

William Kearns

Symposium: "*Why American Music?*"

**For the Opening of the American Music Research Center
at the University of Colorado, Boulder, March 13, 1990.**

As a part of the opening ceremonies for the AMRC, a group of faculty, visitors, and graduate students, under the co-ordination of AMRC Director William Kearns, held a symposium to discuss from various perspectives the idea of teaching, researching, and performing music on a nationalistic basis. Participants included invited visitors Deane R. Root, Curator of the Stephen Foster Memorial and Professor at the University of Pittsburgh; Thurston Dox, professor at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York; University of Colorado faculty members Giora Bernstein, who also is Director of the Colorado Music Festival; Deborah Hayes, of the music history faculty; and Karl Kroeger, of the music history faculty and Music Librarian; and doctoral candidates in American music Linda Davenport, Daniel Jones, Dennis Loranger, Kay Norton, and Larry Worster.

In his preliminary remarks, Professor Kearns pointed out that most music histories written over the past two hundred years, if not overtly nationalistic, are organized along lines that reflect political-cultural groupings. Thus Gustav Reese's *Music of the Renaissance* follows convenient national divisions such as Burgundy, France, the Low Countries, the Roman School, the Italian Production, Spain, Portugal, pre- and post-Reformation Germany, England, and so forth.

The symposium proceeded along chronological lines with Professor Thurston Dox presenting three composers from mid-nineteenth century—John Hill Hewitt, William Henry Fry, and George Bristow—each of whom demonstrated increasing awareness of their roles as American composers. Using a sea battle as a metaphor, Dox noted that Hewitt's oratorio *Jeptha* (1845) was a mere canoe engaging the mighty armada of European oratorios invading our country at that time. Dox likened the polemics and music of Fry to the effectiveness of a destroyer, and Bristow (particularly because of the favorable reviews for Bristow's *Daniel*, 1866) to a battleship in their respective engagements with European music. The issue that emerges from these three composers' careers is the need, even right, of an American to compose music and be heard, not the matter of writing in an indigenous style. Meanwhile, a sturdy vernacular musical tradition which sought to reform as well as entertain society was emerging during the mid-nineteenth century, as is essayed in Linda Davenport's presentation given in full below.

Professor Deane Root was asked to examine Dvořák's role in helping

Americans discover their heritage. Root chose to discuss an arrangement that Dvořák made of Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home," a song "dear to Americans' hearts." The piece was commissioned for a 1894 benefit, a fundraiser sponsored by the *New York Herald* to purchase clothing for poor children. Root noted that Harry Burleigh advised Dvořák that this song had strong significance for blacks, both his generation and that of his forbears. W. E. B. Dubois considered "Old Folks" a hymn to the negro's self-dignity, the right of self-determination, to live in peace and raise a family. Dvořák himself was impressed not only with the beauty of the song but how it was derived from someone's life, indeed from a society itself. Root concluded that the instance of this song and its arrangement did not speak directly to "why" American music, but rather "how" American music comes to be, a synthesis of musical material brought together from many parts of American society, and calling forth a multitude of associations.

Dvořák's advice that Americans look to their own folk heritage in devising an indigenous art music was contemporaneous with the first wave of folklore and folksong collecting and scholarship in the United States. Larry Worster explains what an important effect this work had on subsequent American musical composition in his presentation, given in full below.

Two reports deal with that important period of United States musical activity between World War I and II. Professor Deborah Hayes shows in some detail how richly varied our musical culture had come to be and, at the same time, how difficult it had become to define an American music. Kay Norton chose to focus on a specific style in a specific genre in her examination of what makes the choral music of composer Normand Lockwood and others "American." Both reports are given in full below.

Professor Karl Kroeger was asked to survey American music composition since World War II. He drew on his own observations as an undergraduate composition major at the University of Louisville during the period of the Rockefeller Foundation grant to the Louisville Orchestra for the performance of contemporary music and his later experience as a Ford Foundation composer for the public schools of Eugene, Oregon. Both projects were well-intentioned, highly touted, and adequately supported; however, neither made much difference, in the long run, in a national cultural environment that is basically neglectful of, if not indifferent to, the serious American composer. Although the bicentennial period saw increasing interest in American music of the past and a broadening of appreciation to include American music's social as well as its esthetic worth, the composer's lot has improved very little. The time when American composers, as a group, are given "a fair shake," that is, equal opportunity and recognition compared to their European counterparts, has not yet fully arrived, although Professor Kroeger is hopeful that we can obtain these conditions.

Professor Giora Bernstein spoke on the influence of the European expatriate composer on American music at mid-twentieth century. He described the

1950s as dominated by the neo-classicists trained by Boulanger, with Schoenberg and Mahler virtually ignored. The expatriates themselves, on the other hand, found the United States a haven for their musical expression. Furthermore, they wanted to become a part of America's musical landscape, with Schoenberg writing music for the schools and Stravinsky writing jazz. They took our vernacular seriously. Schoenberg believed that the future of Western music lay with the younger generation of American composers and hoped that they would be persons of character with the courage to express what they have to say.

The symposium concluded with remarks by Daniel Jones and Dennis Loranger about America's post-World War II popular music. Whereas Jones expresses his concern about the corrupting influence of mass culture and mass production, Loranger finds in Laurie Anderson a cross-over artist whose versatility and sometimes abstruse message to be indicative of American culture itself.

Although no attempt was made to reach definite conclusions during the symposium, certain emphases emerged and some positions appeared to be congruent. Thurston Dox's and Karl Kroeger's presentations suggest that the condition of the American composer may not have changed greatly from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. Linda Davenport, Larry Worster, and Dennis Loranger find that numerous and varied associations developed through popular and folk music contribute heavily to defining an American music, and Deane Root shows how a simple song pregnant with such associations can be turned into art music. Daniel Jones notes, on the other hand, how easily popular music can become debased. Deborah Hayes shows how many ways American art music can be defined, but Kay Norton and Giora Bernstein suggest that, nevertheless, certain musical patterns and styles as well as attitudes are considered clearly American.

Below are texts in full for six of the ten presentations.

The Hutchinson Family: An American Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Popular Music

by Linda Davenport

William Henry Fry and George Bristow waged a polemic war in the journals in their effort to get more performances of American Music. I see their reform-minded attitudes as being consistent with the predominant reform mindset of antebellum America. Many Americans living in the three decades before the Civil War were preoccupied with improving society, whether by abolishing slavery, saving people from the evils of alcohol, obtaining voting rights for women, or forming communal societies such as Brook Farm. A spirit of reform was in the air, a direct or indirect result of the Great Revival which had swept across the country in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The new believers, empowered through faith to change their individual lives for the

better, expanded their focus to encompass an ever-improving changing society. What Fry and Bristow, part of the cultivated music tradition in America, sought to reform was the repertory selection of the symphony orchestras. Meanwhile, some musicians in the popular or vernacular music tradition were using music as a means of reforming society itself.

Perhaps the best example is the group known as the Hutchinson Family Singers from a small town in New Hampshire. They were three brothers and a sister, with other family members substituted from time to time. The Hutchinsons obtained national fame and honor by giving concerts all over this country as well as in the British Isles, beginning in the 1840s and continuing for many years. This music was what the farmers in New England were listening to, rather than Beethoven's 5th or 9th. They wrote many of their own songs, either fitting new words to old tunes, setting poems of Americans such as John Greenleaf Whittier to music, or writing both words and music. Their music, like the music of Fry and Bristow, does not have any uniquely American characteristics. Their texts, however, deal with topics of unique concern to Americans. Their abolition song, "Get off the track," warned that the emancipation train was sweeping through the country and bystanders should get out of the way.

Throughout American music history, the texts of popular songs, from eighteenth-century broadside ballads to twentieth-century protest songs, have often focused on current events. The Hutchinsons, like many politically-active modern performers, directly participated in the movements they believed in. They performed frequently at meetings and rallies of various abolitionist and suffrage groups. Many leading abolitionists acknowledged that the Hutchinsons, with their songs, were able to soften hearts unmoved by speeches. What could be more American than using one's First Amendment rights to promote a cause?

The lyrics of these songs help to give us a sense of American social issues of the time, but they also reveal certain moral values, which while not uniquely American, have come to be associated with small-town America of bygone days: love of God, respect for parents, honesty, integrity. The Hutchinsons were proud to be called "old-fashioned singers."

They were living at a time when the idea of a God-given "Manifest Destiny" was widespread. Mid-nineteenth century Americans were confident of a bright future for their nation, which was rapidly expanding all across the continent. Reflective of this nationalist pride is the Hutchinson song "Uncle Sam's Farm," which encourages people from all countries to come to America, where there is plenty of room and where "Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm." Thus, the emerging nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century is manifested in the popular music tradition represented by the Hutchinson Family Singers, perhaps more explicitly than in the cultivated music tradition.

American Folk-Song Scholarship at the Turn of the Twentieth Century and its Effect on Defining an American Music

by Larry Worster

Although Dvořák's exposure to American folk-song through encounters with a Black composition student was indeed fortuitous, similar chance encounters of first-rank composers with folk sources could not have spawned the immense interest represented by efforts of the nationalistic American composers of the 1930s. Such a movement relied on a pre-existent, easily accessible body of collected folk material.

Early efforts to collect folk-songs in America were sporadic but yielded such notable efforts as Lucy McKim Garrison's contributions to *Slave Songs of the United States*, first published in Dwight's *Journal of Music* as "Songs of the Port Royal Contrabands" in 1862. William Wells Newell, who founded the American Folklore Society in 1888, published the first collection in the Anglo-American tradition, *Games and songs of American Children* (1883). Although Harvard Professor James Francis Child's monumental collection *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, published from 1882-1898, included twenty-seven American ballads in fifty-five variants, the musical influence of his work was limited by a preoccupation with the song texts. Child's view of the ballad as a literary event unfortunately set the tone of other American efforts during the late nineteenth century.

The turn of the century heralded a new spirit in American collecting spurred by the appearance of two articles by William Wells Newell in the new English publication *The Journal of the Folk-Song Society*. Although Newell's interest was scientific, that is, the tracing of American ballads to their origins, his scholarly treatment of the subject and the call in 1903 by Cecil Sharp in England and in 1904 by Henry Marvin Belden in America for systematic collection, led to the beginning of serious folk-song scholarship which, in most cases, included notating the tunes. Pioneering efforts in America were begun during the years 1903-1904 by Phillips Barry in New England, Henry Belden in Missouri, and Louise Pound in Nebraska among others. The momentum of this new wave of folk song collecting was to bear fruits in several excellent regional collections as well as the work of two early giants in the field, John Lomax and Cecil Sharp.

Lomax grew up in Bosque County, Texas and developed a love of cowboy songs, hearing them as a youth. He began collecting these songs but destroyed his first collection in 1895 when a professor at the University of Texas labeled his frontier manuscripts as "cheap, tawdry, and unworthy." A decade later while studying at Harvard, Lomax's enthusiasm for cowboy songs was discovered by Barrett Wendell and George Lyman Kittredge, the latter being Child's successor at Harvard. At their urging Lomax circulated a request for native songs and

ballads to a thousand western newspapers. The response was “immediate and surprising” and eventually led to the publication in 1910 of *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. Lomax’s statement that a cowboy song “is a ballad as genuine, however crude and unpolished, as any from English and Scottish sources” reflects a change in attitude toward American folk song.

During this first decade of the new century in England another man was fighting the battle for the legitimacy of folk song. Cecil Sharp had become enamored of British folk dance music when on holiday during Christmas, 1899. Witnessing quite by chance a group of Morris dancers he impulsively jotted down five of their dance tunes. Beginning in 1903 and continuing for the rest of his life he made trips into the English countryside to collect tunes, crusading for their use in the public school system in preference to the generally-accepted use of national tunes. Interestingly enough Sharp’s interest in an efforts at preserving English folk-song preceded him to America, influencing the earlier American collectors. During two trips to America in 1914-15 and in 1916, Sharp ventured into the southern Appalachian mountains to collect songs. The product of his labors was published in 1917 under the title *English Folk-Songs from the Southern Appalachian Mountains* containing 323 tunes. His attitude toward folk-song scholarship represents a significant divergence from the earlier Child canon, for the contents of the volume are 274 folk-songs with 968 melodies.

Thus American folk-song collecting and publication in the first decades of the twentieth century established a large repertory of music from which the American nationalistic movement in the art music of the 1930s and 40s could draw. The merging of folk art music in pre-World War II America could not have flourished without the source material found in the early twentieth-century collection.

The American Wave of the 1930s and 1940s

by Deborah Hayes

I will be talking about a small body of music produced in this country, namely, serious music or concert music, mainly in the western European tradition, composed in the first half of this century. The composers are mostly white, mostly men.

In 1954, the fifth edition of *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* was published in England, an encyclopedia of international scope. It is significant that this 1954 edition contained much more American material than previous editions. There were many more names of American composers—composers writing music that American concert audiences found attractive, winning American composition prizes and competitions, and teaching composition in American colleges and universities.

Peggy Glanville-Hicks, an Australian-born composer and critic living in New York, was in charge of updating the American material in *Grove’s*, and she

also contributed almost one hundred new composer entries. Beginning with the generation born in the 1890s are—Douglas Moore (born in 1893), Walter Piston and Robert Russell Bennett (1894), Bernard Rogers and Leo Ornstein (1895), Virgil Thomson and Roger Sessions (1896), Howard Hanson and Henry Cowell (1897), Roy Harris (1898), Randall Thompson and John Duke (1899), Aaron Copland, Otto Luening, and George Antheil (all three 1900)—to name just a few whose careers were flourishing by the 1930s. Covering the first decade of the twentieth century are articles about Ross Lee Finney (born 1906), Elliot Carter (1908), and Paul Bowles, Samuel Barber, and William Schuman (all 1910). Then comes Alan Hovhaness (born 1911), Arthur Berger and John Cage (both 1912), Norman Dello Joio (1913), Cecil Effinger (1913), David Diamond and Vincent Persichetti (1915), Milton Babbitt and Ben Weber (1916), Robert Ward (1917), and Frank Wigglesworth and Leonard Bernstein (both 1918). Among the youngest are William Bergsma and Andrew Imbrie (both born 1921), Lukas Foss (born 1922), and Peter Mennin (born 1923). Also designated as American, by citizenship, were Nicolay Berezovsky and Nicolay Nabokov (born in Russia in 1900 and 1903 respectively), Colin McPhee and Henry Brant, born in Montreal (in 1901 and 1912 respectively), Ruel Lahmer, born in Ontario in 1912, and Gian Carlo Menotti, born in Italy in 1911. One could say that Glanville-Hicks offers an implicit definition of American music by means of the composers that she selected.

A second definition of American music is that it sometimes sounds American, that is, inspired by American folk or popular musical content. Glanville-Hick's view is somewhat like Dvořák's, although her models were Ralph Vaughan Williams and Bela Bartok. As she explained to readers of Grove's Dictionary, the music of Douglas Moore sounds as though he "had absorbed, digested and forgotten" the whole American folk music heritage, "or as though it had become a spring, deep underground." He uses American moods, color and idiom, she explained, but he resorts to none of the typical phraseologies of standard "Americana." Similarly, she wrote of Virgil Thomson that he had successfully integrated the "substance" or "inspiration" of Missouri church music and other American sounds, with the "means" or techniques he had developed from French Dadaism, his training from Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and dissonant neoclassicism. In music of the younger generation, Glanville-Hicks noted that Leonard Bernstein used American elements such as cowboy songs, Mexican dances, and the "Negro jazz idiom," along with syncopation, rhythmic buoyancy, melodic freedom, and "a dissonant semi-jazz harmonic idiom." Arthur Berger's music likewise showed "assimilation and integration" of American elements to transform them "from vernacular into an art expression."

So, by mid-century, American music was an established repertoire here and abroad. Further, many foreign-born composers had taken refuge here, among them Arnold Schoenberg, Ernst Krenek, Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky, and Bela Bartok (though some left after the war ended in 1945; Hindemith, for

instance). The League of Composers, based in New York, was one American composer organization that welcomed and supported the emigree composers. At the same time, composers and critics questioned the continuing validity of the European tradition as the criterion of American music.

In *The Musical Quarterly*, (41\4 [October, 1955], critic Nathan Broder reviewed the Columbia Records series, "Modern American Music," which includes works of the native-born Carl Ruggles, Cowell, Virgil Thomson, Barber, Persichetti, Schuman, Piston, the naturalized American Glanville-Hicks, and others—in all, twenty-four works by fifteen living composers. Broder noted the lack of conformance to European stylistic trends. "The Schoenberg-Stravinsky-Hindemith-Bartok constellation, sometimes employed to characterize the principal currents of music at mid-century, is not very useful here," he wrote, nor the chronological approach, nor even the "obvious catch-all division into conservative, conservative-advanced, and advanced.

One who revelled in pluralism was Virgil Thomson, particularly in his Sunday column in the *New York Herald Tribune* on January 25, 1948, titled "On Being American." (This column is reprinted in the *Virgil Thomson Reader*). Thomson provides yet a third definition of American music: "The way to write American music is simple. All you have to do is to be an American and then write any kind of music you wish. There is precedent and model here for all the kinds." He went on to elaborate: there is the post-Romantic eclecticism of Howard Hanson, the post-Romantic expressionism of Bernard Rogers, the strictly Parisian neoclassicism of Walter Piston, the romanticized neoclassicism of Roy Harris and William Schuman, the elegant neo-Romanticism of Samuel Barber, the sentimental neo-Romanticism of David Diamond, the folksy neo-Romanticism of Douglas Moore, Randall Thompson and Henry Cowell, the Germano-eclectic modernism of Roger Sessions, and the percussive and rhythmic research of John Cage. Also American were the atonalists Schoenberg and Krenek, and the neoclassicists Stravinsky and Hindemith. And we also have Aaron Copland who combines folk feeling with neoclassic techniques in the Bartok manner.

Thomson wondered, what should prize committees do about the foreign-born Americans? Was their music American or not? The Pulitzer Prize Committee, the American section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, and others, were troubled. Well, wrote Thomson, "I suggest [the selection committees] just hedge and compromise for a while. That, after all, is a way of being American, too."

Choral Music During the 1930s

by Kay Norton

I would like to focus specifically on choral music in the 1930s, using a work by Normand Lockwood as my point of reference. Lockwood and his peers, such as Aaron Copland and Leo Sowerby, had been exposed to startlingly new tonal combinations as a result of their 1920s European experiences (Lockwood first became acquainted with Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* while abroad in 1930). However, once they returned to the United States in the 30s, several reasons motivated him and other composers to set aside these more radical ideas and choose a more conservative musical language. The first was a general lack of experience with new music among United States's choral musicians; a second reason was the generally conservative cultural atmosphere of the country itself in the midst of the Depression.

Included among Lockwood's favored United States's poets are figures in what has been called the American poetic renaissance, a movement which took place in the 1910s (Friedberg 1984). The legacies of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, who wrote long before 1910, but who were re-discovered at that time, became the foundations for this new poetic movement. Younger poets like Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg, as well as one of Lockwood's favorites, the little-known Adelaide Crapsey, contributed to a body of native literature characterized by its honesty, forthrightness, and simplicity.

For Lockwood, a faculty member at Oberlin College from 1932 to 1945, all these poets provided texts—either for choral works or solo songs. However, the unpretentious, free verse of Walt Whitman had the greatest impact. Interestingly, Whitman's poetry was first used as text for music in this country by Charles Ives, a composer with whom Lockwood shares a widely-varied, eclectic approach to musical materials. Ives's Whitman songs were introduced at the Yaddo Music Festival in New York in the 1930s.

Lockwood's fascination with Whitman actually goes back much further—to age fifteen (1921)—when he heard Gustav Holst's *Dirge for Two Veterans* and Frederick Delius's *Sea Drift*, both on Whitman texts. Lockwood later composed choral settings of both of those Whitman texts, in 1936 and 1939, respectively. In 1962 he wrote an article entitled "On Reading and Setting Whitman," in which these words appear:

Composers have a certain preparation for understanding Whitman. He defies the laws of poetry much as a great deal of music defies laws of composition. . . . How to discover form in most of Whitman's poems is not easy. These enter the ear and reach the music-loving soul with appeal to the same sense of form—the same desire for form—that classical form does (Lockwood 1962, 27).

Lockwood's choral setting of *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, the first poem of Whitman's *Sea Drift* set, was written in 1939, for four-part, a

cappella chorus. The harmonic idiom with which he begins this work is so widespread in his works that I have dubbed it the “Paumanok pattern.”¹ The pattern consists of a close-position alternation between a second-inversion tonic chord and a first-inversion supertonic seventh chord. Lockwood’s fondness for the pattern stems from an aural preference, the second inversion triad sounds more “in tune” than the root position. In addition, he likes its prelude-like quality. In his words: “When I want it ‘off the ground,’ I write it like that.” Perhaps this harmonic pattern is an example of “digested Americana”—it would not be found in a folksong, but it reflects the delightful simplicity of the poetry.

Whitman’s directness, as well as his simplicity, drew Lockwood and other composers like Roy Harris and Cecil Effinger to set his poetry to music. The poet’s approachable language was well-suited to the nationalistic musical environment of the 1930s. Composers underscored Whitman and other poets like him in a straightforward style which features very little counterpoint (the text is preeminent and must be understood), often lock-step homophony, proper word-stress for the text, and a form largely dictated by that of the poem.

Randall Thompson is another composer who favored this style, particularly in his *Frostiana*, settings of Robert Frost’s rural poems. In describing Thompson’s music, Elliott Forbes has said that he uses “individual choral colors to serve the successive word sounds, [and takes] care for the natural rhythm of the spoken word” (Forbes 1986, IV, 384). That description can be applied to most choral music of the 1930s. Amazingly enough, Thompson begins his 1940 anthem *Alleluia* with the same harmonic sequence as Lockwood’s “Paumanok pattern,” used by the latter as early as 1938. This is a coincidental phenomenon, certainly; however, the similarity of *Alleluia* to the “Paumanok pattern” is a strong argument for the appropriateness of the idiom in relation to American choral music in the 1930s.

That quality which is so often used to describe the American spirit, forthrightness, was reinforced in American poetry, which became a perfect vehicle for American choral composers in a conservative period. So in answer to the question, “Why American music?” I offer the words of America’s good gray poet, Whitman, from *A Song of Occupations*. Incidentally, these words were used in a 1934 choral piece by Roy Harris. Whitman wrote:

Will you seek afar off? you surely come back at last
In things best known to you finding the best, or as good as
the best.

NOTE

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1. “Paumanok” is an Indian name for Long Island. The poem begins: “Once Paumanok, when lilac scent was in the air and fifth month grass was growing/Up this seashore in some briers/Two feathered guests from Alabama, two together/And their nest, and four light-green eggs spotted with brown/And ev’ry day the he-bird, to and fro/And ev’ry day the she-bird crouched on the nest, silent, with bright eyes.”

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American Music Since World War II: Music as a Commodity

by Daniel Jones

I would like to present a personal viewpoint about American music from World War II to the present—from the perspective of a popular music performer, a graduate student, and more recently, a teacher. Let me preface this viewpoint by saying that my ideas stem from concerns I have felt as an American musician in each of the above roles.

As a music historian, I have found Kenneth Clark's book, *Civilization*, useful in developing an approach which attempts to connect the music of a particular epoch to its sociological context. A basic precept which Clark sets forth is that the creation of civilized products, of which music is one, "requires confidence—confidence in the society in which one lives, belief in its philosophy, belief in its laws." (p.4) Thus, musical styles should reflect the values of the social institutions which sustain the production of those musics.

The primary belief system in which America has invested its sense of confidence since World War II is that of capitalistic materialism, or what Clark calls "heroic materialism." As practiced in our country, this system involves two completely interdependent components: 1) mass production of commodities using corporate systems and drawing upon "state of the art" technological innovations, and 2) mass marketing and mass consumption of those commodities. As Christopher Lasch notes in his book, *The Minimal Self*:

Commodities are produced for immediate consumption. Their value lies not in their usefulness or permanence but in their marketability. They wear out even if they are not used, since they are designed to be superseded by "new and improved" products, changing fashions, and technological innovations (31).

By their transient nature, commodities do not serve as meaningful, lasting symbols with which to identify: they are ephemeral, surface images mirroring shifting trends.

The treatment of music as a commodity has had serious effects on all types of American musics since World War II—folk, pop, and art musics. For

example, rock and roll and jazz are two uniquely American musics produced in the twentieth century. The musical style which came to be known as rock and roll began as a genuinely expressive black American music. Within a very short time, after it became clear that this style had a more general appeal, white cover versions and mass marketing techniques had converted this music into a watered-down commodity geared toward the white youth market. Similarly, the spontaneous vitality characteristic of jazz has been periodically lost in order to produce a music suitable for marketing to a mass, again mostly white, audience. Today the majority of what is referred to as "jazz" is commercial music which is remarkably lacking in that original vitality.

Folk musics have fared no better. In a process beginning before World War II, provincial, indigenous folk styles have been amalgamated, obliterating their individuality in order to achieve a target audience large enough to sustain a mass-production industry. Commercial "country" musicians these days are no longer found sitting on the backporch pickin', but rather somewhere in the corporate structure of the urban-based "country music industry."

The effects of the mass-product/mass-consumer system on art music are just now coming to public attention with the demise of many urban symphony orchestras. These orchestras are not failures as performance groups, but are unable to compete successfully in a commodity-oriented market. Dr. Kroeger has already provided some insights into the plight of the serious American composer since World War II. He mentioned that, though in the 1980s "many composers have returned to writing music that was both attractive in sound and accessible in structure," the public nevertheless continues to remain largely indifferent to these changes. I would suggest that at least some, perhaps much, of this unadventurous complacency among the consuming public is due to the very same mass-product/mass-consumer system I have been describing. As Lasch notes:

The social arrangements that support a system of mass production and mass consumption tend to discourage initiative and self-reliance and to promote dependence, passivity, and a spectatorial state of mind both at work and at play (27).

In other words, the consumer public has become so inundated with high-tech, "new and improved" music commodities—which in art music includes CDs with seemingly flawless sound and a new generation of star conductors and virtuosos to perform the showpieces of the nineteenth century—why should they feel the need to seek out music that may take some time and effort to understand? And I don't mean to suggest that the public at large is lazy or stupid. Instead, I think we have become unaware victims of a very effective system of psychological manipulation.

So how do we take this indictment, transform it into concern, and look with some optimism toward the future? For myself, as a musician and a student of music, I can exercise my own self-confidence, in Clark's terms, in evaluating the

music that I play and study, searching for compositional quality and authenticity of expression. As a teacher, I can transmit this same sense of self-confidence to students, so that they may become discerning listeners, rather than victims of peer and mass marketing pressures. And in a larger historical perspective, I am convinced that the mass-production/mass-consumer system is but one viable socio-economic system, and, inevitably, another sustaining philosophy will emerge at some point to supplant it with a new set of consequences for American musics.

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“Darkest America”: Some Remarks on Personal and National Identity

by Dennis Loranger

Recently, Laurie Anderson, the famous performance artist, gave a concert at the University of Colorado to a full house. By contrast, just the week before Anderson’s concert the Colorado Symphony Orchestra managed to sell a mere 125 tickets to a concert they were giving.

What’s going on here? Is this another symptom of the decline of Western civilization, as it is heralded by neo-conservatives such as Alan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch? Is the symphony dead and being replaced by something cheap, sterile and commercial? And what does this say about the present state of American music?

The problem, if we want to call it that, might lie in the assumed dichotomy between the kinds of music that Laurie Anderson and the Colorado Symphony are doing, in the notion that there really is a difference between art music and popular music. I would like to argue that Anderson’s work calls this distinction into question.

Her critique of such categories is evident if we look at the descriptions critics give of her work. Most writers agree about her mode of performance: sophisticated technology accompanying mostly spoken autobiographical fragments, delivered in a whimsical or mildly ironic tone of voice. But most critics disagree about her message. Is she a political artist, like Brecht, or a nihilist, like Rauschenberg? Is she really a populist who has managed to make high art palatable to the masses, or is she really an elitist who has cleverly managed, for her own gain, to buffalo those same masses? Is she merely clever, and really shallow?

These contradictory descriptions could perhaps call into question the perspicacity of the various critics. Whatever she is doing, they are simply not getting it. But it is also possible that she is a truly protean individual, that the confusion of responses is inherent in her work and, like a true post-modernist, she has managed to avoid overdetermining her text.

Thus considered, her work takes on some interesting aspects and has some interesting consequences. The most obvious of these is the diversity of her audience. She attracts carpenters and stockbrokers, high school students and college professors. This diversity is reflected in her own range of reference, which includes, for instance, Henry Longfellow, Ludwig Wittgenstein, William Burroughs and Jimi Hendrix. And the subjects of her monologues are equally heterogeneous, ranging from a polemic on the recent controversy surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe's work to her own encounter with a baglady.

I would like to draw a comparison between the diversity present in Anderson's work and what we do as performers, teachers and scholars of American music. I see her as, in a way, reflecting at this moment, the diversity of our concerns. For instance, our own AMRC houses a variety of music intended for an equally diverse audience. In our collections Virgil Thomson stands alongside the Dead Kennedys, Uncle Dave Macon and Charles Ives keep easy company, Elliott Carter and the Carter Family are long-lost relations. This diversity is, on the one hand, a sign of our scholarly commitment to understanding what it means to be an American. But, just as with Anderson, the diversity is confusing. Just what does it mean to be an American?

This question leads me back to the beginning of my paper and the unfortunate disparity between the ticket sales for the Anderson and Colorado Symphony concerts. I don't want to conclude by evoking some economic theory of evolution, that only the fit survive, but I could evoke the theory of evolution in another way. Life cannot survive without diversity. A rich environment is the only one hospitable to life. And as with life, so with culture.

Despite the efforts of the culture merchants, of whatever stripe, American music will retain its diversity. There will always be art music and popular music. But there will never be some hard and fast line drawn between them. So while it may be unfortunate that the Colorado Symphony sells so few tickets, we shouldn't take this as a sign of decay, but a sign that things are in a state of flux. This confusion is not a sign of weakness in American culture but a sign of its strength. As Langston Hughes, another man of many talents, said, "That's American too."