weren't being played, and there didn't seem to be a sufficient number of outlets for the younger American music. During the whole period of the Copland-Sessions Concerts, Sessions was not around—he was in Europe. I think he felt a little nervous about his name being used. We were close and we had correspondence, and he'd write me and tell me about something he'd heard or knew about that I ought to look into. I don't remember exactly how the programs were formed, but Sessions finally got quite unhappy about it. He said: "My name is being used and I really don't know what you are doing over there." He is a very careful man. His name means a great deal to him—a real Puritan from New England when it comes to everything being aboveboard, and you are not responsible unless your name is on it, and if it is, you are very responsible, whether you are there or not. But he was a good moral support. I wasn't alone. Did I ever tell you about that lady who came up to me and said: "Oh, Mr. Copland—I love your sessions!"

I had always lived in the place where I taught. I never had a separate studio. I am a night worker, and that was the problem of trying to live in an ordinary apartment house: you are supposed to stop playing after ten—I remember people banging on the ceilings and floors. So I decided I had to get into a loft building where everybody went home at night, and I found this tumbled-

down loft on 63rd Street. It never occurred to me in my wildest dreams that the future cultural center of New York was to be placed on that very spot [laughter].³² There were businesses on the other floors. I had the top floor, and since the businesses all closed at 5 or 6 o'clock, then in the evenings when I used to like to work, the building was empty except for me. The nighttime is usually the more poetic time. It seems to suggest poetry more than the cold morning daylight. But if I was in a rush and had to finish something, then of course I'd have to work at any time. I did quite a lot in that tumbled-down loft building.

The Depression years—I don't have any specific memories of being particularly depressed during the Depression [laughter]. Things had not been that rosy or glorious. The early years were always a problem—how you were going to make enough money so you'd be free to write without occupying all your time making a salary to live on. If that was solved, half your problems were solved. I don't connect the *Symphonic Ode* in my own mind with the Depression. It's a big, ambitious piece. It's long, in one movement, and it took me quite a long time to do it. That would have been a characteristic mood that I was expressing; it wouldn't have had anything to do with 1929. I probably had the idea from some time before, because I used to put things down in a notebook with the idea of working on them later. So the piece was dictated by the nature of the musical ideas that had occurred to me, rather than by what was happening around me at that time. I was in a grandiose mood. I was in a mood to write a long, connected piece in one movement. Koussevitzky was ready to play it, and I was expressing my general feelings about life and the world.

I never compose away from the piano. It's very misleading to say to a layman that you use the piano when you compose because it brings up the idea that you go to the piano and you touch a chord and ask yourself, "Do I like this? . . . No." Then you touch another one and: "No." It doesn't really work that way. One instant before you touch the chord, something tells you what to touch. It can't be pure chance. It's a mysterious thing to attempt to analyze.

You must remember, when one composes at the piano, you are using it like a typewriter; you don't necessarily hear the piano sounds, as such, that you are performing. I've never been accused of writing piano music for a chorus, so I assume that though I touch the piano I am hearing what the voices would be sounding like. Otherwise, how would I make decisions and judgments? I never orchestrate at the piano. I'd make a sketch from which I orchestrate at a table.

It would be lovely to have true statistics about composers for once. Take a hundred of them—fairly well-known ones—and have them tell you frankly

what they do. It would be very interesting to know how many are actually able to write without touching an instrument. I imagine Lenny Bernstein could and Britten could, and Hindemith probably could. How many others, I don't know. Stravinsky was the hero of my student days, and I was relieved to hear at one of Boulanger's classes that he composed at the piano. It's always a slightly embarrassing question that normally you don't ask: "Where do you write?" It would be lovely to do without the piano. You sit at a table and write as if you were writing a letter—that would be marvelous. It's possible that it gives you greater freedom. After all, in a way you are confined to your ten fingers, but not really, because if that were true you couldn't write orchestral music.

You know, I don't dash to the piano in a fit of inspiration and get it down fast or I'll forget it. It doesn't work so much like that. It's more a gradual accretion of materials which one fine day all run to their proper places; and that's a great day, of course. I rarely sat down and decided: "Now, what ought I to do? Should I do this or should I do that?" My music has always taken origin in musical ideas. The musical ideas that came to me would dictate the nature of the piece that I was about to embark upon. The only exceptions would have been when I was specifically commissioned to do something that I wasn't thinking about doing at all, or I needed the dough—one or the other—and worked on them for that reason. So if Koussevitzky would say: "Why don't you write a symphony for the Koussevitzky Foundation," I'd go home and look in my book to see if I had any symphonic ideas to use. Or the idea itself, without anybody asking me to write it, would produce the notion of that particular kind of piece using that idea. The Piano Variations, for instance, must have begun with the theme at the beginning, after which it occurred to me the piece might be worked out in the form of a series of variations. Since I've always kept a book with musical ideas in it, the pieces I write are always based on these kernels of ideas which dictate the nature of the animal.

Also the actual formal structure of a piece tends not to be plotted out in advance, but takes its nature from getting different sections, without a sense of their eventual order. You know it's going to fit somewhere—you don't know quite where—and then one lovely day everything runs to its right place, and that's always a very pleasant feeling. There should be, of course, a certain spontaneity as to how pieces are constructed. The nature of the musical ideas dictates what the piece is going to look like and sound like when you are finished.

I think of myself as a rather realistic person, and when I finish a piece I can probably predict for you in advance what its potential audience is. A com-

poser who writes a piece in a severe style really ought to be wide awake to what he is doing and realize that there are only a number of sophisticated listeners to whom that work is addressed. And I don't think I have ever fooled myself with the thought that a piece like my *Piano Variations* was going to have an audience as wide as the potential audience of *El Salón México*. In other words, you must know what you are doing and to whom you are addressing yourself, and you know by the nature of the ideas you work with how many thousands, millions, or how few you are able to appeal to with that work. I have never been terribly surprised by the failure of any one of my pieces. The ones that have the possibility of being more "popular," like *El Salón México*—it's always very satisfying if you have a piece that's finally found its audience. However, if you write a piece like my *Piano Fantasy*, which lasts half an hour without pause, you'd be very foolish to imagine that everybody is going to love it. Just to be able to sit for one half hour and be able to connect with what the composer began with and where he comes out at the end takes a considerable amount of musical sophistication. I don't like the word *cerebral*, by the way. It doesn't feel that way. It's just as emotional as a simple piece. I never have thought, "Oh, gee, now I am writing a cerebral work." That never crossed my mind. "This is hard to get"—that would cross my mind. "I know this piece is going to be hard to get." But not because it's cerebral. It's just that the character of it is hard to get. I don't think I've ever thought of appealing only to colleagues. I've never thought of writing something that had only that small an audience!

One has to allow a large space for the unconscious in all this, you know. You just don't plan compositions out as if you were running a campaign. After all, pieces are based on musical ideas that occur to you, and they come from heaven only knows where, and then they dictate the nature of the piece that you are going to write. I don't think it's saying: "Now I am going in a new direction." I think you get musical material that seems to indicate the direction. It's more like that—and also a feeling of the times: "Everybody is doing it; now let's see what I can do about it." That might have been part of the origins of the jazz treatment, the fact that the Gershwin *Piano Concerto* had made a big to-do.

I did meet Gershwin once or twice. I visited with him at his apartment once, but we weren't living in the same musical world, so we really didn't have much to talk about. He was very wound up in his own activities, and at the drop of a hat he'd go to the piano and start showing you what he meant—he wasn't terribly verbal and not terribly interested in the sort of thing I was interested in. He was liking his own very busy life in the jazz world, though he liked having

pieces played at regular concerts in Carnegie Hall—there was a certain glamour attached to that you couldn't get in the jazz world. I wouldn't say he was an intellectual exactly. He wasn't so interested in expressing his ideas. He was a born musician who felt most comfortable when his fingers were on a piano.

In 1928 I started giving talks at the New School for Social Research. It was through Paul Rosenfeld that I was recommended to them. He was bored with it, and he didn't need the dough, and so he suggested me. That way I found that if enough people came to the lectures—let's say two hundred—and they all paid a dollar, what you would earn in one evening would take a lot of students individually—if you could find them—to produce. The original series was twelve lectures, I believe, on "What to Listen for in Music," and they were addressed to grown-ups. It wasn't high school or college level, just grown-ups, people who wanted to understand—modern music or music in general. And I spoke from notes. I had been giving the series of talks maybe twice, and some fellow came up to me and said: "Mr. Copland, I don't know if you know it or not, but you are talking a book." I said: "Really? How do you know?" He said: "I am an employee of McGraw-Hill Book Company, and I know a book when I hear one. We'll send a girl down here, and she'll take down verbatim what you say." Since I was speaking freely from notes, it seemed all right. He did that, and, by golly, I never wrote that book. He actually presented me with a book that I just had to go over, change a couple of words, and fix up a bit. I am very pleased, of course, that there have been ten foreign translations, especially in German. Explaining to Germans how to listen to music is turning the tables, finally.³³

The piano trio, *Vitebsk*. I thought the tune that I used was very beautiful. I forget where I found it—in some book, probably—and it said that that folk tune was sung in that particular way in the town of Vitebsk. And I was looking for a colorful name, so instead of calling it a Trio on Jewish Themes I called it *Vitebsk, Study on a Jewish Theme*. When I was in Russia on one of those State Department-inspired tours with Lukas Foss, the question I was most asked by Russian musicians was: "How come you wrote a work entitled *Vitebsk*?" I said: "I used a Jewish tune that was sung in that particular place, in Vitebsk. Why is that so strange?" They said: "You know, Vitebsk is the Pittsburgh of Russia, and no one has ever connected an artwork with that particular town." Which was a great surprise to me.

I no longer remember the exact order of the circumstances, of how I came to write music in a simpler style. In the case of the *Outdoor Overture*, for instance, I was asked to do that by Alexander Richter, an orchestra director

at the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan. I think it was a part of the feeling of the times, a reaction to the highly intellectualized kind of music, the Schoenberg sort of thing. Also, a sense of the need to belong, to appeal to a larger group than just a mere concertgoing audience—making a connection outside the framework of the usual town hall concert crowd. It may have had certain political overtones also. It was the time of the Depression, you know. I mean, there was music for an elite, but there could also be music addressed to a different sort of an audience.

My primary reason for using folk materials was that it was a very easy way of sounding American. There was certainly plenty of precedent: Russian folk tunes produced Russian music from Russian composers, so there was nothing very original about the idea of using American materials. It's rather mysterious—you pick up a book of folk tunes thinking you might use some, and some you look at and think: "This is a good folk tune, but I could never do anything with it." I don't know why; it's just an instinctive feeling. And then suddenly you find one which makes you think: "Oh, gee, this is usable." It has a kind of special attraction, but it's hard to say specifically why one is so much more attractive than another.

It certainly was a great help in the movie scores, like *The Red Pony*, where the American element is strongly emphasized. There was a general feeling of reacting against the more high-flown, sophisticated music addressed to a knowing audience and writing something that might be sung by kids or that was going to accompany a movie that anybody might hear and see. It was as if the audience were changing, and the change in audience suggested a change in general manner. The simplicity or the complexity of a work especially seemed to be one of the main concerns. I wouldn't write the same music for kids to sing or play as I would for a sophisticated audience of concert listeners. Everything had to do with why and who you were writing it for, as to what the style was going to be.

It's fun to write for the dance. I've always liked to dance myself. I had an older sister who taught me. Writing for dance is fun because you never know what they are going to do with it. After all, the movie, when you first see it, is without your music. With dancers, it's a little bit the reverse, for you don't see anything. They just take the music and use their own imagination. Sometimes you think: "What on earth does she think she is doing? That has nothing to do with the spirit of my music," you know. And sometimes dancers seem very rhythmically limited to a composer. But I've been very lucky with the dance things I've done.

Unlike what the composers usually think, most ballets are born in the minds of the choreographer, not in the minds of a composer. And it's the choreographer who then goes and tries to find a composer who wants to put that particular choreographic idea into music. That's the way most of my ballets were written. *Billy the Kid*, for example, was composed for the Ballet Caravan, choreographed by Eugene Loring. I think it had a kind of exotic charm because you don't think of cowboys as dancing around so much. The writing of any score is a feat of the imagination. You don't actually have to have been there. I've never been on the back of a horse—it has always seemed to me that that was a very strange place to be! [laughter] I never did try it, in spite of the fact that I've written cowboy music.

The origin of the *Appalachian Spring* name—I was working on it down in Mexico. I was thinking about Martha Graham the whole time—her personality, her quality as a dancer, the simplicity of the thing. Definitely it's con-

"This strange American ballet . . ."

The Ballets Russes wanted an American ballet on an American theme by an American. When I made my suggestion for a cowboy ballet, the company manager complained to his colleagues in Russian that I would probably ruin the Ballets Russes. I dug in my heels and said I wanted the best American composer, Aaron Copland. Aaron had done *Billy*, and it was strikingly new and very good. "There's one proviso," I said. "I dance the lead at the opening night in New York." At that they just fainted. "Take it or leave it," I said. They took it. Aaron was teaching up at Tanglewood, and he called when the score was ready and came up to Jacob's Pillow with a young friend to play it for me. Aaron said to the boy, "Could you play the treble part? I can't play it." The boy played wonderfully. He was Leonard Bernstein. Aaron didn't see *Rodeo* until a few days before our opening in New York. The cast was scared to death. That opening night—October 16, 1942—I gave the performance of my life. I got twenty-two curtain calls. The manager of Ballets Russes soon realized that this strange American ballet was their meal ticket—there were seventy-nine performances in 1942 and '43 alone! *Rodeo* has stayed in the ballet repertory. In 1976, a year after a severe stroke, I supervised the ballet for the Joffrey company from a wheelchair, and it was a major success.

—Agnes de Mille
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
25 June 1980, New York City

nected with her as an artist and as a human being. I got back to Washington just in time to see the rehearsals for the performance there. The first thing I said to Martha was, "What have you called the ballet?" (I had called it "Ballet for Martha.") And she said: *Appalachian Spring*. I said, "What a pretty title. Where did you get it?" She said: "Well, actually, it's in a poem by Hart Crane." And over and over again, I can't tell you how many times people have come up to me to say that they can see the Appalachians and they can feel spring when they hear the music.

I went to Lake Bemidji because a relation of mine who lived in Minneapolis had a small bungalow that wasn't being used that summer. It was rather an experience because the town seemed so remote from so-called civilization. I went with Victor Kraft, and we lived in this house for free—that was the great thing. It was the Depression time, you know, and we didn't have any money. I remember being very aware of the radical movement up there. There was a small cell of the Communist Party which was very vocal, and they used to have street-corner meetings. I think it was probably the first time I saw a live Communist face to face! And I think they published a newspaper. That was the period when we were very "masses" conscious [laughter]. I never joined anything. But I was very sympathetic for the more radical side of things. It was a kind of a feeling of the period. One was going to carry it along. I was never a member of the Communist Party or anything like that, nothing that they [the House Un-American Activities Committee] could really accuse me of in any specific terms. I think probably the most ghastly thing I may have done was to write a song in the thirties which was published in the *New Masses* called "Into the Streets May First!" I think it was a kind of a competition, and I won it. Well, it was the mood of the times. We were all young radicals and we were going to stir things up. And there was a general feeling of getting closer to the people. I was good copy—that might have had something to do with their interest. They had no interest in anybody whose name wasn't a bit known to the public. Numbers of people were called down, and I was just another person. It wasn't a special hearing for me, except to sit down with Mr. McCarthy and his adviser, Roy Cohn. That left an impression. It was rather unpleasant. I had a Washington lawyer who, by the way, wouldn't go to the hearing himself. He was a good rock-ribbed Republican gentleman, and he didn't want to be associated, I suppose. He sent his assistant.³⁴

I was delighted to receive a letter from André Kostelanetz suggesting I compose a patriotic work: a musical portrait of a great American. André

Copland at the McCarthy Hearings

Copland preferred talking about amusing and pleasant incidents. He did not enjoy discussing the House Un-American Activities Committee hearing (1953) when Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy and his sidekick Roy Cohn interrogated him about possible Communist affiliations. Like many artists and intellectuals in the thirties, Copland was a leftist, and this came back to haunt him in the fifties. The hearing was a disturbing and humiliating affair that Copland was determined to put behind him. He would say with a laugh, "Agonizing is not my thing," but the McCarthy event was probably the most agonizing moment in Copland's stellar career. The range and depth of its repercussions were known only to those closest to Copland at the time. Minna Lederman was aware of the distress the hearing caused him. He described it to her in detail: his dislike of Roy Cohn's crude manner; his amusement at McCarthy's mistaking composer Hanns Eisler for politician Gerhart Eisler; and his puzzlement at the presence of a beautiful young man sitting by Roy Cohn, saying nothing—just looking intently at Copland. Minna Lederman was convinced that this was a kind of homosexual intimidation. (It later became known that Cohn himself was homosexual.)

—V.P.

explained that he was also approaching Virgil Thomson and Jerome Kern. My first choice was Whitman, but when Kern chose Mark Twain, Kostelanetz requested that I pick a statesman rather than another literary figure. Lincoln seemed inevitable. When Virgil and I discussed our choices, he amiably (and wisely) pointed out that no composer could hope to match in musical terms the stature of so eminent a figure as Abraham Lincoln. Virgil, who had been making musical portraits of famous people for years, chose two living subjects: Fiorello La Guardia and Dorothy Thompson. I was skeptical about expressing patriotism in music—it is difficult to achieve without becoming maudlin or bombastic or both. I was hoping to avoid these pitfalls by using Lincoln's words.

It's been fun listening to, or even conducting, different speakers in *Lincoln Portrait*. I remember one performance very vividly. This took place in Venezuela. The concert was in an enormous outdoor stadium with a capacity of thousands of people, and the speaker was a Venezuelan actress, a fiery thing. About five minutes before the concert was to start, there was an announce-

ment backstage that the local dictator was about to arrive for the concert. This amazed everybody because he had always been afraid of appearing in public for fear that someone might take a shot at him. Sure enough, they had to hold the start of the concert until he arrived, and he arrived with a whole entourage of ten or twelve other gentlemen. He was well hated, particularly by my soloist, the fiery actress, and boy, she was going to give it to him. When she got to the end of the piece, the end of the concert, the lines “government of the people”—*por el pueblo y para*—the whole audience of about six thousand people stood up and started screaming and yelling and applauding. It was really a stunt [laughter]. They told me that six months later the dictator was out of power [heartly laughter]—deposed. I was given the credit for helping that revolution. I am sorry to say that they also told me two years later that the dictator was back.

I had never thought of narrating *Lincoln* myself until Bill Schuman put together a Copland festival at Juilliard in 1960 and invited me to speak the part. Later, I found myself at the podium again on the occasion of my eightieth birthday, Lenny [Bernstein] conducting. President and Mrs. Carter appeared in their box for the first time in public since Carter’s defeat in the election a few weeks earlier. Rosalynn Carter had once spoken the narration, and she was particularly anxious to hear *Lincoln* that evening. When they appeared in the presidential box, a full house stood to cheer them, and my closest friends and relatives sat with President and Mrs. Carter as I spoke Lincoln’s words about the country and the presidency.

I remember performing it once with Adlai Stevenson. We had a rehearsal at Stevenson’s apartment, and I began to wonder, should I tell Adlai Stevenson how to talk? When I did, he didn’t mind at all. I recently performed it with Marian Anderson as speaker, and [University] President Kingman Brewster, who did it at Yale—and Walter Cronkite. Carl Sandburg, also as speaker, was enormously effective. He had appeared as speaker numbers of times with André Kostelanetz, and as the years went by he was getting pretty old. Kostelanetz tells this story. He thought: “Shall we take a chance and ask the old man? Oh, well, if he doesn’t read the speaker’s part too well, everybody will understand. After all, he is such a distinguished-looking gentleman, he fits the role.” At the rehearsal, during the section of the piece before the speaker stands up to speak, Sandburg began to complain about feeling chilly. So they stopped the rehearsal—several people rushed around and found a blanket, and they put the blanket over him. They began rehearsing again, and every-

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On the occasion of Copland's eightieth birthday concert, Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C., 14 November 1980. Left to right: first lady Rosalynn Carter, Aaron Copland, President Jimmy Carter, Leonard Bernstein, and Mstislav Rostropovich

thing was fine. But on the evening of the concert "Kosty" asked, and some of his advisers said, "Do you think we ought to give him a blanket? He is liable to feel chilly and catch his death of cold." "Well," they said, "the audience will understand. After all, he is such an old man. Nobody will care, so let's give him a blanket." So they gave him a blanket, and they spread it over him. You remember, the work begins with a ten-minute introduction. Kostelanetz was conducting, and then comes the time for Sandburg to get up, but when Kostelanetz motioned to him, there he was, fast asleep under the blanket! Kostelanetz went: "Carl, Carl!" The old boy sort of staggers to his feet and looks around as if to say, "Where am I?" Eventually: "Fellow citizens! We cannot escape history." He should have said, "We cannot escape falling asleep."

Eugene Goossens, conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, had written to me at the end of August about an idea he wanted to put in action for the 1942–43 concert season. During World War I he had asked

British composers for a fanfare to begin each orchestral concert. It had been so successful that he thought to repeat the procedure in World War II with American composers. Oh, gosh. *Fanfare* has just taken off on a career all its own. Because, you see, the high school bands can play it. It's one of my most played works now. I don't know where I got the idea of calling it *Fanfare for the Common Man*, but I think it was an inspired idea. I remember Walter Piston wrote a *Fanfare for the Fighting French*. That was his title. I was thinking, well, the common man has to bear the brunt of this war, so he really deserves a fanfare.³⁵

I don't go to the films much, so I am not too aware of what's going on with film music. I assume that the musical language is more sophisticated than it used to be, not as slushy or as conventional. They can do almost anything they please nowadays if it helps the effectiveness of the film. It was very difficult to break in because the attitude of the directors was "He may be a fine composer, sure, in the concert hall, but has he ever done a film score?" I think that documentary that I did [*The City*] probably helped break the ice a bit.³⁶

I used to enjoy working in the studio at night, which was when I did most of my work, because they empty out at 6 P.M. Most of the workers are gone, and the streets of a film studio are rather darkly lit. You have the feeling you are in a medieval town somewhere—no movement to speak of, ideal conditions for work—nobody around in the building where you are working. I used to work until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, starting perhaps at 8 or 9.

It's very stimulating to have your music directed by some outside source. You know, when the girl starts running, you are going to have to stop what you are doing and write music of a different sort. It helps the whole formal structure of the music, which is one of the primary worries—how to shape this amorphous material so it makes sense. It is rather solved by the fact that the action of the film itself dictates the length of a section, the nature of the section, the character of the music—so in many ways it's really much easier than writing ordinary concert music.

I enjoyed doing *The Heiress* because it was a very well done picture. There is a scene in the film where the young lovers (who are being disapproved of by the girl's father) decide to go off and get married right there and then. It's close to midnight and the young man says, "I know a minister who will come right now. I'll go and get him and he can marry us right now, and then off we go." She gets very enthusiastic about the idea; he dashes off in the carriage to go and get the minister; and she begins pacing around the room. We

assume a certain passage of time, but then as time goes on, she starts getting restless. Each time that she hears a carriage, she rushes out, but a carriage goes by. It doesn't stop. She's been jilted.

They took this picture to one of the little neighborhood theaters in order to try it out on an audience. When that scene was played and she walked back into the house, dejected—the audience burst into laughter. That was murder! The director [William Wyler] came up to me after the show and said to me, “Copland, you’ve *got* to do something about the scene. If the audience laughs at her then, they are not taking her seriously. They don’t care about her. She is a mess, and we might as well go home and forget about it. You’ve *got* to stop the audience from laughing.” I said, “But how can I stop them from laughing?”

Then I began to think, to see if maybe I could stop an audience from laughing. We threw out the music I’d written, and I wrote a completely different sort of music, much more dissonant than you normally hear in a moving picture theater, especially in comparison with the music that had been used in the film up to that point.³⁷ They brought in a whole orchestra (at considerable expense) to record about three minutes’ worth of music. After they incorporated it into the movie, they took it to another showing in a little theater of a similar sort, played the same scene, and there wasn’t a sound in the house. It made the scene. Nothing could be funny with this dissonant, rather unpleasant-sounding music going on. There was nothing to laugh at.

A composer is in a special position to appreciate what music does to a film, because you first see it without the music. Then you see it with the music, and you realize how much more human the screen seems when there is music going on, even if nobody pays any attention to it. It just seems to warm up the whole atmosphere around you. The emotions seem more touching because music is going on. The audience doesn’t even know they are listening to music at all, but it works on them, I am sure.

I might have composed more if I’d stayed home more. My conducting had more to do with the fact that Koussevitzky died around 1950, and he had always discouraged it, you see. He was always taking the attitude: “Don’t waste your time conducting. You must compose.” That was always the line he had. It was good advice, probably. But as soon as he died, I began to spread myself out. If you compose music yourself, I suppose you think you have an insight into how a piece of music works better than somebody who is a mere interpreter, who has never composed anything. It’s sort of looking at it from the outside in. It’s mainly in the shaping of a piece of music when you are conducting

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Aaron Copland conducting, 1966

it that being a composer helps. You have a sense of the high points, the low points. Not everything is equally interesting. There are times when you mustn't insist on making something too important because then the really important parts seem to suffer from that. At least it gives you a chance to have a try for yourself. If you begin to bog down as a composer, it's boring to sit home and do nothing. It's much better to go out and make beautiful music with fine orchestras.

As I see it, being a composer is a great privilege. I find a profound satisfaction in the fact that the works I composed in my own home have found a response in the outside world. An artist can take his personal sadness or his fear or his anger or his joy and crystallize it, giving it a life of its own. Thus he is released from his emotion as others cannot be. The arts offer the opportunity to do something that cannot be done anywhere else. It is the only place one can express in public the feelings ordinarily regarded as private. It is the place where a man or woman can be completely honest, where we can say whatever is in our hearts or minds, where we never need to hide from ourselves or from others.

It has been my good fortune to spend my life with the art of music. Music is a world of the emotions, feelings, reactions. The language of music exists to say something—not something that can be translated into words necessarily, but something that constitutes essential emotions that are seized and

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Copland outside his home, Peekskill, New York, ca. 1988

shaped into meaningful forms. I wouldn't want to translate it into so many words because that would be limiting it. The feelings are like feelings *are*—emotional, and sometimes sort of vague. It shouldn't always be possible to put them into words.

I think that my music, even when it sounds tragic, is a confirmation of life, of the importance of life. I would also like to think that my music enlarges the listener's sphere of reference, just as when I listen to a great work by Bach or Palestrina, I have a larger sense of what it means to be alive. Perhaps the answer to why a man such as myself composes is that art summarizes the most basic feelings about being alive. It is very attractive to set down some sort of permanent statement so that people will be able to go to our artworks to see what it was like to be alive in our time and place—twentieth-century America.

Roy Harris (1898–1979)

He was born in Lincoln County, Oklahoma, on February 12, 1898 [Lincoln's birthday]. His parents were pioneers of Scotch-Irish descent who had staked out their claim during the Cimarron frontier rush and built their log cabin of virgin timber. One of his grandfathers had been a Kansas circuit rider, and the other a rider of the Pony Express from Chicago out to the western fronts.

—Brochure, "Roy Harris," BMI

Roy Harris would seem to be the stuff of an American legend. There are no records to confirm the facts, but Harris loved the story of his birth, and he wrote several compositions inspired by Lincoln's life or words. When Harris was a boy, his family moved from the legendary log cabin to a farm in Covina, California, where they grew orange trees and potatoes. As a young man, he worked as a farmer and later drove a truck delivering butter and eggs for a dairy. After a brief enrolment at the University of California at Berkeley, he decided to return to Los Angeles and study music seriously. He soon became the private student of the Americanist Arthur Farwell. It was Farwell who introduced Roy Harris to the poetry of Walt Whitman. As Charles Ives is often associated with Emerson, Roy Harris came to be associated with Whitman. Harris and Whitman shared in common an optimism, an idealism, and a sense of wide-open spaces—as well as an attraction to Abraham Lincoln. Both were known for their embrace of America's vitality and boundlessness. William Schuman, one of Harris's best-known students, said, "He was very grandiose in his social outlook. I think he saw himself as a Walt Whitman."³⁸

Roy Harris often described his good fortune, and one such instance was meeting Aaron Copland at the MacDowell Colony in 1925. Copland was quick to recognize Harris's talent—and his need for further study, due in some part to his delayed music education. Copland encouraged Harris to study with Nadia Boulanger, which he did from 1926 to 1929. What an unlikely candidate for the Boulangerie! And what a wide range of personalities: Aaron Copland, the eastern urbanite; Virgil Thomson, the Kansas City man with southern roots; and Roy Harris, the farmer and truck driver from the West. Thomson remembered his first experiences with Harris:

Farmer from Oklahoma and California, he spoke with dry humor and a bonhomie not unlike those of the comedian Will Rogers, then popular as a cowboy commentator. His Western ways were winning; and his musical vocation, only lately clear to him, was serious. He had come to France for help in building mastery, and in order to avoid wasting time had gone to live outside of Paris. After one winter spent on the banks of the Seine at Chatou, he found that neither the dampness nor his wife, a worried reader of intellectual magazines, was good for his work. So he renounced them both and went to live alone on higher ground, near Gargenville, where his teacher, Nadia Boulanger, lived much of the year. There, surrounded by year-round garden-

ing, by wheat fields and ripening fruits, he wrote many of the early chamber works that are still his glory.³⁹

When Nadia Boulanger asked her new student to bring in 20 melodies for the next lesson, Harris, with typical overflowing self-confidence, responded by bringing in 107! Their relationship, one of mutual respect, was also fraught with tension. Copland reflected, "All his natural American independence came to the fore when he was in Paris, and he was rather on the defensive, absolutely certain that he didn't need the French to tell him how to write music."⁴⁰

Harris embodied several striking contradictions: this country farmer from Oklahoma pursued a passion that led him to a thriving foreign city. He never forgot his homespun origins, but he blended in sophistication and eloquence. This spokesman for American music also spent years abroad assiduously studying European compositions, especially the works of Beethoven, as well as of Bach and the early Flemish masters. This man of extreme self-confidence (sometimes known for his egotism) was also supremely generous, and his home was the center of musical activities wherever he lived.

Roy Harris rose to prominence in the late 1930s and 1940s. He embraced American themes, writing several works to Whitman's poetry, setting American folk songs, and working to promote American music. His *Symphony* 1933 was the first American symphony to be recorded commercially. Koussevitzky was a great proponent of his work, premiering many pieces with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, including the Third Symphony. This was the first American symphony to be heard around the world.

Harris and his music were always described in extreme terms: muscular, powerful, vital, full-bloomed, unboundedly enthusiastic, heroic, ruggedly American. Aaron Copland said, "He looked like a movie star, but he seemed like a farmer with a simple charm and a winning personality."⁴¹ Harris was considered the messenger of the American aesthetic. Koussevitzky commented, "I think that nobody has expressed with such genius the American life, the vitality, the greatness, the strength of this country."⁴² And Copland: "What Harris writes, as a rule, is music of real sweep and breadth, with power and emotional depth such as only a generously built country could produce. It is American in rhythm, especially in the fast parts, with a jerky, nervous quality that is peculiarly our own. It is crude and unabashed at times, with occasional blobs and yawps of sound that Whitman would have approved of."⁴³

In 1936 Harris married the brilliant pianist Beula Duffey. She had been the youngest Juilliard faculty member when she joined the summer staff at the age of fifteen. At the time of her marriage, she was twenty-three and Harris was thirty-eight. It was her first marriage, his fourth. He promptly changed not only her last name to Harris, but also her first name to Johana, after J. S. Bach. (A belief in numerology led them to spell the name with only one *n*.) The marriage with Johana

“He stuck to his guns . . .”

Father’s great Fifth Symphony had been dedicated to “The Valor of the Russian People.” That was back in the fourth decade of this century, when Russia was our only ally on the Eastern Front. But as the Cold War intensified, so did the pressure to rescind that dedication. My father refused, no matter how oft assailed. He stuck to his guns. The hard times rolled in. He was put on trial in Pittsburgh for being a Communist, and we had trials of our own for being a Commie’s kids. We were stoned on our way to school; the teachers moved our desks to the rear of the classroom, away from everyone else’s; we were never called on in class. Those around us were afraid, and they took great care to see that we felt contaminated. Mom told us later that they’d received phone calls threatening our lives and that plainclothesmen followed us everywhere. Since then, I’ve often wondered how they liked the Saturday matinee with seventeen cartoons.

[The German émigré conductor] William Steinberg had programmed the Fifth, and you’ve gotta hand it to him: he didn’t flinch in the heat. As the work concluded, people all over the hall started rising and cheering and tossing their hats and programs into the air, shouting “Bravo! Bravo!” The next week, my father was legally exonerated with unsuspected help from the American Legion. And no, he would not shake hands with McCarthy’s henchman. He would not make friends and forget all about it. We got the feeling that he didn’t think highly of anyone who could attack a person’s patriotism and loyalty by casually glancing at an appendage to his artistic output.

My father had fabulous cars for as long as I can remember. He traded and bought new vehicles with such regularity that all the car salesmen in Santa Monica knew him by name. He loved to drive. Slowness was not his norm, however. He always bought machines that could go twice the legal speed limit, and he always tried them out. I think he liked lavish cars for two reasons: he really enjoyed owning fine things, and he felt he could depend on a vehicle the proper maintenance of which had been his responsibility. In many respects, he was a product of America’s coming of age; cars remained one symbolic bastion of his belief in the prowess of American ingenuity.

—Patricia Harris

from “Grassroots Grandpa,” an unpublished memoir of her father,
courtesy Patricia Harris

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the print version of this title.]

Roy Harris with his Lincoln Zephyr "Golden Boy," Colorado Rockies, ca. 1941

lasted for the rest of Roy Harris's life and was a dynamic and complementary partnership of two extraordinary musicians. Johana became the leading interpreter of Harris's piano music. They raised a family together and had a nomadic succession of jobs in various cities and states.

Roy Harris was moved by the courage of the Russian people in defending themselves against the Nazis in World War II. His dedication for the Fifth Symphony from 1942 read: "To the heroic and freedom-loving people of our great ally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as a tribute to their strength in war, their staunch idealism for world peace, their ability to cope with stark materialistic problems of world order without losing a passionate belief in the fundamental importance of the arts." Ten years later, this dedication created problems for Harris when the piece was to be performed at the Pittsburgh International Festival of Contemporary Music. Certain authorities, caught up in the spirit of Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee, challenged Harris. Eventually all charges against Harris were dropped, and the symphony was performed as planned.

In 1940, when Aaron Copland wrote *Our New Music*, he described Roy Harris's promise and contribution to American culture: "It is on music such as this that future American composers will build." Twenty-seven years later, he revised the book, changed the title to *The New Music*, and noted, "My prognostication . . . now strikes me as downright naïve. I had completely lost sight of the fact that a new generation of composers, at a distance of thirty years, would have its own ideas about where a usable past might be found. . . . Today's gods live elsewhere."⁴⁴ Indeed, Roy Harris did not become the figure that future generations emulated; a number of his

works have found their way into standard orchestral repertoire, however, and he is recognized for his efforts to establish and define an American musical identity.



ROY HARRIS

From interviews with Donald Schippers and Adelaide Tusler, 1962–1969, Pacific Palisades, California; with William Weber, 9 August 1977, Pacific Palisades; and with Marcia Lebow, June 1975, Pacific Palisades; and public speaking engagement, 1971, California State University

My mother was a folksinger, and she knew a great many of the folk songs of America. I heard them from the time I was a little child. She played guitar when she sang them. That had a big influence on me—and also Protestant hymn tunes, even their harmony and their cadences.

My parents were awfully hard up. They were pioneers, and they had been in the Cimarron rush. My father and my grandfather had ridden in on horseback and staked out a claim. They cut down the trees and built the log cabin I was born in. It was in Lincoln County in Oklahoma. My father used to gamble. One night he had a stroke of luck, and he broke the bank. He was afraid to come home and bring the money. So he stayed there until daylight, when the little commercial bank opened up. He got the money in the safe. With that money he auctioned off the farm and came out to California. That's how we came—he broke the bank in gambling.

We lived west of Covina. One time I remember my father and I brought in a beautiful wagonload of potatoes which we had grown. I'd helped plant these potatoes. I'd seen them grow in beautiful green foliage, and helped dig them up and sack them. We brought them to the Los Angeles market. I remember stopping and watering the horses and resting them a little while, then coming on through the hills and getting in there about five in the morning. We were offered such a little price that the old man loaded them up and took them back home. I was thinking that I don't by any means believe that my music is as good as those potatoes were, but I had better luck.

I was born into a family of farmers. Farmers don't talk very much, the ones that I've known, anyhow. They sit around the table, have dinner, and very little is said. That doesn't mean that they are not thinking, but they are thinking in other terms. They are not thinking in the conventional word terms. They are thinking in terms of the essence of things—what a tomato looks like, what is the texture of a peach, what a horse can do in terms of power, what the sun

feels like, or what the quality of moonlight is. They are thinking in these terms, I think, more than they are in the terms of words and the social implications of words. This is because they don't see people very much. They are with animals, plants, the seasons, and all that has to do with nature. I think that is a wonderful and fortunate beginning for a person who is going to become a composer. This is because music is not a word language but a time-space language. It has color and rhythm. It's like fluid architecture that expands and contracts. If you live on a farm, there are all kinds of birdsongs. One feels as well as sees the ripple of leaves with the breeze blowing through them. One feels what the dog radiates, for instance. I had some wonderful dogs and marvelous horses when I was a youth. We understood each other. There was some kind of communication which was not a word communication but a feeling communication. Of course, music is the language of the emotions. It's not a language of words. It's not a language of the intellect in that sense. It's a matter of subjective identification and transference.

This is background as to why I went gradually more and more toward music. Later on, I had a tremendous tug-of-war inside of myself as to whether or not I would be a writer or a composer. I wanted very much to be both. Gradually and almost imperceptibly, it came over me that language is so determined by the associations of the person who is hearing the word or reading the word. Take, for instance, the word *dog*. A dog can be of any color—an old dog, a young dog, a big dog, a little dog, a vicious dog, a nice dog, a male or female dog, a long-haired or short-haired dog, in good condition or mangy, full of fleas or clean. Every noun has to be so conditioned that it is no longer *a priori*. It only means what the person has experienced in relationship to it.

A C-major chord is here today, here tomorrow, and will be here a hundred years from now, I presume. It was here a hundred years ago and probably meant about the same thing then as it means now. That sets fixed values. It was something that I could hang on to in search of truth. I was very, very much concerned with truth when I was at the university. I was trying to find out what the truth is. I still am. In those days, I was trying to find it out in philosophy. I found out gradually that philosophy seemed all bound up with interpretations and semantics. That alienated me enormously from philosophy finally. I'm not taking a slap at philosophers. I have great admiration for them, but it gradually seemed to me that it was a word-mongering business.

As this was happening, I became more and more enamored with the beauty in what seemed to me the essential truth or falseness, about what music

is and what it does. I discovered that it has the power to evoke the deepest and most elusive emotions in an individual and release them. That seemed to me a very powerful thing. I think music is one of mankind's most powerful vehicles.

I don't think one really decides to be a composer; it sort of happens. It happens because opportunity arises and probably because you live more through your ears than you do through your eyes. I have the feeling, as I grow older, that sound goes more directly to the subjective man, and that sight is more objective. I got into music, I suppose, because I was drawn into it, and I think probably this is the only real way to do it. I think life has to draw you into things. I don't think you make decisions about things.

I came to Southern California and studied composition with Arthur Farwell. He was a fantastic fellow, a cousin of Emerson. Of course, he was a Transcendentalist. He had lived with the composer Engelbert Humperdinck and studied with him on the Rhine, where he had a castle. It was all related to the Wagnerian cult; he knew Cosima and Richard Wagner and the whole outfit. Farwell was quite old when I studied with him, but we became very, very close companions. He was the first one who wrote a big article about me—in the *Musical Quarterly*. That was my first big break. He was convinced that America had to write its own music, as naturally he would, knowing Walt Whitman and Emerson. All the Transcendental group was convinced that America had to produce a culture of her own, that she couldn't borrow it. I think they were quite right. But he had the idea that America was going to produce an indigenous culture by using Indian tunes and attaching them to European norms—European harmony, counterpoint, all the formulas. Of course, it didn't really work. That was a great complication of old ideas. What we really need is a great simplification of new ideas for a new country.

Then I went east, on the advice of Mr. Farwell. I had twenty dollars when I left. I hitchhiked, and I saw a lot of America. It took me two months to get there, but I had forty dollars when I arrived! That's the story of my life. It's just a strong quotient of survival.

I knew Mrs. Edward MacDowell quite well because I went to the MacDowell Colony for a whole summer. I was interested in what her reactions were to MacDowell's life. They lived up in the woods there, and MacDowell became so shy of people that if he saw a neighbor coming down the road, he would duck into the trees. She used to say to me, "Every creative artist, every

composer certainly, must have his own studio somewhere which is off-limits for everybody, including the family.”

The temper of the family has to be fairly even. If people are having tantrum fits, squalls, and all that sort of thing, then the creative work just goes down the drain because it doesn't work. It requires a certain serenity and a certain kind of happiness. The people that I have responded to in my life have been of differing types. When I'm working very hard, I want somebody around who is very simple, very direct, very earthy, very matter of fact—like a peasant. But when I've finished work and I want to play, then I like somebody who is a sophisticate, who has been all over and knows many things, who is a fine conversationalist and is amusing, and who likes good food, all the arts, and all the fine values. I find that when I'm working very hard, my values are rather coarse in the sense that a farmer's would be—not coarse in a moral sense, but coarse-grained, rather. The people that I prefer to be with are people whom I can count on, people who are rather solid, not very full of subtleties. There is nothing that annoys me so much as subtlety when I'm profoundly interested in something else. I should not have to rack my brain to find out what somebody meant who's trying to tell me something.

I'm also attracted to people who need me. I can help them, and that makes me feel good. It makes me feel that I am a benefactor. To worthy students, I give a great deal of my time and energy because I feel that it's like planting seeds in virgin soil. I expect them to do something with these things.

I wrote an orchestral work [*Andante*] which was performed by Howard Hanson at Eastman School of Music [1925]. It was later played with the New York Philharmonic in Lewisohn Stadium, and then in Hollywood Bowl.⁴⁵ That was a big break. America was rather eager to have some composers in those days, and it sounded a good deal like César Franck's symphony—not the themes, but the *feel* of it. I went to New York to hear this work at the Lewisohn Stadium. I figured, well, I'll hear *one* work in my life, anyhow. I expected to be away two weeks, and while I was there I received a letter from a person I'd never met, asking me to come and see her. I went to this gorgeous home over on the East Side, and it turned out to be Alma Wertheim's. She said that she'd had a big party at her house a couple of days before, and they were discussing this work. They were all musicians. A lot of them had heard it, and they thought that I should have a chance to go on and study more. She offered me the opportunity to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris.

She said I could go over there and stay for four or five years, and she'd give me the money. I've had nothing but luck my whole life—I've worked hard, but I've had the breaks all the way through. So I went to Paris, and in the first year, I wrote a large work which won the Guggenheim scholarship. I never had to use their money after the first year.

I studied with Nadia Boulanger. She was a great musician, a strange combination of masculine mentality and feminine emotional equipment. If she couldn't conquer with her brains, her mind, and her words (she was very fussy with words), then she would weep to have her way. She did that several times when I was a student with her. She was a person of enormous sensibilities, great perceptions, great talent, enormous historical knowledge, and deep conscientiousness. Her home was a center for some of the greatest talent of the whole Western world. They came from all over.

She was full of humor in a very calm kind of way, very direct, and a very devout Catholic. I would have to say that she was a profound reactionary. She knew Franco and went down to see him. She knew Mussolini. She visited Mussolini. At the same time, she was on the board of some of the most important publishing companies in all of Europe, all the different countries all over everywhere, as an adviser. She was a very powerful personage who always did what she thought was right.

Her basic idea was that the most important thing in the world was discipline. Talent was an important thing, but talent without discipline was less important than discipline without talent. I can't say that we got along very well. We were profoundly disagreeing on many things. I, for instance, have a great admiration for Walt Whitman. I introduced her to Whitman, and she didn't like him. She said, "I don't think he has any discipline at all." Of course, he had a wonderful discipline. Simply, it is in rhythm. On the other hand, she thought the Tuilleries were wonderful, and the clipped gardens in Versailles. She thought it was just wonderful to see all these evergreens clipped like vases and fountains. So I went out and saw it. I thought that it was just miserable. I come from great trees. I've seen the sequoias, wonderful oak trees, magnificent eucalyptus trees, pine trees, all the trees that I love so much. Then I went there to see these poor trees, oh God, all clipped. They looked like vases, animals, cats and dogs. I thought it was just fierce.

We just didn't agree on many basic things. I will tell you where we ran head-on into each other. I didn't realize until years later what the trouble was. There has been a constant oscillation, a kind of ebb and flow, between what

you might call evangelism and ecclesiasticism. That's stated in terms of the church. The evangelist is the inspirational person. The ecclesiastic is the man who believes in forms. There is that and the difference between the romantic and the classic, between law and order and the profound zeal for the good of the commonwealth. Sometimes they run smack into each other. It's the difference between the conservative and the progressive. Everything that we keep has been kept by the conservative. We can't do one without the other. If we have too much of the inspirational or the emotional and not enough of the tradition of codified thought, we run amok on emotionalism. We don't have any of the juice of humanity. We dry out. We've got to have both. It is this back and forth which makes the ups and downs of civilization. The dominant personalities in each generation determine which way we go. If I had been as mature when I was a student as she was as a grown woman of great experience, then we would have gotten along all right because I would have agreed with her on most of the things she said. I would have said, "Well, of course, I agree with you, but the other half is this." She would have had the grace then to say, "Probably yes, the other half is that. It's just a matter of emphasis."

But she had a tremendous influence on me, nevertheless, because she understood music so deeply, because she was so devoted, and because she constantly harped on the idea that there is no excuse for shabby work no matter what it is. She couldn't stand meager quantity or quality. She wanted both quantity and quality because she had it herself. She gave unstintingly of her talents and her energy, of which she had a great deal. In that respect, she was very much like my father. My father had something which he used to say over and over again, "Nothing excuses the need for an excuse." That is the same thing that Nadia Boulanger always used to say, "Nature does not excuse. Nature is not interested in excuses. Nature only understands the perfection."

She was a perfectionist and she wanted all of her students to do extremely well. It wasn't only for vanity. She had a great love for her students. She was hurt when somebody didn't do well. She was hurt for them. She hurt for humanity. She was hurt because she felt that people misinterpreted her, or had underestimated her, or weren't living up to what she had offered for them. Because she was such a formalist, she depended too much on the codification of traditional formulas. I remember when for my first lesson, she asked me to write some melodies. I brought her a whole book full of melodies in one week. She looked them all through and said, "With this book, I could make a great career." Well, she was quite wrong, of course, because she thought that if you

have materials, you can make a suit of clothes. But a suit of clothes and a symphony are not the same thing. A symphony has to have a kind of new impetus all the time. It's not just that here, I give you this, and out of this seed grows a tree. It doesn't work that way.

I asked her about teaching for money. She said, "Oh, yes, I teach for money." After I'd had lessons for about two or three months, she wouldn't take money from me any more. I said, "Well, don't you teach for a living?" She said, "Yes, I teach for a living." Everybody knew that she was rich. She just cleaned up. She made the Americans pay through the nose—and in American money. In those days, a franc wasn't worth anything at all. So she said, "Yes, I have four kinds of students. I have those who have talent and no money. Those I take. I have a lot who have no talent but they have money. Those I take. Then there are those who have no money and no talent. Those I don't take. Then there are those who have talent and money. These I never seem to get."

I think that she is a magnificent human being. I have profound respect for her. I think that she was full of all kinds of Académie française prejudices. I just feel that she's an extremely dangerous teacher to study with. Nobody should study with her until he's pretty solid on his feet because she has too much to offer for the normal person anyhow. She just swallows them up. A person has to be strong to study with Nadia Boulanger because she's a very powerful personality of great talent, great routine, tremendous discipline, and tremendous experience. It's a privilege to study with her. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

I was worried when I first went over to study, because I wanted to be myself, and I was a little afraid that I might be influenced. Then I discovered to my great pleasure and joy that no person is ever the same as any other person, no matter where he's born, in what time, or with what background. It's like our fingerprints: they're just plain different. The sum total of spiritual qualities and intellectual perceptions and physical drives are so different—with their different backgrounds and experiences they couldn't possibly be the same. So then I wasn't worried anymore.

One thing she taught me was that nobody ever wrote a completely good work. There was no such a thing as a masterpiece. She taught me that a thousand times, although she used the word herself over and over again. One of the things which we did together was to go through the great works of the great composers. She would show me where all the weaknesses were. That's one way

to learn, a wonderful way. I didn't agree with her at all about her approach to counterpoint, harmony, or anything else. The best way for us to study together was to study the works of great composers. She would always say, "There's a principle." I would say, "Well, what is the principle?" Then we would look at the principle, and it would all boil down to practically nothing. Then she would get furious and say, "Well, you're an autodidact, that's all—you're an autodidact, and I can't do anything with you."

I was trying every day to discover how to write what I heard inside my mind's ear. I felt very definitely that I didn't belong to Europe, and yet I felt my antecedents in Bach, Mozart, and Schubert, Orlandus [Lassus] and Josquin des Prez and Debussy. I had and still have a tremendous respect and admiration and love for what they've done. I feel sorry for young composers who don't know the history of their art, because they're missing so much. It's such an inspiration to have it and feel it.

I had some big decisions to make in my mind about whether I was going to go along with the modernism of Stravinsky or the modernism of Hindemith; those were the two most modern at that time. I decided that there hadn't been any great music written, with the possible exception of Debussy, since Beethoven. So I made an exhaustive study of the Beethoven string quartets, all his

"Why should I have said Beethoven? . . ."

My choicest anecdote about Roy Harris came from Virgil Thomson. They had lunch together, and Harris was in a pensive mood. "I am fifty years old," he said, "and I don't think I'll make it."

"Make what?" Thomson asked.

Harris looked at him and said, "Beethoven!"

Harris was furious when I reported this story to him. He denounced it as a total fabrication, with a flurry of floral epithets related to Thomson's lifestyle. Then he added, "Anyway, why should I have said Beethoven? After all, there is nothing in Beethoven's melody, harmony, or counterpoint that is superior to mine. Had I said Bach, it would at least have made sense."

—Nicolas Slonimsky

from *Perfect Pitch: An Autobiography* (Omnibus, 2002)

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Letter, Roy Harris to Aaron Copland, 3 May 1933

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

piano sonatas, and his symphonies; and then I went further back to Bach. I just got lost in Bach, in Mozart, in Orlandus, and Josquin des Prez, and Victoria, and Palestrina.

Le Sacre du printemps was considered a very advanced work in those days—I thought that it was an evidence of disintegration. Melody was poor, there was hardly any harmony; it was all orchestration and rhythm and dynamics. I was much more deeply interested in counterpoint and harmony and beautiful melody. I felt that music was deteriorating a great deal, and it didn't interest me much. I remember getting a score of *Le Sacre du printemps*, studying it for a whole week, and finding that nearly all the materials could be found in the piano exercises of [Carl] Czerny. It was full of Alberti basses and trills and broken chords, with a little Russian folk tune and some eighteenth-century ornamentation, all scored up to beat the band. That music was really doing exactly what we were doing in our marketing: it was all going into packaging. Very few people have agreed with me. Stravinsky himself forsook his own best period to find something else. He's been searching his whole life for something. I honor him for his search, but I don't think much of his music.

Boulanger wanted to be right on the crest of the moment. That didn't mean that she didn't enjoy and understand and love the other things, but she had the feeling that you had to be what she called *au courant*, that you had to belong to the time period that you're living in. Well, you see, I had the feeling that time periods and cultures go back and forth, in and out, up and down, but that the basics don't change; the basic universal laws don't change; and so I've been interested my whole life in finding what the ingredients were of the peaks of the arts all the time. That's what I spent my life for, and I must say I'm not sorry at all. I concentrated harmonically on the development of modern consonance, exactly the opposite of most of them who have been concentrating on dissonance. I studied it, and I felt that dissonance couldn't take you very far because it was all gray. There's no color to it without the two opposites. It had to have that dualism. I felt the greatest part of music was a consonant thing, and, of course, this was supported by my philosophical attitudes, that nature keeps the world in perpetuity through coordination, not through disorientation. I'm sure I'm right about it. Even the physicists say that.

I've had all the breaks when they should come. I've had great teachers, and I had great performances when I was first starting and needed it: for instance, Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. That was luck, when Copland introduced me to him. Koussevitzky said, "Copland told me you are

like an American Mussorgsky. I want you to write a symphony for me.” And I said, “Well, what do you want me to write?” He said [imitating Koussevitzky’s accent], “I want a big symphony from the Vest!” This was June, and he wanted it in September, and that was my first symphony [*Symphony* 1933], so I sure sweat blood on that one. I was there at the dock when he got off the boat. The symphony was finished and bound, and I handed it to him. We went up to his apartment in New York, and he told his secretary to call a press meeting. He announced the date of this, and that turned out to be the first American symphony that he recorded. Recorded by Columbia.

The Third Symphony is a war symphony. (My Fourth and Fifth were also war symphonies, but this was the first.) It was at a time, 1939, when Hitler was taking over one country after another. England seemed indisposed to intercede. We were not in the war ourselves. Things looked bad for democracy. I was deeply depressed, and I felt that I wanted to write a work which might be my last work and probably would never be performed. And so I wrote the highest, best that I knew how—not that I don’t always do so, but somehow or other there was this terrific excitement in the time period in which we were living. We all felt that we were living on a volcano. I wrote this work very swiftly; in six weeks I wrote the work from the first note to the end, completely scored, because I was living in it day and night.

In the Third Symphony, I wrote a sort of survey of the evolution of Western music from the beginning to the end—beginning with music such as the Gregorian chant; going forward into a kind of homophonic, harmonic music; and then going into contrapuntal music, which had a good deal of gaiety in it and a lot of thrust; and then going into a pantheistic kind of music, which had double inverted canons in eight voices in the strings as a background, all these woodwinds with this sense of abandon and freedom; and then settling back into the driving fugue, opening first with the tympani. I remember it took me a week to write that subject—I wrote it over and over again. And then when I finally got it just as it seemed—it just opened the door to everything, it went like wildfire after that. It became extremely exciting, and finally settled into a long coda at the end, which was full of the fate of mankind.

Koussevitzky was so excited about it. He told me, and his wife told me too, “You know, he can’t sleep from studying that score.” And when he did finally perform it, he was so excited by it, and I was too. Victor recorded it right away. I remember my publisher, Schirmer, said they were going to send the score to Toscanini. He’d never played any American music, and I said that

“ . . . a dominant seventh chord for Roy Harris was like heresy for a bishop . . . ”

I heard his *Symphony 1933*, and I thought it was one of the most original works I had ever heard from an American composer. I still think so. Right now he happens to be a very underestimated composer, and I think one reason is that a very small percentage of his large output is on the very highest technical plane of which he is capable. But I think his best pieces are quite extraordinary, and the First Symphony was certainly one, so I sought him out and went to study with him at Juilliard. Fortunately, I got three A's in my courses, because when I became president of Juilliard, the students immediately looked up my record.

I love to talk about Roy. In those early days, obviously I was very much influenced by him. It's something that I am very happy to acknowledge because it was a most constructive time in my life. Not only did Roy introduce me to some of his own ideas about composing music, but he was the one that introduced me to early music—Lassus, for example. I am indebted to him for that.

I would sometimes go out to Princeton for sessions, to show him things. I did a setting of Thomas Wolfe's foreword to *Look Homeward, Angel*, and I took it to him. He implied that it was leisure-class music, taking a quite socialist view toward it. He would use strange, almost pseudo-Nietzschean terms, like it's not “blood music,” or “You don't feel it with your blood.” It was all set to be performed by the Westminster Choir Festival, but he said: “No, I won't permit it. I'm not going to let you do it.” And I thought it was terribly cruel. But in retrospect I don't think it was. Although he has always had a strong sadistic streak in him, he never took it out on me in any way that I can recall.

He was a composer who taught only in terms of his own techniques, whereas Copland could look at a score and try to understand what *you* were trying to do and judge it in terms of your language. Harris would have to judge it in terms of his language. For example—it sounds naïve to say so today, but a dominant seventh chord for Roy Harris was like heresy for a bishop; it was something you just didn't do. It had Greek overtones, absolutely a Greek tragedy. It just couldn't take place. And he was very strict about all those things.

I realized that—with all due regard for his enormous gifts—his learning wasn't advancing. That, I think, was part of the problem. His technical learning wasn't advancing. But I still think he is a mighty impressive figure on the whole American scene, and I think one of these days somebody will just pick out all the best works and put on a great Harris festival, and then we'll have something quite special.

Our relationship was not exactly student to teacher. For example, I was on a scholarship, and he never would take a fee. That was never discussed, though in other ways he made practical use of whatever resources I had. He would like to stay with you, and all sorts of things would be found missing, like shirts and blankets and things [laughter]. He is famous for the fact that if Roy Harris invites you to dinner, you'd better have plenty of money with you, because you know where

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

American composers in Moscow, 1958. Left to right: Peter Mennin, Tikhon Krennikov (then head of Composers' Union), Wallingford Riegger, unidentified, unidentified, unidentified, Roy Harris, Dmitri Kabalevsky, William Schuman

the bill is going to end up. He is well known for this. I am not telling secrets outside of school.

One of the things that he was fond of saying in those days was that form had to be autogenetic, meaning just growing out of itself, and that always appealed to me. I always found his forms very original, growing out of the material, not in any way conventional, even though he used names like sonatas and things of that kind.

I remember Koussevitzky said to me at one point: "You have to learn to 'hate' Roy Harris"—*hate* being in quotes—meaning I had to become my own man. And that was the only time that I ever felt more mature than Koussevitzky, because I knew then, even in my twenties, that if I had my own man to become, I would do so—and if I didn't, I wouldn't—and influences never bothered me. But my music departed radically from the style of Roy Harris from my Third Symphony on.

I think the younger generation—they probably don't even know his name very much except out of history books—but people of my generation fail to appreciate the enormous influence that he was on the American scene.

One of the nicest encounters I have had with him recently was with Copland. The three of us were in Washington—I believe it was the spring of 1975. [Antal] Dorati gave a program consisting of the Harris Third, followed by my Third, and after intermission Aaron's Third. We were treated as though we were movie

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Roy Harris

stars! It was a most exciting reaction from the public—cheers and lines of people for autographs, and a national press conference. It's the sort of thing you dream about in being a composer, and I don't mean for the superficial ego titillation. I mean because the audiences were really wild about three American symphonies. Whenever people tell me that American music can't appeal to the established symphony orchestras, I think of that particular evening.

He was a very good teacher because he was good for me. He might not have been for someone else. I found him very good because I admired him so much. That's part of it, isn't it? I just thought he was really wonderful.

—William Schuman
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
2 February 1977 to 16 November 1977,
New York City and Connecticut

the publisher might as well save the score because he'd never hear anything from it. The next thing I heard, it was announced in the *New York Times* that Toscanini was doing it. He did a magnificent job, and I think one of the reasons why it had such a success was because the Victor Company brought out Koussevitzky's recording the same week that Toscanini broadcast it.

I would say I knew Toscanini well, but I knew him only as a colleague—he did my music, and he invited Jo and me up to his home, that sort of thing. He was a very loving person—every great musician I've ever known has been. They have an outgoing quality, like children, believing everything until somebody did something that wasn't true, and then they're just tigers, you know? Enraged, because something was done which wasn't right. I think musicians are highly moral. By that, I don't mean the kind of church morality, but in a large, biological sense, in the sense that only the right will survive. You're searching for it all the time and are disgusted because you never quite find it. I think it's terrific, a marvelous calling, to get involved in music.

After Toscanini did the Third Symphony, I was given a party. At this party Rachmaninoff asked him how he liked my music. He said that he can't answer; he only knows that it's important, and it's too difficult for him. He said he wants to do a great deal more of it, but he mustn't. He said, "I played the young man when I was a young man, and the young man now must be played by the young man." I rather expected the young composers would come up with more stuff than they did. They got absorbed with all kinds of mannerisms and dialectics. When music is blooming and the fruit is coming out, composers don't think much, they just do it. There's been too much thinking. A creative artist doesn't examine himself. It's sort of like digging up the potatoes to see if they're growing. He must not examine his own processes.



[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

SEVEN

Exploring the World of Duke Ellington



Born in 1899, one year after George Gershwin and one year before Aaron Copland, Duke Ellington is among the most important composers in American history. He possessed extraordinary energy and productivity, writing more than one thousand songs and instrumental works, many of which have become jazz standards, and leading one of the most legendary and enduring big bands of the century. He disliked the term *jazz*, thinking that it suggested too narrow a range of music. With characteristic wit, he said, “We don’t use the word *jazz*. As a matter of fact, we haven’t used it since 1943. Everything is so highly personalized that you just can’t find a category big enough, and jazz certainly isn’t big enough a category to combine so many wonderful people in it. Everybody’s got his own individual style. Like the Diz has got his ‘ding,’ and Hawk’s got his ‘hing,’ and Bird had his ‘bing,’ and Rabbit has his ‘ring.’”¹

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington (1899–1974) was the son of James Ellington, a butler who sometimes worked in the White House, and Daisy Ellington, a doting mother who instilled strong religious values and self-confidence in her son. Ellington commented, “Do I believe that I am blessed? Of course I do! In the first place, my mother told me so, many, many times.”² Ellington grew up in a refined and cultivated household within the growing African-American middle class. Duke’s younger sister, Ruth, described the unusually close family ties: “Everybody in the family loved everybody else so intensely, and everybody in the family expected everybody else to be perfect. We were always taught that we were the best, and so we couldn’t be anything else but the best.”³ Duke

The Ellington Oral History Project

At the gala occasion of the founding of the Duke Ellington Fellowship program at Yale University (7 October 1972), Duke Ellington agreed to be interviewed for the Oral History American Music project upon completion of his autobiography. Unfortunately, he died before this was possible. Nevertheless, an oral history project on Ellington was initiated by OHAM shortly after his death in 1974. It eventually grew to ninety-two interviews with musicians, family members, record producers, jazz critics, cultural historians, and others in the music business. Even John Joyce, Ellington's undertaker, was interviewed. A subseries included those who knew Ellington's close collaborator, Billy Strayhorn (for the entire list of Duke Ellington Project interviews, see the OHAM website: www.yale.edu/oham/). It is interesting to note that several individuals drew parallels between Duke Ellington and Charles Ives: both were complex and private, paradoxical, and innovative; and both are seminal figures in the development of American music.

earned his nickname early on because of his stylish dress and polished manners—qualities he would be known for throughout the rest of his life. He lived up to his noble title with legendary charm, sophistication, and dignity.

Ellington grew up during a time when Washington, D.C., was filled with dance halls and ragtime music. As a youth, he picked up keyboard techniques in the local pool hall from Washington rag pianists and heard Eubie Blake and Harlem stride pianist James P. Johnson perform. He painstakingly memorized Johnson's "Carolina Shout" by slowing down a player piano roll and watching the keys move. Ellington started his musical studies with piano lessons from a teacher appropriately named Mrs. Clinkscapes. He described his early musical life:

Oh, I began to get interested when I first went to high school at about fourteen. Before that I had piano lessons like all kids do, and I learned enough to play one half of the piano at the church recital. The teacher, Mrs. Clinkscapes, played the upper half of the piano. She took the major responsibility, naturally. I sort of learned to play piano, and composing—as you might call it, after a fashion, if this is composing—all came at one time.

When I was a kid I became interested in jazz and ragtime, and I tried to get a lot of people to teach me what they were doing around Washington, but I never could learn anything anybody taught me. So, I was sick and had to stay in the house a couple of weeks, and I finally came up with the "Soda Fountain Rag."

Well, probably the most outstanding incident in my musical career was the beginning of it as a paying proposition when I charged a lady seventy-

five cents to work from 8:00 until 1:00. The woman was desperate for a piano player, and I was the only thing left in town, so she had to take me. I played the worst piano in the world with no rhythm section. I only knew about three or four numbers, and I kept changing the tempos—played them slow and fast, medium tempo. And then she paid the seventy-five cents, and I ran home like a thief. I ran home so happy and woke up everybody in the house to tell them about it. A lot of things sprang from that. I became the school pianist. I played for all the school dances and a lot of things locally.

I was supposed to have been a painter. That was my first recognized talent. I've seen some of my things I did years ago. They are pretty good. You know, I won a scholarship in fine art to the Pratt Institute, but by the time I was ready to take advantage of it, I was already too much involved in music.

When my repertoire got up to about four or five numbers, I was working in the number five band in Washington with all the society work, and I got very smart one day. You know, the guy would send me on a job and say, "Well, collect \$100 and bring me \$90." And I get the \$10. I said, "Well, this is a pretty good business. I think I'll go into it." They had their ads in the telephone book, so I decided to put my ad in the telephone book. My ad was as big as anybody else's, so I began to get work, and I was sending out bands too. I was a pretty good businessman then, seventeen, eighteen years old.

It got around that I was playing the piano, and when you play the piano you get exposed to the ladies. You become aware of them, and they become aware of you. A lot of people think I got bags under my eyes writing music late at night, but it's not true. No, actually what the bags under the eyes are, that's an accumulation of virtues [laughter].⁴

Ellington developed a successful career as a pianist and bandleader in Washington. In 1918 he married Edna Thompson, and in 1919 their son Mercer was born. The musical scene in Washington was thriving, but when Ellington was given the opportunity to work in New York City, he jumped at the chance. In 1923 he went there with drummer Sonny Greer and saxophonist Otto Hardwick. These were the first of numerous musicians who enjoyed unusually long musical associations with Duke Ellington. By the fall of 1923 they joined banjo player Elmer Snowden and trumpeter Arthur Whetsol, called themselves The Washingtonians, and began a four-year engagement at the Hollywood Club. After a fire, the venue was renamed Club Kentucky (usually referred to as the Kentucky Club). It was here that Ellington first met Irving Mills, a controversial figure who was to manage Ellington's business affairs and bring him national prominence.

Irving Mills was a shrewd and aggressive businessman who had his own publishing firm, Mills Music. From 1926 until 1939 he played a crucial yet problematic role as Ellington's manager. During this period, there was a strong division between white and African-American musical acts. Mills, who was white, provided recording and performance opportunities that would otherwise have been unavail-

able to Ellington. He also published Ellington's music, and he has been criticized for taking unearned credit and royalties for Ellington's work. Mercer Ellington commented, "It was the practice of publishers in those days to take credit. If they were somewhere, as Duke Ellington said, and you wanted to get somewhere, you had to make a deal with somebody to get your first tunes out. Today it hasn't changed too much."⁵

By 1927 Ellington had begun to record on the Brunswick, Vocalion, Columbia, and Victor labels, and he had written some of his early classic pieces such as "East St. Louis Toodle-O," "Creole Love Call," and "Black and Tan Fantasy." Then came one of the most significant opportunities of his career: an engagement at the Cotton Club. This was the top spot in Harlem, noted for its lavish interior and high-class (exclusively white) customers. Ellington described the lucky break that helped land the job:

They were having auditions for a band to go into the Cotton Club. About five or six bands or so auditioned. I think the audition was set for noon. When we got there about two o'clock, everybody else had auditioned and gone home. We went on with our audition, and when we got through the man said, "You're hired." I later discovered that the man who said that was the big boss, and he wasn't there when the other guys were there. He only heard us! Some of the fellows around there didn't have very high hopes for us staying there. The waiters were giving odds on us getting thrown out after three or four days, and we stayed there five years.⁶

Ellington's stint at the Cotton Club was during the period known as the Harlem Renaissance, when African-American literature, poetry, fine art, drama, and music flourished. Harlem was the cultural capital of black America, and some adventurous white people, including George Gershwin and Aaron Copland, went there to sample the exotic artistic offerings. The Cotton Club presented elaborate revues with chorus girls, dance numbers, comedians, and singers, all accompanied by Ellington's band. These diverse demands challenged the musicians and expanded their artistic palette. Ellington pointed out another element of the band's success: "Radio was first catching on, and we were broadcasting almost every night across the country. At the same time all the other big bands in the world were imitating Paul Whiteman and playing big grandiose fanfares and that sort of thing. And we had a very plaintive style. As a matter of fact, we were contrasted by all these other people imitating Whiteman."⁷

During his Cotton Club period, Ellington performed a number of original tunes in "jungle style," including "East St. Louis Toodle-O," "Jungle Nights in Harlem," "Echoes of the Jungle," and "The Mooche." Jungle style employed such pseudo-African effects as pounding tom-toms, unusual harmonies and scales, and plunger-muted growling brass lines.⁸ Ruth Ellington recalled, "I remember that I

turned on the radio and this music came, and the announcer said, 'jungle music,' and my shock: Edward was playing jungle music?! Why would Edward be playing jungle music? I've often thought about that—what a funny thing that was."⁹ The Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes described the period as a time when the Negro was in vogue. Always a supreme entertainer, Ellington gave his white audiences what they wanted, including jungle music. He was an outstanding musician, so he did it well.

Ellington had remarkable skill at selecting musicians for his band and getting the most out of them. His band was made up of brilliant, individualistic, and sometimes eccentric voices. He wrote for these specific musicians and featured their unique qualities. For example, the trumpeter Arthur Whetsol had a sweet and elegant tone, while his colleague and 1923 successor Bubber Miley performed with raunchy growls and plunger technique. Miley's presence started to define a new Ellington sound, hotter and dirtier, and his growling trumpet was used in pieces such as "East St. Louis Toodle-O," which he co-wrote. Over the years, the Duke Ellington Orchestra featured such legendary and outstanding musicians as Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster, Jimmy Blanton, and Cootie Williams. Ellington explained, "We write to the individual, provide him with a fitting ornamentation, and he has complete freedom. If you know the man behind the instrument plus the instrument or that which comes out as a result of the two—then, of course, that has a specific musical image. Actually, it's like tailoring a suit."¹⁰ The Duke Ellington Orchestra was remarkably stable, and individuals often stayed on for decades. This was probably due not only to the regular salary that Ellington provided but also to his charismatic leadership, loyalty, and respect for each musician's particular artistic qualities.

Ellington was known to encourage each performer's musical contribution; his compositional process relied upon close interaction with the band. The historian and jazz critic Nat Hentoff described Ellington's working methods: "He would bring out some of the manuscript paper, and if somebody didn't like the way his part was, he would say so. And sometimes a whole section would get together and try to overrule him, saying, 'This will sound much better if you let us do this.' And he would listen because he didn't have that kind of megalomaniac pride of composition. He learned by listening. He didn't always accept the suggestions, but he put a whole lot of them in."¹¹ Some people hold the opinion that in this interactive approach to composition, Ellington exploited his band members, while others feel that he simply encouraged their creative freedom.

During the Cotton Club period, Ellington's band established a distinctive sound, and Ellington's compositions were increasingly innovative. "Creole Love Call" included a musical gesture new to jazz: a wordless vocalise sung with raspy tone by Adelaide Hall. "East St. Louis Toodle-O" was a programmatic song depicting the shuffle of a tired man's broken walk. The piece is highly original in its har-

“Duke was always putting the men in the forefront . . .”

Duke picked up on my style, which I didn’t even recognize. He would teach me a song, and he would imitate me to show me what I was doing. He also told me, “See every live performance you can wherever anyone is performing. From all of them you will be aware of what you’re doing. Just be conscious of everything: how they walk out on the stage, how they bow, all the different things.” And I did. I really focused on it, and that was a great education for me. But I never would have thought about that if he hadn’t said that to me. He helped me find my style. But I didn’t realize that was what was happening. It just sort of fell into place.

Everybody had a chance to solo numerous times, because that’s the way he’d write. He wrote for everybody. The majority of the men with Duke’s band were soloists. They were all stars in their own right, and he gave them the opportunity. Unlike, for instance, when I was with the Benny Goodman band—he didn’t want anyone to star. It was such a contrast I couldn’t believe it. Duke was always putting the men in the forefront. There was great respect for Duke. There was no question that he was the leader and he was the boss and they didn’t want to upset him. He was in command.

—Joya Sherrill

from OHAM interview with Valerie Archer,
29 November 1979, Great Neck, New York

mony, orchestration, and timbres: it featured plunger mute technique in the brasses as well as the growling trumpet of Bubber Miley, accompanied by a bottom-heavy scoring of three saxes in close harmony with the tuba doubling one of the lines an octave lower. The popular “Mood Indigo” of 1930 was scored for a trio of muted trumpet on melody, muted trombone in the middle, and clarinet on the bottom. Not only did this create a totally new sonority, but it utilized new technology: Ellington instructed the trio to stand close to the microphone to achieve a perfect blend, and he recalled that this was “the first tune I wrote specially for microphone transmission.”¹² In addition to its unique tone color, the song’s winding chromatic harmony and quiet rhapsodic style defined a distinctive Ellington sound.

The Depression brought extreme hardships and limited opportunities to many musicians, but Ellington’s band continued to make records and to perform and broadcast steadily from the Cotton Club. In 1929 Ellington’s career expanded to include Hollywood, with his first motion picture, a short film called *Black and Tan*. The next year the orchestra performed in its first feature-length movie, *Check and Double Check*. Ellington and his band appeared in several more Hollywood

"They didn't mention my name . . ."

I just write the melody, and Duke write the arrangement so I give him credit. Like, for instance, "Caravan," written by Duke Ellington and Juan Tizol. I used to get mad when on television I hear all the time, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, we will play 'Caravan' by Duke Ellington," and they didn't mention my name. Still they're doing it. He had nothing to do with "Perdido," "Lost in Meditation" and "Gypsy Without a Song," "Conga Brava," a million songs that I did. They are my tunes, and I put it that he made the arrangement so he could get a little cash through the ASCAP. Well, God bless him because he's dead now, but he took credit for everything I did.

—Juan Tizol

from OHAM interview with Brad Dechter,
30 July 1980, Los Angeles

movies, including *Symphony in Black* of 1934, in which they performed with a little-known singer named Billie Holiday.

The Duke Ellington Orchestra made its first tour abroad in 1933, with enormously successful performances in England and Paris. Ellington was thrilled by the enthusiasm and knowledge of European audiences and moved by their conception of him as a serious artist. Not only did the band perform on concert stages rather than in clubs, but elaborate program booklets accompanied the shows. Ellington also had the opportunity to meet some of the British royal family; on one occasion, the prince of Wales even sat in on the drums! The tour had a positive impact on Ellington, both commercially and artistically.

As the Depression began to abate in the middle of the thirties, musical tastes changed. People had more money to spend and were likely to go to nightclubs rather than to stay home and listen to the radio for entertainment. Swing was all the rage, and big bands led by such white bandleaders as Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Jimmy Dorsey were at the height of their popularity. This trend was an obstacle to Ellington's career. A key element of swing is rhythmic drive, and Ellington's band was criticized for not swinging. Its drummer, Sonny Greer, was more inclined toward elaborate and artistic drumming, and Ellington's compositions themselves tended to be more complex and innovative than the standard swing tunes. Ellington—who had written "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got that Swing)" years before the rise of swing—said: "My definition of swing is that part of music that causes a bouncing buoyant terpsichorean urge. It makes you want to dance and bounce about. Of course, that isn't what's accepted today as swing. Swing today is a com-

“He was the consummate everything in jazz . . .”

My parents and all of their classical music friends in the New York Philharmonic, particularly the ones who were German—they were all down on jazz. I don’t know whether it was because Hitler had put jazz down and declared it as “degenerate music” or whether they just innately couldn’t understand jazz; I don’t know. My mother used to berate me when I listened to Louis Armstrong sing. She didn’t mind his trumpet playing so much, but he sang with this gravelly, growly voice. She said, “*Das ist doch gar kein Singen*. That’s no singing. How can you listen to that?” Well, I just kept on listening and in my own little teenage mind, thought “Wait a minute. I don’t believe what any of these people are telling me. This is great music—particularly Ellington.” Ellington was for me and still is *the* greatest jazz composer—in the full sense of the word *composer*, not just in the improvising performer sense in which many other fine musicians are also composers, instantaneous composers. Ellington was everything. He was an improviser; he was a composer; he wrote extended works; he was a great pianist; he was a remarkable bandleader; in short, he was the consummate everything in jazz. Some of the sounds that Ellington created in his career as early as the late twenties and early thirties are sounds which had never been heard before on the face of the earth—had never been created before by anybody: not Ravel, not Debussy, not Schoenberg, not Stravinsky, not anybody. He was a totally unique and new world of sound, rhythm, and even harmony.

—Gunther Schuller

from OHAM interview with Ev Grimes,
18 July 1992, Lenox, Massachusetts

mercial label on a music itself. But we always thought that swing was an emotional element. We’ve always accepted it as that. It is something that you feel when the music is played. When your pulse and my pulse are together, we’re swinging. That’s total agreement, you know.”¹³

During one of the band’s many national tours, Ellington met a young man who was to have an enormous impact on his compositional life for years to come. The slim, shy, and bespectacled Billy Strayhorn may have seemed an unlikely partner for the handsome, charismatic Ellington, but they worked so closely together and their creative output was so intimately connected that Strayhorn is often described as Ellington’s alter ego. From 1939 until Strayhorn’s death in 1967, the two worked together with a remarkable and legendary compatibility. Numerous individuals cited occasions when the two would work independently only to find that both

ended on the same key or produced almost identical musical material. Luther Henderson, arranger, orchestrator of Ellington's *Beggar's Holiday*, and friend of Strayhorn, recounted one such tale:

They literally could think together. I mean, Ellington would start something, and he would give it to Strayhorn and see if he could finish it. Strayhorn really did a great deal of the exposition in *Beggar's Holiday*, but all the tunes were written by Ellington. I remember one night that something came up in the show, and they decided they needed a ballet. Duke was out in the country someplace. Strayhorn got on the phone with Ellington, and they must have talked and hummed for an hour or more. And Strays: "All right, okay, oh great." And got himself a little beer and some coffee and wrote it that night. It was about a five-minute ballet, but he did it over the phone.¹⁴

Ellington described their first meeting:

Somebody brought him to the theater we were playing in Pittsburgh and said, "This young man has got a lot of talent and I think you should hear him." And he sat down and played some of his music and the lyrics. And he had such perfect wedding of words and music. And I said, "Gee, I'm going to bring you to New York and let you write lyrics for me." So finally, he came to New York, and when he came, I was just about to leave for Scandinavia. That was 1939, and I left him at my house with my son and my sister. While I was gone for six weeks, they were there going through my scores. He had wonderful musical training, schooling, but he had never written for a band. And he got these ideas and started playing with them. One day we had a small band date, six pieces, eight, or something, and I got stuck for a number. I said, "Write this. Do something." He did it, and everybody's eye's popped when they heard what he played because it was wonderful—the first thing. Then of course, in 1940 came the renaissance of vocal background orchestration when he did "Flamingo." And of course it's been flowering ever since.¹⁵

In addition to "Flamingo," Strayhorn wrote such memorable songs as "Lush Life," "Chelsea Bridge," "Lotus Blossom," and "Take the A Train," which became the band's theme song.

Soon after Strayhorn started to work with Ellington, two other legendary musicians joined the band: bassist Jimmy Blanton and tenor saxophonist Ben Webster. The young and brilliant Blanton revolutionized jazz bass playing, and Ellington responded by writing pieces which featured him, such as "Jack the Bear," and to record an extraordinary album of duets. Ben Webster's unique and compelling sound and terrific rhythmic drive distinguished him as an important solo voice. He joined a saxophone section that already included the expressive and soulful Johnny Hodges, and he was featured in "Cotton Tail" and "Conga Brava." Many consider the band of the early forties to be the finest that Ellington ever led. At this point

"That's not for me . . ."

Uncle Bill was low key. I mean, he was never a braggadocious person. He was very humble, quiet, and gentle. I knew that if he were aggressive or if he had wanted more from his career that it could have been so. In fact, I can remember when André Previn, who is a preeminent jazz musician, when he was really making his play to get into the national limelight. And I said, "Uncle, you're every bit as competent as André Previn. There's no reason why, using some of the contacts you have, that you couldn't be equally—" And he looked at me and he said, "Yeah, I think so. But that's not for me. What's it going to get me? Oh yes, a lot of fame, a lot of publicity," he says, "a lot of ulcers. All that money that you end up making, then you end up paying it either to the doctor or you give it to a shrink trying to get your head back together because you're trying to keep up with too many things. No, I'm really happy with the kinds of things I'm doing. And I'd rather be behind the scenes where I can be creative. I can work at my own pace. I'm not dangling at the end of somebody else's string." He was happy in what he was doing, and he just didn't need all the money and all the limelight.

Ellington and Strayhorn were creative artists, and I don't think they did much about the business side. I think Uncle Bill gave Ellington a whole new dimension, a new flair. And it really added something to all this music, and I think that's what he recognized. And I think that's what he exploited. I don't mean exploited in the negative sense. But that's what happened.

—Gregory Morris, Billy Strayhorn's nephew
from OHAM interview with Harriet Milnes,
23 August 1984, Pittsburgh

Ellington furthered his career by changing management, parting from Irving Mills and joining the William Morris Agency. He signed a five-year contract with RCA Victor in 1939.

In 1941 Ellington wrote a musical, *Jump for Joy*. The show, sometimes called a civil rights musical, gave Ellington the opportunity to express his views on race relations. Although Ellington generally avoided controversy, the show included some biting criticism of racism. Moreover, it portrayed the all-African-American cast in a positive, strong, and nonstereotypical way. The show, which included the popular "I Got It Bad (and That Ain't Good)," was widely praised, but it closed in Los Angeles after an eleven-week run and never made it to Broadway.

One of the most momentous occasions in Ellington's extraordinary career came in 1943, when the band performed in Carnegie Hall. Although they had played on European concert stages, in America the band was more often seen in

"Simpatico . . ."

They had a marvelous relationship, where Edward could be in California and Strays could be in Paris, and Edward would call him up and tell him he had an idea for a certain number. Strays would write his part in Paris, and Edward would write his part in California. And when they got the two parts together, they had started or ended on the same key or the same note, or they could dovetail the two together and make one piece without having discussed it with one another. They were that simpatico. Extraordinary relationship.

—Marian Logan
from OHAM interview with Sonia Rosario,
27 February 1978, New York City

nightclubs, cabarets, dance halls, and stage shows. Similarly, Carnegie Hall rarely featured jazz groups, with the notable exception of Benny Goodman in 1938. An African-American jazz group on stage at Carnegie Hall was dramatic, and Ellington used the occasion to premiere a striking piece, *Black, Brown, and Beige*. Subtitled *A Tone Parallel to the History of the American Negro*, this work also addressed racial issues, but its greatest notoriety came from its length: a little more than three quar-

" . . . it was impossible to tell where Duke stopped and where Billy started . . ."

Billy was the one that took care of rehearsals. Duke was there, but Billy would do the arranging on a lot of things and he would direct the guys. Not only that, at a recording session it was impossible to tell where Duke stopped and where Billy started, because Duke would be conducting and Billy would be playing the piano. It would happen at concerts too. He would be conducting, and then there was a spot that he wanted to go to the piano, and Duke would pick up the next note and sit down and finish what he was doing without missing a beat. When you'd listen to a record, Billy would be playing in Duke's style, but he was able to do this so well.

—Joya Sherrill
from OHAM interview with Valerie Archer,
29 November 1979, Great Neck, New York

“He did not make himself easy to know . . .”

Billy was a marvelous person. He was very astute, very sharp. Much sharper than he would let on because his image was like his nickname, Sweetpea. But he knew what was going on, and he was utterly devoted to Duke. I did not get the sense that he felt diminished by being Duke’s alter ego. I think that was really the role he wanted, and he was delighted he could do it, and he really was indispensable to Duke. Billy was a homosexual at a time when the closets were still largely closed. Although jazz was supposed to have been a field in which individuality had a fair amount of free exercise, nonetheless, Billy was not all that eager to have it known. Part of his retiring nature was, I think, because he was in the closet. He did not make himself easy to know.

—Nat Hentoff

from presentation to Duke Ellington Seminar, Yale University,
28 February 1978

ters of an hour. The length of most popular songs then was three minutes, dictated by the limits of a ten-inch 78 rpm record. Ellington had earlier experimented with longer durations and forms with songs such as “Reminiscing in Tempo” of 1935 and his “Creole Rhapsody” of 1931, but *Black, Brown, and Beige* sparked a particularly lively debate. Many critics questioned whether Ellington was capable of writing a good large-scale piece or whether such forms were appropriate for jazz. In *Jazz* magazine, John Hammond asked the tendentious question, “Is the Duke Deserting Jazz?”¹⁶ Others wondered whether jazz itself belonged in Carnegie Hall, described by Jake Trussell Jr. as “the sacrosanct, hypocritical hideout of everything and everybody that hates jazz music.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Duke Ellington Orchestra would go on to perform six more concerts at Carnegie Hall.

After the heady times of the early forties, Ellington’s fortune began to shift. The band experienced numerous personnel changes, including the departures of Cootie Williams (for Benny Goodman’s band), Barney Bigard, Ivie Anderson, Ben Webster, Rex Stewart, Juan Tizol, and Otto Hardwick, and the deaths of Jimmy Blanton and Tricky Sam Nanton. Some of these musicians, like Hardwick and Nanton, had been working with Ellington for decades; others, like Blanton and Webster, had redefined the band’s sound with their brilliant and individual voices. By the late forties, the band had lost its widespread popularity. The rise of bebop made Ellington seem old-fashioned, and pop singers like Frank Sinatra attracted much larger audiences. By the early fifties, very few big bands survived. People moved from the city to the suburbs and watched television, the latest novelty, rather than listen to

"You work with what you've got . . ."

I wanted to tell you about an incident with Duke, just to give you another idea of the kind of guy he was. We were traveling, and I was doing more strenuous dancing than I had ever done before. I went out on the stage, and I found that although it was hardwood, the old floor had deteriorated, and it was almost like corrugated wood. I used to do a series of slides in which I'd kick up one leg and would slide along with one foot attached to the floor. It felt like it was going to tear my upper thighs apart. We used to look at those performances religiously, and I was really hurt because of it. I had experienced this the first show, and I came backstage and I was beating the walls with my fists. And Ellington saw it.

So Duke: "Hi, babe. What's the matter? What happened to you?" I said, "God, that stage out there. It's tearin' my thighs apart." He could see I wasn't needing surgery or anything. It wasn't that severe, but I was just unhappy about it. So he says, "Hey, c'mere." He took me to the other side of the stage where the piano was that he had performed on and he showed me his hands en route. His hands looked worse than a bass player's: calluses, cuts, cracks, and so forth. He said, "You know, I'm the star of this show, and this is what I have to work with." I looked at the piano. It was a mess. The black keys were ripped off by the dozens. The white keys, through use of fingers rubbing along it, get a sort of rounded shape and the very edge is razor sharp. That's what had been cutting up his fingers. This guy is the feature attraction of the whole show, and that's what he had to contend with. This was the way that he taught you things. The moral of this story being: you don't question what you have to work with in show business. You work with what you've got. I never complained anymore.

—Alfredo Gustar

from OHAM interview with Harriett Milnes,
19 February 1983, New York City

the radio or go out to hear live performances. In 1951 the band suffered another crushing blow, the departure of Johnny Hodges, Sonny Greer, and Lawrence Brown, who left to form their own band. Hodges's sensuous and expressive saxophone had long been a featured attraction of Ellington's band, and Greer had worked with Ellington since their youthful days in Washington, D.C.

Despite these adversities, Ellington, with characteristic optimism and dedication, continued with his band. He hired new players, such as trumpeter Clark Terry and saxophonist Paul Gonsalves. However, the former glory days of performances in major urban venues and European tours were replaced by low-paying one-night stands and even a six-week stint accompanying ice-skaters in Flushing, New York.

One lucky night on tour in 1956 Ellington's shifting fortunes turned around yet again. The band performed brilliantly at the Newport Jazz Festival, and their set culminated in a spontaneous twenty-seven-chorus solo by Paul Gonsalves on "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue." The record producer George Avakian described the occasion:

The performance was just unbelievable. The band was in terrific shape that night. Gonsalves was just fantastic. There was a good-looking blonde girl in a tight black dress who started dancing in the crowd, and it got everybody steamed up, including the band interchanging with her. You know, the guys, when Paul was blowing, clapping hands behind him and shouting. The excitement was quite tremendous. The recording was just a super smash. It was the best-selling Ellington record of all time, and remains so, and it was a real turnaround in Duke's career. Duke himself appreciated it enormously because he was one who always understood the problem of retaining musical integrity and goals, but at the same time having to reach people in order to meet the payroll. Duke said, "Well, I've gotta do it no matter what, because without the band, I can't be me, and I can't work."¹⁸

After the comeback in Newport, Ellington and his band enjoyed renewed opportunities. *Time* magazine featured Ellington on the cover, and Columbia Records offered the band a contract and recorded numerous albums, including "A Drum Is a Woman," a satirical history of jazz. Ellington and Strayhorn also wrote a number of extended works, including *Such Sweet Thunder* (also known as *The Shakespearean Suite*), the *Nutcracker Suite* (based on Tchaikovsky), *Peer Gynt Suite* (based on Grieg), and *The Far East Suite*. Ellington created music for a number of film scores including *Anatomy of a Murder* and *Paris Blues*, and he wrote incidental music for the Ontario Shakespeare Company in Stratford. Ellington collaborated with such well-known and diverse artists as Ella Fitzgerald, Rosemary Clooney, Coleman Hawkins, John Coltrane, and Frank Sinatra. He joined two major figures in the jazz world, Charles Mingus and Max Roach, to create the *Money Jungle* record of 1962. The following year he wrote *My People*, a large-scale work celebrating various distinguished African-American leaders. The piece was presented in Chicago as part of a celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. It included "King Fit the Battle of Alabam'," a piece dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr., who attended a rehearsal and greeted Ellington warmly. Despite the fact that *My People* and previous works like *Jump for Joy*, *New World a-Comin'*, *Deep South Suite*, and *Harlem* addressed racial issues, Ellington was sometimes criticized for not speaking out more vehemently and directly about civil rights.

Prestigious honors and awards came to Ellington in increasing numbers. He received honorary degrees from such institutions as Yale, Brown, Howard, and Washington Universities and the Berklee College of Music. President Nixon presented him the Presidential Medal of Honor at a gala White House celebration of Duke's

" . . . my people . . . "

The music of my people is what? Let's see, my people? Now, which of my people? I'm in several groups. I'm in the group of the piano players. I'm in the group of the listeners. I'm in the groups of the people who have a general appreciation of music. I'm in the group of those who aspire to be dilettantes. I'm in the group of those who attempt to produce something for the plateau. I'm in the group of what? Oh yes, those who appreciate Beaujolais. The music of the people—*the* people, that's a better word. *The* people, rather than *my* people. Because *the* people are *my* people. The music: you go further and further back in the music that I have become a part of. It's strongly American Negro.

—Duke Ellington

seventieth birthday in 1969. Haile Selassie, ruler of Ethiopia, paid tribute to him with the Emperor's Star, and France's president Georges Pompidou named him to the Legion of Honor. Even snubs, like the decision of the Pulitzer Prize Committee in 1965 not to present him with a special award in composition, did not seem to upset him. With his usual calm graciousness, the sixty-six-year-old Ellington's sardonic reply was, "Fate is being kind to me. Fate doesn't want me to be famous too young."¹⁹

Near the end of his life, Duke Ellington wrote three large-scale religious works, the Sacred Concerts of 1965, 1968, and 1973. Ellington's religious convictions had been strong since his youth. He commented on the startling idea of putting jazz into a religious setting:

They said they would like for me to do a sacred concert up at the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. Of course, this knocked me completely out. I said: "Wait a minute. I'll have to think about this," because this is quite a thing. I'm going to go up in this beautiful cathedral and make my kind of noise? This has to be right—because when you play or say something in a church, you can't be acting. You've got to mean what you say because you never know what's going to fall on you if you don't. You have to mean what you say. If you don't, you've got no business in there.²⁰

The First Sacred Concert was created largely from preexisting material, including the haunting tune "Come Sunday," originally written for *Black, Brown, and Beige*. It was premiered at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, and included the band, chorus, solo singers, and a tap dancer. The Second Sacred Concert, which premiered at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine, consisted of entirely new

"He was like Bach . . ."

The contemporary composer as misunderstood, ignored, unappreciated, alienated, I find an absolutely pathological model. I decided early on in my life that a composer like Duke Ellington was a far more important model to me. Ellington particularly influenced me because he was a person who wrote for his audience. He wanted to be popular. He wanted to write hits. He worked constantly. He was like Bach. There was just this endless flow. He never stopped. He was married to his work and married to the players in his band. He created one of the great bodies of art in this century.

—John Adams
from OHAM interview with Perlis,
3 May 1997, New York City

material, including Ellington's original lyrics. It was very well received and was widely performed for many denominations throughout the world. The Third Sacred Concert was premiered at Westminster Abbey in London.

In the last year of his life, Ellington completed his autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress*. This book, full of colorful and positive reflections, has been criticized for its inaccuracies. Ellington, always polite and nonconfrontational, must have recognized the overly optimistic nature of the book. He said to his son Mercer and coauthor Stanley Dance, "We've written the Good Book . . . and now we'll write the Bad Book!"²¹ Even after the publication of his memoirs, Ellington remained enigmatic. Musician Willie Ruff described him as "a master of illusion. . . . Never heard anybody get a straight answer out of him."²² Ruth Ellington commented, "Many people thought he was an enigma, and I've often described him as having veils behind veils behind veils behind veils behind veils. I think that he developed that kind of facade because he was so hypersensitive that he knew that he was vulnerable to injury, and therefore he did not expose large areas of himself. He just opened up small little facets here and there, and he was always extremely aware of what was going on about him. He could look at people and see straight through them."²³

Duke Ellington has been described as unique, original, elusive, refined, hard-working, and restlessly productive. His obituary in the *New York Times* referred to him as "America's most important composer."²⁴ The pianist Randy Weston called him "a prophet, one of the great leaders in music. There'll never be anybody who's ever accomplished what he accomplished, before or after. With his elegance and his quick wit and his manners and his charm and his fantastic personality, there'll never

" . . . like reading James Joyce . . . "

Music Is My Mistress—that's the book that really says everything, but you have to look at it like reading James Joyce; you need to know the humor and the wit and all the subtle nuances. Knowing his intuitive sensing of things, I think he sensed that he might have been at the end, and I think that he looked at the book as thanking a lot of people, not really a biography as such. This was giving credit to those who contributed. That's the basic spirit that the book was written in. He does comment on a lot of things in there, but it'll take fifty years before the scholars and the general world will get enough knowledge of him to be able to read that book and see all the irony in there. He says some very potent things, if you know how to read it. His sarcasm: he had a way of seeming to be building someone up and actually putting them down. The musicians that live with him, they read it and understand it. I talked with several of them and we laughed over certain passages, the type of thing that would be very difficult for the average person to understand. I try to tell them he told everything—you just didn't read it right. It's all right there.

—Michael James, Ellington's nephew
from OHAM interview with Harriett Milnes,
22 January 1983, New York City

be another Ellington."²⁵ Pianist Billy Taylor described the worldwide embrace of Ellington's music, calling it a "monumental achievement." He added:

His melodies were interesting and the harmonies always went to some unexpected place. I asked him, "Duke, how is it that your harmonies are so logical and they seem to flow naturally into unexpected places? How did you ever get started in that direction?" And he said, "Well, when I found out C-sharp wasn't D-flat." It was very profound. And then, hand in hand with that, was the way in which he presented his music. He was serious about his music, even something that was obviously a lot of fun—I mean, the band is having a good time, Sonny Greer is playing on everything in sight—but they were serious about it. That made a marked impression on me because I could see that there were two approaches to fun. Some guys were comic in the show business sense. Fats Waller would do all these outrageous things when he was playing the piano. Louis Armstrong would do his show biz kind of routine with the handkerchief and everything. And yet Ellington was just as effective and communicated just as much with a certain kind of elegance. It was all through his music.²⁶

“Duke felt a responsibility to his musicians . . .”

Duke could have lived on his ASCAP royalties very easily and never have a band. Duke felt a responsibility to his musicians, and this is one of the rare times that anything like this ever happened in the music business. It was marvelous. Duke not only kept a lot of great musicians working, but he also kept looking for great musicians. A lot of the best musicians we’ve ever known passed through Ellington’s band when Ellington could have made two or three times as much money just writing songs and living on his royalties. Duke’s band was in the red most of the time in the last years. Duke was almost unique among orchestra leaders—it was real social responsibility on Duke’s part keeping his band together.

—John Hammond
from OHAM interview with Paul Kolderie,
3 April 1978

Family

Mercer Ellington • Mercedes Ellington • Ruth Ellington

Duke Ellington’s son Mercer Ellington (1919–1996), worked intermittently in the Duke Ellington Orchestra and wrote several compositions for its repertoire, including “Blue Serge,” “Jumpin’ Punkins,” and “Things Ain’t What They Used to Be.” He became the ensemble’s road manager and trumpet player in 1965 and its leader after his father’s death in 1974. His 1978 memoir, *Duke Ellington in Person*, was written with the Ellington historian Stanley Dance.



MERCER ELLINGTON

From OHAM interviews with Harriett Milnes, 19 June 1983, Chicago;
and with Daniel Caine, 22 July 1979, Chicago; and presentation,
13 October 1977, Yale University

My father had great respect for people who might be classified as “carny men,” a person who could take something and then ballyhoo it and make it so very important. This is one of the things that made him have such great respect for Irving Mills, and also for anyone else who proclaimed to the public that this was a great man coming before it. With each of these people, he admired the fact that they were almost as much ham as he was!

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Duke Ellington

My father's relationship to Irving Mills was that he felt it was a great place for him to get an education. He learned the business end from Irving and also many rules of being a showman. You have to bear in mind that Irving was as much of a genius in his field as Ellington was in music. When that band traveled in those days, the college band would be there to greet the train. They'd march him around to the hotel. That alone gave him a new importance. Irving was responsible for this and him being in the Cotton Club, which was the break place of one of the new babies, radio. As a result, at a time when everybody else was relatively unknown—and there were great orchestras, like Fletcher Henderson and the rest of them—he was being broadcast coast to coast and gaining tremendous recognition from it. Today, you've got people who make the great breakthroughs; you've got black millionaires like James Brown, but in those days, you just didn't get that price. Irving was one of the first to demand that Duke get the same consideration as the big white acts.

People considered *Jump for Joy*—not necessarily Duke Ellington, but the show—a pretty radical experience, because there were many outspoken comments about the disadvantage of being in the South for blacks. During the run of the show, we had something like five or six bomb threats. When it closed, it was to a standing-room-only house.

The first concert in Carnegie Hall was in '43. Of course the big thing was *Black, Brown, and Beige*. I knew that this was revealing and was in a sense a criticism against society, both black and white prejudices. It was a criticism especially with the prejudices that existed within the race itself, because of shades and colors. I feel that what many of the critics wrote about *Black, Brown, and Beige* had nothing to do with the general opinion of the audience. It never bothered him once he was aware of the fact that critics, in many instances, were not really well founded in the remarks they made. In most cases the audience raved about it and thought it was a great work.

When we went to black countries, he was being used as a diplomat, to cement social relations. When we were sent to Iron Curtain countries, we were sent there to counteract the propaganda that the black man in the United States was downtrodden. It was an example of how a person could be black and could become successful, and also to show that not every black got up there on a soapbox and made speeches on militancy—but that there was somebody who could be genteel and still persuasive.

You know why he was anti-Communist? Because he was so religious, and anything that downed religion had to be wrong. Aside from that, he liked the idea of one day becoming rich. I think he felt it was one of his great achievements that as a young man, he went in the back door of the White House to visit his father; eventually he was invited in the front door. So he liked the idea of being someplace where this was possible.

He lost his first fortune in the Crash [of 1929], and we've gone through that experience about four or five times. So from time to time, he had to quickly find a way to keep the band together. It never really pressured him or bothered him that much, because, fortunately, after the thirties he had ASCAP to fund the band at times when the road wasn't paying for them. It's the one thing that held the band together. And he did it for pure love, because anywhere in the last five or six years, if he had just taken tours for three months here and five months there, he would have come off with tremendous profit. But he would just as soon go into the Blue Note [jazz club] and play for forty people two or three nights a week and just weather it out. At that time he used

to create more, and the next time they went on tour, they had something new, and it was audience-proven. Most cases where Pop was involved with money, he had very little respect for it. If it was something he really wanted to do, he financed it himself, like the *My People* project, which only lasted for two weeks in Chicago. He designed and painted the scenery. He was the one that thought of the choreography and sent for these dance troupes from different places. He had Alvin Ailey's group there on one hand; he had Tally Beatty's group on the other, and he just wanted it because he delighted in seeing his work, and that was his real reward. There was no way that he could come out of it with any sort of a profit. He never had a thought about posterity. He just didn't believe that he was ever going.

There was a thing he taught me: when you write a song, you write two at the same time, one slow and one that has a beat to it. One should suggest the other, or one comes with the suggestion from the other. When you write something, if you get something which is totally appealing and somewhat unrelated, just leave it out, go to another sheet, and that's another number. He believed in simplicity in certain things. If he would write to a point where he felt he'd gotten somewhat of a commercial success, it was almost as if he'd warn himself, "If you don't look out you're gonna be commercial." And then he'd go on and do something like the *Perfume Suite*, that was more ethereal and more artistic.

I went to college on the G.I. Bill to study composition, and we studied every composer and every system of arranging and writing—Berlioz, Strauss, Schoenberg, and so forth. I was then to find out that there was this link between Schoenberg and Ellington. They'd lived apart, never been associated with each other, were practically ignorant of each other's works, yet there was an absolute parallel. Later, many people told Ellington that he sounded like Schoenberg. He himself preferred to be compared to [Frederick] Delius. But when I got to understand the church music, which was his latest and most avid interest in his career, his apex, then I found out that he had disguised the fact that he'd gone into atonality. People accepted it as if it was an everyday thing. They could still remember the melodies of the tunes he was writing—and yet he was as far out as Bartók and other people who were considered avant-garde. He had disguised it and kept his intelligence hidden. Only when you saw it on paper or really listened to it closely could you detect the way it was.

Mercedes Ellington (1939–), Mercer's daughter, made history in 1963 as the first African American to be part of a dance troupe on *The Jackie Gleason Show*. She danced and choreographed many Broadway shows, including *Sophisticated Ladies*, a 1981 revue featuring Duke Ellington's music.



MERCEDES ELLINGTON

From an interview with Valerie Archer, 30 June 1980, Yale Club, New York City

Of course, everyone believes that Duke Ellington was their best friend and that they were something special to him. That was the thing about him—the way he made people feel. It was another gift for him to be able to do that.

He was really very far ahead of his time, I think, even the way he dressed. He dressed that way because that was what he wanted to do—it was really unique. Nobody else dressed like that. Nobody wrote like that. Nobody talked like that. He really knew what he was about. At one point my father was mortified by the fact that he was wearing his old pigtail. I think he did it for a long time just to bug my father. He told me, “I don’t know what’s the matter with Mercer. Why is he so bothered with this pony tail? I’m gonna keep it.”

I know he must have been depressed at points or had bad moments, but I never saw that side, even in the hospital. When I was with him in the hospital, I’d bring him pads and pencils and he’d love to talk about his great affairs—the women in his life. A man’s dying in a hospital, and this is what he’s talking about—the most vibrant part of life. He knew how to live.

Ruth Ellington (1915–2004), Duke’s younger sister, managed his business affairs and Tempo, his music publishing company.



RUTH ELLINGTON

From OHAM interview with Vivian Perlis, 11 November 1977, New York City

The Cotton Club shows were on the radio when I was still in Washington. I may have been eight years old, something like that. The entire family went to the Cotton Club, and it was really very glamorous, very

exciting. It was like an Arabian Nights place. The ceiling was tented, heavy purple drapes, and there was trim of gold. Then there was a stage in the center with the audience sitting around the stage in a kind of a U form. But the show was *sensational*, because the girls were *gorgeous*. They had two kinds of girls. They had what they called the Little Ponies, who danced in the chorus line, and then they had the tall showgirls. Of course the beautiful, tall showgirls did not dance—they simply walked, and posed. They had the Adagio Dancers, and tap dancers, and the chorus line. Although all the girls were black, they varied in color from peach to brown; however, they threw an amber spotlight on them, and all the girls looked gold. The costumes were incredible, with feathers and spangles, the kind of thing that we saw in the Ziegfeld Follies. Then of course the music was marvelous.

He did not want to hear problems. He used to say, “I have to think about beautiful music.” I knew that, and my job was to mind the store in New York, to take care of the problems. Because his job was to be creative and to be on the road. I never saw him lose his temper; I heard he lost it once about twenty years ago. I also think that it was physiological to a certain extent, because he had a normal pulse rate of forty-seven and a rapid pulse rate of fifty-five. Dr. Arthur Logan once said to me, after he had had an examination by several doctors, that they all concluded that he was a physiological as well as a psychological phenomenon.²⁷

I really think his was a message of love. He was very religious, and he very much believed in our Judeo-Christian heritage of love. That’s why he said the Sacred Concerts were the most important things that he’d ever done, and he devoted the last ten years of his life to that. He had read the Bible three or four times before he was thirty. He knew the Bible very well. Once someone asked him, “If you were going to be on a desert island, what book would you take?” He said, “I’d take the Bible, because all the other books are in it.” Yes, that was something that had stayed with him from the time he was very young. He said his mother taught him about God at that time. Our entire family is very religious. There wasn’t this feeling that everybody in the family dressed up in starched white clothes and went to church every Sunday morning. The feeling of religion was more one of how you behaved every day—it was truly a philosophy of life.

When he began to write the Sacred Concerts, he wrote all of the lyrics. It was as if he were preaching. He felt that he had to say for God. He changed his whole behavior at that time: he stayed in his room, withdrawn, ceased to

have all kinds of ladies, and went to work, came home, meditated, wrote, slept, and ate—a very Spartan routine.

He said he never felt fear of anything except the fear of hurting or offending someone else, because he knew that God wouldn't like that. It was only his religious belief that gave him that kind of emotional support and security. When you are leading the kind of life that he was leading, flying through monsoons and all kinds of dangerous things and never knowing quite what's gonna happen in the show biz life, you really have to have something to give you equanimity. That's why so many artists resort to drugs and alcohol—because it is a very harrowing existence. He never resorted to any of those. It's the only way to stay on top—you can't stay on top for fifty years if you resort to drugs. He felt that it was a kind of a thing that one should never do, particularly if one had a wife and children. He used to say, "You have to protect yourself in order to protect the ones you love."

The Early Band

Sonny Greer • Louis Metcalf • Irving Mills • Adelaide Hall

The drummer Sonny Greer (1895–1982) worked with Duke Ellington for more than thirty years, from 1920 in Washington, D.C., through the Cotton Club period, and until 1951, when he left to join a band formed by Johnny Hodges.



SONNY GREER

From interview with Stanley Crouch, January 1979, New York City

Nobody never seen nobody like us, never heard nobody. We used to broadcast from the Cotton Club every night from 6 o'clock to 7. Everybody was waiting—from New York to California, coast to coast, they was waiting for that. That's supper time. Ain't nobody got nothing to eat till we come off. Dad's working all day—starve to death till we got off.

They never seen nobody like the band, the way we played, the way we looked, and the class we had. We traveled; we had our own Pullman car. And nobody could come in our Pullman car because the doors stayed locked because people would annoy you. We had our own baggage car because we traveled heavy. If we done four or five shows a day in the theater, every show we had a different uniform on. Every show was different, from top to bottom.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Duke Ellington with members of his band. Left to right: Junior Raglin, bass; Lawrence Brown, trombone; Johnny Hodges, saxophone; Ellington; Ray Nance, trumpet; Sonny Greer, drums; Freddy Guy, guitar; Harry Carney, baritone saxophone

We had our own lighting equipment, own stage. We were one of the first bands to use the roll-down and roll-back stage. We carried that. We carried our own lighting system. One of the first bands with the overhead pinpoint lights. We had an electrician. They had never seen that. They may have seen the colored band pull up in a bus or something. But when we pull up, we pull up in the station. We never had to run get no rooms. We paid an excellent fare to have our car parked in the station with a Pullman porter and conductor. That's the way Irving Mills made us travel.

Nobody's band ever cut our band, outplayed our band. We were a living legend. Every tick of the clock, twenty-four hours a day, somewhere in the world—not only in the United States, all over the world: Russia, everywhere else—they're playing some of our tunes. Every time a fashion show used to come on, you heard "Sophisticated Lady." They play "Mood Indigo" damn near as much as they play the "Star Spangled Banner"! Yeah! They play our tunes every tick of the clock. That's no exaggeration.

The first show at the Cotton Club: it was heavy. The guy that staged the show had them girls and different acts. Had the Nicholas Brothers, the Berry Brothers, Peg Leg Bates, Ethel Waters—they were the headliners—a dance team and oh, sixteen prettiest girls you ever saw in the chorus. When it's opening night, everybody in New York was there. Sensational.

That's the first time we really played in what you call a stage production. The girls stopped the show cold, just the girls. They were handpicked, the prettiest colored girls in the world. They looked pretty on the stage, and when they go on the street, down Broadway, shopping, people turn around and look at them. That was the Cotton Club girls—famous. And you better believe they could dance. With all due respect to the Rockettes, these girls were something else, boy. They'd look at the band like they were nothing, because they made plenty of money. Couldn't nobody hit on 'em because they had the pocketbook full of money. They'd need somebody like a hole in the head. My wife was one of the Cotton Club girls. She couldn't see me with a telescope, and she was one of the lead dancers. Yes, that's right.

The trumpeter Louis Metcalf (1905–1981) began his career in New Orleans and then moved to New York City, where he performed with such legendary musicians as Willie the Lion Smith, Sidney Bechet, Elmer Snowden, Jelly Roll Morton, King Oliver, and Fletcher Henderson. He was a member of Ellington's Cotton Club Orchestra from 1927 to 1928.



LOUIS METCALF

From OHAM interview with Jeremy Orgel, 1979, New York City

The first steady job I took was down through the Rhythm Club.²⁸ It was a musicians' club. Everybody came in every night when they got off from work and spent money and bought drinks, and everybody was happy. I got the job with Sidney Bechet and Johnny Hodges, Tommy Benford, and Willie the Lion Smith in the band. That was the craziest band. Bechet played his heart out, and Johnny just sat and listened. He was getting his lessons right there.

Duke came to New York and got right into this New York spirit. Everybody looked up to him. He had some ground to cover because when he got here, he was just a kid. Duke came in to a hornets' nest: Eubie Blake and Art

Tatum and Claude Hopkins, Fletcher Henderson—all them characters. But Duke was in New York for about six months and he turned out to be one of them hornets, man. He was one of the greatest bandleaders that I've come in contact with, and I've played with nearly all of them. I don't think he really ever intended to be an arranger. It was just that he was given a job, and he went at it.

I knew Bubber Miley.²⁹ We were good friends. Boy, he had a lot of soul on that trumpet and plunger. When I first came to New York, that's what it was all about. The plunger had taken over New York City. It wasn't that way in the West—in Kansas City or New Orleans.

Sonny Greer was always the type of guy—you'd meet him and you'd like him in the first three or four minutes. He liked to tell jokes and liked to laugh and liked to socialize with people. He might have introduced Duke to a lot of people, because when Sonny got to New York, in two weeks he knew everybody who had a name. I remember Sonny Greer got so big at the Cotton Club that New York didn't know nobody but Rudy Vallee and Sonny Greer. He used to have a beautiful voice, but he just drink his self away. He drank so much, and I don't know why, because he certainly was successful and people loved him. But I think he was just busy enjoying his self, going to all the parties that he was invited to—sometimes two and three a night. I used to try to hang out with him, but I said, "This guy is gonna break up my marriage." You know, a woman ain't gonna believe all them parties.

When this Mills signed Duke up, he went too far with his liberty. We got a session down there, and we're gonna play certain numbers. We'd get out there, and this guy Mills would change it all around. Mills was kind of a show-off cat. Sometimes he'd take the liberty to sing. I remember he'd sing "Diga Diga Do." Man, we had some arrangements, and then this monkey comes in, and that's when everybody began to get down on Duke. They'd say, "How can you let this man louse up your band?" Well, Duke said, "I don't want to jump before I'm really big enough to go for myself." And that was smart thinking. Finally Duke made so much money horsing around with Mills that he said, "Listen here, I'm buying out my contract. You and I are through. You don't tell me nothing no more." And boy, then everybody was so happy. But Duke never told nobody what he was thinking. He knew what he was going to do, but he had to wait for the right time, and he didn't go around blowing his horn and having nobody tell all his secrets.

We did a couple of benefits for Mayor Walker.³⁰ Anybody working at the club: "Just go and park where you want to. How many parking tickets you

got there?” “Four or five.” “Hand them here.” They had a big box up there. The box was at least three feet high and six feet long and filled with tickets. They sent them down to Mayor Walker and hot damn, shit, he used to have them burned up. That’s the kind of mayor he was. And everything was so bully. I mean, relationships between white people and black people were so beautiful. It wasn’t nothing like what’s going on now.

Benny Goodman used to hang out up there in Harlem. And all the guys: Jack Teagarden and Charlie Barnet—they used to come up there every night. We’d jam some, and then—they served ribs there, and we’d stop and eat. We’d eat together and then get back on the bandstand and start jamming some more. We used to be there till 6 o’clock in the morning. I can just imagine those poor neighbors trying to sleep, and we were pounding away downstairs. When you’re with a band that everybody’s got talent to offer, your mind goes many different ways. It was a great help, like a school every day—only the kind of school that you liked and got paid for. We was playing music all night and talking music all morning. And if we felt like it, we’d jump up and have a jam session at 10 or 11 o’clock in the morning. They were beautiful, beautiful times. If I could live my life over again, I’d start in the twenties and stop in the forties, and go back again to the twenties, and play the same record over and over again.

Irving Mills (1884–1985) served as Duke Ellington’s publisher and manager from 1926 through 1939. It is widely thought that Mills took undeserved credit (and remuneration) for Ellington’s artistic work. In the following interview, Mills clearly credits himself with much of Ellington’s success.



IRVING MILLS

From OHAM interview with Irene Kahn Atkins, 23 April 1981, Beverly Hills, California

I strolled into the Kentucky Club one evening, and the manager said, “I just hired a new band that came in from Washington. Let me know what you think of them.” I heard the band, five pieces, and I loved them. I immediately thought of the quick change that I could make between him and Fletcher Henderson, who had been working for me to do the background music for my vocal artists on my black labels. Fletcher Henderson was one of the greatest musicians at that time, and he was doing a lot of work for me. He was a composer and a good arranger and a good conductor, which was more than the qualifications that Duke had at the time. But he was unreliable; for phono-

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Duke Ellington with manager Irving Mills, and longtime companion Beatrice “Evie” Ellis

graph dates, you must be there on time with the men that you hired there. He never had the same men twice, or he didn’t have the arrangements ready, or there were always some little things that didn’t make the date perfect. It was not good for the band, not good for the singer. So much for Fletcher Henderson. When I heard Duke play, I heard not only Duke, but I fell in love with every individual man as a soloist. Each one had his own particular good style. There were great possibilities of doing a lot of things with the boys.

I left the club and was so intrigued with the possibilities of the band that to make sure that I’d get them to record, I went back to the club. I dated up Duke to come to the office and arrange the recording. It came out perfect.

One date was better than another. They were trying very hard, and they were very, very enthused for someone to take the kind of interest that I took in them, because they were making all of that extra money. That recording money, outside of their regular job, meant a lot to them.

I wanted to build the best black band in the whole world. And I knew that I had it with Duke, because of my recordings, because of the publicity, because as a publisher, being able to develop the songs. So I sold the Cotton Club the idea of putting a show in there instead of vaudeville acts. It was so good that they immediately ordered another show to be put on, with better costumes. We got more songs. Again they liked that one. The Cotton Club became a place to go. They had fine waiters. They were all gentlemen. No rough-house. They didn't allow any blacks. If they did, it was some select people who sat on the side. They kept it as a real fine, high-class club, ran it beautifully. And the owners were the mob, who I never knew. They always called me Mr. Mills. They never called me by my first name. And they said anything I wanted to do was okay. It worked out fine for them. It was very profitable.

I had a contract with Victor whereby I could record whatever I wanted, wherever they had a studio, whenever I wanted, by whoever I wanted. I put Rudy Vallee in there. I put Gene Austin in there. I had another band, a white band called Irving Mills and the Hotsy-Totsy Gang—Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Red Nichols, all the big-shot boys, all in the one band. I take this white band, twelve pieces, and I take Duke Ellington, twelve pieces, and I've got twenty-four pieces. And I put them on the Victor label. Comes time to release the record, I get a call from Camden, New Jersey, to come right in. They've got to talk to me: I had a hell of a lot of nerve, and I should have known better than to put black and white together. They didn't know whether to put it on a black bulletin or on a white bulletin. It was mixed up. That's when I made the point: we go on the white bulletin, or we won't make any more records for Victor on black at all. Duke was the first one to go on the white bulletin.

We were the first ones to break into the Deep South. I took them down through Texas, and we had no trouble. I had front people working all the time. I've always spent as much money as we made, and more sometimes, for protection, to see that they're housed well. Duke always stayed at a doctor or lawyer's home. He was the first one to play through Florida and all through the South. They loved him there. So we broke the South and we broke the white label for the Victor company.

Duke was always working. If he wasn't on a job, he was writing and he was traveling. He was always on the go. They kept booking him solid all

the time, so he didn't have too much time for himself. But he loved good clothes. If he knew he was going to wear four suits, he had four trunks with forty suits.

We gave every man in the band an opportunity to write, to encourage them. You'll notice there are three names on practically all the songs. They came in with ideas, and Duke helped to develop it and give it the style. When I discovered them, I didn't find Duke Ellington. I found five great musicians. Every one of them was great.

I created the balances. I cut out the arrangements. Whatever they did, I thinned it out. His music was always too heavy. He overarranged. I simplified most all the tunes. That's why all of my tunes, you could sing—"Solitude," "Sophisticated Lady," "Mood Indigo," "Sentimental Mood."³¹ But nine tenths of everything he recorded you can throw in the wastebasket. They don't sell, and he hasn't made no money for Capitol, he's made no money for Victor, he's made no money for anybody.

When I heard a tune, I'd get a title. I title all the tunes. A tune hits me, "Mood Indigo." I get the style of it. Now it was much later when the lyric was written. Here's what happens: when you're making thirty, forty, fifty numbers a month, you don't have the time to write all the lyrics. So once you get the idea, the story, you turn it over to somebody to write. We used to have Mitchell Parish do that. That's why we always had three writers on most of the songs.

Duke was a good listener. He followed instructions. He's sponsored. He's got nothing to worry about: money, or the job, or the men. Now he can work. All he has to do is write. If I've got a date for next week, and I have to have four tunes ready, I can come up and say I want this kind of a tune or that kind of a tune. I got a bellyful of melodies, I can give him a phrase, and he knows exactly what I want. He had that ability. He could do it.

Duke always knew his position and was always very grateful for everything that was being done, because he knew he was getting all the best of everything. Everything we created "from the pen of Duke Ellington," whether he wrote it or he didn't write it. Now he never made an arrangement. He knew how to construct at the piano because the boys knew what he wanted. He had the boys so trained, you see, they knew the harmony and they knew the tricks. If three trumpets are playing together, they all have to tune a certain way. So he had the boys tune it. They knew. That's why the sound was different. But he didn't leave anything behind. It didn't make any difference—we knew we could always get it after it was perfected by the whole band by taking it off of the records. And this is the way we did it. I had people copy it note for note.

As fast as he got the money, that's how fast he spent the money. He was very liberal. He was the softest touch. He couldn't go to a town where they didn't nab him for this, that, and the other thing for charities. He gave away more money. He gave everything away. He was a kind gentleman who tried to help everybody. He was good to his men, and his men were with him for a lifetime practically.

Women was one of the highlights in his life. He had to have women. There was no interference with his business or anything. He was good to his women. He always had a woman, always kept a woman here, kept a woman there, always had somebody. He was good-looking. He liked women, and women loved him.

First I owned the band. They were working for me under a salary. Then I made a corporation out of Ellington. Then I found Cab Calloway, and I wrote "Minnie the Moocher," and that became a big hit.³² By this time I've already got twenty black bands working around. Cab Calloway was a busboy when I found him. He doesn't play an instrument, and he's not a musician, so there was no rivalry with Duke. He led my band, the Mills Blue Ribbon Band. That band was as good a band as the Duke Ellington band, and I built that band so that in case anything happened to any man in the Duke Ellington band I could replace him immediately with one of my men. And when I took Duke out of the Cotton Club, I had to have another band to put in there, so it was the Mills Blue Ribbon Band. I went out to control Broadway, to have all the theaters locked up under my attractions. I had the Paramount, the Loew's, the Rivoli, the Rialto, the Roxie, and the Capitol. I had sixteen pages in *Variety* with my bands.

Every now and then the record companies wanted me to make outside tunes, so occasionally I would make a "Twelfth Street Rag" or some old, old tune. Otherwise I stuck to 100 percent Duke Ellington. That's what did it. Otherwise he'd have gotten mixed up with Gershwin, Berlin, Rodgers and Hammerstein. There were a million show tunes on Broadway, and all kinds of requests. In order for him to stay on his style, he couldn't afford to listen too much to other things.

Duke, all of a sudden, got religious. He got into all religious music. The fifty thousand dollars that he got to do the book, he put into a religious album which isn't worth fifty cents.³³ He threw away a whole fortune of money. And he lost control of the very thing that made Duke Ellington what he was, the style of what he was. I don't want to be the one to criticize that he went on a religious binge, to write that kind of thing. That was his objective. And whatever he accomplished out of it, I suppose he got a big satisfaction out of the thing.

I was determined to buy the Tempo catalogue when he died.³⁴ His sister had it. I wanted to get it, and she told me herself that he left nothing behind. The lead sheets, you can't understand them. He left a lead sheet, but you didn't know what he meant by it. If he had an idea, he would scribble something down. Half of the boys in the band couldn't read music. So one took it from the other: play G-flat, play B-flat, play C major. This is where Duke came in. He was great at that, teaching each section the thing.

They all called me Pops, all the boys in the band. I enjoyed it while I did it. I enjoyed it because I could feel the momentum, how much everybody's enjoying it, and that I was succeeding at what I was doing, and that there was nobody following me any better, the Count Basies or whoever. But nobody topped the Duke Ellington thing, because of the tons of publicity that I put out on it. The amount of money that was spent on it—well, I don't believe anybody would ever do it again, to take that kind of a gamble. But if it wasn't for the music business being good to me at that time—being flush, I could afford to do it. I always had the band dressed up beautifully. They were always spic and span, and they liked that. I made them all look very handsome. And they had a lot of respect for me, including the people at the Cotton Club.

I think that the first big love affair with Duke was his amazement of me liking the things that they were playing, that I had a feel for it, and with no complaints encouraged him to do more of the same. I could have immediately thrown in a lot of my own songs and plugged a lot of other things. But then that wouldn't make the number one band in the country.

The vocalist Adelaide Hall (1904–1993) worked occasionally with Duke Ellington in the late twenties and early thirties. She originated the expressive vocalise in “Creole Love Call,” which she recorded with Duke in 1927.



ADELAIDE HALL

From OHAM interview with Valerie Archer, 25 March 1981, London

I was out on the road when “Creole Love Call” came about. Duke was closing the last half, and I was closing the first half. I heard all this gorgeous music downstairs, and I said to my husband, “Before we go home, I think we should go down and listen to that lovely orchestra and Duke Ellington.” So we went bouncing downstairs, and we were standing in the wings. Duke was

playing these beautiful tunes. When it came to this “Creole Love Call” melody, that’s all it was, just the melody. He was playing, and I started humming a countermelody. Duke was catching that melody that I was singing. He came over with his baton right to the edge where I was standing, and he said, “Well, that’s just what I’ve been looking for. For goodness sakes, sing it again.” I said, “But I can’t do it. I don’t know what I was doing. This is all impromptu.” He said, “Try it! Try it!” So he went on to the center and started again, and I started this countermelody. At the end, he said, “That’s just what I’ve been looking for. We’re going to record that either tomorrow or the next day.” I said, “I don’t know how ‘cause I don’t know what I was doing. Haven’t any idea.” Anyway, a few days later, we were in a studio. It all turned out so lovely, and I didn’t think it would.

Musicians

*Al Hibbler • Betty Roché • Max Roach • Tony Watkins
Clark Terry • Aaron Bell • Art Baron*

The vocalist Al Hibbler (1915–2001) worked with Duke Ellington from 1943 to 1951. He was known for his rich baritone voice and clear enunciation.



AL HIBBLER

From OHAM interview with Martha Oneppo, 1 December 1980, Teaneck, New Jersey

I had an audition with Duke Ellington in 1935. He was going to take me with him, and something happened. I didn’t make it. I ran into Duke again at the Hurricane in New York, 49th and Broadway. I went up and had another audition. I kept going down to see him, and every night he’d introduce me like, “We have a young man in the house and we want to see how the public likes him, and we call him out, Albert Hibbler.” And he called me out and I’d do a couple of numbers, and he’d call me back. I told him one day, “Duke, I can’t keep coming down here. I’m not making any money in this, coming down here doing this every night.” And he said, “Man, go get your money.” He said, “You’ve been in the band for two weeks.” I was in Duke’s band for two weeks and didn’t even know it.

Duke Ellington was a very congenial man. He was thoughtful toward members of his band. I was in the band for eight and a half years, from 1943 to 1951, and I never knew him to fire a musician in all that time I was with

him. In fact, I never heard of him firing a musician even before I got with him. He would tell you, say, “Well, looks like you’re kind of tired. You don’t feel like working so much. Why don’t you take a rest and do something else, and when you feel like you want to come back, come on back.” If that’s not congenial, I don’t know what you’d call it.

The vocalist Betty Roché (1920–1999) sang at the premiere of Ellington’s *Black, Brown, and Beige* at Carnegie Hall. She is best known for her 1952 recording of Billy Strayhorn’s “Take the A Train.”



BETTY ROCHÉ

From OHAM interview with Harriett Milnes, 19 November 1982, New York City

If he was teaching me a new song, he would teach me the melody, then he would give me a piece of paper with the lyrics on it, and I would run that through my mind. Then he would have me rehearse it with the music and he and Johnny Hodges and Sweetpea [Billy Strayhorn] would get with me. Whenever I did a number, he’d say to me, “Just do it any way that it comes out in your mind.” He said, “If you sing off, it’s perfectly all right.” And when I would sing, I had a fashion of holding my hand out. And he said, “Don’t take that gesture out, keep it in. Anything you feel, you do it.”

The concert was *Black, Brown, and Beige*, and it was something he had planned on doing for quite a while. He wrote and we rehearsed for it all across the country. We would go to different clubs to break some of the songs in—we would do it in front of the audiences to see how they would accept it. When we got to Carnegie Hall, I don’t think I have ever worked in my life in a place that was as big and as pretty as it was. When I walked out on the stage and looked out in the audience and I see some ordinary people sitting there, and next to them might be Glenn Miller, and next to them Eleanor Roosevelt. Frank Sinatra came backstage and brought me a bouquet of roses. I was introduced to Mrs. Roosevelt and Glenn Miller—just everybody—Leopold Stokowski. I had the most beautiful dress I think you’ve ever seen—it was white, and it had great big gold stars scattered all over. It was net, and you could stand it up in the corner and go to Brooklyn and come back, and it’d still be standing in the corner.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Cover of recording *Money Jungle*, 1962. Left to right: Duke Ellington,
Max Roach, and Charles Mingus

The drummer Max Roach (1924–) worked with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in the forties and helped to develop the bebop style. His career has flourished, and he has worked with such prominent artists as Miles Davis, Anthony Braxton, and Cecil Taylor. In 1962 he came together with Ellington and the bassist Charles Mingus to record the LP *Money Jungle*. He described their recording session.



MAX ROACH

From OHAM interview with Mark Edwards, 25 January 1978, New York City

Well, they had a lot of whiskey there that day because it was a celebrated event, and Mingus called Mr. Ellington a “has-been,” an old-time pianist, and me a bebop drummer. He packed up his bass and walked out of the studio. The producers came into the studio and prevailed

on Mr. Ellington to say something to Mingus, and Mr. Ellington wasn't about to. When Mingus did this act, Mr. Ellington looked at me and said, "Well, there will be a duo with just drums and piano," and he let Mingus go. He could care less, the way I looked at it. And while Mingus was in the anteroom, Mr. Ellington and I were in the studio continuing the music. And may I add, it may have had more to do with Mingus's insecurity himself than with his bass playing, or his musicianship, or with me or Mr. Ellington. In any case, I didn't care and neither did Mr. Ellington. He could've left and made more room for somebody else. But Mr. Ellington acquiesced, and he went outside and looked at Mingus and said, "Mingus, you sound wonderful," and Mingus started crying and came back in and finished the session. It was just an emotional moment as far as I'm concerned; it was uncalled for on a professional level.

Mr. Ellington is a consummate artist. Anything that he does is good. If he even says a poem on stage, it's meaningful, and it's there. It has a design, a form; it has color. When you get to the stage that Mr. Ellington is, everything he does is just absolute. If he just plays a few notes during the whole piece, those notes are perfect.

The vocalist Tony Watkins (1947–1986) joined the Duke Ellington Orchestra for its First Sacred Concert at Grace Cathedral in 1965, and he was often featured as the a capella performer of "The Lord's Prayer," which ended performances of the Sacred Concerts.³⁵



TONY WATKINS

From OHAM interview with Harriett Milnes, 19 November 1982, New York City

The Ellington Orchestra would never stay together—they'd stay in different rooms because when you've been on that bus for three hundred and four hundred miles, you really don't want to be in a room with this guy. The Ellington band would watch their soap operas, order their food, and probably get on the telephone and talk to everybody in the world. The most expensive thing—you would think was the bar tab—but it was our telephone calls. We called everybody, and, of course, Ellington was the King of the Calling. He would call Paris and London and Ruth in New York. He believed that you could take care of all of your business from the bed with the telephone.

He says, “This is how the real tycoons run the world. They just reach for the phone, and it’s all taken care of.”

Many times, unexpectedly, Duke would just call up a musician and say, “Hey look, this is Duke Ellington, what are you doing now, baby? Nothing? You know, we need a drummer and you got the gig if you want it.” Duke said, “I don’t have to hear you.” It would come out of the nucleus of the band, ‘cause knowing that these men had to live together, he would ask the band. That’s basically how folks got into the Ellington band.

I was telling a friend last week about him being presented to Her Majesty, the Queen. We had come back from Africa to London to do an evening at the Palladium for the Actor’s Fund, and the cream of the crop is there; the queen was there. Afterward we went to the greenroom, and Her Majesty had come up. She came to me and thought I had a magnificent baritone voice, and I thanked Her Majesty and told her how lovely she was. Then she got to Ellington, and she said, “Ah, Mr. Ellington, it’s so good to see you.” And he says, “Your Majesty, since I’ve last seen you, your beauty has compounded ten times.” And she just kinda looked at him and went, “Ahhhhhh.” He says to me, “Hey, you have to know what to say. She’s still a lady.” You could see it in her face—I saw that the Duke had made the queen bow [laughter].

The trumpeter Clark Terry (1920–) joined the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1951 after playing with Charlie Barnet and Count Basie. He worked with Ellington until 1959 and became known for his wide range of styles, brilliant technique, and good humor.



CLARK TERRY

From OHAM interview with Dan Friedheim, 6 June 1978, New York City

Just being around him, through the process of osmosis, many things rub off on you. You learn things about, first of all, establishing a rapport between that which is on the bandstand and those who are in the audience. Secondly, there’s a great deal that you learn about leadership, and Ellington was the most fantastic master of all. Also, about getting out of the people with whom you surround yourself the things that you want. You know, Ellington was fantastic at that. He could get out of you things that you didn’t dream

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Duke Ellington with Queen Elizabeth

were in you. He could psych you into doing whatever he wanted you to do because he had an insight for things like that. He was a phenomenal person. I usually refer to my stint with the Ellington band as having attended the University of Ellingtonia for close to ten years.

He was very, very, very slick. He had a way of doing things. For instance if a guy would beef to him about a salary, he had a way of just laughingly putting it off on the road manager. "Say, this cat wants a raise, man. Give him what he wants." Knowing well that he can't. So it would go on to the point where you would have to laugh at it. He was one of the few people in the world

that could put you on, and you would really dig it. Whatever it was that you came to him with grievances about, you forget it, and you walk away laughing.

I think he had a knack for reaching the masses. You could have an audience of ten or fifteen different types of music appreciators, and before the night was over, he would reach everybody. He had a knack for being able to spot and feel what people wanted and what they didn't want.

We did an album called *A Drum Is a Woman*, and he suggested that I should portray the role of Buddy Bolden. Of course I had never heard any records by Buddy Bolden. There *are* no records by Buddy Bolden! So he says, "Oh sure, Sweetie, you are Buddy Bolden. He was suave and dapper and clean, and he bent notes, and the ladies had a great feel for him, and he loved ladies. And when he blew with such a big, powerful, strong tone in New Orleans, you could hear him across the river, and he would break glasses on the shelves over there." And when he gets through psyching you, you believe you are Buddy Bolden. So he says, "Come on, play me some Buddy Bolden." So I thought about all these things, I felt myself being surrounded by a bevy of beauties, and I could picture a bunch of glasses over there on the other side of the river. I'm gonna try to break these glasses, I'm gonna bend some notes! He says, "That's it, that's Buddy Bolden!" And that's what came off on the record.

Sometimes he would remind us, "Listen!" And sometimes rather vehemently; he was really mean. "Listen, goddamn it, listen!" For a while you would begin to wonder, "What the hell is wrong with this cat? Does he think we're deaf? We got cotton in our ears or something?" Actually what he meant was to listen totally. Listen to the timbre and the texture. Listen what your section meant to the overall piece. Listen to the type of vibrato that was being used. Follow the lead man. Listen to what your segment is contributing contrapuntally to the rest of the sections of the band. And then I began to find out what listening means.

He had a word—*disciplinarian*. "I am not a disciplinarian. I have surrounded myself with people that I feel capable of playing my music the way I want it played and not being a disciplinarian. I expect you to know what to do." He truly would never tell you how to play your horn. What he did was listen to the way you played your horn and use it to his advantage. Let me give you an example. He knew that Rex Stewart had a way of playing the E-natural, and anywhere in the chord, in the trumpet section, where the E-natural (concert D) was used, it would be on Rex's part. And he didn't give a damn if it was the first, second, third, fourth, fifth. As a matter of fact, when he wrote parts in

Handwritten musical score for "Intro Dance - 1" by Duke Ellington. The score is written on ten staves, with the first staff labeled "OPEN". The notation includes various musical symbols, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The score is divided into sections labeled (1), (2), (3), (4), (A), (B), (C), and (D). The bottom of the page features the Paramount Pictures Corporation logo and the text "PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORPORATION".

Duke Ellington, autograph manuscript page from the Second Sacred Concert

those days, for the band, they would have Rex, Cootie [Williams], Cat [Anderson], or Ray Nance, or Clark [Terry]. All the names would be on the parts. No parts, just the names. You often heard it said that Duke Ellington's band was his instrument. When he's writing the score he's thinking about these people. All the time. Every member of every section.

He had wise psychological expertise in allowing a person freedom to

do the thing which he does the best. You just give them freedom, and it's a fantastic thing when they're stunned with love and respect, great admiration and loyalty. He was a loyal person, and he loved everybody that he surrounded himself with or you wouldn't be there. So, you have a feeling—wow, this cat really digs me, and I've gotta give him my best—and that's what he got from everybody who was ever there.

The bassist Aaron Bell (1922–2003) was a member of the Duke Ellington Orchestra from 1960 until 1962.



AARON BELL

From OHAM interview with Dan Friedheim, 25 November 1977, New York City

In choosing a reed section, most leaders would try to get the members of the section to have matching vibratos, as close as possible. But Duke Ellington had five guys, and not one of them had the same type of vibrato. This is a perfect example of the type of leader, conductor, and musician that Duke was. He'd take these five different vibratos, meld them into one, and present a sound which was distinctive and later came to be known as the Ellington sound. You know Duke majored in art. He never studied music formally. The technique of blending colors in art—he transferred that to his music. Duke was able to get more varied colors from a seventeen-piece orchestra than anybody else ever did.

He had great insight into a person's character. When he chose a man to join the band, it was not because of technical ability on the instrument alone. I recommended a very fine trombonist, and he was excellent. Duke tried him out and didn't hire him. He hired another fellow who had lesser ability, technically speaking. But there was something else that he had that Duke wanted. He was definitely an individual, a character. I don't think Duke had a preconceived idea of what he wanted the next individual to sound like if he had to make a replacement in the band. I think he would listen to a person, and if he heard something there that he recognized could be melded into his overall sound, he would know it.

Duke was a master improviser, not only in playing a solo, but also in arrangements and in conducting and in performance. During a performance

he might make a change that had never been made before. He could tell from crowd reactions where they were. He knew where the band was in emotional pitch, and he knew what would make the overall performance come alive. Whenever the band went on, we never knew what he would do. And if they didn't insist on a printed program, he wouldn't do it. Because he played according to the audience, and he was just that sharp at it.

I'm reminded of the first time we played *The Monterey Jazz Festival Suite*. You know where we rehearsed it first? During a concert performance in Boston! We started, and as we got further into it, the more the motor began to stall. Finally we came to a halt about letter C. So Duke, with his smooth impresario capabilities, gets up to the mike and says, "Ah! I liked that so well, let's take it again. Take letter B again." So we go down to letter B and start chugging along again, and finally we get to the end of it, and the audience breaks up clapping.

Duke did not like to rehearse something over and over until it was letter-perfect. He liked for it to be a little loose. He thought he could get the best performance that way. And he did. Sometimes [laughter]. Sometimes it backfired on him—he could catch the band and make us sound like a group of high school kids, but when we went to the top, you'd never find anything like it. You take a band like Count Basie's—it's like a well-oiled machine; it would always give a performance up to a certain level. They would never go down to the level that Duke went, but they never reached the heights that he'd reach either. So that is the joy of working with him.

My first year in Duke's band, I wasn't nervous. I joined them at the Hotel Riviera in Las Vegas and played one set, and then after that Duke says, "Do you know 'Jack the Bear'?"³⁶ I says, "I've listened to it, but I don't think I can play it." He said, "Oh, I wanted to play that next show." I say, "Well, do you have the music?" No, he didn't have the music. So what's he do, he goes out at the next set and says, "Now we'd like to feature the newest member of the band, bassist Aaron Bell, playing 'Jack the Bear.'" I was angry. As I passed him I said, "It's your band. If you don't give a damn, I don't." I went for it, and I managed to get through it. I think it's a psychological thing that Duke uses on new members: Throw you in the deep water, and you sink or swim. Duke's pretty shrewd. He knew that I would be able to do that.

When my father died, he gave me two weeks off to go to the funeral. When I came back, I was feeling very low and down. He got up from the piano

and came over and put his arm around my shoulder and says, “Don’t worry, you’ll always have a father as long as I’m living.” It really moved me.

The trombonist Art Baron (1950–) played with the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1973 and 1974, the last years of Ellington’s life. He performed the recorder solo in the Third Sacred Concert and went on to lead his own band, The Duke’s Men.



ART BARON

From OHAM interview with Mark Tucker, 18 December 1986, New York City

Duke said come on back and see me. He was in a trailer with about twenty women hanging all over him, and he says, “Man, yeah, maybe you oughta play in the band.” And this chick says, “Oh, Duke, you want a drink?” “Oh, thank you, lovely.” Finally, after about twenty minutes of that, he gives me his phone number, and says, “Call me.” So I called him, and he said, “Yeah, do you want to play with us?” He told me when they were leaving; I didn’t even know what I was gonna get paid. We were on the road, and somewhere along the way, I found out what I was making. Mercer [Ellington] was road manager and trumpeter in the band at that time. Duke was ripped off by so many, he figured he could trust Mercer.

In six weeks, we had three nights off, and two of them were going from one end of Europe to the other, which in those days was all-day traveling. It was really hectic. We had three nights in Brussels, and the middle night we had off. That was the one real night off we had. He didn’t like to be dormant on the road. If we had a night off, he’d probably go out and find another gig. We rehearsed after the gig, like at 2 in the morning.

When you’re on the road for two months together without a break, once in a while someone would wanna kill someone else. But the funny thing, twenty minutes later, they’re buying drinks for each other. You gotta vent your frustrations somewhere. They used to have a thing called the H.B.P. Club; you ever hear of that? I’ll give you a hint: it has to do with how you could conceal that you had a little bit too much to drink before you got on the bandstand. And it was called the Hide Behind Paul [Gonzalves] Club.

Duke didn’t care what happened, as long as you played the music. I like to remember his way of handling people. He was very accommodating.

I like to think of the old man, how he would handle things and not get up-tight. He just let things happen. He put his signature on it, he put the energy out, and it worked. Chuck Connors used to tell me this story that the band got somewhere, but half the band was lost on the bus, and only the people that got there on their own made it. So it was three trombones, Clark Terry, and Duke. Duke said, "Well, the band's here, let's play." And they played. That's enough: three 'bones and Clark Terry. You never knew what would happen. Sometimes we'd be in town, and Ake Persson, this trombone player, was around, and they'd set up a stand, and he'd come in and make up a part. I couldn't believe how loose it was. That's one thing I learned. You just gotta do what you can, and then let it happen.

One time I was upstairs, practicing recorder, and Jim Lowe, Duke's valet, called me and said, "The Maestro wants to see you." So I went, and he said, "Let me hear that instrument. What's the range? I'm gonna write something for you, for the Sacred Concert." And every once in a while he'd see me and say, "Yeah, I'm working on it." So finally, two days before the concert, he hands it to me.

The Sacred Concert rehearsal went till 5 of 8, and Princess Margaret or Princess Anne came in. They were all coming in, and we were in our street clothes still. So we had to run off and get changed. No one knew the order; no one knew what was happening. He gave an order before we started, which we discarded after the third piece. What I later found out—Chuck said it's never any different. He said every big deal he did with Duke was like that. You never knew how it was gonna go. Duke would just piece it together, and it was great. The magic happened. You know, it would always happen.

Half of Duke's stuff had no markings on it, just notes. The trombone section is probably the friendliest section in that band—they'd take the time and hang out with me, and say, "Let's take the book out. Show you what's here, what's missing. You gonna have to learn this. I'll show you the notes." Kinda passed it on, person to person.

I went to Berklee [College of Music in Boston]. You walk in the doors at Berklee, and they give you rules. You can't do this; you can't do this. Duke used to have these C-major seventh chords with a low B in the bass trombone. Like, B, an octave and a minor second below C, right where you'd expect to hear the root. Things like that—it really opened my head up. He would just try anything. If it sounded good, he'd leave it in. Chuck used to say, "You can do what you want, but if he likes it, he's gonna want you to play it every night."

It was interesting to see the whole creative process. Sometimes he might give a clarinet part to a trumpet, just see how it would sound there. I really think some of the stuff just kinda happened.

I'm totally convinced that you can have all the intellectual knowledge in the world, but you cannot have a clue as to what Duke Ellington would or wouldn't write. Also, you don't learn Duke Ellington's music by trying to replicate it. Try and sift it down into a symbol that you can read, and you start serving the symbols more than the symbols serve you. I have trouble when people tell me Duke Ellington would do this or he wouldn't do that. I would never say that to anybody. I'm one of the few lucky people on the earth to have seen how Duke worked. You can't assume anything.

As for repertory groups, the easiest thing to do is to re-create the notes and rhythms, but the feeling—that's the thing. I was lucky, I got a chance to live it. I had the good fortune to be inside of that. I'm not saying it's wrong for someone else to try it. But there's an element missing if you don't have the experience to play with those people. Learning off of records is good, I'm glad it's done, but there's nothing in the world that'll ever synthesize sitting next to Cootie Williams for four years. Everything from the musical to the way he liked to mess with me—everything. It's all personality music. I really love music where it matters who's playing.

All the people that stayed in that band were really connected with what they were playing. Think of the way Ray Nance plays. It's like his guts are coming up right through his horn. Cootie too. I mean, everyone. I thought whenever Duke Ellington played a note of music he absolutely meant it. He really loved the people, you know. That's why he did so well in his music, because he knew they were out there listening. And in some ways, I don't think he thought he was so special. I'm sure on some level he hadda know. "Oh, yeah, we hang out with the kings and queens." But it was just another gig.

Colleagues and Friends

George Avakian • Luther Henderson • Alvin Ailey
Marian Logan • John Gensel • Willie Ruff

George Avakian (1919–) was director of popular music at Columbia Records in the 1950s. He released the LP *Ellington at Newport*, a live recording of the band's legendary performance at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival, an event that brought them renewed acclaim at a waning point in Ellington's career.



GEORGE AVAKIAN

From OHAM interview with Paul Kolderie, 17 March 1978, New York City

When I was eighteen years old, a friend of mine whose family lived in Westchester told me that Duke was hired to play at a dance at his parents' country club, and I could get in with the family. I had to go to the john at intermission. When I went in, there was somebody in one stall, and I hesitated because it was Duke. I stood up next to him and I introduced myself. As I was finishing up, I made some kind of comment, trying to think of something to say to this magnificent artist. I said, "I'm glad to see that you're bringing back some of your old tunes," because Duke had been rerecording "Black and Tan Fantasy" and "East St. Louis Toodle-O" on Brunswick. And I said, "I hope you'll do 'Misty Morning' and 'Saratoga Swings' and the others." He said, "Yeah, we'll get around to them, but"—and this is the thing that impressed me so much—"but you know, I can't look backwards. That was fine music, and I like playing new arrangements of the old things, but I've got to keep going all the time because there are an awful lot of good things around, and if I don't move forward then the music will start slipping back, and then I'm lost." Those weren't his precise words, of course, but that's what he was saying in the two minutes or so that I spent at his side urinating and washing hands. And not many years ago when we became friends I said, "Well, I was really surprised that you said something that serious and that meaningful and important to just a young eighteen-year-old fan." And he said, "Well, why not? If somebody asks a serious question, you give them a serious answer, no matter who they are." And that's the kind of person he was.

The first time that I attended a Duke Ellington rehearsal, the most fascinating part was that after Duke worked out a few things, he never put it all together. He'd just tell the guys, "Okay, that's enough. That's fine. Thanks a lot. Just keep that in mind. We'll work on it again." And he said, "We're going to keep doing this whenever we get a chance." And I said, "Well, what is it going to be?" because I couldn't tell. He said, "I don't know, but I'm going to use it somehow, and the guys will know what to do when I want to put it together." Then after the guys started to pack up and leave, Duke sat at the piano, and he was doing much the same thing himself, playing phrases and reworking them.

I had that experience of watching Duke put something together in the

studio. This would be late forties or early fifties. He literally would play a phrase over and over on the piano and call sections of musicians together, and they'd work out their own harmonies, which were indicated by Duke, of course. They'd work a phrase over until they had it down, and then they would put it with what another section was doing. The Ellington band was notorious for being late. Duke himself was always late for recording sessions. The musicians trickled in very slowly. Duke was not among the first to arrive, and something like two hours after the session was supposed to begin, the engineer and I were still discussing yesterday's baseball scores with the musicians, and Duke said, "All right, let's start." And he began setting up a blues with whoever happened to be there. There was some kind of odd instrumentation—as I recall there was only one, possibly two, brass players, and about three saxophones. But this did come out in an album, and it's called "New York City Blues." A second thing that was done on the session was an enlargement of that first recording, but it was not with a full band. More people had walked in. Then finally, I think we made three tunes that day. The last one was with a full band. And that was what Duke had basically planned to do. I'm sure that Duke always used to work very informally like that, because he had musicians, at the beginning especially, who were very poor at reading. And I guess Duke himself, if he had been pinned down to paper, wouldn't have done so well. So that's why the individuals and Duke and the music were all really part of one cohesive unit, although the cohesion certainly didn't show in the creative process.

What he did was create his own music. He was influenced, of course, by everything around him. There's no question that there are elements of classical music in his work, especially contemporary music. But Duke never consciously tried to fuse anything, didn't borrow very much from Debussy or Ravel, even though he was a great orchestral colorist, and whole tone scales do appear in his work. There's something of Stravinsky in him and all that. But basically it's really Duke. There never was and never will be anything quite like it.

The arranger Luther Henderson (1919–2003) worked with Ellington on dance arrangements and orchestrations for *Beggar's Holiday* and *A Drum Is a Woman*. He was also a close friend of Billy Strayhorn's.



LUTHER HENDERSON

From OHAM interview with Valerie Archer, 7 July 1981, New York City

Strayhorn was hired originally as a lyricist. He was working in a drugstore in Pittsburgh. I don't know how Ellington heard about him, but there was one thing about Ellington: he knew a good thing immediately. As I remember, Strayhorn came and started just to write some lyrics. But then he began writing tunes, and Ellington would like the tune and he'd say, "Well, maybe write an orchestration." It just sort of grew from one thing to the other, and they were so completely compatible musically.

At one point I had an idea that I was going into vocal coaching: doing acts and having material. So I said to Strayhorn, "Why don't we go into business, man? You don't have to write the orchestrations. Just write the tunes, and I'll teach 'em to the people." Ellington did not like that. He let me know that he did not care for that to be happening. He said, "You know Billy is not geared to produce the way that we are"—in the commercial things.

The one thing that used to kill me about Ellington's band—we'd go into a recording session—and you couldn't get a quorum. If you called a session for 2 o'clock, you just couldn't get enough people to run it before 2:30. I know when we recorded *A Drum Is a Woman*—I did a couple of arrangements in that. I was at the studio bright and early, and it was desolate. But it didn't bother Ellington at all. Then they would come in, and they would have their meeting, and Tom Whaley would be sitting there copying while they're getting the rest of the things together. I guess that's a part of the relaxed attitude that's a mirror of what jazz is. You know, when they say, it doesn't mean that it's not serious. I think that's one of the things that Ellington wanted to do, to make people understand—to take it seriously but to continue with a relaxed feeling.

I think he did this in terms of his orchestra, too. I've always felt that complete disarray, which at that time was horrendous to me—as I look back in retrospect, I think that it was part of his genius. He has surrounded himself with—what's the opposite of homogenous—a group of stars—of specific virtuosi who did special things. He picked specific people and then persuaded them to do their thing his way. I think that Ellington used his people, including me, exactly as he wanted. He persuaded everybody to do their thing his

way and that's what happens. Even if he weren't such a musical genius, that quality in itself is genius.

I've always thought that Ellington was the most inventive composer there was. I've regretted that it wasn't Ellington who decided to do something of a lasting nature with the literature of American pop tunes—American jazz—as George Gershwin did. *Porgy and Bess* will stand as a monument, a collection of the idioms of jazz done in a more structured form. Now I feel that if Ellington had done that—how he would have gone about shaping it, the things he might have imagined, his great wit. And it was all original. He used to say that when people asked him about the history of jazz, he wouldn't have the slightest idea because “I am the history of jazz, because I know all these people. I was around when Buddy Bolden was playing.” All these people that go back to 1900, back to the turn of the century—all kinds of jazz—he says, “I know 'em. And I got a good memory.” And it's true: anything he wanted to remember musically—he could do it.

Alvin Ailey (1931–1989) provided choreography for Ellington's *My People*, in 1963, and they collaborated in the creation of a large-scale ballet, *The River*, in 1970. Ailey's multiracial dance company, American Dance Theater, has received international acclaim.



ALVIN AILEY

From OHAM interview with Harriett Milnes, 7 September 1983, New York City

Ellington was always popular. It was our folk music. I mean, you've always known “Satin Doll” and “Take the A Train” and all of those things. They're part of our blood. Ellington was a serious composer. He wanted the music to be looked upon as fine music, and he didn't want it to be categorized. He would say that his music was “beyond category.” He did not like the word *jazz*—he felt that it was denigrating the music. It was giving it a racial kind of reputation when his messages were universal.

I got together with him in late 1962 or early 1963 for the first time when he was putting together a show called *My People* in Chicago for the World Centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. He came when we were rehearsing and saw some pieces of mine. He was looking for another company

to dance, as well as Tally Beatty's.³⁷ He asked me to choreograph some pieces of his that he wanted to put into the show. One of the things he did, which neither Tally or I knew about, was to have us choreograph the same piece of music. The stage was set up so that the orchestra was in the center, and there was a big stage area downstage and a huge platform above the orchestra. Tally had a company of twelve to fourteen dancers, and I had about ten. Duke conducted in the middle, and he had two versions—one dance company on top doing one version and one dance company on bottom dancing to the same music. It was fascinating. He loved to have his music danced. Coming from the dance band era, he felt that his music was dance music. He'd been through dances for years with the Cotton Club dancers, and all the tap dancers and duos and ballroom dancers that he'd been doing things with.

Lucia Chase had been talking to me for a long time about making a ballet for American Ballet Theatre. This was in 1970. I said to her that I would like to do something with Duke Ellington. So she spoke to him about it at one meeting, and he said he'd love to. I was shipped out to have a meeting because he was always on tour. So I went to Vancouver. I arrived there about 1 in the morning and went to a club that he was playing in, watched him conduct his whole thing, and then went backstage after. He was lying on the couch with his robe on and his head rag. It was just wonderful. So about 3 or 4 in the morning we went to the hotel, and he sat at the piano and started playing little snippets of tunes for me, wonderful little tunes.

He told me about this ballet that he had in mind. It was a comic ballet about a king who couldn't laugh—nothing could make him laugh. And he told me about all the sequences. There were all the Ellington characters. There was this jive guy who would come in, and he did his act with the king, and the king wouldn't laugh. And they brought in the jugglers, and he wouldn't laugh. They brought in this Sweetie Pie or whoever this mythical lady is that Ellington kept writing about, and she did her number for him. He wouldn't laugh. And so finally some guy comes in with a mirror and does a dance with a mirror and then puts the mirror in front of the king's face, and the king looks at his own face and cracks up. And that was the end of the ballet. Anyway, I've never done a comic ballet in my life, and I haven't got a comic bone in my body. I didn't want to start with that one.

He said that he had another idea which was about the stream of life, and this one was called *The River*. It was to be all water music, and it was to follow the course of this stream through various stages: through a meander,

a falls, a whirlpool, and then gurgling rapids. I fell in love with the idea. I left him at 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning. He was about to take a plane and go out to Los Angeles and do some television show with four or five of his men, then come back that night and do the performance again. This was a man with incredible energy.

Once he decided that he was going to write this river piece as a ballet, he had all the world's water music on recordings. He had the scores and everything. He had Handel's *Water Music*; he had Debussy's *La Mer*; he had Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*. He said, "I've been listening to this to see what other people have done with water music."

The next time I met him was about a month later in Toronto, and this time I lived down the hall from him at the Royal York Hotel. They were playing there, and our rooms were about three doors apart. He always had these suites like the king and always a valet or a butler to take care of him and always the piano at the foot of his bed. He composed constantly. He had constant ideas. He was stimulated by everything. He would talk about all these kinds of music and what he had seen when he got off the plane. "You know who was at the airport? There was this woman with this child and she had on this hat and she was walking like this." So he'd be working on a tune called the "Yellow Hat Walk."

He would get up about 5 in the afternoon and have breakfast until about 7 and get dressed and receive people until about 9. Then he'd get dressed and go down and do the 10 o'clock show, come back upstairs at midnight, change clothes, receive more people, go back downstairs, do a 1 o'clock show until 3 in the morning, socialize with people until 4 or 5, and then come up at 5 in the morning and work and compose from 5 o'clock until 10. I would hear him. I could hear the piano between 5 in the morning and 10 in the morning, working away on whatever he was doing. Then he'd go to sleep and get up at 5 again.

I expected, of course, from having worked with Mr. Bernstein, Mr. [Samuel] Barber, and Virgil Thomson, that I was going to get a score. I'd know there's so many bars of this and so many bars of that, and now I'll start to choreograph it. The first piece of music I got was a tape with several versions of the same piece of music. The first tape had him on the piano. Beautiful! It was not written on paper, so I have a marvelous woman, named Martha Johnson, who's a pianist for American Ballet Theatre. She was assigned to me as a rehearsal pianist, and she put it down on paper. So the next day arrives another tape. This is a new tape now. Same piece. Different version of the same

music with a different structure. So then I worked on that one for a couple days. Then the next day came another one, this time with his band playing the first version and snatches of other tunes.

It's the first time I'd done anything for a major ballet company; the premiere has been announced, and I will never forget this day. I had gotten another version of the music, we had put it all down and I had choreographed a version of it that I thought was very good, and another tape arrived. I literally threw up my hands. I told Lucia Chase, "Look, every day the music is different. I cannot go on with this. We should just postpone it. I just can't do it like this." The door opens, and in walks Mr. Ellington—with white coat and hat—with his entourage. It was a magical moment. He had come up to see how the rehearsal was going. I sat down with him. I said, "Look, I cannot do this like this. I have to have the whole piece so I can see what I'm doing from beginning to end." He said to me, "Look man, if you'd just worry a little bit more about this choreography and stop worrying about the music, you'd be better off." I said, "But this choreography *is* the music." He also said to me, "Take this music—take the themes of music and arrange it the way you want to." I said, "I cannot do that. I cannot work like that. I have to have it structured the way you want it structured." So he finally understood.

You know what he had been doing? He would take the orchestra to a recording studio and work out different variations. That is the way they work. He's not writing down the whole score. He would write but eight bars and then go with the orchestra and work on it with them and then record it. That's what he was sending—snatches and pieces of how he thought the orchestration should be. That was his style: not to finish till the last minute. The music was just beautiful, but it was driving me out of my mind.

I talked to the people who worked with him. They said, "Well, that's the way he works. You're just going to have to learn how to work with him like that. He'll take sixteen bars into a studio, eight bars of this and two bars of that, and come out four hours later with eight fantastic pieces. That's just the nature of the way he works." He wrote with the orchestra—the orchestra was his instrument. He composed in the recording studio; his band was his Stradivarius.

We made the premiere on time, but I didn't do all the pieces. There were twelve, and I think I did eight. The music was still arriving—the music was arriving complete now. He knew that I wanted all of it, but it would arrive page by page or two pages at a time. I wouldn't get a whole piece of music. But it was consistent. He never changed it. So the music arrived very late. I remember the day before we opened the first version of *The River*, rehearsing

a piece of music that had just arrived that was being orchestrated—a gorgeous piece of music.

The Budapest Opera Ballet does *The River* in Budapest. The Caracas Company does it. Ellington's loved all over the world. They love Ellington in Hungary. The idea of the Budapest Opera Ballet having a ballet to music by Duke Ellington just thrilled them.

He had a very calm, very civil lifestyle. He didn't drink. I know the first time I met him in Vancouver, we went to his suite in the hotel, and he said, "Would you like to have a drink?" I figured he was going to open his liquor cabinet, but he went to his airline bag. He had a little blue airline bag, and he had little bottles of liquor that he had gotten from the airline. He said, "Scotch, vodka, or rum?" I said, "Scotch." So he made me a drink with this. But he didn't drink. He drank Coca-Cola all the time.

On the famous Vancouver night, he was on the bandstand, conducting and playing all the tunes, and suddenly he remembered that somebody was there who had just gotten married. He called them up to the stage, and he made this couple sit on the stage while they played "Auld Lang Syne" and "Satin Doll" to them. He did a little dance for them. He'd make jokes, and they played these special tunes for them. He waltzed around. Oh, it was just superb. Such charm and such elegance and such style! I was always in awe—I was in awe of him until he died.

Dr. Arthur Logan was not only Duke Ellington's physician but also his close personal friend. He and his wife, Marian, sat in on recording sessions, attended many performances, and were generally treated as Ellington's extended family. Dr. Logan died suddenly in 1973, and news of his death devastated Ellington. The following reminiscence is from his widow, Marian Logan (1920–1993), a civil rights activist and, at the time of this interview, New York City's commissioner of human rights.



MARIAN LOGAN

From OHAM interview with Sonia Rosario, 27 February 1978,
New York City

As Arthur told me, and as Edward told me, they fell madly in love with one another from the beginning. Ellington wanted him as his doctor, and he remained his doctor from '37 until he died. Ellington was quite a hypochondriac. He didn't think he could swallow a glass of water

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Duke Ellington, ca. 1960.

without checking it with his doctor. And it didn't matter where he was—he had “telephone-itis,” I used to say. He would call from India, or anyplace. Every town he landed in, he would go see a doctor and tell that doctor to call his doctor. Many doctors, of course, did not understand Ellington's penchant for always having himself checked out by doctors, and the fact that whatever any doctor said to him, Ellington would always tell him, “But you must call

my doctor in New York and let him explain me to you.” So many a night he would call at 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning, and I would waken Arthur and tell him that Ellington was on the phone, and they’d talk. They talked at least three or four times a week. Sometimes I heard him speaking to a doctor in French, if he happened to be in Paris.

Ellington was a very special kind of person. Anything that was painful, he rose above it. He never accepted the fact that it was there. Anything that was wrong—he had people around who were paid to just get rid of that, you know. He just couldn’t deal with pain or anything that was troublesome or anything that interfered with him and his music. His music was *really* his mistress. As far as the one-night stands were concerned, he loved it. He loved the idea of always being on the go. He often said that New York was where he received his mail, but he never stayed any length of time. He was not a home person. He wasn’t one a woman could fix a home up for, that he wanted to come back to, as we ordinary mortals do. He was just that exceptional and that different. His home was on the road in hotels, and he made them as comfortable as could be. Everywhere he went he’d been before, so people knew he liked steaks and grapefruit and caviar, and people had these things prepared for him. And he stayed in suites and hotels all over the world. That was his life, and he loved it.

He was very impressed, having received his honorary degree from Yale. My husband was with him in Washington when he got the honorary degree at Howard. The thing that impressed him so much—the thing about which he was very elated and so proud—was that on that same day he went back to Dunbar High School, and they gave him his high school diploma.³⁸ And that he loved more than anything. I remember him walking down the street with Arthur talking about how great it was. That meant more to him than Howard or Yale or anything.

One of Ellington’s birthdays—I believe it was in ’58 or ’59—Arthur and I were trying to figure what we would give him. Arthur hit upon the idea of having all his music written down on paper because much of his music was never written down. It was just played by the band, and arrangements were made as they played. So we had everything copied from records and from books where we could find them. A fellow who played trombone named John Sanders did most of the copying, together with a bassist, Joe Benjamin, and Strayhorn and Mercer, and Irving Townsend, who was a friend of ours who worked at Columbia Records and produced most of Ellington’s albums, and

"He couldn't have thirteen . . ."

I couldn't work until they got the fourteenth man. I couldn't go to work because Ellington was superstitious. He couldn't have thirteen.

—Trombonist Lawrence Brown
from phone interview with Dennett Harrod,
30 April 1983, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles

who understood Ellington better, I think, than any other of the people in that area. They all worked together, and we had it bound in leather and wanted to present it to him, and he kept refusing to accept it. Finally one day we got him in New York and presented him with it. He gave us all four kisses, as he always did, and said, "That's lovely," and flew off. He didn't want to see it because he was very superstitious about life and all that kind of thing that reminds you of the fact that you could possibly die. He thought that having all the music catalogued and copied meant that his life was over, and he wasn't ready for that.

Atlanta was reportedly the foremost advanced city in the South. I went down to integrate a hotel. When Martin [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.] found out that they did not admit blacks to the hotel or to many of the restaurants, he called me and said he wanted me to come down. I'll never forget, when Ellington found out I was going south he called up and asked me was I crazy? What was I doing going down there? Why didn't I stay home and "take care of my doctor so that he can take care of me"? Well anyway, Ellington would call me every morning at 4 or 5 o'clock to see if I was alive and well. And Strayhorn would call me at noon, and Arthur would call me in the evening.

Ellington, at the time, was in Chicago, working on a piece called *My People*. When I told him I had finished my assignment and that I was leaving he said, "Why don't you come on through Chicago on your way home?" I said, "As I remember the map, Ellington, Chicago is not on the way home from Atlanta." He said, "Well, it's just a curve." So I told Martin that I was going to Chicago, and I said, "Come on, why don't you go with me? We'll go catch Ellington's show." Then Martin and I flew to Chicago—of course whenever you went anywhere with Martin there were loads of police and press who met him at the airport. We got into limousines with police escort, and we entered Chicago.

I was going to stay at the Blackstone, where Ellington had been staying for years. They decided they would drop me off, and when we got there I said, "Wait a minute. I'll see if Edward's up." Because anything before 5 o'clock was the middle of the night for Edward. He didn't get up early, unless he was staying up all night. So I went in the hotel and I told him to come down—that I wanted him to meet someone. He came down in his cashmere coat and his little porkpie hat, and it was very windy on the corner. When Ellington and I walked out of the hotel, Martin saw us. He jumped out of the limousine, and he and Ellington embraced. It was a very warm embrace they gave each other, as though they had known each other forever and they had great respect for one another. Ellington was thrilled meeting Martin.

We got in the car and drove Ellington to the place where he was having a rehearsal, and Martin and I sat in the director's booth with Ellington while he ran through a couple of the numbers, one of them being "King Fit the Battle of Alabam'." It was the first time Martin had ever heard that, and he was very impressed, very proud. It was quite a moment. Even Ellington, in his book, did not write it exactly the way it happened. Of course there were many things that Ellington wrote in his book that did not happen exactly the way he told. I guess his memory played tricks on him. But I was there, and I know what happened.

There are many ways in which you can pay your dues to the civil rights movement. I think Ellington's greatest contribution is the fact that he traveled, and his music was accepted and he was accepted, above and beyond being a black person. There are some people who have to yell and scream about blackness, and there are others who do it in a quiet, continual way, and that's what Ellington did all his life. He projected the black idiom, black music, and his blackness and the blackness of his people. But he didn't have to get on the bandstand and scream, "I am black!" He was really interracial. He crossed all the barriers. You can't just say that Ellington wrote, created, and played for blacks. He played for people. And because of being a black person himself, what came out of him had to be the black experience.

We were planning to go to Europe and meet Edward on the Monday after the Sunday that my husband died. I felt that Ellington should know about Arthur's death and then have the right to make his own decision about coming. I had talked to Ruth a couple of times, and I asked her if she had told Edward, and she said no. I told her that I thought she should, and she said that was a decision she and Mercer should make. So when Ellington called me—it

was on Thursday morning, the morning of the actual funeral. He said, "What time is the funeral?" And I said, "At noon." He said, "When?" I said, "Today." He said, "What time is it now?" I said, "Twenty after 9." He said, "Morning or night?" and he sounded very confused. And I said, "It's morning." And he said, "Well, I can't even make it." I said, "I know, Edward. I tried to get them to tell you before. Since Sunday I've been trying to reach you." He said, "Well, I don't know what I'm going to do. I won't be able to get back, and I can't do anything." I felt that Ruth and Mercer had done Ellington a cruel injustice, and I was very bitter about it at first, because I knew how very close they were. I thought that their concern was only that Edward do a concert. I thought that Edward's concern was the fact that he pay whatever tribute he was going to pay to Arthur, and that he was deprived of that opportunity at this time—when he most needed to.

Ellington was just so shocked and so devastated, and he told me that he would never make it; he wouldn't last six months. Of course I believed him because I knew how important Arthur was to his feeling of well-being and really his survival.

Ellington felt he couldn't sit around and bemoan the fact that he was dying.³⁹ He wanted to get a lot of things done. He wanted to write and get many things recorded before he died. Arthur had felt it was the best thing for him to continue, although Arthur had been very, very saddened by it, and frustrated because he realized that the friend he loved most—he couldn't do anything to help. And he had felt the same way when Strayhorn died. He felt so helpless.

Edward came back from Europe, went into the hospital, and never came out. He called me nearly every night. I talked to him the night before he died, and he told me he took off his "kissy blue" sweater, which was his expression—he always wore casual sweaters as underwear instead of undershirts. And I knew when he took off the sweater that he was ready to go. He got pneumonia and died—and just two days short of the six months he had predicted.

In 1965 Pastor John Gensel (1917–1998) was hired by the Lutheran Church to work full time with the jazz community in New York. He counseled musicians, conducted weddings and funerals, and established a jazz worship service, called Jazz Vespers, at St. Peter's Lutheran Church on Lexington Avenue. Ruth Ellington was a member of the congregation, and through her, Gensel got to know Duke. He helped to organize the Second Sacred Concert at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.



JOHN GENSEL

From OHAM interview with Jeremy Orgel, 14 December 1979, New York City

Duke Ellington never got into politics. If he did something for a politician, he did not want it to be used that Duke was sponsoring them or was a Democrat or a Republican. Just the same way that if you would ask him, “Are you an Episcopalian or a Lutheran?” I’m sure he’d say, “Well, I’m both or neither.” He was the same way about politics. In fact, some of the more militant blacks were a little bit critical of Duke because they said he didn’t come out and parade and that sort of thing. He did it in his own quiet way and made a tremendous contribution in the whole aspect of the racial situation.

It would be interesting to get Duke Ellington’s theological concepts by taking these Sacred Concerts and both listening to the music and going through the words very carefully to see whether he was pantheistic—he certainly wasn’t denominational. In a sense he claimed all of us. I was his pastor, one of his pastors. He had rabbis and Episcopal priests. So theologically he was not zooming in on any denomination per se. He fitted into all of them and did his Sacred Concerts in small churches and cathedrals and in synagogues.

He touched the lives of many, many people. All of them seemed to have a personal feeling for him, and they always spoke about his graciousness. One time I was standing with him, and a little boy came up to him and was admiring him. Duke looked at him and said, “When I grow up I want to be like you.” Or a young lady would come up to him and would say, “Oh, Dr. Ellington, how wonderful your music was and how resplendent you are.” And he would say, “My rags are just a reflection of your glory.” He was just so full of these remarkable statements—he was something else!

The musician, author, and educator Willie Ruff (1931–) is the founding director of the Duke Ellington Fellowship at Yale University. Ellington Fellows regularly visit Yale and inner-city classrooms for performances and lectures. In 1972 Ellington, Eubie Blake, Noble Sissle, Dizzy Gillespie, Slam Stewart, Max Roach, Mary Lou Williams, Dave Brubeck, and many other notable jazz figures came together to celebrate the inauguration of this extraordinary “conservatory without walls.”

“ . . . a monumental experience . . . ”

I had the unfortunate experience of having to handle his funeral services. I embalmed Duke Ellington. Two of his men died just before he passed away. We had the service for Paul Gonsalves a Wednesday evening, and then we brought him back to the chapel, and we had a service for Tyree Glenn on Thursday evening and we had both burials scheduled for Friday morning. On Friday morning shortly before, Ruth Ellington, Mercer Ellington, and Cress Courtney came in to make arrangements for Duke's service, and in the meantime I dispatched a hearse to the Presbyterian Hospital to bring Duke down. While we were getting ready to go to the cemetery to bury Tyree Glenn, Duke Ellington was brought into the chapel, and for a few minutes all three of them were in the chapel at the same time.

At the time of the service there were approximately fifteen thousand people inside St. John's, and there was no standing room. Outside the church, I would estimate somewhere between twenty-five and thirty-five thousand people. The funeral service for Duke was like a service for a head of state. It was a monumental experience, to put it mildly. There were government officials of all levels, people representing the governor and mayors of various cities, people from the diplomatic corps. When he was reposing in the casket, he wore around his neck a collar that was presented to him by the government of France, which was the very highest honor for the country to bestow on any single individual. He also had in the casket with him a medal from Haile Selassie from Ethiopia. I recall so vividly just prior to the time that Duke was removed from the hearse: I looked out and there was nothing but a whole sea of people—down the street that was facing the church, the entire section of Amsterdam Avenue was filled, as far as I could see, to the right and to the left. Nothing but people standing shoulder to shoulder, as it was, inside the church.

In the chapel at the time of the viewing, there were people who would just break down, who would almost stumble when it dawned on them—Duke Ellington is really dead. They'd reach a certain point coming in, and they'd know as soon as they turned the corner they were going to see the casket. And you'd see this grief. People who had never met him in their lifetime, but he had reached them and touched them through his music in such a way that it was almost god-like. It was the most incredible experience I've ever had in this business.

—John Joyce
from OHAM interview with Harriett Milnes,
21 September 1983, New York City



WILLIE RUFF

From presentation to American studies class, 4 April 1978,
Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Not everything that is attributed to Ellington is Ellington. He is unique in his time and place, but not because of his own attributes at all. All the excellence surrounding him is not of his making. They were a large cadre which are still shrouded in mystery, whose names you may or may not know, who saw at that particular point in the history of a nation and the history of a music that it was vital for them personally to take low.

You know what I mean by “take low”? Take low means to check out, to step back, to be willing to make subservient your own visibility, your own role, so that a racial, national image itself may shine brighter from your contribution, without your name ever being mentioned, without you having been what is known as properly credited for it. And there were whole cadres of those who did that. First among them and perhaps most importantly was Mr. Strayhorn. You cannot know Ellington without knowing something, perhaps even more personal, about Strayhorn. Because it was Strayhorn’s sole function to polish

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the print version of this title.]

Photos by “PoPsie” © 2004 Michael Randolph.

Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington

the star of Ellington because it was the only one, and the one that did shine brightest, not for Ellington, but for a race.

Ellington and Strayhorn: It's a strange story, shrouded in very deep mystery. You can go to the copyright office now and find one's hand with another's signature over it on the registration of the copyright. But that's not important—it didn't make any difference whose it was. One was the other's.

The focus on Ellington is a focus on a moment of excellence, surrounded by other moments of excellence coming from other people. Ellington could not have happened in a vacuum; Ellington could not have happened by himself. He would not have had the impact that he had, had he been Duke Ellington the piano player. And in order to have a Duke Ellington orchestra, he's got to have sixteen others with him on the stand. He was not the greatest piano player in the world. A lot of piano players could play him up and down and could railroad him and skin him up really bad. What made him the dean of that period involved so many other people taking low so that he may take high—he was uniquely privileged to look like he looked, to speak like he spoke, to walk like he walked, to play like he played, to live like he lived. To be a part of a broader effort was worth it to those who did take low for that.

Critic

Nat Hentoff

The cultural historian, author, and jazz critic Nat Hentoff (1925–) was associate editor of *Down Beat* magazine from 1953 to 1957. He is coeditor of *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz by the Men Who Made It* and the author of *Jazz Is*.



NAT HENTOFF

From presentation to Yale University Duke Ellington seminar,
28 February 1978, New Haven, Connecticut

He once said to me that composing for him was, in a sense, solving a problem. He loved to do that. In the early years of the band, he would say, “Guys would come in and I would know their strengths and I would know their weaknesses, and I would play to their strengths. I would know what this guy can do on this part of the horn, and it was fun to take a kind of narrow compass of range and see how much I could get him to get out of it.”

Jack Tracy was then the editor of *Down Beat*. This was in Chicago, and the tenor saxophonist was really zonked. Jack said, "You know, it really doesn't look very good to have this junkie snoring up there." Duke went into such a fury. He said something to the effect that "what you don't know is that this man fought for you and the rest of this nation in the South Pacific, and he contracted malaria." Now that guy never could have gotten into the army. No way! He was nowhere near the South Pacific. But Duke was annoyed that some outsider was trying to tell him what the morality of the band should be. He was loyal to his men, although he did not like unpleasantness, and he would go a long way out of his way if he could avoid it.

I don't think Duke ever lost the black attitude. It was always conscious in his mind. You've probably heard that story that he told me that back in the twenties when Paul Whiteman was bringing dignity to jazz, he went to Fletcher Henderson and said, "Look, why don't we stop this confusion and why don't we call what we're doing black music? And they won't be able to call what they're doing black music, and let them take jazz." And Fletcher was always a rather timid man, and he wouldn't do that. But all through his career until the very end, Ellington thought of himself essentially as a black composer and musi-

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

cian. He was very strong on race, very strong. Although it didn't come out in ways that made people realize quite that.

Of all the people in jazz history, he created over a long period of time, the largest, the most diversified and the most consistently extraordinary body of music. He was able to use his orchestra as his instrument so that he was continually able to hear what he had just written and continually able to change it and to know exactly how it sounded—not by imagining it the way classical composers have to do or by extrapolating on the piano but by hearing it in action. I think what Duke did was teach people how to hear differently. I mean, his way of voicing, even his rhythms—he was often put down for having a band that didn't swing. Well, there are different ways of swinging. He used many more forms than any jazz composer has done since or up to now. He was really protean; he was a genius.

Notes



COMMENTS ON ORAL HISTORY

1. Alex Haley, "Black History, Oral History, and Genealogy," in Dunaway and Baum, *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 257–279.

2. *Oral History Review* 29, no. 2 (Summer–Fall 2002).

3. Terkel has written numerous books based on oral history interviews, including *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1970), *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel* (1974), and the Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II* (1984).

4. For a complete list of OHAM's acquisitions, see the website, www.yale.edu/oham/.

5. Malcolm was the subject of a lawsuit that caused a furor in the worlds of journalism, psychiatry, and law. In 1983 she wrote a profile of Jeffrey Masson for the *New Yorker*, which she later published as the book *In the Freud Archives*. Jeffrey Masson sued her for libel, claiming that Malcolm fabricated quotations. The case went before the United States Supreme Court, where it was decided that a public figure could recover libel damages from the publisher of an article that includes altered quotations. Although none of the exact quotations in question were found in Malcolm's many tapes, she eventually won the lawsuit on the grounds that the altered quotations either were substantially true or were rational interpretations of Masson's statements.

6. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 155.

7. Quoted in "Definitions of Oral History," forum chaired by Elizabeth I. Dixon, in Oral History Association, *Proceedings of the First National Colloquium on Oral History* (Los Angeles: Oral History Association, 1966), 14.

8. These interviews became the basis of Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered*.

9. John Kirkpatrick (1905–1991), foremost scholar, editor, and performer of Ives's music, was curator of the Ives Papers at the Yale Music Library. See Chapter 1 for more on Kirkpatrick.

10. The recordings were released in 1974 in *Charles Ives: The 100th Anniversary*, a five-record album by Columbia Records. Producers, Sam Parkins and Vivian Perlis; CD released by Composers' Recordings, Inc. (CRI), 1999.

ONE. INTRODUCING THE CENTURY

1. Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 Through 1942*, 15; and transcript, *Music in the Twenties*, WGBH television, Boston, 1965.
2. For a unique view of Henry Gilbert (1868–1928) from his daughter, see interview, Isolde Gilbert Horton with Caitriona Bolster, OHAM, 31 December 1976, Winchester, Mass.
3. See Adrienne Fried Block and Carol Neuls-Bates, eds., *Women in American Music: A Bibliography of Music and Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979); and Judith Tick, *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).
4. Schneelock Sisters Diaries, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
5. Lawrence Gilman, *Edward MacDowell* (New York: John Lane, 1906).
6. *The Celestial Country*, composed between 1898 and 1900, was performed at Central Presbyterian Church on 57th Street, New York, 15 April 1902.
7. Ives, *Memos*, 128–129.
8. Burkholder, *Charles Ives: The Ideas Behind the Music*, 82.
9. For a survey of the music see Hitchcock, *Ives*; and Starr, *A Union of Diversities*.
10. See J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
11. See Richard Crawford, “Edward MacDowell: Musical Nationalism and an American Tone Poet,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 49, no. 3 (Fall 1996), 528–560.
12. Ives did not know MacDowell personally, but a copy of the *Sea Pieces*, Op. 55, was found among the scores in Ives’s studio. MacDowell was on the list of important persons to whom Ives sent his privately published compositions in the early 1920s. Mrs. MacDowell responded politely (27 April 1923), apologizing for not playing the *Concord* sonata yet and promising to do so soon. She also wrote to Ives later (22 January 1948) to congratulate him on winning the Pulitzer Prize. See Ives Papers, Yale Music Library.
13. From Chadwick’s memoir of 1899; New England Conservatory Library archives. Courtesy Steven Ledbetter.
14. Ives, *Memos*, 132.
15. See Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata*; and Kirkpatrick, “What Music Meant to Charles Ives.”
16. See Feder, “My Father’s Song.”
17. Elie Robert Schmitz (1889–1949) was an eminent French-born pianist. In 1920 he founded the Franco-American Musical Society (later known as Pro Musica Society), devoted to presenting new European composers to American audiences and vice versa. See Vivian Perlis, *Two Men for Modern Music*, I.S.A.M. Monograph no. 9 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1978). The Yale Music Library holds Pro Musica papers.
18. Aaron Copland, Foreword to Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered*, xii.
19. See Feder, “My Father’s Song,” 198–199.
20. Sherwood, “Charles Ives and ‘Our National Malady.’”
21. See Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered*.
22. Joseph Moss Ives (1875–1939), Ives’s younger brother, practiced law and raised his family in Danbury, Connecticut.
23. Ruggles was an artist as well as a composer. He designed covers for Cowell’s *New*

Music editions, including *New Music Orchestra Series*, 1932, the issue containing Ives's *Lincoln: The Great Commoner*.

24. At the time of his death, the American composer Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884–1920) was gaining a reputation as a promising young talent.

25. Theosophy attracted many freethinking artists and intellectuals at the beginning of the century. The term *theosophy* refers to the knowledge of the divine essence as experienced directly through insight and experience, an element of some ancient as well as modern religions. The Theosophical Society was founded in New York City by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in 1875. Other early leaders included William Q. Judge, Henry S. Olcott, Alice A. Bailey, and Annie Besant. Theosophy is not a religion but a body of teachings confirming the essential oneness of all beings. Theosophists study comparative religions, philosophy, and science, and most believe in reincarnation, karma, and such parapsychological phenomena as clairvoyance and telepathy.

26. For correspondence from Katherine Ruth Heyman to John Kirkpatrick and to Charles Ives, see John Kirkpatrick Papers and Ives Papers, Yale Music Library.

27. Tape recordings of Kirkpatrick's presentation "Ramble Through the *Concord*," presented for Vivian Perlis's classes at Yale, are in the OHAM archive, as are recordings of a presentation on Ives's Fourth Symphony. Both feature Kirkpatrick at the piano.

28. Other letters in addition to Edith Ives's arrived after the publication of *Charles Ives Remembered* in 1974: Leticia Echlin described her family's move into the Ives house on 74th Street and the kitchen "with the big old wood stove where Charles Ives listened to his cook's radio and heard the Second Symphony for the first time"; Jesse Angel Hall, son of Harmony Ives's sister, wrote that he lived with the Iveses for a time and recalled "a wonderful guy in corduroys who made the piano jump playing 'Marching Through Georgia' . . . and Tante Harmony, a quiet, gentle, smiling presence."

TWO. ON RAGTIME AND EUBIE BLAKE

1. Berlin, *Ragtime*, 11.

2. See Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 7.

3. Berlin, *Ragtime*, 11.

4. Hasse, *Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music*, 11.

5. James Sinclair, liner notes to Charles Ives, *Ragtime Dances* (Koch International 3-7025-2). Sinclair arranged for chamber orchestra from piano sketches; Ives's original orchestrated versions were lost.

6. Among the many Ives pieces that refer to ragtime are the two piano sonatas, and Piano Studies No. 20 and No. 23.

7. John Erskine, "MacDowell at Columbia: Some Recollections," *Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (October 1942), 399–400.

8. A search was made by OHAM in the early 1970s for traces of Joplin. Inquiries in his hometown of Texarkana, Texas, brought forth letters from two children of Joplin's brother Monroe. Also, a niece wrote (24 January 1972): "I knew him. He left here before he was grown." A nephew responded from Marshall, Texas (20 January 1972): "Yes I knew and remembered him quite well." In a second letter (2 February 1972): "I saw him once and I was 7 years of age at the time. He spent about a week with us. But the friends kept him going all the time."

9. From conversation with Vivian Perlis.
10. See Thomas L. Riis, *More than Just Minstrel Shows*, I.S.A.M. Monograph no. 33 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1992), 48.
11. See Kimball and Bolcom, *Reminiscing with Sissle and Blake*.
12. “Memories of Eubie,” and *Eubie!* Broadway musical, 1978.
13. According to Berlin, Eubie Blake’s year of birth is in question. Evidence suggests that he was a few years younger than Blake and others previously claimed.
14. Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles wrote the play from which *Shuffle Along* was adapted. Europe brought the four men together.
15. The Shuberts, a prominent family of theater managers, controlled many theaters in New York City and elsewhere and produced some six hundred plays.
16. Paul Whiteman (1890–1967), popular band and orchestral leader, most famous for gentrifying jazz and commissioning and premiering George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* at Aeolian Hall in 1954.

THREE. FROM THE EARLY MODERNISTS

1. See Vivian Perlis, *Two Men for Modern Music: E. Robert Schmitz and Herman Langinger*, I.S.A.M. Monograph no. 9 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1978).
2. Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955). Chase used the term *ultramodernism* and described it as a movement following futurism. Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.
3. Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, rev. ed. (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1972; orig. pub. 1955), 19.
4. Thomson, *Virgil Thomson*, 153–154.
5. Morgan, “Rewriting Music History.”
6. Composers particularly influenced by Cowell’s book are Conlon Nancarrow, Harry Partch, John Cage, Lou Harrison, Henry Brant, Ben Johnston, and Kyle Gann.
7. For many years, Ornstein’s birth date appeared as 1895, probably an attempt by the family to make their son appear a child prodigy. Ornstein had a twin sister who somehow gradually became several years older than her brother. OHAM interviews with Ornstein revealed the error. Further research by Denise Von Glahn and Michael Broyles confirms that the birth date is still uncertain, and Ornstein’s son Severo adds that the family name may have originally been Gornstein.
8. Bertha Feiring Tapper (1859–1915), distinguished pianist, teacher, and composer. A. Walter Kramer wrote in her obituary: “Trained in Leipzig . . . she was able after some thirty or forty years in music to adjust her understanding to the ultramodern utterance of a young iconoclast.” *Musical America* 21 (25 September 1915).
9. Pauline Ornstein, letter to Perlis, 21 December 1972.
10. Pauline Ornstein, letter to Perlis, 2 August 1981.
11. Waldo Frank, “Leo Ornstein and the Emancipated Music,” typescript for article in *Onlooker*, 1916. Ornstein Papers, Yale Music Library.
12. Paul Rosenfeld, “Ornstein,” *New Republic* 7, no. 82 (27 May 1916), 83–85.

13. Leo Ornstein, letter to Perlis, 6 April 1974. The term *futurism* referred specifically to a group of Italian artists, led by the poet Filippo Marinetti, concerned with machinery and the aesthetic use of noise. Balilla Pratella (1880–1955) was the only composer in the group. The painter and inventor Luigi Russolo, another prominent member, wrote a 1913 manifesto on the “art of noises.” Ornstein was not connected to the Italian or German futurist movements, but the term was often used interchangeably with *modernist* or *ultramodernist*.

14. Interview, Leo Ornstein with Perlis, OHAM, 8 December 1972, Waban, Mass.

15. Henry Cowell is generally credited as the first composer to use unusual techniques (e.g., fists, arms, pieces of wood) to produce secundal harmonies, but several other composers used them around the same time, principally Ives and Ornstein. They appear in Ornstein’s *Danse sauvage* and Ives’s *Concord Sonata*. Cowell was the first to coin the term *tone clusters*.

16. Leo Ornstein, letter to Perlis, 6 March 1974.

17. Martens, *Leo Ornstein*.

18. See correspondence, Ornstein Papers, Yale Music Library.

19. For Varèse and visual artists, see Bernard, *The Music of Edgard Varèse*.

20. Quoted in Mattis, “Edgard Varèse and the Visual Arts,” iv.

21. Gunther Schuller, “Conversation with Varèse,” 32–37.

22. *Ibid.*, 33.

23. Interview, Otto Luening with Joan Thompson, OHAM, 12 December 1978, New York.

24. Louise Varèse, *Looking-Glass Diary*, 136–139.

25. Edgard Varèse, “The Liberation of Sound.” *Ionisation* was published in 1931.

26. Quoted from Oliver Daniel, *Stokowski: A Counterpoint of View* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1982), 226–227.

27. Edgard Varèse, “The Liberation of Sound” in Schwartz and Childs, *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, 196–198.

28. For Zappa and Varèse, see “Random Notes (Frank Zappa to host tribute to idol Edgard Varèse)”; and interview, Frank Zappa with David B. Fischer, OHAM Acquisition, 17 August 1977, Los Angeles, California. For Parker and Varèse, see Ross Russell, *Bird Lives* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973), 342.

29. Milton Babbitt in Mattis, “Varèse and the Visual Arts,” appendix B: Varèse Oral History Project, excerpts, 266.

30. See the *Manifesto* of the International Composers’ Guild (ICG) for Varèse on “isms.”

31. See Chou, “Varèse.” For program of first concert see Louise Varèse, *Looking-Glass Diary*, 171.

32. See Oja, *Making Music Modern*, chapter 3; correspondence of Joan Peyser and Claire Reis, Perlis collection, courtesy Claire Reis; and interviews, Claire Reis with Perlis, OHAM, various dates between 21 January 1976 and 6 May 1977, New York; and Louise Varèse, *Looking-Glass Diary*, 187–191.

33. Ives’s *Three Places in New England*, conducted by Nicolas Slonimsky, 6 June 1931, Salle Gaveau, Paris; and Varèse’s *Ionisation*, 5 March 1933, New York.

34. In a symposium of 1978 devoted to Varèse, the music was described, discussed, and analyzed. The major participants were Elliott Carter, Robert P. Morgan, and Chou Wen-chung, who presented papers and responded to questions from the audience. A publication of the pro-

ceedings followed. See Sherman Van Solkema, ed., *The New Worlds of Edgard Varèse: A Symposium*, I.S.A.M. Monograph no. 11 (New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1979). Analysis of the music has been attempted by others, among them Milton Babbitt, Jonathan Bernard, and Olivia Mattis.

35. Stefan Wolpe, “On New (And Not-So-New) Music in America,” trans. and notes by Austin Clarkson, *Journal of Music Theory* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1984), 1–45.

36. Richard Franko Goldman, “Reviews of Records,” *Musical Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (January 1961), 133–134.

37. Schuller, “Conversation with Varèse,” 35.

38. Oja, *Making Music Modern*, 26.

39. Quoted in Ruth Julius, “Edgard Varèse: An Oral History Project, Some Preliminary Conclusions,” *Current Musicology* 25 (1978), 46–47.

40. Varèse’s papers may become more accessible. In 2004 it was announced that the Paul Sacher Foundation in Switzerland had acquired the Varèse music manuscripts.

41. Chou Wen-chung, “Open Rather Than Bounded,” in *Reflections on American Composers: A Symposium*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1971), 50–51.

42. This piece was eventually finished by the composer Chou Wen-chung in 1973. It was performed in the incomplete version by Composers’ Showcase, Robert Craft conducting, 1 May 1961, New York.

43. Wolpe, “On New (And Not-So-New) Music in America.”

44. Conducted by Ruth Julius for CUNY. See Julius, “Edgard Varèse.”

45. Harold C. Schonberg, “Maverick, Revolutionary, and Father to a Generation,” *New York Times*, 14 November 1965, X11.

46. An informal tape-recorded interview of Varèse with Leonard Altman reveals Varèse’s intolerant attitudes. OHAM Acquisition, 1965.

47. Louise Varèse, *Looking-Glass Diary*, 21–23.

48. Edgard Varèse, “The Liberation of Sound.”

49. This definition is from the mathematician and philosopher Josef Hoene Wronski (1778–1853). According to Chou Wen-chung, Varèse most likely found this quotation in the composer-theorist Camille Durutte’s (1803–1881) *Esthétique Musicale: Résumé élémentaire de la Technique harmonique et complément de cette Technique*, from 1876. See Chou Wen-chung in Schwartz and Childs, *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, 199.

50. Ferruccio Busoni, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*, trans. Theodore Baker (New York, 1911); rpt. in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music* (New York: Dover Publications 1962), 79. Also rpt. in Schwartz and Childs, *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, 3.

51. Carlos Salzedo (1885–1961) was a pioneer in contemporary harp technique and a champion of contemporary music. He worked with Varèse in the International Composers’ Guild (1921) and was involved with the New Music Society of California, the Pan American Association of Composers, and Pro Musica Society.

52. The International Composers’ Guild premiered two of Ruggles’s vocal works: “Toys” (4 March 1923) and *Vox clamans in deserto* (13 January 1924).

53. Sources vary regarding the number of players and rehearsals.

54. For a commentary on the ICG concert series and a complete list of programs, see

R. Allen Lott, “New Music for New Ears: The International Composers’ Guild,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36, no. 2 (1983), 266–286.

55. The unfinished *Nocturnal*.
56. Leonard Bernstein conducted *Arcana* in November 1958 and *Déserts* in January 1964.
57. See Jean Roy, “*Déserts* d’Edgar Varèse,” *Derrière le Miroir* 73 (February–March 1955).
58. Conversation, John Kirkpatrick with Perlis, New Haven, Conn., 1972.
59. Edgard Varèse, Princeton Lecture, September 1959, Princeton, N.J.
60. Kirkpatrick, “The Evolution of Carl Ruggles.”
61. See Ziffrin, *Carl Ruggles*, 253.
62. Ruggles Papers, Yale Music Library.
63. Harrison, “About Carl Ruggles.”
64. Igor Stravinsky with Robert Craft, “Some Composers,” *Musical America* 82, no. 6 (June 1962), 6–12.
65. Gilbert, “Carl Ruggles.”
66. See notes to *The Complete Music of Carl Ruggles*, Buffalo Philharmonic, Michael Tilson Thomas, dir. Liner notes by John Kirkpatrick and Michael Tilson Thomas, CBS Masterworks M2 34591, 1980. Kirkpatrick realized several Ruggles piano works from sketches in the Ruggles Papers; pianist Donald Berman, a former Kirkpatrick student, premiered them at *The Complete Piano Music of Carl Ruggles*, Miller Theater, New York, April 2003.
67. Dane Rudhyar, “Oriental Influence in American Music,” in *American Composers on American Music*, ed. Henry Cowell (1933; rpt. New York: Ungar, 1961), 185.
68. Rudhyar, *The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music*, 195.
69. Interview, Dane Rudhyar with Perlis, OHAM, 18 March 1970, San Jacinto, Calif.
70. Oja, *Making Music Modern*, 99.
71. Rudhyar, *Claude Debussy et son oeuvre*.
72. Scriabin’s *Mysterium: Sketches for an Acte Preamble*, 1914–1915, a philosophical opera to be performed in an Indian temple.
73. Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Personality*.
74. Interview, Charles Seeger with Adelaide G. Tusler, OHAM Acquisition, 1966, Pacific Palisades, Calif.
75. Ruth Crawford transcribed folk songs for the book by John and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).
76. Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
77. See Oja, *Making Music Modern*.
78. The Russian inventor Leon Theremin (1896–1993) is best known for the electronic instrument that bears his name.
79. “Aunt” Molly Jackson (1890–1960, née Mary Magdalene Garland) was born and raised in a coal-mining community of Kentucky. She came to the attention of New York’s radical left-wing community in the thirties and was persuaded to move there and use her music to promote their causes.
80. Cecil Sharp (1859–1924) was an English folk song collector and editor. He visited America and in 1918 published *American-English Folk-songs*.

81. For more on the melograph, see Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger*, 211–218.
82. Terman's records are included in the Henry Cowell Collection, New York Public Library, opened June 2000.
83. Joel Sachs, "Henry Cowell: A Biographical Perspective," in Oja and Allen, *Henry Cowell's Musical Worlds*.
84. Interview, Dane Rudhyar with Rita Mead, 18 November 1975, New York, quoted in Mead, *Henry Cowell's New Music*, 21.
85. Henry Cowell, Preface to *Quartet Romantic*; *Quartet Euphometric* (Jan. 1964) (New York: C. F. Peters, 1974).
86. Nicolas Slonimsky, "Henry Cowell," in Cowell, *American Composers on American Music*, 59–60.
87. Louise Vermont, "Musical Note: Butcher's Paper and Cold Feet," *Greenwich Villager*, 15 April 1922.
88. Henry Cowell and Sidney Cowell, *Charles Ives and His Music* (1955; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1983).
89. The number of Hymn and Fuguing Tune pieces is sometimes counted as sixteen, sometimes as eighteen. See Wayne Shirley, "The Hymns and Fuguing Tunes," in Nicholls, *The Whole World of Music*, 96.
90. John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 71; interview, Lou Harrison with Perlis, OHAM, 24 March 1970, Aptos, Calif.
91. Grimes and Cellum, *Tribute to Henry Cowell*.
92. The exact extent of Cowell's formal education is uncertain. Seeger and the psychologist Lewis Terman report only a few months of schooling, but Joel Sachs, Cowell's biographer, states that Cowell went through the third grade. In the Beate Gordon interview, Cowell stated that he received a certificate saying he was prepared to enter the fourth grade. See William Lightenwanger, "Henry Cowell, Composer of Music," in Nicholls, *Whole World of Music*, 149; Sachs, "Henry Cowell"; and interview, Cowell with Beate Gordon, OHAM Acquisition, 1962–1963.
93. Sidney Cowell's account in particular contradicts contemporary newspaper articles and the writings of Michael Hicks. See Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian*, and "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 92–119.
94. These interviews are in the Henry Cowell Collection, New York Public Library.
95. Grimes and Cellum, *Tribute*.
96. "Aeolian Harp" does not require another performer to hold down the piano pedal. Harrison is probably referring to "The Banshee" (ca. 1925).
97. Lou Harrison, "Sarabande and Prelude," *New Music* 11, no. 4 (July 1938).
98. Grimes and Cellum, *Tribute*.
99. Cage is probably referring to the rhythm-harmony quartets, the *Quartet Romantic* (1917) and the *Quartet Euphometric* (1919).

FOUR. ON THE JAZZ AGE AND GEORGE GERSHWIN

1. The war affected the early modernists in various ways: Cowell enlisted in the army and played flute in military bands; Ives was so disillusioned he stopped composing but worked for

the war effort, selling bonds and donating ambulances; Seeger was a pacifist and suffered criticism and trauma; Ornstein composed “Poems of 1917” about the war.

2. This poem, “First Fig,” was written in 1918 and published in *A Few Figs from This-tles: Poems and Sonnets* (New York: Salvo, Frank Shay, 1920). Millay (1892–1950) was the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for poetry (1923).

3. Joseph H. Remick & Company, publishers of popular music, paid Gershwin fifteen dollars a week. J. B. Harms, Incorporated, publishers of operettas and musical comedies, paid Gershwin thirty-five dollars a week. Max Dreyfus (1874–1964) became Gershwin’s publisher.

4. Quoted in Bolcom, “A Serious Composer with Broadway Style.”

5. Gershwin wrote the music for the *George White’s Scandals* for five years, from 1920 to 1924. He used various lyricists in addition to his brother Ira.

6. Jerome Kern (1885–1945) was considered “the father of the American book musical.” He was a strong influence on Gershwin, who said, “Kern was the first composer who made me conscious that most popular music was of inferior quality.”

7. Van Vechten, “George Gershwin.”

8. *Blue Monday* was removed from the production after one performance. Whiteman admired the work, however, and after revisions, he and his orchestra performed the mini-opera a few times.

9. Van Vechten, “George Gershwin,” 40.

10. Experiment in Modern Music was reconstructed and conducted by Maurice Peress, 12 February 1984, Town Hall, for the sixtieth anniversary of the concert. Featured were Dick Hyman and Ivan Davis. The recording was released by MusicMasters, 1986, #60113. Notes by Peress, facsimile program booklet.

11. Grofé (1892–1972) was Whiteman’s regular arranger and orchestrator. Grofé arranged the original *Rhapsody* for jazz band and piano. Later, he expanded it to the full orchestra version that became most familiar to audiences. At the Library of Congress are the following: manuscript of Grofé’s original orchestration, his 1926 arrangement for larger orchestra, and Gershwin’s original sketch. The sketch lacks the opening clarinet glissando.

12. Paul Whiteman, *Jazz* (New York: J. H. Sears, 1926), 278.

13. Edmund Wilson, “The Jazz Problem,” *New Republic* 45, no. 13 (January 1926), 217.

14. Charles Luckeyeth (“Luckey”) Roberts (1895–1968) was a New York–based ragtime composer and pianist. James P. Johnson (1891–1955), a stride-piano pioneer, was also a versatile composer of ragtime, jazz, popular, and concert music.

15. For an insightful discussion of Damrosch’s ambivalent attitude toward jazz, see Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 319–320.

16. Isaac Goldberg, “Music by Gershwin,” part 3 of a three-part article in *Ladies Home Journal*, 25 April 1931, 196.

17. Jablonski and Stewart, *The Gershwin Years*, 194–195.

18. Two unpublished piano works, originally called “Novelettes,” incorporated jazz and were also the basis of *Short Story*, a work for violin and piano arranged by Samuel Dushkin in 1924–1925. It was published in a revised arrangement by Dushkin in 1945.

19. Paul Rosenfeld, *An Hour with American Music* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1929).

20. See Analytic Index, *Modern Music*, ed. Wayne Shirley (New York: AMS Press, 1976).

21. Virgil Thomson, "George Gershwin," *Modern Music* 13, no. 1 (November–December 1935), 13.
22. Aaron Copland, "America's Young Men of Promise," *Modern Music* 3, no. 3 (March–April 1926), 13–20.
23. Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 Through 1942*, 130.
24. Sue Neimoyer, "The Kilenyi/Schoenberg Connection: New Insights into Gershwin's Musical Education," paper presented at the Society for American Music Twenty-Ninth Annual Conference, Tempe, Ariz., 10 March 2003. According to Neimoyer, Kilenyi's diaries show that he taught Gershwin modernist musical principles, including concepts of voice leading drawn from Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre*. She suggests that contrary to the myth of Gershwin as a self-taught composer, these studies had a significant effect on his concert music, as demonstrated by examples from *Rhapsody in Blue* and Concerto in F.
25. Léonie Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger: A Life in Music* (New York: Norton, 1982), 216–217.
26. Noel Riley Fitch, *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation* (New York: Norton, 1983), 173.
27. See Forte, "Reflections Upon the Gershwin-Berg Connection."
28. Jablonski and Stewart, *The Gershwin Years*, 309.
29. *The George Gershwin Song Book* (New York: Random House, 1932). These arrangements are no longer commercially available.
30. The songs appear in the original printed form followed by Gershwin's arrangements.
31. Armitage, *George Gershwin*, 77.
32. Jablonski, *George Gershwin*, 245.
33. Copland also contemplated an opera based on *The Dybbuk*, and both Gershwin and Copland were interested in theater projects suggested by the writer Lynn Riggs.
34. Richard Rodgers, foreword to Kimball and Simon, *The Gershwins*, xiii.
35. Thomson, "George Gershwin," 13–19.
36. Frederick Jacobi, "The Future of Gershwin," *Modern Music* 15, no. 1 (November–December 1937), 3–7.
37. Cori Ellison, "'Porgy' and Music's Racial Politics," *New York Times*, 13 December 1998.
38. Miles Davis with Quincy Trope, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 399.
39. The Gershwin Collection is at the Music Division of the Library of Congress. The centenary celebration *The Gershwins and Their World* (Washington, D.C., 13–16 March 1998) was supported by the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trust, as was the Gershwin room, a permanent installation of memorabilia. Carl Van Vechten established the George Gershwin Memorial Collection, which includes donations of manuscripts or memorabilia from friends and colleagues. The archive is located at Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tennessee. Van Vechten's collections of African-American materials and his photograph archive are at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
40. Gershwin's funeral was at Temple Emmanu-El, 15 July 1937.
41. "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" (1937) from the movie *Shall We Dance*.
42. Following Gershwin's death, Ira Gershwin and Kay Swift examined the manuscripts and notebooks, Swift copying more than one hundred possibilities—forty or fifty complete tunes plus verses, themes for arias, and more. In 1982 manuscripts and orchestrations by Gershwin,

Cole Porter, and Richard Rodgers were discovered in a Warner Brothers warehouse in Secaucus, New Jersey. This discovery adds considerable material to the Gershwin archive.

FIVE. WITH A FRENCH ACCENT

1. Quoted in Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger: A Life in Music*, 101.
2. Interview, Aaron Copland with Perlis, OHAM, 21 February 1976, Peekskill, N.Y.
3. Virgil Thomson, *American Music Since 1910* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 3.
4. Annette Dieudonné studied composition with Nadia Boulanger and became her teaching assistant and lifelong friend.
5. Symphony for Organ and Orchestra, later arranged by the composer without organ as the First Symphony.

SIX. FROM THE BOULANGERIE

1. Thomson, *American Music Since 1910*, 3.
2. Thomson, *Virgil Thomson*.
3. For an account of this relationship, see Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle*.
4. Letter, Thomson to unidentified correspondent, 17 December 1952, in *Selected Letters of Virgil Thomson*, 260.
5. Thomson, *A Virgil Thomson Reader*, 209.
6. Aaron Copland, transcript, *Music in the Twenties*, episode 10, WGBH television, 1965.
7. Letter, Virgil Thomson to unidentified correspondent, 17 December 1952, in *Selected Letters of Virgil Thomson*, 260.
8. Conversation, Virgil Thomson with Perlis, 1980.
9. A version of “Old Paint,” a folk tune in *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, also appears in “Saturday Night Waltz” from Copland’s *Rodeo*.
10. Virgil Thomson, “Aaron Copland, American Composers, VII,” *Modern Music* 10, no. 2 (January 1932), 67–73.
11. Interview, Minna Lederman Daniel with Perlis, OHAM, 22 February and 21 March 1979, New York.
12. Conversation, Aaron Copland with Perlis, September 1980.
13. Interview, Minna Lederman Daniel with Perlis, OHAM, 17 September 1980, New York.
14. Aaron Copland, transcript, *Music in the Twenties*, episode 10.
15. Video interview, Virgil Thomson with Perlis, OHAM, 23 June 1978, New York.
16. Interview, Virgil Thomson with Tim Page, OHAM Acquisition, 1986, WNYC, New York.
17. Hoover and Cage, *Virgil Thomson*, 157–158.
18. The falling out had to do with a squabble over the division of financial rights to *Four Saints in Three Acts*.
19. Interview, Virgil Thomson with David Dubal, OHAM Acquisition, ca. 1987, New York.
20. Video interview, Virgil Thomson with Perlis, OHAM, 23 June 1978, New York.
21. Interview, Aaron Copland with Perlis, OHAM, 12 June 1979, Peekskill, N.Y.

22. Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 Through 1942*, 62; interview, Aaron Copland with Perlis, OHAM, 18 December 1979; Copland, transcript, *Music in the Twenties*, episode 8.

23. In 1923 Copland composed a two-movement piece for string quartet: the first movement was *Hommage à Gabriel Fauré*, a transcription of Fauré's Prelude Op. 193, no. 9; the second movement was "Rondino," which eventually became the second movement of *Two Pieces for String Quartet* (1940).

24. Quoted in Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900–1942*, 173.

25. Quoted *ibid.*, 57–58.

26. One exception was *Symphonic Ode*. Copland revised the piece, replacing the first version of 1929 with a slightly shorter revision in 1955 with changes made, primarily simplification of the rhythmic notation.

27. Paul Rosenfeld, "The Newest American Composers," *Modern Music* 15, no. 3 (March–April 1938), 153.

28. Interview, Ned Rorem with Perlis, OHAM, 21 January 1987, New Haven, Conn.

29. Letter, Leonard Bernstein to Aaron Copland, 20 October 1938. Music Division, Library of Congress.

30. Michael Tilson Thomas, lecture at Copland workshop, Zankel Hall, New York, 19 November 2003.

31. Among the papers in the library of the Conservatoire américain was a student piece by Copland based on a theme by Paul Vidal. The score is one of three short pieces acquired by the Library of Congress.

32. Copland is referring to the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

33. Copland's *What to Listen for in Music* has been reissued several times since its first publishing in 1957. An edition was released in 2002 by Signet Classics with an introduction by Copland's colleague William Schuman.

34. In 2003 the transcripts of the McCarthy closed hearings, previously available only to scholars, were made public. The material made the front page of the *New York Times*; see Sheryl Gayle Stolberg, "Transcripts Detail Secret Questioning in 50's by McCarthy," 6 May 2003. Several newspaper and magazine articles cite Copland's dignified responses to McCarthy's interrogation.

35. Other composers included in Goossens's commissioned project were Felix Borowski (*Fanfare for the American Soldier*), Henry Cowell (*Fanfare to the Forces of Our Latin American Allies*), Paul Creston (*Fanfare for Paratroopers*), Anis Fuleihan (*Fanfare for the Medical Corps*), Morton Gould (*Fanfare for Freedom*), Harl McDonald (*Fanfare for Poland*), Darius Milhaud (*Fanfare de la Liberté*), Walter Piston (*Fanfare for the Fighting French*), William Grant Still (*Fanfare for American Heroes*), Deems Taylor (*Fanfare for Russia*), Virgil Thomson (*Fanfare for France*), and Bernard Wagenaar (*Fanfare for Airmen*).

36. *The City*, 1939, a documentary produced specifically for the New York World's Fair, directed and filmed by Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, after an original concept by Pare Lorentz.

37. The new film music was based on a discarded segment from the Piano Variations.

38. Interview, William Schuman with Perlis, OHAM, 15 February 1977, New York.

39. Thomson, *Virgil Thomson*, 202–203.

40. Copland, transcript, *American Music in the Twenties*, episode 10.

41. Aaron Copland, conversation with Perlis, December 1980.

42. Quoted in brochure, "Roy Harris," Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI).

43. Aaron Copland, *The New Music* (New York: Norton, 1968), 119.
44. *Ibid.*, 125.
45. The performances of *Andante* at Lewisohn Stadium (July 1926) and at the Hollywood Bowl (August 1926) were conducted by Willem Van Hoogstraten.

SEVEN. EXPLORING THE WORLD OF DUKE ELLINGTON

1. Ellington is referring to musicians by their nicknames. “Diz” is Dizzy Gillespie; “Hawk” is Coleman Hawkins; “Bird” is Charlie Parker; and “Rabbit” is Johnny Hodges. Interview, Duke Ellington with unidentified interviewer, OHAM Acquisition, 1970s.
2. Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress*, 15.
3. Interview, Ruth Ellington with Perlis, OHAM, 11 November 1977, New York.
4. Interviews, Duke Ellington with Byng Whittaker, OHAM Acquisition, 5 September 1964, for CBC radio; with Doug Hanton, OHAM Acquisition, 1939, “Western Division of Radio Newsreel”; and with unidentified interviewers, OHAM Acquisition, 1970s.
5. Interview, Mercer Ellington with Daniel Caine, OHAM, 22 July 1979.
6. Interview, Duke Ellington with unidentified interviewer, OHAM Acquisition, 1970s.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, s.v. “Jungle Music,” by Mark Tucker.
9. Interview, Ruth Ellington with Perlis, OHAM, 11 November, 1977, New York.
10. Interviews, Duke Ellington with Michael Parkinson, OHAM Acquisition, 1973; and with unidentified interviewer, OHAM Acquisition, 1970s.
11. From presentation to Duke Ellington Seminar, Yale University, 28 February 1978.
12. As quoted in Hasse, *Beyond Category*, 134.
13. Interview, Duke Ellington with unidentified interviewer, OHAM Acquisition, 4 April 1939, Stockholm.
14. Interview, Luther Henderson with Valerie Archer, OHAM, 7 July 1981, New York.
15. Interview, Duke Ellington with unidentified interviewer, OHAM Acquisition, 1970s.
16. This was the title of Hammond’s article in the May 1943 issue of *Jazz*.
17. Quoted by Tucker, “The Debate in Jazz (1943),” *Duke Ellington Reader*, 171.
18. Interview, George Avakian with Paul Kolderie, OHAM, 17 March 1978, New York.
19. Quoted in Hentoff, “This Cat Needs No Pulitzer Prize.”
20. Interview, Duke Ellington with Michael Parkinson, OHAM Acquisition, 1973.
21. Mercer Ellington with Dance, *Duke Ellington in Person*, 172.
22. Presentation to Perlis’s American studies class, 4 April 1978, Yale University.
23. Interview, Ruth Ellington with Perlis, OHAM, 11 November 1977, New York.
24. John S. Wilson, “Duke Ellington: A Master of Music, Dies at 75,” *New York Times*, 25 May 1974, 1, 32.
25. Interview, Randy Weston with Valerie Archer, OHAM, 15 January 1980, New York.
26. Interview, Billy Taylor with Perlis, OHAM, 16 February 1981, Riverdale, N.Y.
27. Dr. Arthur Logan was Ellington’s personal physician and close friend from 1937 until Logan’s death in 1973.
28. In 1924 Metcalf worked in the Rhythm Club, an informal basement venue.
29. The trumpeter Bubber Miley (1903–1932) was one of the earliest members of

Ellington's band. He is known for developing the plunger technique, creating the growl trumpet sound dominant in Ellington's jungle music style. In 1929 Miley left Ellington and went to work for Noble Sissle.

30. Jimmy Walker was elected mayor of New York City in 1926 and resigned in 1932 amid charges of corruption.

31. In *Music Is My Mistress*, Mills's name appears as co-writer of "Mood Indigo" and author (presumably lyricist) of the other tunes mentioned.

32. "Minnie the Moocher" became the famous Cab Calloway theme song. It is credited to Calloway and Mills.

33. Mills refers to the advance Ellington received for his autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress*.

34. Ellington started his own publishing firm, Tempo Music, in 1942 after he broke off with Mills in 1939.

35. Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress*, 289.

36. Ellington's "Jack the Bear" (1940) features the bass and was originally written for Jimmy Blanton.

37. A recording of a 1981 lecture by Tally Beatty is included in the Duke Ellington Project, OHAM.

38. Dunbar High School was the first public high school for blacks in America. Ellington actually attended Samuel H. Armstrong Technical High School, the other African-American high school in Washington at that time.

39. Ellington had been diagnosed with lung cancer in early 1973. He did not share this information with his band.

Resources



The following refers the reader and listener to sources not usually included in standard bibliographies. Since the emphasis in this publication is the spoken word, it is appropriate to cite resources relating to sound and video collections. A selected list of oral history archives and general resources on oral history is followed by information about each major figure, including such material as location of manuscripts and a limited selection of the authors' choices of literary publications. For further bibliographic information, the notes contain full citations of the publications used by the authors and not listed here, and a more extensive bibliography can be found on the OHAM website (www.yale.edu/oham/).

ORAL HISTORY

Collections, Music

Hogan Jazz Archive Oral Histories, Tulane University

Jazz Oral History Project, Rutgers Institute of Jazz Studies

Louis Armstrong House and Archives, Queens College

Music with Roots in the Aether, video portraits produced and directed by Robert Ashley

Oral History American Music (OHAM), Yale University

Eugene Ormandy Memorial Oral History, University of Pennsylvania

Collections, Some Musical Figures Included

California State University, Long Beach University Library, Special Collections/University Archives

California State University, Los Angeles Library, Special Collections

Center for Southern Culture, University of Mississippi

Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University

George Mason University Oral History Program

Indiana University Oral History Research Center

Institute for Oral History, Baylor University
 Library of Congress
 New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
 Oral History Program, University of California at Los Angeles
 Oral History Research Office, Columbia University
 Regional Oral History Office, University of California at Berkeley
 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
 Southern Methodist University Oral History Collection on the Performing Arts
 Smithsonian Institution
 William E. Wiener Oral History Library, American Jewish Committee Institute of Human Relations

Projects on Musical Organizations

American Composers Orchestra
 American Musicological Society
 Curtis Institute of Music
 Marlboro Music Festival
 Music Library Association
 Music Publishers' Association
 New York Philharmonic
 Society for American Music

Additional Resources and Information

Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC)
 New Music Box website: www.newmusicbox.org, American Music Center
 Oral History Association (OHA) publishes a newsletter, a twice-yearly journal, *The Oral History Review*, proceedings from early colloquium, and miscellaneous pamphlets such as "Oral History and the Law," by John Neuenschwander, and "Oral History Evaluation Guidelines."
 Public radio and television stations
 Regional historical societies and libraries

Selected Bibliography: General Titles in Oral History

Baum, Willa. *Transcribing and Editing Oral History*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991.
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RESOURCES FOR PRINCIPAL FIGURES

Eubie Blake

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

The Eubie Blake National Museum and Cultural Center, Baltimore, Maryland
OHAM (audio and video)

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

The Eubie Blake National Museum and Cultural Center, Baltimore, Maryland
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

"Memories of Eubie." Video documentary, co-produced by Ruth Leon, Allan Miller, and Vivian Perlis. *American Masters*, PBS, 30 December 1979.

OHAM holds an audiotape of the Eubie Blake Memorial, St. Peter's Church, New York City.

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Nadia Boulanger

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

OHAM

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

Bibliothèque nationale, Paris

Conservatoire américain, Fontainebleau

Conservatoire nationale, Lyon

Longy School of Music, Cambridge, Mass.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Symposium, "Nadia Boulanger and American Music," American Music Research Center, University of Colorado at Boulder, Thomas L. Riis, director, 7 to 9 October 2004. Presentations by Noël Lee, Robert Levin, Emile Naoumoff, and Jay Gottlieb. See Web site: www.nadiaboulanger.org

Fondation internationale Nadia et Lili Boulanger. contact@fondation-boulanger.com

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Aaron Copland

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

- Library of Congress (audio and video)
- OHAM (audio and video)
- Oral History Research Office, Columbia University

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

- Copland House, Cortlandt Manor, New York
- Library of Congress, principal repository
- New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

- "Aaron Copland: Self Portrait." Video documentary, co-produced by Ruth Leon and Vivian Perlis, directed by Allan Miller. *American Masters*, PBS, 1985. Outtakes are at the Library of Congress.
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Henry Cowell

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

Columbia University Oral History Research Office
 New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (also self-conducted interviews by Sidney Cowell)
 OHAM

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, principal repository

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Duke Ellington

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

OHAM
 Smithsonian Institution Archives Center

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Smithsonian Institution Archives Center, principal repository

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

"Ellington: The Music Lives On." Video documentary, co-produced by Bob Bach and Bill W. Chastain Jr., directed by Jerome Schnur. WNET *Great Performances*, PBS, 27 February 1984.

The Chicago Jazz Archive contains *The Billy Strayhorn Master Editions*, a collection of performance scores and parts derived directly from Billy Strayhorn's handwritten manuscripts. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

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George Gershwin

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

Library of Congress

OHAM (on Gershwin)

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

Library of Congress, principal repository

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

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Roy Harris

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

California State University, Long Beach Oral History Program
 California State University, Los Angeles Library
 OHAM

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

California State University Los Angeles, principal repository
 Library of Congress
 Louisville Academy of Music, Kentucky

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Charles Ives

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

OHAM (on Ives)

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Danbury Museum and Historical Society, Danbury, Connecticut.

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Leo Ornstein

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

OHAM (audio and video)

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University, principal repository

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Historical Sound Recordings, Yale University Library, holds recordings of Ornstein improvising and playing excerpts of his music.

For the published work of Ornstein, see his son Severo's website, www.otherminds.org/ornstein/

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Dane Rudhyar

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

California State University, Long Beach
OHAM

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

American Composers Alliance holds musical manuscripts.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Rudhyar wrote extensively on astrology, including this notable tome: *The Astrology of Personality: A Re-formulation of Astrological Concepts and Ideals, in Terms of Contemporary Psychology and Philosophy*. New York: Lucis, 1936; rpt. Santa Fe: Aurora, 1991.

For recorded talks, mainly on philosophy and astrology, contact Big Sur Tapes, Tiburon, California.
Dane Rudhyar Archival Project website: <http://khaldea.com/rudhyar/>

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Carl Ruggles

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

OHAM

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Yale University Music Library holds several Ruggles paintings as well as catalogues from a one-man show featuring Ruggles's work.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Charles Seeger

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

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OHAM (audio and video)
Oral History Program, University of California at Los Angeles

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

Library of Congress

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

The Library of Congress holds interviews, field recordings, and papers relating to the Society for Ethnomusicology.

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Virgil Thomson

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

Columbia University Oral History Research Office
OHAM (audio and video)

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University, principal repository

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

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Edgard Varèse

LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

OHAM

LOCATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS

New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
Paul Sacher Foundation, principal repository

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CD Track Listing



DISC 1

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| 1. Introduction (5:10)
Aaron Copland
Duke Ellington
Mel Powell
David Lang
Ellen Taaffe Zwilich | 7. Nicolas Slonimsky (2:08) |
| 2. On Charles Ives (2:50)
Vivian Perlis
John Kirkpatrick | 8. Henry Cowell (1:36) |
| 3. Vivian Perlis (2:50)
Chester Ives
Philip Sunderland | 9. Lou Harrison (1:22) |
| 4. John Kirkpatrick (3:40)
Vivian Perlis
Charles J. Buesing | 10. Mary Howard (2:18) |
| 5. Babe LaPine (1:34) | 11. Charles Ives (0:55) |
| 6. Elliott Carter (3:56) | 12. Introduction to Eubie Blake (1:02) |
| | 13. Eubie Blake (13:07) |
| | 14. Introduction to Leo Ornstein (1:58) |
| | 15. Leo Ornstein (6:05) |
| | 16. Edgard Varèse (4:20) |
| | 17. Dane Rudhyar (6:41) |
| | 18. Henry Cowell (5:30) |
| | 19. On Henry Cowell (5:14)
Lou Harrison
John Cage |
| | Total Time 72:16 |

DISC 2

- | | |
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| 1. Introduction to George Gershwin (1:01) | 13. Roy Harris (5:59) |
| 2. On George Gershwin (0:45)
Irving Caesar | 14. Duke Ellington (7:46) |
| 3. Kate Wolpin (5:18)
Frances Gershwin Godowsky
English Strunsky | 15. Billy Strayhorn and Ellington (1:52) |
| 4. Ira Gershwin (0:29) | 16. On Duke Ellington (1:19)
Sonny Greer |
| 5. Alfred Simon (3:22)
Morton Gould
George Gershwin | 17. Ruth Ellington (1:19) |
| 6. Todd Duncan (2:25) | 18. Irving Mills (1:37) |
| 7. Kay Swift (3:07) | 19. Juan Tizol (0:49) |
| 8. Nadia Boulanger (4:35) | 20. Betty Roché (1:40) |
| 9. Virgil Thomson (6:41) | 21. Clark Terry (2:06) |
| 10. Aaron Copland I (2:19) | 22. Art Baron (0:50) |
| 11. Aaron Copland II (7:35) | 23. Alvin Ailey (1:42) |
| 12. Aaron Copland III (7:13) | 24. Marian Logan (1:55)
John Gensel |
| | Total Time 73:44 |

CD Music Credits



A list of musical excerpts featured on the two compact discs accompanying this book follows. Some tracks feature early and rare recordings of performances by the composers. CDs were co-produced by Perlis, Van Cleve, and Stefan Weisman.

DISC 1

Track 1

Aaron Copland, *Music for the Theatre*. Yale Symphony Orchestra; Shinik Hahm, conductor. Live recording, 18 February 1996.

Duke Ellington, “It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing.” Princeton University Concert Jazz Ensemble; Anthony Branker, director. Live recording, 11 October 2003.

Mel Powell, “Etude.” Robert Helps, piano. CRI 874.

David Lang, “Anvil Chorus.” Steve Schick, percussion. CRI 646.

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Chamber Symphony. Boston Musica Viva; Richard Pittman, conductor. CRI 621.

Tracks 2–11

Charles Ives, Piano Trio, Movement III. The Monticello Trio. CRI 583.

Charles Ives, Second Piano Sonata (*Concord, Mass., 1840–60*), “Emerson” and “Alcotts.” Charles Ives, piano. CRI 810.

Charles Ives, “Some South-Paw Pitching” (Study No. 21). Donald Berman, piano. CRI 811.

Charles Ives, *Washington’s Birthday*. Imperial Philharmonic of Tokyo; William Strickland, conductor. CRI 163.

Charles Ives, “The Greatest Man.” Helen Boatwright, soprano; John Kirkpatrick, piano. CRI 675.

Charles Ives, *Washington’s Birthday*. Daniel Stepner, violin; Stephen Drury, piano. New England Conservatory Series, NEC 122.

Charles Ives, *Thanksgiving*. Iceland Symphony Orchestra; William Strickland, conductor. CRI 177.

Charles Ives, *Central Park in the Dark*. Yale Philharmonia; Lawrence Leighton Smith, conductor. Live recording, 4 April 1998.

Charles Ives, String Quartet No. 1, Movement I. Armadillo String Quartet. Live recording, 11 May 2004.

Charles Ives, Fourth Symphony. Yale Philharmonia. Live recording, 31 January 1992.

Charles Ives, Study No. 22. Donald Berman, piano. CRI 811.

Charles Ives, *The Celestial Railroad*. Anthony De Mare, piano. CRI 837.

Charles Ives, "They Are There!" Charles Ives, vocal and piano. CRI 810.

Tracks 12–13

Eubie Blake, "Classical Rag." Eubie Blake, piano. From video documentary *Memories of Eubie*, co-produced by Ruth Leon, Allan Miller, and Vivian Perlis. Broadcast American Masters, PBS, 30 December 1979.

Eubie Blake, "Charleston Rag." Eubie Blake, piano. From *Memories of Eubie*.

Eubie Blake, "Baltimore Buzz." Eubie Blake, piano. From *Memories of Eubie*.

Eubie Blake, "Lucky to Me." Eubie Blake, piano and vocal. From *Memories of Eubie*.

Eubie Blake, "I'm Just Wild About Harry." Eubie Blake, piano. From *Eubie Blake: Live Concert*, recorded 22 May 1973. Eubie Blake Music EBM 5.

Eubie Blake, "Love Will Find a Way." From interview, Eubie Blake with Vivian Perlis, OHAM, 1972.

Eubie Blake and Andy Razaf, "Memories of You." Eubie Blake, piano. From *Memories of Eubie*.

Tracks 14–15

Leo Ornstein, String Quartet No. 3. Lydian String Quartet. New World Records #80509-2.

Leo Ornstein, *Wild Men's Dance*. Michael Sellers, piano. Orion ORS 75194.

Leo Ornstein, Piano Quintet. Janice Weber, piano; Lydian String Quartet. New World Records #80509-2.

Leo Ornstein, "Joy" and "Anger," from *The Three Moods*. William Westney, piano. CRI 339.

Leo Ornstein, "Tarantelle." Leo Ornstein, piano. From private recording.

Track 16

Edgard Varèse, *Density 21.5*. Thomas Nyfenger, Flute. Live recording, Yale University. Recordings of Nyfenger appear on the CD *The Flutistry of Thomas Nyfenger*, available through Paul Nyfenger, 347 High St., Closter NJ 07624, 201-784-9247.

Edgard Varèse, *Offrandes*. Yale Contemporary Ensemble; Arthur Weisberg, conductor. Live recording, 12 December 1984.

Edgard Varèse, *Poème électronique*.

Edgard Varèse, *Octandre*. Yale Contemporary Ensemble; Arthur Weisberg, conductor. Live recording, 9 December 1981.

Edgard Varèse, *Intégrales*. Yale Contemporary Ensemble; Arthur Weisberg, conductor. Live recording, 15 December 1982.

Track 17

Dane Rudhyar, *Paeans*. William Masselos, piano. CRI 584.

Dane Rudhyar, *Five Stanzas*. Colonial Symphony; Paul Zukofsky, conductor. Musical Observations CP2 13.

Dane Rudhyar, "Tumult of the Soul," from *Advent*. Kronos Quartet. CRI 604.

Dane Rudhyar, "Stars," from *Pentagram No. 3 (Release)*. William Masselos, piano. CRI 584.

Dane Rudhyar, *Granites*. William Masselos, piano. CRI 584.

Tracks 18–19

Henry Cowell, *Ostinato Pianissimo*. New Jersey Percussion Ensemble; Raymond DesRoches, conductor. Nonesuch 9 9150-2.

Henry Cowell, "The Tides of Manaunaun." Henry Cowell, piano. CRI 109.

Henry Cowell, "Tiger." Anthony De Mare, piano. CRI 837.

Henry Cowell, *Persian Set*. Leopold Stokowski, conductor, with members of his orchestra. CRI 114.

Henry Cowell, Variation for Orchestra. Polish National Radio Orchestra; William Strickland, conductor. CRI 740.

Henry Cowell, "Aeolian Harp." Henry Cowell, piano. CRI 109.

Henry Cowell, "Sinister Resonance." Henry Cowell, piano. CRI 109.

Henry Cowell, "Exultation." Anthony De Mare, piano. CRI 837.

DISC 2

Tracks 1–7

George Gershwin, *An American in Paris*. Wei-Yi Yang and Indhuon Srikananda, pianos. Live recording, 8 December 1998, Yale University.

George Gershwin, "Swanee." Al Jolson, vocal; Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra; Victor Young, conductor. The Radio Years RY 9.

George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*. George Gershwin, piano; Paul Whiteman and his orchestra. Pearl GEMM CDS 9483.

George and Ira Gershwin, "Fascinatin' Rhythm." Fred and Adele Astaire, vocals; George Gershwin, piano. Pearl GEMM CDS 9483.

George and Ira Gershwin, "Someone to Watch Over Me." Frances Gershwin, vocal; Alfred Simon, piano. ACD-116.

George and Ira Gershwin, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off." Marnie Nixon, vocal. Reference Recordings RR-19.

George and Ira Gershwin, "Hi-Ho." Ira Gershwin, vocal; Harold Arlen, piano. Recorded 1937 or 1938 "at an impromptu gathering."

George Gershwin, "Of Thee I Sing," from live broadcast of the Rudy Vallee Show, recorded 9 November 1933. Pearl GEMM CDS 9483.

George Gershwin, "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," from *Porgy and Bess*. Todd Duncan, baritone; Anne Brown, soprano; George Gershwin, conductor. Musicmasters D111175 5062-2-C.

George Gershwin, "Summertime," from *Porgy and Bess*. Arthur Gershwin, piano. From interview with Robert Kimball and Alfred Simon, 30 November 1972.

George Gershwin, "Oh Lawd, I'm On My Way," from *Porgy and Bess*. Todd Duncan, vocal. Included in interview with Berthe Schuchat, 1976.

George Gershwin, "I Loves You, Porgy," from *Porgy and Bess*. Cynthia Haymon, soprano; London Philharmonic; Simon Rattle, conductor. EMI CDS 7 49568 2.

George Gershwin, "I Loves You, Porgy." Paul Bley, piano. IAI 37.38.53 AXIS.

George Gershwin and Ira Gershwin, "Love Is Here to Stay." Joan Morris, mezzo-soprano; William Bolcolm, piano. Nonesuch CD 9 79151-2.

Track 8

Nadia Boulanger, *Vers la vie nouvelle*. Angela Gassenhuber, piano. Trouba Disc TRO-CD 01407.

Nadia Boulanger, *Three Compositions for Violoncello and Piano*, Friedemann Kupsa, cello; Angela Gassenhuber, piano. Trouba Disc TRO-CD 01407.

Nadia Boulanger, "Soir d'hiver," from *Sept mélodies*. Melinda Paulsen, mezzo-soprano; Angela Gassenhuber, piano. Trouba Disc TRO-CD 01407.

Track 9

Virgil Thomson, Symphony No. 3, Movement II. New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra; James Bolle, conductor. CRI 750.

Virgil Thomson, "Tiger! Tiger!" from *Five Songs of William Blake*. Mack Harrell, baritone; the Philadelphia Orchestra; Eugene Ormandy, conductor. CRI 398.

Virgil Thomson, "Solitude: A Portrait of Lou Harrison." David Del Tredici, piano. CRI 864.

Virgil Thomson, "Before Sleeping." Betty Allen, mezzo-soprano; Virgil Thomson, piano. CRI 670.

Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach*. The Philip Glass Ensemble. Nonesuch #79323.

Virgil Thomson, *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Orchestra of Our Time; Joel Thome, conductor. Electra/Nonesuch 9 79035-2.

Tracks 10–12

Aaron Copland, *Latin American Sketches*. Live recording, 26 September 1991, Yale School of Music.

Aaron Copland, "Jazzy," from *Three Moods*. Ramon Salvatore, piano. From *Copland Piano Music—Romantic & Modern*, Cedille Records CDR 90000 021.

Aaron Copland, Piano Concerto. Noël Lee, piano; Orchestre National de France, Aaron Copland, conductor. Etcetera CD KTC 1098, 1990.

Aaron Copland, *Dance Symphony*. Japan Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra; Akeo Watanabe, conductor. CRI 129.

Aaron Copland, *Music for Theatre*. Yale Symphony Orchestra; Shinik Hahm, Conductor. Live recording, 18 February 1996.

Aaron Copland, Piano Quartet. Gilbert Kalish, piano; Boston Symphony Chamber Players. Nonesuch 79168-2.

Aaron Copland, Piano Sonata. Sara Laimon, piano. Live recording, 20 February 1991, Yale School of Music.

Aaron Copland, *Lincoln Portrait*. American Symphony Orchestra; Leonard Bernstein, conductor; Aaron Copland, narrator. Live recording, 9 November 1980.

Aaron Copland, *The Heiress*. From video documentary *Aaron Copland: A Self-Portrait*, co-produced by Ruth Leon and Vivian Perlis, directed by Allan Miller. Broadcast American Masters, PBS, 1985.

Aaron Copland, *Appalachian Spring*. New Music New Haven. Live recording, 26 September 1991, Yale School of Music.

Track 13

Roy Harris, Third Symphony. American Recording Society Orchestra; Walter Hendl, conductor. ARS 115.

Roy Harris, Violin Sonata. Josef Gingold, violin; Johana Harris, piano. From Roy Harris at California State University, OHAM Acquisition, 1973.

Roy Harris, *Elegy and Dance*. Portland Youth Philharmonic; Jacob Avshalomov, conductor. CRI 664.

Roy Harris, *Contemplation*. Johana Harris, piano. CRI 818.

Tracks 14–24

Duke Ellington and Irving Mills, “The Mooche.” Dwiki Mitchell, piano; Willie Ruff, horn. Live recording, Yale University, 19 February 1999.

Duke Ellington, “Soda Fountain Rag.” Duke Ellington, piano. Live recording, from interview with Byng Whittaker, 1964, OHAM Acquisition.

Duke Ellington, Mitchell Parish, and Irving Mills, “Sophisticated Lady.” Stanley Dance Collection.

Duke Ellington, “Informal Blues.” Stanley Dance Collection.

Duke Ellington and Bubber Miley, “East St. Louis Toodle-O.” Duke Ellington and his Kentucky Club Orchestra. Stemra Classics Records 539.

Duke Ellington, “Tootin’ Through the Roof.” Stanley Dance Collection.

Duke Ellington and Bubber Miley, “Black and Tan Fantasy.” From *Duke Ellington and His Orchestra Live at the Cotton Club*. Master Digital 19 900/3, Delta Music GmbH.

Duke Ellington, Irving Mills, and Edgar DeLange, “Solitude.” From BMG/RCA Victor CD *The Duke Ellington Centennial Edition*.

Billy Strayhorn, “Lush Life.” Billy Strayhorn, vocal. From live broadcast, Duke Ellington and his band at Basin Street East, New York City, 14 January 1964.

Duke Ellington, “One More Time.” Stanley Dance Collection.

Duke Ellington, “Tootin’ Through the Roof.” Stanley Dance Collection.

Duke Ellington, “Blues.” Stanley Dance Collection.

Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh, “Diga Diga Do.” Irving Mills, vocal, with Duke Ellington and his orchestra. From BMG/RCA Victor CD *The Duke Ellington Centennial Edition*.

Duke Ellington and Juan Tizol, “Caravan.” Princeton University Concert Jazz Ensemble; Anthony D. J. Branker, conductor. Live recording, 11 October 2003.

Duke Ellington, “Blues,” from *Black, Brown, and Beige*. World premiere recording; Betty Roché, vocal. Prestige Records P-34004.

Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, “Hey Buddy Bolden.” Clark Terry, trumpet. From *A Drum Is a Woman*, LP Columbia Special Products.

Duke Ellington, *Third Sacred Concert*. Featuring Art Baron, recorder. Live recording.

Duke Ellington, *The River*. New York, 1970. Saja records LMR 91045-2.

Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, “Tonk.” Double Edge, pianos. CRI CD 637.

Duke Ellington, “Come Sunday,” from *Black, Brown, and Beige*. Johnny Hodges, saxophone. Prestige Records P-34004.

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