
In The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture, Giles Gunn writes that "a field, no less than a discipline, defines itself—as, say, a subject area alone does not—chiefly in relation to the questions it asks, the problems it poses, the arguments it encourages."¹ The Cambridge History of American Music (henceforth CHAM)—which describes itself as "the first study of music in the United States to be written by a team of scholars" (p. i), with twenty chapters written by nineteen authors—offers an opportunity to consider the field of American music scholarship from this point of view.² I begin by noting the field’s exuberant youth: it arguably came into official academic existence only in the 1970s—the Bicentennial decade. Since that time, interest in the field has grown considerably and is reflected not only in an explosion of new scholarship but in job postings as well.³

Surveys organized around the geopolitical unit of a "country" or "nation-state" typically reflect consensus ideology regarding intellectual traditions. CHAM is no exception. Its astute editor, the British composer-historian David Nicholls, explains his organizing principle using a classic contemporary American keyword:

If there is a single feature which both characterizes and defines American music, it is diversity. . . . in America, almost uniquely among the world’s nations, the many manifestations of music—from simple to complex, popular to recherché, concrete to abstract—are interdependent rather than independent, inclusive rather than exclusive. It is this interrelated diversity of musical experience which the Cambridge History of American Music . . . seeks principally to celebrate. (p. xiii)

³. Obviously, this is not to say that no scholarship in American music existed before the 1970s, but rather to acknowledge the way scholarly societies and centers legitimize fields of study and facilitate a sense of tradition among scholars. A study of the impact of the Bicentennial on American music scholarship (and on American Studies in general) remains to be written. Two important landmarks were the founding of the Institute for Studies in American Music in 1971 and The Society for American Music (previously known as the Sonneck Society) in 1975, which began publishing its journal American Music in 1983. Nor should we overlook the significant, indeed foundational, activity in the fields of African American Studies and Women’s History, which included the important journal The Black Perspective in Music, founded by Eileen and Joseph Southern in 1973, and the book Women in American Music: A Bibliography of Music and Literature, compiled and edited by Adrienne Fried Block and Carol Neuls-Bates (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1979).
Nicholls explicitly extends the concept of “diversity” from content to method, thus endorsing eclectic interdisciplinarity as an important approach to the field. He explains how “CHAM’s second aim is to reflect the diversity of American music by studying it from a multiplicity of viewpoints” (p. xiii), having solicited essays from ethnomusicologists, composer-critics, and theorists, as well as from many prominent historical musicologists.

The generally high quality of the essays as well as the admirable and unexpected liveliness of the book as a whole shows the virtue of Nicholls’s approach. Still, I think it is useful to question its intellectual rationale of “diversity” insofar as it relies on a particular form of “difference”—the ideology of “American exceptionalism.” As one contemporary political critic writes, “one of the most familiar arguments [of exceptionalism] . . . is the claim that America, compared to other societies in the world, is unique in being a ‘young’ or ‘new’ nation of immigrants lacking in a monolithic cultural tradition and characterized by extraordinary social mobility.” This sense of “uniqueness” has been the compass charting a course for American music scholarship for the last fifty years. Does “diversity” camouflage the strife of cultural competition? Does individualism exaggerate the “maverick” aspect of our artists? In raising these kinds of questions, I draw attention to current debates about exceptionalism among contemporary historians, economists, political scientists, and—last but not least—our composers. In language that is part toast, part prophecy, part blessing, and part curse, John Cage wrote in 1967, “To us and all those who hate us, that the U.S.A. may become just another part of the world” (quoted on p. 275).

A field also defines itself by the questions not asked. Nicholls chose not to provide a retrospective historiography of previous surveys of American music history. Even if he made this decision for practical reasons, probably wanting to keep the size of an already large book from increasing, I think it indirectly speaks to American music scholarship’s lack of engagement with its own historiographic traditions. Richard Crawford has criticized the field’s resistance to the notion of a scholarly “usable past”—to borrow Van Wyck Brooks’s classic phrase once more—and the slow coalescence of a repertory of core scholarly writings; “No such [historiographic] tradition,” Crawford writes, “has


5. See, for example, Richard Crawford’s foreword to Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, rev. 3d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), xv: “Chase’s *America’s Music* is a landmark in American music historiography because its author was the first general historian of the subject to recognize American music as a unique phenomenon that demanded to be studied as such. . . . It is precisely in the author’s perception of America’s difference from Europe that the viewpoint of *America’s Music* is rooted.”
formed for historical studies in American music as a whole.” Perhaps this state of affairs mirrors our narratives of American creativity. Consider how many American composers have characteristically expressed a fascinated ambivalence toward the very concept of “tradition.” Charles Ives railed against misuse of European canonic greatness. Aaron Copland wrote about being “struck” by “to what an extent the European musician is forced into the position of acting as caretaker and preserver of other men’s music, whether he likes it or no.”

Nicholls divided CHAM into two parts, with the eight essays in part 1 covering about three hundred years (through 1920) and the ten essays in part 2 covering the last eighty years or so. He commissioned the composer and historian William Brooks to provide an “overview” of music in America for each section, in which overlapping patterns of cultural values and concerns might be found to emerge across time, place, and styles. Brooks builds his argument around an “American dialectic” (p. 32) based on the classic trope of American national character as polarized between individualism and egalitarianism:

Deep in America’s dreams, locked in a complex embrace, stand two mythic figures: the Pioneer (inventor, frontiersman, outlaw, tycoon)—naked, self-made, indebted to no-one, whose accomplishments dwarf his compatriots; and the Citizen—anonymous, unremarkable, but with the strength of thousands, shielded by the absolute equality of the polling booth. In their entanglements—sometimes cooperative, sometimes competitive—these figures act out the profound tension between two fundamental ideologies which drive America’s politics and culture: individualism and egalitarianism. (p. 30)

After that curtain raiser (is that Ayn Rand wrapped in the arms of William Billings’?), Brooks ties expressive culture to political process: “elitist art” (a.k.a. classical music) is the representative of individualism, and “folk music” (a.k.a. “people’s music”) is the embodiment of “egalitarianism.” These categories, occasionally recalling Wilfrid Mellers’s still powerful Music in a New Found Land, elaborate H. Wiley Hitchcock’s well-known distinction, itself an outgrowth of New Deal consensus scholarship, between “cultivated” and “vernacular” music. So far so familiar. Brooks, however, transports us beyond that influential historiography by brilliantly charting the vast middle ground between these two polarities. His sections about cultural mediation through

music—titled “Form and Reform” (“improving a people’s music by imposing elitist values and techniques” [p. 259]), “Counter-reform” (its inversion: hoping “to revitalize an elitist art by injecting national or populist values and materials” [p. 259]), “Popular Music” (acting as “a broker between music-makers and music-users” [p. 262]), and “Improvisation and Experiment”—offer fresh perspectives. To take one irreverent example, Brooks makes William Henry Fry and Milton Babbitt “mannerist” cousins. To take another larger case in point: who would expect to find common ground among the nineteenth-century gospel hymn, the twentieth-century music-appreciation movement, the vernacular borrowings of Gottschalk, Copland, and John Adams, and the anti-hierarchical aesthetics of Charles Ives and Charles Seeger? I leave the reader to discover how Brooks succeeds.

The intensity of Brooks’s engagement with the cultural responsibilities of music and music practitioners raises the question of the philosophical roots of American music scholarship. One possibility points us in the direction of American Pragmatism. John Dewey wrote, “In the degree to which art exercises its office, it is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity.” Brooks writes, “All American musicians . . . must find a way to reconcile individual creativity with good citizenship” (p. 271). A bravura coda persuasively locates the authority of American musical experience in the choreography of cultural dissonance:

The dance, the struggle, the embrace between Pioneer and Citizen is not meant to end by separating the two figures; the conflicts intrinsic to American culture are not to end in a draw, any more than in a victory. It is the dance itself, in its constantly shifting gravities and balances, that animates American culture. To redefine music so that it can no longer be stressed by the pull between individualism and egalitarianism is to bypass tension in favor of tranquillity, to flatten into utopia the rugged resistance of America’s tangled terrain. It is in the persistence of the dance that America endures . . . [and] of America’s deep desire that it continue. (pp. 274–75)

Some CHAM authors do explore Brooks’s tangled terrain. Others, however, engage different ethno-theoretical issues, as Brooks’s “pioneer and citizen” yield to public dreams regarding the very meaning of “citizenship.” Here questions about the one (individualism) versus the many (egalitarianism) recast themselves as questions about subcultural identity (the “one” as ethnic or regional identities) versus nationhood (the “many” as a collective union). These connect to such issues as the impact of race, ethnicity, and immigration (forced or chosen), and the tensions between diaspora and assimilation.

In two essays written from ethno-theoretical perspectives, a “mapping” process framing interpretation takes on a drama of its own. Victoria Lindsay Levine’s “American Indian Musics, Past and Present” begins with a “musical map of North America” (with sections on the Eastern Woodlands, Plains,

Great Basin, Southwest, Northwest Coast, and Arctic). Her overview, entitled "Historical Dynamics in American Indian Music," discusses fascinating examples of creative adaptation, such as the twentieth-century growth of pantribalism in the Ghost Dance, syncretism in the contemporary currency of a Christian-influenced Native American church, and the powwow. Still, in my view, Levine blunts the political edge of this history: references to life "on the rez" (reservation) are rare in her narrative, and she makes the claim of "a profound influence on American musical life" by Native Americans (p. 28) despite their continuing status as outsiders. 10 Jacqueline Djejje’s chapter, "African American Music to 1900," maps Africa as a set of culture regions whose legacies have been suppressed because of slavery’s historical erasures. In a revisionist reproach to past scholarship, which typically conflated the multiplicity of a continent into a single construct, she describes African culture regions (including Western Sudan, West Africa—further divided into Ibo, Edo, Yorubaland, Dahomey, Gold Coast, and Windward Coast—and Central and Southeast Africa). This chapter lays the groundwork for scholarship that can establish relationships between these regions and African American music with greater sensitivity to specific place. Not that long ago, scholarship about African American music was characteristically embedded in debates about credit between white and black contributions. In her historical overview (relying largely on Eileen Southern’s scholarship), Djejje underscores another revisionist approach to the question of influence. For example, she states provocatively that, "by the time Spain took over in the 1760s, Louisiana was thoroughly Africanized" (p. 117).

**CHAM**’s coverage of eighteenth-century colonial life separates secular and sacred music, as has been recent historical practice. Nym Cooke’s outstanding essay, "Sacred Music to 1800," stands on a foundation of research far deeper than that available to other scholars in American music because the "extraordinarily rich creative phenomenon" (p. 78) of psalmody’s musical settings in late eighteenth-century America provided a focus for the renaissance of American music scholarship in the 1970s. His section "Change and Resistance in Congregationalist New England" offers a revisionist view of New England religious expression that one historian recently described as "alien" and "startling" because it challenges conventional depictions of their repressive piety. 11 Cooke further notes, "With roughly 5,000 musical compositions by American psalmists printed through 1810 . . . , the measure of this repertory has yet to be taken" (p. 97). That statement, which echoes through *CHAM* as a whole, helps explain why American music scholarship continues to embrace overviews and aspirations of "bibliographic control" of repertory—research

10. The phrase "on the rez" is borrowed from Ian Frazier, *On the Rez* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000). For a contrary assessment of influence, see Charles Hamm’s conclusion that "mostly, Indian music has been one thing and all other music in America has been something else," in his *Music in the New World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 23.

priorities that, while deemed old-fashioned and positivistic by some, remain essential to this field.

The survey in the previous chapter, “Secular Music to 1800” by Kate Van Winkle Keller with John Koegel, is enlivened by the major bibliographical contributions to which Keller in particular has devoted much of her career. Even if it is apparently too soon to expect that relatively recent bibliographic tools and databases will produce a new critical vision, we can still glimpse a few revisionist themes. One concerns this essay’s wider view of musical life through an interest in the “common man” and “people’s music.” While aristocratic musical founding fathers like Jefferson and Franklin get their due, the authors also include names of obscure entrepreneurs and music teachers and music manuscript owners as paradigms of widespread musical activity. A second theme portrays New England as a regional culture rather than as the crucible of national temper. Just as Levine and Djedje raised historiographic questions by partitioning their chapters through place and cultural agency, Keller and Koegel (the latter in particular associated with the recovery of Hispanic American music history) undermine the geo-historical hegemony of colonial New England by discussing not only familiar rival cities (New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston), but also less-known areas such as Quebec, Louisiana, Florida, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The traditional preoccupation of earlier colonial-music historians with Puritanism is dispatched in a single sentence: “The notion of Puritan hostility to all music is a myth” (p. 52).

In contrast to eighteenth-century research, established for several decades, scholarship about American music in the nineteenth century is still located at a bustling frontier. Two complimentary chapters by leaders in the field—Katherine Preston’s “Art Music from 1800 to 1860” and Michael Broyles’s “Art Music from 1860 to 1920”—sail through the century on the currents of urbanization, immigration, expansion, and feminism. Both authors deftly survey huge expanses of history, integrating recent scholarship about collective social practice (e.g., Broyles’s consideration of “a new breed of woman”) along with fresh discussions of music by such important composers as Chadwick and Beach, the latter’s emergence from relative obscurity into a major figure testifying to the impact of women’s history. Broyles’s elegant synthesis of an extraordinary period of growth, which follows on the heels of Preston’s own pathbreaking research on the “electrifying” effect of the intro-

12. In addition to those listed in the bibliography for this essay, a new electronic database, Early American Secular American Music and Its European Sources, 1589–1839: An Index, incorporates the work of Keller, Carolyn Rabson, and Raoul F. Camus. For details see the following Web site: <http://www.colonialdancing.org/Easmes/Intro.htm>. A CD-ROM of the same title, by Robert M. Keller, Raoul F. Camus, Kate Van Winkle Keller, and Sue Cifaldi (Annapolis, Md.: Colonial Music Institute, 2002), is also available; see <www.colonialdancing.org/EASM-cdr.htm>.
duction of Italian opera into American musical life, includes this surprising fact:

Curiously, in 1889 Iowa had more opera houses than any other state in the country, with 157, followed by New York with 154, Illinois with 149, and Kansas with 135 . . .

This does not mean that the houses were built for opera, or even that opera ever played in them, however. (p. 224)

At this relatively early juncture in nineteenth-century American music studies, these essays manifest some typical historiographic habits that merit further comment. Let me label them the “Dwight-Ritter Syndrome,” in reference to two important intellectuals: John S. Dwight, the editor of Dwight’s Journal of Music, and Frederic Louis Ritter, the author of Music in America (1883), the first comprehensive survey of the subject. Both were Germanophiles who typically disdained folk and popular music, and their one-liners on these topics have made them easy targets. The syndrome manifests itself in the critical approach specifically applied to German American contributions to American musical life, and more generally to patterns of social participation during the foundational period for American concert music.

What happens when we view the dissemination of a great symphonic literature through the lens of “hegemony,” a term that implies pervasive cultural domination and inequalities of power? In Dwight’s case, his transcendentalist idealism is obscured and a leader becomes instead a follower: a “resolute disciple of this growing German instrumental hegemony” (Preston, p. 207) and a proponent of “a musical hierarchy with Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven at the pinnacle” (Broyles, p. 215). Was a belief “in the superiority of their musical heritage” (p. 199) really unique to German émigrés? Perhaps closer studies of the still neglected contributions of German Americans will complicate this pervasive perspective.

Another issue concerns the emphasis on social anxiety, often now associated with our descriptions of emergent concert life. In the opening of Broyles’s essay, classical music, not unlike Victorian sex, evokes duty rather than pleasure: “‘Art music, what is that?’ Music lovers and many others in the second half of the nineteenth century were confronted with a new idea, a choice and an obligation. Some music, art music, had acquired a special status, and whatever one thought, there were things one was supposed to think about it” (p. 214). This widely shared viewpoint may reflect the influence of Lawrence Levine’s celebrated Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural

13. Ritter is infamous for his statement that “the people’s song . . . is not to be found among the American people” (Music in America [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1884], 385). Dwight’s insensitivity to popular music is evidenced by his remark that Stephen Foster’s melodies “are not really popular in the sense of musically inspiring, but . . . such and such a melody breaks out now and then, like a morbid irritation of the skin” (quoted in Gilbert Chase, America’s Music [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966], 284).
Hierarchy in America. Levine described the Gilded Age as a transformative period in "the social construction of cultural categories." He coined the now widely used term "sacralization" to refer to the elitist pieties that late nineteenth-century patrons and supporters of symphony and opera promoted and the subsequent alienation from more democratic participation that followed in their wake. Levine’s argument has been indirectly sustained by the emergence of a rival ideology to sacralization, which might be called "vernacularization." By this I mean a characteristic trajectory in American twentieth-century music scholarship and cultural criticism that validates—indeed celebrates—folk and popular expressive genres and styles, and conflates them with democracy. The more we have paid attention to folk and popular musics, the more we have reproached our predecessors (e.g., Dwight and Ritter), who did not.

Vernacularization prevails in Dale Cockrell’s intense and engaging essay, “Nineteenth-century Popular Music.” Cockrell opens his argument by situating Brooks’s dialectical dance between citizen and pioneer on “the street” where the common man lived. This idealized thoroughfare then turns into a symbol of “an old world view of the world, one that treasured cacophony and disorder” (p. 160), as opposed to a new world order of industrial capitalism, in which spontaneity was displaced by discipline and regimen. His skillful transition from this level of abstraction to musical genres deserves quotation:

The new won out, of course, supported by newly established police departments and merchants and businessmen who believed that public thoroughfares should reflect the moderation and decorum of what was in their view the streets’ primary purpose, expediting commerce. With this victory, traditions belonging to common people, which were often ancient, had to accommodate themselves to a brave new world, or suffer imminent demise. Two musical institutions adapted well: bands, which fed off life in the streets, and theatres, which brought life in from the streets. (p. 160)

Later in the chapter, the “street”—and therefore class conflict—supports his revisionist interpretation of blackface minstrelsy, a genre that has received a great deal of critical attention in the last decade or so. While consistently acknowledging the degrading racism of minstrelsy, Cockrell reserves his scholarly enthusiasm for the historical variable of “class,” rather than race or gender. Probing minstrelsy for its potential insights into class relationships, particularly the sensibilities of white working-class men who formed the majority of the genre’s audience in its early decades, he writes how the stereotype

16. For succinct commentary on and summary of this scholarship, see Daniel Kingman assisted by Lorenzo F. Candelaria, American Music: A Panorama, 2d. concise ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 232.
of Zip Coon "satirizes the pretentious upper class at least as much as lower-class blacks" (p. 167). Further, he clears space for "the transgressing possibilities" in Stephen Foster's plantation songs (p. 170). This perspective will continue to be argued in the lively scholarship Cockrell has helped pioneer.

The second part of CHAM, covering American music since 1920, differs considerably from the first part. Instead of overviews, it presents close-ups of particular genres and more probing cultural critique. The essays here replace the earlier, relatively homophonically narrative with different approaches in both method and interpretation.

Philip Bohlman's chapter on "immigrant, folk, and regional musics in the twentieth century" contrasts sharply with the parallel chapter by Michael Broyles covering "immigrant, folk, and regional musics in the nineteenth century." Broyles synthesizes important ethnic repertories and trends in a beautifully balanced historical narrative. Bohlman, instead, takes the opportunity to offer a theoretical rather than historical overview, based not only on "diversity," but equally on another important American keyword: "identity." Adopting the concept of "postethnicsity" from David Hollinger's Postethnicsity America: Beyond Multiculturalism (1995), Bohlman writes: "In postethnicsity America musical identities multiply as individuals are able to create new groups and communities by choosing selectively from different origins, blurring and combining origins, and determining for themselves which affiliations serve their cultural needs most effectively" (p. 283). He accepts a model based on intellectual history rather than the social science and anthropology that are so central to the identity of his own field. This important essay, which implicitly challenges the field of ethnomusicology to re-theorize foundational methodology, should generate much scholarly discussion.

A Grand Canyon of discourse divides the two contributions on twentieth-century popular music. In a distinguished essay entitled "Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film," Stephen Banfield achieves a rare balance between style analysis and history. The question implied in his approach is whether or not commercial music can sustain formalistic analysis. Drawing on the canon of what has come to be called "the Great American Songbook," Banfield treats the thirty-two-bar song form like the American Lied. With Tovey-like virtuosity, he dissects its "anatomy" through discussions of its "modular form," "quadratic melody," and "melopoetic dimensions." The word power, which is so important in Robert Walser's expert survey of the rock era, rarely appears.

But power is essential to Walser because the questions he asks arise from the politically energized discourse of Cultural Studies and Popular Music Studies, which he has helped pioneer. In his penetrating essay, Walser revisits the cultural demographics of early rock, typically tied to the emergence of "adolescence" (a 1940s term). He prefers to explain rock's origins through a "paradigm shift [where] . . . commercially mediated working-class and rural musics disrupted the dominance of Tin Pan Alley popular song" (p. 345, quoting George Lipsitz). Like Cockrell, Walser tenaciously emphasizes class
consciousness: Cockrell’s focus on working-class culture is echoed in Walser’s interpretation of 1950s rock-and-roll as conveying a “working-class understanding of the world” (p. 354). How does this interpretation apply today? Although Walser does not discuss older debates about “mass culture,” he raises the issue of rock’s unprecedented global reach and cross-generational appeal. He notes the commodification of rock in a music industry that is “the United States’s second biggest net export (after aerospace products)” (p. 387). Echoing Bohlman’s focus on performatve strategies, he observes how “popular music is one of the means people have of trying on new identities, of making contact with people and experiences which are otherwise kept separate from them” (p. 387).

Three essays on jazz—Jeffrey Magee’s “Ragtime and Early Jazz,” David Joyner’s “Jazz from 1930 to 1960,” and Ronald Radano’s “Jazz Since 1960”—survey this rich, complex musical tradition from equally varied perspectives. Magee’s outstanding essay tacitly acknowledges Brooks’s description of jazz as “a primarily African American tradition in a racist culture” (p. 270) by opening with a lyric from a “coon song” by the remarkable black composer Will Marion Cook in order to explore a “peculiar paradox”: the coinciding of “the unprecedented blossoming of black secular musical styles” with the extreme repression of the “Jim Crow” era (pp. 389, 388). In contrast to typically depoliticized textbook rhetoric, Magee writes, “Black citizens were systematically, sometimes violently, being denied entrance into the social and political mainstream, just as black music was entering the musical mainstream with electrifying results” (p. 389). These results include the genius of both Scott Joplin (who commands far more space than either Bessie Smith or Louis Armstrong) and Irving Berlin. Magee describes his inclusive approach to ragtime as “more flexible and holistic” (p. 403) than that of past scholars, whom he criticizes for attempting to impose a “modernist” canon on the repertory (he reproaches Rudi Blesh, in particular). Yet the history of jazz scholarship rests on the same paradox of racism and appropriation that Magee acknowledges at the opening of his chapter. One need only read Gilbert Seldes’s classic *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924), in which nary an African American musician’s name is cited, to understand how Blesh himself rectified earlier exclusionary jazz criticism.17

Such issues barely ruffle the responsible (if just a bit bland) essay by David Joyner, which in a topical textbook approach tracks the midcentury decades now considered by some jazz historians to represent the classical high point of the tradition. All the familiar names of people, bands, and trends are covered here, along with the less familiar. A welcome section on women in jazz during the 1930s and 1940s, which again registers the impact of women’s history in the field of American music scholarship, includes instrumentalists along with the great artists who made “the genre of jazz singing . . . the most matri-

archal” (p. 428). But Joyner ignores most reception history, however dramatic it may be. From his account of Duke Ellington, one would hardly suspect the “crescendo of praise marking the Ellington centennial celebration,” which placed the mantle of “Great American Composer” on his shoulders.18

In contrast to Magee and Joyner, Ronald Radano, in writing about jazz since 1960, treads on the quicksand of contemporary music and reputations still in flux. Positioning his powerful essay in dialogue with traditional jazz historiography through interdisciplinary perspectives grounded in Cultural Studies, African American Studies, and the New Musicology, he raises historiographic questions throughout. He opens with a discussion not of one particular figure but of the language typically used to construct jazz history: “One of the most compelling portrayals of jazz develops from the theme of the downtrodden hero. According to this narrative, jazz, as an anthropomorphism of black survival—America’s ‘living art’—endures a precarious existence, trapped within a plebeian and often hostile commercial environment” (p. 448). He closes with a description of the ways in which Wynton Marsalis and “neoclassical jazz” reflect “dominant conservative social movements that claim to work against the encroaching threats of political correctness, multiculturalism, etc.” (p. 470). His final cadence delivers another blow to interpretive complacency: “That ‘jazz,’ a living, progressive art, could now serve to articulate these same resistances in progress’s name testifies to the maddening instability of aesthetic meaning in late-twentieth-century public culture” (p. 470).

Radano’s “maddening instability of aesthetic meaning” evokes parallel processes within American politics, as words like “liberal” and “conservative,” “libertarian” and “progressive” march across the spectrum from “left” to “right” (whatever they mean) and a new movement calls itself the “Radical Middle.” In Shaping Political Consciousness, David Green writes:

Political labels are image-laden, appealing as much to the emotions as to the intellect. . . . This broader evocative power, the power to reach both mind and heart, gives the labels a political importance they would not have were their meanings precise and limited. . . .

. . . Because politics is an ongoing struggle for power, the competition to define political terms is constantly being renewed.19

This is also true of the shaping of aesthetic consciousness, as is revealed in the four essays about twentieth-century American art music: two written by theoretically oriented historians—Larry Starr’s “Tonal Traditions in Art Music from 1920 to 1960” and David Nicholls’s “Avant-garde and Experimental


Music”—and two by historically oriented theorists—Stephen Peles’s “Serialism and Complexity” and Jonathan Bernard’s “Tonal Traditions in Art Music Since 1960.” There is much here to praise, particularly the analytic integrity of Peles’s discussion of Elliott Carter, Starr’s treatment of Gershwin and Copland, and Nicholls’s discussion of the New York School. There is also much here that raises disciplinary questions about the discourse of cultural politics.

In CHAM the “garde” advances and retreats. Tonality represents the Great Divide to some but not to others. “Conservative” and “progressive” labels are placed on unusual suspects. Nicholls, who some years ago pioneered the notion of an “American experimental tradition” grounded in a distinctive approach to “dissonant counterpoint,” now differentiates “avant-garde” from “experimental” and proposes three shades of radical practice—“prospective, retrospective, and extraspective” (p. 517)—to deal with porous boundaries crossed by composers who refuse to stay still. This helps explain why Lou Harrison turns up as an “experimental” composer for Nicholls and an old guard, postwar, tonal composer for Bernard. “Zeitgeist” characterizations are equally fluid. What was the climate after World War II like for classical composers in the United States? To Starr, it was one of “widespread cultural conservatism,” a period of diminishing “empathy and tolerance for a wide diversity of musical styles” (p. 484); to Bernard (who calls Koussevitsky “conservatively minded”), the 1950s were a period when “musical modernism appeared to gain a new lease on life” (p. 537). Starr qualifies Nicholls’s editorial stylistic divisions: “‘Tonality’ and ‘atonality’ were not central theoretical and stylistic issues, as they were for many European composers at the time” (p. 472); while Peles quotes Roger Sessions observing that “no younger composer writes quite the same music as he would have written had Schoenberg’s music not existed” (p. 499).

Thus, in providing many examples of ever shifting evocative rhetoric used to describe twentieth-century art music, the essays in CHAM raise questions about the need for new language. As Bernard writes, “varieties of music are springing up that respect none of the old stylistic boundaries” (p. 551). Perhaps these categories (e.g., “tonal,” “atonal,” “serial,” “avant-garde,” and “experimental”—in which language about means (technique) has been unduly pressed into the service of ends (historical interpretation)—suffer from battle fatigue. No one in CHAM focuses much on the comparatively recent attention that foreign scholars have paid to American art-music composers in the last half of the twentieth century, in an emerging international literature about American art music that focuses particularly on Ives, Cage, and minimalism.

Consensus reigns on one point: the contemporary vulnerability of American art music as a whole. Authors Starr, Peles, Nicholls, and Bernard believe that modern American art music is generally undervalued in national public culture. Their essays reverberate with William Brooks’s *cri de coeur*:
“Throughout its history, art music in the United States has been attacked by egalitarians, populists, and demagogues; in recent years, amplified by anti-intellectualism, the drumbeat has become especially deafening” (p. 40). They raise these familiar concerns: (1) the extent to which the canon inherited from the past smothers contemporary expression; (2) colonial burdens of inferiority that privilege Europe over America; and (3) the lack of support for noncommercial music in a capitalist (social Darwinist) marketplace economy. Starr ends his essay by lamenting the neglect of a generation of American symphonists: “A large potential audience has been deprived not only of the opportunity to know and enjoy a body of important work, but of the opportunity to gain a greater general familiarity and comfort with twentieth-century styles through exposure to some of the more accessible practitioners” (p. 495). Peles wonders “whether atonality will survive as the intellectually and musically vibrant force it was, as it jostles for attention along with the numerous other options open to the young composer in the musically pluralistic university environment it did much to help create” (p. 516). And Bernard depletes that the “powers of discernment” of American audiences are “rapidly eroding owing to the near-disappearance of public education in the arts” (p. 545).

Could they be wrong? Charles Hamm recently asserted that our cultural life today reflects the “demystification of classical music” and

a sweeping democratization of every aspect of classical music in the first half of the century: repertory (programming based largely on a “standard” repertory); the education of musicians and composers; social relations, with a gradual shift of patronage from the most privileged classes to public, municipal, and state support corresponding to a similar change in the constitution of the audience itself; and the education of potential listeners.20

In tribute to CHAM’s achievement, I leave the reconciliation or explication of differences on this issue and others raised in my review to my colleagues as testimony to the vitality of this anthology of essays. CHAM successfully lives up to the vision of its editor, whose fine team of contributors has given us scholarship written with expertise, originality, passion, and responsibility. As the historiography of the field of American music scholarship is written, CHAM will serve as a guidepost of its sense of purpose and achievement at the end of the twentieth century.

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