MUSA: An American Monument

Music of the United States (MUSA) is a projected forty-volume series intended, in the words of its editor-in-chief Richard Crawford, “to reflect the character and shape of American [United States] music making.”¹ Eight volumes have been published to date; fifteen are in preparation. Crawford further comments that the United States has heretofore, unlike other “developed nations,” lacked such a gathering of “their proudest musical achievements.” Thus, MUSA makes its claim as a historical, scholarly series encompassing the music of a nation in the manner of celebrated European series such as Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst (Monuments of German Music) and Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich (Monuments of Austrian Music). These venerable historical editions were begun in the nineteenth century by groups of scholars with financial aid from their respective governments. Likewise MUSA has government assistance (the National Endowment for the Humanities), professional organizations (the American Musicological Society and the Society for American Music, formerly the Sonneck Society), and a committee of scholars to establish policy and select offerings.²

Criteria for developing MUSA are (1) “that the series as a whole reflect breadth and balance among eras, genres, composers and performance media; (2) that it avoid music already available through other channels; (3) that works in the series be representative, chosen to reflect particular excellence or to represent notable achievements in this country’s highly varied music history.”³

This article surveys the first six volumes of MUSA and will conclude with a few comments about these and the project as a whole. Two of the first six volumes are edited by scholars associated with the American Music Research Center: Professor Thomas Riis, AMRC director; and Professor Emeritus Karl Kroeger, a senior fellow. The first six volumes fall into three quite different categories of American music: psalmody, popular song and theater at the turn of the twentieth century, and classical music by two early-twentieth-century American women composers.

Before looking at each volume, a few observations can be made that apply to all. First, their editors have worked and published extensively in their special fields. Second, all music has been newly printed in a format large enough to
encourage performance as well as study. The volumes are paper-bound, unlike most European sets, and the classical-music volumes contain unbound individual parts for the convenience of performers. Third, all music has been critically edited, with comments on the original sources, variants, editorial methods and other matters that these editors want to bring to readers’ attention. Fourth, each edition contains portraits, facsimile pages of manuscripts, programs or other material pertinent to the subject. Fifth, all contain extensive introductions on which many of the remarks in this article are based. The editing and printing of MUSA makes it a series that compares favorably to the best European monuments of music.

Psalmody

Two MUSA volumes embrace psalmody, a major activity in early American music. The term psalmody is used to designate the composition, publication and performance of Protestant religious music, principally in New England, from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries. This activity accelerated dramatically following the War for Independence. Approximately 250 American “tunesmiths” composed strophic, harmonized hymn tunes, fuging tunes and anthems that were printed in collections, most of them oblong in shape, called “tunebooks.” Many texts were versifications of the Psalms of David, thus accounting for the designation of this entire musical school as psalmody. This large body of compositions is now regarded as our first indigenous music in print. For early English-speaking America, it had strong recreational and aesthetic as well as religious value.

Karl Kroeger’s magisterial study, Daniel Read: Collected Works (MUSA, vol. 4) not only serves to codify the life and music of early America’s leading psalmist next to William Billings, but also is richly contextual. The reader is presented with a thorough study of a psalmist and an overview of psalmody itself.

Daniel Read (1757-1836), like many of his fellow composers, combined music with other occupations. He worked also as a comb maker and merchant and was successful in business. He resided in New Haven, Connecticut, where he published three collections: The American Singing Book in five editions (1785-96), The American Musical Magazine in twelve numbers (1786-1787) and The Columbian Harmony in four editions (1793-1810). Each contained Read’s music as well as that of other Americans and Europeans. In all, Read published a total of ninety-four of his own compositions, of which eighty-four were strophic psalms or hymns, and ten were anthems and set pieces. He especially favored fuging tunes. In a study of pieces published most frequently in sacred tunebooks of the period, Read has a total of nine, more than any other psalmist including Billings, who is a runner-up with eight.

Professors Kroeger and Richard Crawford, MUSA general editor, are coauthors of the twenty-five-page introductory essay. It is divided into sections on Read’s life, his music collections, a thorough description of his music, the per-
formance practice of the time and Read’s posthumous reputation. The essay
carries one from the specificity of Read’s life and music out into the entire
genre of psalmody itself. Read is an ideal psalmist to be included in MUSA
because he was both a representative and popular composer. His long career
traces the history of psalmody from the distinctive, rough-hewn style of the
post-revolutionary period to the European-influenced, more polished writing
of the early nineteenth century.

If Daniel Read’s music was the most popular among New England congre-
gational singers, that of Timothy Swan appealed especially to the musically
trained. As singing schools flourished during the Federal Period, demand in-
creased for a more technically challenging and esthetically satisfying music.
6), describes Swan as “the most stylistically original” composer among the New
England psalmists, and most of the detailed introductory essay is devoted to
an analysis of Swan’s original melodies, “absolute diatonicism,” discursive har-
monic progressions, and sensitivity to text.

Swan was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1758. As a youth, he served
apprenticeships in nearby towns, one of which, Groton, afforded him the op-
portunity to attend a singing school. He also served in the army and attained
proficiency as a fifer. He moved inland to Northfield, Massachusetts, in 1774,
where he apprenticed as a hatter and began to write music. In 1780 he moved
fifty miles down the Connecticut River to Suffield where he married and worked
as a hatter and merchant. Here he published secular duets in *The Songster’s
Assistant* (1786) and sacred pieces in *New England Harmony* (1801). His music
also circulated in manuscript. In 1807, he returned to Northfield, where he died
in 1842.

Swan’s most popular fusing tunes, judging by the number of printings in
various tunebooks, were “Bristol,” “Montague,” and “Rainbow.” The hymn tune
“China” survived the Federal Period to become a popular New England funeral
piece throughout the nineteenth century. In addition to a thorough explora-
tion of Swan’s life and music, Cooke also devotes a section to the manuscripts
(several are extant), offers suggestions on performance, and chronicles the his-
tory of the composer’s most famous tune “China.”

Considering the amount of scholarship that has been lavished on psalmody,
one wonders why today’s performers and audiences have not given this large
body of music from the Colonial Period and early Republic more attention.
The repertory has much to commend it. The melodies are sometimes vigorous,
other times plaintive. The very basic harmonies suggest our traditional virtue
of plainness but also contain an occasional enlivening dissonance. The rollick-
ing fusing tunes reflect another of our values: vigor, and the more extended
anthems have a variety of moods. Most important, this is the repertory that
gives us the closest link with our rugged, courageous Congregational forebears.
Its appeal was and is broader than the religious texts on which it is based. Yet it
remains a historical curiosity rather than a vital part of our cultural and artistic life except in the rural South, where so-called “shape note” tunebooks containing many New England tunes have had a sustained appeal.

**Popular Music in the Early Twentieth-Century**

Major changes occurred in American popular music at the turn of the twentieth century. Increasing urbanization and the shift in incoming immigrant groups from western to eastern Europe are major sociological events. The advent of two major popular styles, ragtime closely followed by jazz, reflect a growing national interest in black music. Two MUSA volumes—*The Music and Scripts of “In Dahomey”* (vol. 5), edited by Thomas L. Riis, and *Irving Berlin: Early Songs, 1907-1914* (vol. 2, 3 parts), edited by Charles Hamm—focus, in turn, on a musical and a song writer’s early oeuvre. These have much to say not only about the transitional 1900s but the entire course of twentieth-century popular music. Irving Berlin, whose immigrant roots lie in eastern Europe and whose ethnic background is Jewish, became the “Dean” among those American songwriters, also mostly Jewish—Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter and Harold Arlen—who dominated American popular stage music through mid-century. *In Dahomey*, which received more than 1,100 performances in New York and London, between 1902 and 1905, marked a major change in the perception of black music. The public began to look beyond the derogatory minstrel and coon songs and gain a fascination for black rhythms, tunes and culture in general.

In his thirty-four-page introductory essay, Riis demonstrates the importance of *In Dahomey* as a major touchstone in the history of the American musical theater as well as African American history. Its principal composer is classically trained Will Marion Cook, and its best-known performers, the comic team of Bert Williams and George Walker. Playwright Jesse Shipp provided the libretto and the distinguished poet Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote texts for several of the songs. Many others made contributions throughout the life of the work, thus making *In Dahomey* a pastiche in the best theatrical tradition. As in so much earlier theater, the musical comedy “was simultaneously one thing and many things, a story told in dialogue, song, and action, yet never quite the same on successive nights.” Although the plot of *In Dahomey* is concerned with the attempts of an African colonization society in the United States to resettle in Africa, the production itself was a means of displaying black dramatic, comic and musical talent through dialogue, stump speeches, dance, songs and choruses. A British critic called the musical “a negro musical medley,” asking audiences to “forget purpose, plot, reason and coherence, simply look and listen.”

Fortunately *In Dahomey* has more extant source material than the usual musical from that time. Both an American and English script exist (the American script is used here), and a piano-vocal score (1903) accounts for approxi-
mately one-half of the musical numbers used during the New York and Lon-
don productions. Riis has been able to recover thirty-seven pieces. (A typical
show would contain 13-15 numbers.) These are arranged in alphabetical or-
der. In addition, an operatic interpolation (an aria from Meyerbeer’s L’Africaine,
Appendix 1) and three orchestrations of pieces (Appendix 2) are included.
Browsing the music of this volume leaves one with a deep appreciation of the
variety and quality of black music culture at that time.

No popular songwriter is more important to the twentieth century than
Irving Berlin. The twenty-two stage works to which he contributed songs stretch
from the Ziegfield Follies of 1911 to the musical, Mr. President (1962). He wrote
some or all of the music for seventeen films from 1928 to 1954. His approxi-
mately 1,500 songs appeared as sheet music throughout the United States,
Canada and England from 1907 through the 1960s, and many were major hits.
For the extraordinary length of the first six decades of this century, Irving Ber-
lin managed to stay at or near the center of popular music. The second volume
of MUSA, in three parts, contains the first 190 of Berlin’s copyrighted, pub-
lished songs, which he wrote from 1907 to 1913.

In the Preface, editor Charles Hamm—the major scholarly authority on
America’s popular song,10 describes these songs as individually conceived, al-
though many also appeared in musical revues of the time. They were the result
of a collaborative process in which Berlin dictated melodies to and worked
with a staff musician to create harmonization and piano accompaniment.

The Introduction is divided into several sections ranging from an overview
of popular song in the United States to specific information about the com-
poser himself. Hamm discusses popular song in the nineteenth century in “Irv-
ing Berlin and Early Tin Pan Alley.” “Irving Berlin and Tin Pan Alley Song Pro-
duction” sketches Berlin’s meteoric rise from a singing waiter and song plugger
to a salaried songwriter and eventually to a partner in a publishing firm after
the success of “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” (1912). In the portion of his essay
entitled “Style and Originality in Berlin’s Early Songs,” Hamm finds an encom-
passing feature to be Berlin’s empathy with both performers and audiences:
“Berlin drew on the collective knowledge and memory of his audience to
fashion dramatic situations and musical phrases similar to those found in songs
they already knew, shaped in slightly unexpected ways.”11 In “A Stylistic Over-
view of Berlin’s Early Songs,” Hamm marvels at Berlin’s skill at parody, espe-
cially a fourteen-page reworking of the sextet from Lucia di Lammermoor.12
One could also cite Berlin’s “Woodman Spare that Tree” (No. 96), in which a
genteel, nineteenth-century song is transformed into a raifish urban novelty;
the tree must be spared because, “When my wife starts after me, up in that tree
I roost.” Yet another Berlin parody, “That Mesmerizing Mendelssohn Tune (No.
26),” borrows freely from “Frühlingslied” (“Spring Song,” op. 62. no. 2).

Under “Genre in Tin Pan Alley” Hamm establishes a taxonomy for these
190 songs, noting that seventy-three can be designated as ballads: “a lyric,
nondramatic song projecting a romantic, pathetic, nostalgic or moralizing sentiment”; 11 127 are novelty songs: “sketching a vignette or brief story of an amusing or provocative nature; 14 thirty are ragtime or other dance songs, and fifty-six are songs written for revues or shows. In Performance Practice and Period Recordings Hamm notes that about one-third of the early songs were recorded at the time they were written. 15 One can perform them literally, reading from the sheet music (as would have been done by amateurs of the time); or more elaborately, as a collaboration between composer and performer (professionals contemporaneous with Berlin would have done so), or they can be reshaped according to today’s performer-audience tastes.


Two Women Classical Composers

Among the first six MUSA publications are two composers representative of two important schools of American classical composition. That they both happen to be women may be an indication of the strength of the feminist movement in American music scholarship. If so, both are first-rate exemplars. Amy Beach is generally classified as one of the “Boston Classicists,” a member of the “Second New England School” at the turn of the twentieth century; and Ruth Crawford, among the avant-gardists of the 1920s and early 1930s.

Born in 1867, Beach emerged as a child prodigy both in piano performance and composition. She made her debut as a pianist at age sixteen and briefly pursued a concert career until her marriage at eighteen to Dr. H. H. A. Beach of Boston. Thereafter, until her husband’s death in 1910, she mostly composed. Among her larger works are the Piano Concerto in C# minor (1899), Mass in Eb (1890), the “Gaelic” Symphony (1894), and the Piano Quintet (1907), as well as numerous piano pieces, songs and choral works. Following her husband’s death and that of her mother in 1911, she resumed her concert career, first in Europe and then the United States, which lasted until the late 1930s. She continued to compose during residencies at the MacDowell Colony, at her Hillsborough, New Hampshire home, and at her summer home on Cape Cod. She also lived part of the time in New York City, where she died in 1943. Editor Adrienne Fried Block lists her singular accomplishments, in addition to her compositions totaling over 300, as the United States’s first American-trained concert pianist and its first woman composer to write large-scale works. 17 Her leadership among women composers and in American music generally is evident.
in the oft-cited moniker, “Dean of American Women Composers.” Beach worked tirelessly with various musical organizations and individuals, and served as the first president of the Society of American Women Composers from 1925 to 1929.

Amy Beach’s reputation as a meritorious composer among her peers—Edward MacDowell, George Chadwick, Arthur Foote and Horatio Parker—was acknowledged during her own lifetime. Later, her music suffered the same decline in interest as did that of others of her generation, with occasional revivals prompted by historical curiosity or a sense of responsibility to forebears. The feminist movement, however, has generated a continuing interest in her music to the point that it no longer is treated as “quaint,” or “representative of its time,” but rather as worthy of genuine esthetic appreciation. Possibly, the present-day reception of Beach’s music could pave the way to renewed interest in that of her compatriots.

Beach’s Quartet for Strings or Quartet on Inuit Themes (in one movement), op. 89, is the single composition of MUSA volume 3. In the first section of her twenty-one page introduction, “Amy Beach’s Quartet on Inuit Themes: Toward a Modernist Style,” Adrienne Fried Block provides some basic reasons for the choice of this composition, which Beach began at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire in 1921 but did not complete until her residence in Rome eight years later. The piece was first performed publicly on 28 November 1942, at a two-day festival of Beach’s music, held in Washington, D. C., to commemorate her seventy-fifth birthday. It was recorded by the Crescent String Quartet (Leonarda 111) in 1981, but has remained unpublished until now.

In other sections of the Introduction, Block treats the Quartet as pivotal in Beach’s change from her earlier, late-romantic style to a more intense exploration of motivic possibilities, a new “leanness,” and a more advanced harmonic progression “normalizing dissonance.”18 Beach borrowed her themes from Franz Boas’s The Central Eskimo (1888), and Block notes considerably more sensitivity in her treatment of folk material here when compared to that in some of her previous compositions. Block concludes that Beach’s purpose was to establish a contemporary American idiom based on folk sources and that the work, like MacDowell’s Indian Suite, belongs to “the American National Movement.”19

Although she died only a decade after Amy Beach, Ruth Crawford (1901-1953) hailed from a much different generation of composition. MUSA volume 1 contains Crawford’s Music for Small Orchestra (1926) and Suite No. 2 for Four Strings and Piano (1929). The music has been carefully edited by Wayne Schneider. Judith Tick, who wrote the introduction, classifies Crawford as part of the “ultra-modern wing” of 1920s composers, along with Henry Cowell, Carl Ruggles and Dane Rudhyar.20 After studying and teaching piano in Florida briefly, she entered the American Conservatory in Chicago in 1921. There she became a part of Dians Lavoie Herz’s avant-garde group and was increasingly drawn toward the ideas of Cowell and Rudhyar. Her interest in theosophy and
Eastern religion replaced the Methodism of her youth. Crawford was also receptive to the European “modernists,” of that time: Scriabin, Stravinsky, Hindemith and Honegger. In general, these heady influences intensified her search for the spiritual in art.

Tick describes the single tone repetition opening *Music for Small Orchestra* as indicative of Rudhyar’s “theory of a single tone as a spiritual nucleus” and “the imprint of her spirit.”21 Although the piece is her first work for more than two instruments, Crawford demonstrates remarkable skill in independent writing for the flute, clarinet, bassoon, and piano, as well as among the strings consisting of four violins and two cellos. A prominent feature of its style is the “layering of unrelated ostinatos” and polyrhythms.22 Tick describes the first movement as “solemn with moments of lightness and darkness,” and the second movement as one of “roguish humor.”23

Other pieces from the Chicago period include the Sonata for Violin and Piano and *Five Songs: Poems by Carl Sandburg*. Undoubtedly her friendship with the Chicago poet was a contributing factor in her later extensive work in folk music. Tick finds that Sandburg may have helped her to associate her musical ideas with vernacular expression. She once observed, “a school of gnats [provides] a lesson in rhythm.”24

In 1929 Crawford moved to New York City, and, on Cowell’s recommendation began study with Charles Seeger. There she also met Carl Ruggles, whose use of “dissonated” melody in *Portals* strongly impressed her. The Suite No. 2 takes the teaching of Seeger, whom she was to marry in 1931, into account. It is described as “transitional,” demonstrating a better handling of thematic development and a heightened interest in dissonant counterpoint, the latter a product of Seeger’s teaching.25 The three-movement composition (Lento-Cantando, Leggiero, Allegro energico) has cyclic features in its literal repetition of the opening nine measures and other motivic material. Again, evidence of Crawford’s spiritual esthetics can be found in the understated opening.26 Her control of pitch repetition—“sounding seven to ten pitches before repeating one”—and the powerful climax of the third movement show the influence of Ruggles.27

These two pieces, not previously published, are important forerunners of the String Quartet (1931), Crawford’s best known work. Tick describes them as a “combination of spirituality and youthful exuberance, summarizing Crawford’s early style.”28 They help to give us a broader perspective of a composer whose reputation rests on so few works.

**Comments on the Completed Series and Works in Progress**

A reading of the Appendix reveals that MUSA is well on its way toward the completion of and planning for the forty-volume series. Among the twenty-three volumes listed there, seventeen are devoted to individual composers, of whom three are women. Seven volumes are devoted to art music, five to folk
and ethnic music, three to theater music, four to popular music and jazz, two to psalmody and one to band music. Among eighteen volumes for which chronology is significant, only two treat the period of the early republic; three come from the mid and late nineteenth century; one bridges the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the remainder belong to the twentieth century. Except for a balancing of eras, the MUSA committee and its editors are following their initial criteria scrupulously. The quality of work examined here augurs well for the remainder of the series. Certainly the diversity of music presented and planned for to date does reflect “the character and shape of American music making” as well as musical achievements of which we can be proud.

Notes

1. Foreword to each volume. MUSA is published for the American Musicological Society by AR Editions, Inc., Madison, Wisc. MUSA volumes are co-numbered with A-R Editions’s Recent Researches in American Music. MUSA’s headquarters are at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Mark Clague is the Executive Editor. Wayne Schneider and Jeffrey Magee were previous editors and supervised the publications of the volumes under discussion here. See the appendix to this article for a listing of those volumes completed and in preparation.

2. The present Committee of the Publication of American Music consists of Richard Crawford (chair), Marva Griffin Carter, Mark Clague (Executive Editor) H. Wiley Hitchcock, Judith McCulloh (Society for American Music), Ingrid Monson, Carol Oja, Christopher Reynolds, Wayne Shirley and Ron Wiecki (A-R Editions, Inc.).

3. Foreword.

4. MUSA has won six awards for “graphic excellence” from the Music Publishers’ Association (Vols. 1-5, and 8).


9. Ibid.


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., xxix.


15. Ibid., xli.

16. Ibid., xlix.


19. Ibid., xii.
Appendix

Information below taken from MUSA website: www.umich.edu/~musausa. Music in the United States of America

Completed Volumes
1. Ruth Crawford: Music for Small Orchestra (1926); Suite No. 2 for Four Strings and Piano (1929), edited by Judith Tick and Wayne Schneider.

Volumes in Progress
13. The Core Repertory of Slave Songs of the United States, edited by Eileen Southern.