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## One on One: Max Roach in Conversation with Kofi Ghanaba

In late July 1974, Max Roach (1924–2007), the legendary drummer and percussionist, bandleader, composer, teacher, and one of the original innovators of bebop, undertook a historic trip to Ghana in search of Kofi Ghanaba and the African roots of African American music. Formerly known as Guy Warren, Kofi Ghanaba (1923–2008) was the Ghanaian drummer and percussionist who created his own brand of Afro jazz in the 1950s. Roach first met Ghanaba in Chicago in the mid-1950s when the latter worked on the fringes of the jazz scene. The friendship continued when Ghanaba moved to New York in 1957. In New York, Ghanaba led his own group, The Guy Warren Soundz, and performed his Afro jazz for a year in the African Heritage Room at 780 Third Avenue. Feeling frustrated with the jazz establishment in the United States, Ghanaba returned to Ghana in 1965 to continue his music. Ghanaba was unaware of Roach's visit until a cab driver brought him to his house in Achimota, a suburb of Accra. Max Roach stayed with Kofi Ghanaba for two weeks.

As can be imagined, Roach's visit was an opportune time for these drum buddies to catch up with each other as they played together and recorded some of the jam sessions. Ghanaba exposed Roach to live performances of traditional drumming and dance, and, crucially, they engaged in conversations covering a wide range of topics. Toward the end of the second week, with imagination and foresight, Ghanaba taped one of those rare conversations. Ghanaba, as the host, pitched the questions and Roach responded. As usual, the taped conversations covered music and musicians, drums, politics, race, segregation, class, tribalism, perceived relationships between Africans and African Americans, jazz education, and many more subjects. Ghanaba gave me copies of the taped interview and the jam sessions in the summer of 2003 during one of my field research trips to Ghana. Taped in the

days of portable tape recorders, the sound quality is quite poor, but I managed to transcribe it for the purposes of publishing and making the contents available to a wider audience.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to invoke a comment by Robert Walser to underscore my aim for transcribing and publishing this taped conversation between Roach and Ghanaba. In the preface to *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) Walser writes, “If we are to study jazz as history, we must try to recover some of the ways in which people related to it and understood their involvement with it—the history jazz has actually had, not the one we think it should have had” (xi). Seen in this light, the conversation presented here might provide us with a window, however small, into the private lives of these two legendary drummers, an African and an African American, and how they saw themselves in relation not just to the music industry, but also the socio-political dynamics in the heady days of the early 1970s. This type of conversation is a historical document that enables critics, journalists, and scholars to become “familiar with more ways of hearing and relating to jazz, and gaining more awareness of those whose lives have been touched by it” (xi).

As we are aware, the discipline of jazz studies takes a special interest in oral histories. For instance, we can draw on published interviews and conversations in magazines, journals, and books of what I call “musician-to-musician” sessions. A case in point is Christian Scott’s interview of Wynton Marsalis in front of an audience in Volga Hall during the July 2007 North Sea Jazz Festival, published in the same year in *Down Beat* (74/11: 49–51) by Dan Ouellette under the title “Answering the Next Generation: Christian Scott Interviews Wynton Marsalis.” Arthur Taylor’s *Notes and Tones* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1977, 1982) is a book publication of his conversations and interviews with a variety of performers. As a jazz musician himself, Taylor taped the conversations between 1968 and 1972 with the aim of publishing “the real voices of musicians as they saw themselves and not as critics or journalists saw them” (9). Conversely, there are numerous “critic-to-musician” interviews for the print and electronic media; I note just two out of several publications: *Living the Jazz Life: Conversations with Forty Musicians About Their Careers in Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) by Royal Stokes, and the renowned older collection *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya* (New York: Rinehart, 1955; reprint 1966 by Dover) edited by Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff.

The conversation between Roach and Ghanaba is unique among oral histories in the sense that, unlike the publications named above, the subjects had

no intention, in the short or long term, of putting their spoken thoughts into print. Secondly, Roach and Ghanaba engaged in the taped conversation on their own accord; no journalist, critic, or media representative had a hand in setting it up. It may well be that Ghanaba simply wanted a historical record of Roach's visit to add to his home collection of jazz memorabilia. Although they were aware that the taped conversation would someday be available to the general public, they engaged in a candid, frank, and honest discussion.

Stunningly, and despite its historical relevance, Max Roach's trip to Ghana is never mentioned in any biographical information about him. None of the plethora of obituaries that were published following his passing on 16 August 2007 had anything to say about his trip to Ghana. Ted Panken's extensive obituary "A Different Category" in *Down Beat Magazine* (74/11: 31–37) failed to mention Roach's trip, despite highlighting another Roach excursion to Port-au-Prince, during the early 1950s, to meet with the Haitian master drummer Tiroro (36). Peter Keepnews' posting of Roach's obituary, "Max Roach, a founder of modern jazz, dies at 83," was probably the first to appear on the Drummerworld website on the same day of his passing and, like all the others, made no reference to his Ghanaian sojourn.

More surprising is Roach's failure to mention this trip to his academic colleagues at the time. In the early 1970s Roach was serving as adjunct professor of percussion in the Department of Music and Dance at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and no record of his African visit has turned up at that location. One wonders whether he even mentioned his experience in Ghana as an anecdote for his students at Amherst.

By 1974 Max Roach—a near-legendary performer—had accomplished a great deal in the African American music industry. Is it reasonable to suppose that he had specific practical motivations for undertaking this trip? The first answer comes from Roach himself. In an epistle bearing the headline "Ghanaba is a genius" that was published in the Ghanaian newspaper the *Daily Graphic* on 30 August 1974, he stated in part:

In this letter, I [would] like to record that Ghanaba was so far ahead of what we were all doing, that none of us understood what he was saying, that in order for Afro-American music to be stronger, it must cross-fertilise [*sic*] with its African origins. Ghanaba's conception, like that of Marcus Garvey, George Washington Carver, etc., was beyond our grasp. We ignored him. Seventeen years later, Black Music in America has turned to Africa for inspiration and rejuvenation, and the African soundz of Ghanaba is [*sic*] now being imitated all over the United States wherever Afro-American music is played. . . . I have now come

to realize what an immense role Ghanaba could play in Black Music, of which he is the Father, if he could record more of his music for posterity, and appear in Universities, and schools, and places of education in the United States, as well as on stage in specially arranged public concerts . . . and to do a series of lectures. It was this idea which brought me to the doors of my friend and compatriot Ghanaba on July 31, 1974.

I would like to comment briefly here in order to capture the full implications of the subtext in the above statement. Considering Roach's long-standing disdain for the label "jazz" as used by the recording industry, critics, and journalists, he made conspicuous efforts to separate his music away from easy categories as he transformed and innovated his sound. His contempt for the designation "jazz" is spelled out in his article "What 'Jazz' Means to Me" in *The Black Scholar* (1972, 3–6).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, he is quoted as saying in a radio interview in the early 1980s, "You try to invent things so that you can better define your musical personality" (Panken, *Down Beat* 74/11:32). His resentment of the general categories defining all forms of black music, whether rhythm and blues, rock and roll, gospel, spirituals, blues, and others, is part of the reason why he participated in the late-night jam sessions at Minton's Playhouse with Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, and others to create a new style of African American music. From all indications, Roach was not happy when the byproduct of the jam sessions was named "bebop" by the recording industry. Nevertheless, the trajectory of his compositions, recordings, and collaborations are framed by this conscious insistence on defining his own musical personality.

A review of his oeuvre looks like this: Roach co-founded Debut Records with bassist Charles Mingus in 1952 and produced *Drum Conversations*, his first drum solo LP, in 1953; the Clifford Brown-Max Roach quintet was formed in 1954; *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* (Candid, 1960) combined solo voice and a gospel choir; in the early 1970s, he formed the cooperative nine-man ensemble M'Boom, consisting of only percussionists; his Double Quartet in the early 1980s with the Uptown String Quartet featured his daughter, Maxine Roach, on viola.

The constant urge to explore novel musical paths led Roach to collaborate with artists representing other styles and genres. He played drums in a concert for disc jockey and break dancers in 1983. He collaborated with Amiri Baraka on a musical about Bumpy Johnson, improvised on drums to video images from Kit Fitzgerald and dancing by Bill T. Jones, composed the musical scores for Off-Broadway productions of Shakespeare and Sam Shepard, and for the legendary dance choreographer Alvin Ailey. For an outspoken

critic of America's racism, Roach's humanity knew no bounds as he engaged in cross-cultural performances with the Japanese Koto Ensemble, Gitano flamenco singers, and Jewish and Arab percussionists in Israel. The second subtext in his *Daily Graphic* letter is the renewed interest among African Americans about Africa in the 1970s. The new and emerging independent states in sub-Saharan Africa brought a fresh wave of optimism and yearning for the motherland from African Americans. For an African American whose *Freedom Now Suite* (released in the previous decade) linked the American civil rights movement with independence movements in Africa, 1974 was the right time for him to make a pilgrimage to the motherland.<sup>3</sup>

Although Kofi Ghanaba was the first African musician to be elected to the prestigious American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, in 1957, he is not well known in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Also there is no doubt that Ghanaba was a controversial figure with a strong ego. As Roach puts it in the following conversation, he was "a difficult man to deal with." Since his school days in Ghana, Ghanaba had been uncompromising with respect to the kind of music he wished to play, and it was this attitude that perhaps turned off a lot of potential admirers and jazz musicians in the United States. However, once you got to know him, as I did, you came to realize that Ghanaba was a deeply spiritual man with an insatiable love for nature. In the last years of his life he moved to a secluded area in the village of Medie, outside of Accra, where he was surrounded by trees and birds and other sounds of nature day and night. On Friday, January 18, 2008, at the newly renovated Ghana National Theatre in downtown Accra, Kofi Ghanaba played his drums for the last time and in a symbolic gesture, handed his drumsticks to his son, Glenn Ghanababi Warren. He then made his much-anticipated announcement that he was now formerly retired from "active performance."

The occasion for the announcement of his official retirement was the OneTouch Afrika Speaks Concert. Organized by the Accra-based Katamadara Concepts with assistance from the European Commission in Ghana and the United Nations Children's Fund, the theme of the concert was adapted from Ghanaba's 1957 album, *Africa Speaks, America Answers* (Decca). The grand concert featured Meiway (from Cote d'Ivoire) and Ghanaian artists Amandzeba (formerly known as Nat Brew), Bibbie Brew, A. B. Crentsil and Obour, K. K. Fosu, and Glenn Ghanababi Warren.<sup>5</sup> On May 4, 2008, Ghanaba celebrated his 85th birthday and the OneTouch Afrika Speaks Concert brought to a close over three score years of a musical career.

It is not hard to understand why the European Commission and a major arm of the United Nations would co-sponsor the OneTouch Afrika Speaks Con-

cert. Ghanaba's music transcends the localized confines of the Ghanaian highlife market with far-reaching impact on the global market of jazz, classical, pop, and Afro-pop. In addition to his exceptional skill on drums and percussion, Ghanaba was a composer, arranger, producer, and a journalist. In the early 1940s, he was a member of the pioneering highlife band The Tempos, led by E. T. Mensah.<sup>6</sup> After a brief stay in the United Kingdom in 1950 and performing with Kenny Graham's Afro Cubists band he settled in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1953 where he took up a job as a radio station disc jockey. For his second trip to the United States, he settled in Chicago and joined Gene Esposito's Band as a co-leader, percussionist, and arranger.<sup>7</sup>

Ghanaba was the first to infuse American jazz with African drums and percussion when he performed and hung out with such jazz luminaries as Duke Ellington, Lester Young, Sarah Vaughan, Max Roach, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and Dizzy Gillespie. After his return to Ghana in the mid-sixties, he Africanized the jazz drum set by replacing the entire setup with mainly Akan drums.<sup>8</sup> In his attempt to redefine American jazz by introducing African drums and percussion and musical structures, Ghanaba invented his own brand of jazz, which he dubbed Afro jazz, and succeeded in recording with major labels in the United States. His concept of Afro jazz can be found on the following LPs: *Africa Speaks, America Answers!* (Decca, 1957 DL 8446), *Themes for African Drums* (RCA-Victor, 1958 LPM-1864), *The African Soundz of Guy Warren of Ghana* (Fiesta, 1960 FLPS-1646), *African Rhythms: The Exciting Soundz of Guy Warren and His Talking Drums* (Decca, 1962 DL-74243), *Emergent Drums* (Columbia, 1963), and *Afro Jazz* (EMI/Columbia, 1968 SCX-6340). He released *That Happy Feeling and Ghanaba! Live at the Arts Centre, Accra!!* on his own label, Safari Records & Tapes. The Retroafric label released his work *The Divine Drummer: Odumankuma* as a CD in 2002 (RETRO16).

Since the early 1950s, numerous musicians on the world stage have covered his compositions. The list includes the jazz drummer and band leader Art Blakey's cover of Ghanaba's "Love, The Mystery of" on the LP *The African Beat* (Blue Note, 1962 BST-4097); Randy Weston's *Khepera* CD (Verve/Gitanes, 1998, 557 821-2) also features a cover of the same piece.<sup>9</sup> In Germany, Bert Kaempfert's orchestral arrangement of "That Happy Feeling" (Decca, 1962 DL-74273) was an instant hit in Europe and the United States.<sup>10</sup> Ghanaba played the drums on Ginger Baker's *Stratavarious* (Polydor, 1972, 2383 133), which also includes a cover of Ghanaba's "Blood Brothers."

In July 2003, the Ghana National Theatre honored Kofi Ghanaba and Professor Emeritus J. H. Kwabena Nketia with the Living Legends Award for

their “immense contribution to the development of arts” in Ghana. Under its Africa House Expressive Arts and History project, New York University (NYU) partnered with Ghanaba to develop his African Heritage Archive located at his home. Under the terms of the partnership, NYU agreed to develop and organize Ghanaba’s collections of audiotapes, videos, musical instruments, posters, photographs, and newspapers for research purposes.<sup>11</sup>

In the interest of presenting an unbiased report in the transcript, I have avoided adding supplementary remarks, hoping that readers will provide their own interpretation and conclusions. In a few instances, I have made brief comments in footnotes to clarify an issue or add snippets of information. As I indicated above, the taped audio is of low quality and so I have adopted the following method for transcription. At several points where the tape is inaudible, I have indicated this by an ellipsis. Square brackets are added to supply the full name of a musician (e.g., “Hawk” [Coleman Hawkins]). When there is an obvious interruption or complete silence on the tape, the words *break in tape* are added. Verbal tics and miscellaneous vocables are omitted without comment.

**Kofi Ghanaba:** The place is Achimota, my house, and my guest is my blood brother, Maxwell Lemuel Roach of Newland, North Carolina. I have known Max in spirit for a long time before I met him in the flesh. He’s a drummer and I’m a drummer, and therefore of all the Afro-American musicians who play Afro-American music, he is closer to me than anybody else, because he does the same things as me. I swear, he curses, he schools [*sic*], he does everything that I do. That is why we are blood brothers. He fights without bounds. He is a giant in the field of Afro-American music and a perfect exponent of the Afro-American style of drumming. He has worked with a lot of the big brothers in his world of Afro-American music, . . . Brother Miles [Davis], Prince Charles [Charlie Parker], and a whole lot of them. As a jazz student, I’ve always wanted to corner Maxwell one day and talk with him, and ask him questions that are of historical importance to me as a researcher and as an advocate and a musician. So, by the way, when did you show up in town here, Maxwell?

**Max Roach:** Two weeks ago.

**KG:** Counting today, two weeks today?

**MR:** Two weeks today.

**KG:** Two weeks, yes. Today’s Thursday isn’t it?

**MR:** Thursday and I arrived Sunday . . . in the latter part of July. I got here on Sunday night and to your place on Monday. The purpose of my trip was to come here and see you, of course.

**KG:** Yes, yes. The whole thing for me has been a big ball, because it's wonderful to have somebody who can talk your language, feel the way you feel. It's always beautiful to have somebody alongside of you. Nobody should go alone in this world. Anybody who tells you that he is alone in this world actually is goofing off. We [need] somebody or something—who could be a piece of stone?— something to make you wholesome, eh?

**MR:** It makes me feel good to hear you say that because so many people here in Accra who are admirers of yours seem to feel as though you have been living a monkish life so to speak.

**KG:** Yes, well that's a fallacy. I don't.

**MR:** It's good to hear you say that.

**KG:** The thing is that I need nourishment, just like any artist I need nourishment, [I am someone] who takes his art seriously. The nourishment cannot come from looking. . . . It must come from being with nature and other people and the birds. . . . Many people don't know about this. They think I live life like a hermit, but I have nothing to say about that.

But anyway, today Maxwell is going to invite me to walk through his family and through his work. What pleases me most about Maxwell today is the fact that he is putting less time into playing gigs, per se, jobs—one night here, two nights there—and he is concentrated on the history of the music he plays and it's affinity with Africa. It is also food for thought to know that along these lines we have come to do this recording. [*break in tape*] So this to me is a historic trip, and I want to take this opportunity to ask him a whole lot of questions. Maybe this session will take an hour or two hours, but he's very kind and intends to answer these questions, and so I will go right ahead with the firing of the questions. Maxwell, why drums?

**MR:** Why drums? You know I grew up in the States [during] the Depression, and we were people from the South, in North Carolina, farmers in fact. My father and mother had come to the big city, New York City, to improve their lives and their family's; they brought two children, myself and my brother.

**KG:** Do you have a brother?

**MR:** He's dead.

**KG:** Oh, he's dead?

**MR:** Yes—and [my parents] worked very hard during the daytime, whatever work they could do menial; my father survived with his mechanical skills. But we, my brother and I, were always left at the church. Church was the focal point of our community. During the days these churches acted like day-care centers for families who worked. We had this organized many, many years ago. In these church day-care centers would be a physical plan, and they had arts and crafts and music. My first instrument was piano. My second instrument was trumpet, but my mother thought that I was just a little bit too young to be doing an instrument that was half my size at that particular time. I was about eight or nine years old. *[break in tape]*

. . . the next instrument which my mother and I both felt was good, and which enabled me to participate with all the other children, during the day in the summertime, and in after-school day-care centers in New York was the drums.

**KG:** Was she in love with the drums?

**MR:** Oh, she was in love with her children and was so protective. She saw this huge instrument and me puffing and blowing in it and trying to get something out of it, and so she says, “Why don’t you switch to another instrument?” So I switched to drums. I just fell madly in love with it and from that point on, you know, I tried to develop as best I could.

**KG:** Was your father a drummer?

**MR:** No, he wasn’t a musician. My mother was a gospel singer, but she sang only in church and in the neighborhoods that we grew up in. During the thirties and forties in New York there was a lot of music. . . . On every block there was a band. There were marching bands, there were church bands, there were large bands, Lodge meeting bands. There were bands that played for dances. You could go up to a friend’s house and his father would have a drum, a piano, a saxophone, a clarinet, and while he was away working, sometimes we’d come home from school and we’d have a chance to even pick up an instrument and try to do something with it. Or witness them when they had their rehearsals; that’s how we’d learn, you know.

**KG:** You know for a long time, I couldn’t figure out myself about “Why drums?” That’s why I asked you. Because, like you, I always studied other instruments: the tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, and a little bit of piano, which I—as an exponent of Afro-American music—wanted to use.

But this call has always come back to me: drums, drums, drums! So I’ve always wanted to know, “Why drums,” you see? At that time I felt I couldn’t

play drums. Drums were cheap instruments. I couldn't be creative on drums. I looked down upon it. Until, thinking in hindsight, I didn't *know* drums then. I didn't know the power of drums. What it could do and what it couldn't do and the power of the rhythm it generates. So I was asking you "Why drums?" because this was my problem at the start. I didn't like the instrument that much, and yet I couldn't get away from it. According to your experience, when you got to meet drums you just fell in love with them.

**MR:** Yes.

**KG:** Were you ever a dancer of any sort?

**MR:** Well, with drums you need to dance, everybody danced in the community. We all danced, I danced, and then later when we all came in contact with people like brother Baby Lawrence, people like that, Honey [Combs], there was a lot of theater in the black communities at that time. You saw dances, tap dances.

**KG:** That's right.

**MR:** Everybody would learn a few steps. Tap dancing was very close, very percussive. So you know there was a kind of a cross fertilization between dances and drums. You had to dance a little.

**KG:** I myself was a dancer, you know. I taught myself how to tap dance, this particular dance which I saw merchant seamen [doing]. They used this form of dancing in the Gold Coast [region of Ghana]. Merchant seamen from America, the Charleston and tap dancing. I took lots of tap dancing, because of the percussive nature of the dance. I also heard that Joe Jones was a tap dancer.

**MR:** Uh-huh.

**KG:** I've heard a lot of good drummers started out as dancers. That's why I asked the question. You also come out of the same bag—as a dancer?

**MR:** Not as a dancer predominantly. I came out of a piano bag, I would imagine. We always had a piano around. I remember my first experience with a piano was when my family moved to a new flat. We didn't have moving vans in those days. Everyone was very poor, including me, and we moved into a flat where I remember that the people who had moved out couldn't afford to move their piano. This was how we got to own a piano.

**KG:** I was going to ask about that too. I read somewhere along the line, in a history of Afro-American music I think, was it Jelly Roll Morton who said that it wasn't common to find a piano in the average home of the Afro-American,

because this is an expensive instrument? You could [only] afford to buy a broken down saxophone or something secondhand maybe.

It's very interesting for me because I studied the history of Afro-American music and also I could play it. I studied it as a subject. I wonder now, Maxwell, if this came to you naturally or did you also study it? Because to be able to do something this well you must study. Did you ever—not study per se but—become aware of this art form in your early life? Did you read books about it? Was it [seen as] a wholesome thing or was it a hobby?

**MR:** No, it was something that you worked at, you practiced and you really worked at it all the time. Because the technique is so demanding, the technique that was laid down, especially on percussion instruments, by people like Chick Webb and Baby Dodds. The master and baby drummers would sit down, play rolls, and things like that. To understand how they moved the instrument was something that we studied. [Written] history for the African American was always taken with a grain of salt because . . . unless it was handed down from mouth to mouth, meaning from Chick Webb to Joe Jones, Joe Jones to Sidney Catlett, and from Sidney Catlett to maybe Kenny Clark, and from Kenny Clark to me, on down. We always took the books that were written with a grain of salt because they were all diluted. [Our] history was oral, and the techniques that were taught were oral and visual. They were man-to-man not man-to-book or just memorized. There was never an in-between.

**KG:** I believe you.

**MR:** So, this is how we studied, this is how we worked, and the people who were teaching at the time (and are teaching now) were very demanding. You had to learn how to do things fast and well. You know, they'd say, "OK, take your time in a hurry."

**KG:** That's right.

**MR:** And all kinds of those contradictory little statements.

**KG:** "Vacate slowly."

**MR:** Yeah, and "Don't stumble, you might fall and hurt yourself." I've noticed that I find many things here [in Ghana] like that. Signs on the road, the lorries that travel up and down the road, picking up people. Little sayings that give you some sort of message. A teaching.

**KG:** A personal philosophy.

**MR:** I saw one today that said something like, "God bless the child that hasn't been born."

**KG:** Yes, we've got beautiful sayings like that. Tell me again, Maxwell, who was the first drummer whose work went "bang" at you?

**MR:** Well in New York City we were exposed to everybody who came to the Apollo Theater.

**KG:** It was Chick Webb's buckets.

**MR:** It was Chick Webb, it was Joe Jones, it was Big Leo Stenson, Big Sid Catlett, Brass Mitchell. All of those were individuals. It was like they all belonged to a different tribe, you know? They all had their own thing. One thing about the way we were taught to think in the States, regardless of what instrument that you played, was that you had to be yourself. You had to live, and you had to add something creative. It wasn't enough to be just a good imitator. The only time the masters could recognize you was when [one might say], "Oh, that boy sounds like [another better] boy." Then you'd know you were on the right road. But you know these [master players] were so individualistic. It wasn't a matter of our saying, "Wow for Chick Webb" or "Wow for Joe Jones" [alone] . . . You were constantly being amazed by people. This is good because it doesn't develop prejudices.

**KG:** Yes, but you must have had [some favorites]. I knew a lot of drummers in my time, in contrast to what you said, [who were] just "gray" drummers. I was in a colonial territory, and the history and the music of the Afro-American was exported to me in a different form, if not a bastardized form. I knew about Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich and the "gray" drummers, you see? I was influenced more or less by the Buddy Rich style, so that even though I had a spectrum of drummers to listen to and choose from, I had a partial affinity for the Buddy Rich style. So I wanted to ask you, even though you heard these great individual drummers, did you ever have an affinity for maybe one or two of them?

**MR:** No, we didn't have that problem. Our attitude is totally different from that. I noticed that many of the Africans picked up the white mannerisms and, frankly, the white way of thinking. The elitist attitude almost comes out. This is something that we had to be exposed to constantly, face to face. We couldn't go to a village and partake in the kind of rituals that I witnessed over here. We had to wake up in the morning and go to bed in the evening and retreat back to our neighborhoods and stay there. So these attitudes of elitism were always white-faced, and when we saw blacks acting like that we really identified them with the same kind [of attitude].

**KG:** But wouldn't you call that natural information even though it's elitist?

**MR:** No, no, I think it's wearing the white man's clothes. Really, I really do, because there are many Africans who come to the States who are in the diplomatic corps from the newly independent countries, whose attitude is . . .

**KG:** Gray.

**MR:** Gray. They snap their fingers, they have that same aloofness that's really not wholesome.

**KG:** Uh huh. Of course, of course.

**MR:** Because the sun shines on everybody the same way. Because you see a man like Joe Louis, who really comes from the bottom, who kicks everybody's ass, and you see a man like Muhammad Ali who comes from no lesser place and does the same thing. And you see a Charlie Parker who comes from no lesser place. He went to high school with Roman Bierderkamp. So we're always [hearing individuals]. There was never someone who hit me like this—boom!

**KG:** You couldn't point [to anyone]?

**MR:** No, that's taboo. That's taboo. There's no one.<sup>12</sup>

**KG:** I think that you're very lucky not to have suffered that. . . .

**MR:** There's no one of anything. Because [the music] was constantly being improvised.

**KG:** I see.

**MR:** On Saturdays, when we were allowed to go to the Apollo Theater, we'd go and take our lunch, and be in the theater all day . . . we'd sit there, show after show, eat lunch, and watch whatever particular instrument we were interested in. Some of the guys were saxophonists, some were pianists, some were bassists and some were drummers, and we all went together. One week we're hearing Count Basie with Joe [Jones], and everybody was just magnificent. And the next week we'd hear Chick Webb.

**KG:** That's right.

**MR:** The following week we'd hear Andy Kirk with O'Neil Spencer. It was another world altogether.

Now, you know what? The amazing thing about my two weeks here—and I'm so grateful for all the people who've shown me around and have helped me, especially you—but with the variety of things here, nowhere can you say, "Well, this group is greater than that . . ."

**KG:** No.

**MR:** Because nobody is playing it the same way. Maybe within one particular group there may be a man who has spent more time and has gotten more experience as a musician. But when you listen to another group, the instruments and the approach and the style is so different and is so totally varied, until you lose all sense of that comparative thing, which to me is Western. . . . So we kinda grew up like that. You know, since you talk about our affinity to Africa, there are a lot of things that I've seen over here that sound different but are approached by blacks in the States in the same way.

**KG:** Same way.

**MR:** In the same way that Africans approach things here.

**KG:** Oh yes, it even creates things like that.

**MR:** Totally! It grabs you really gently. The fact that the individual has to be creative, really creative, and not imitative. It's something that separates people who are in the arts as a hobby and people who are seriously creative.

**KG:** You are saying therefore that you don't have any folks or heroes of the arts that are Afro-American? [*break in tape*] . . . that are playing tenor saxophone or trumpet, or piano or whatever it is?

**MR:** Well, there were some of the young men when I was growing up. Some like [*inaudible*]. Others like Hawk [Coleman Hawkins], others like Pres [Lester Young], some like Johnny Hodges, some like Benny Carter.

**KG:** There you go. See you named all of them. Which justifies what you are saying. Everybody has a little to offer.

**MR:** Benny Carter and Rabbit [Johnny Hodges] in that group were great lead saxophone players.

**KG:** Highly melodic.

**MR:** . . . and when they led a session it meant something. It was very important.

**KG:** Yes, like Marshall Royal...

**MR:** To me these are very important people. [*break in tape*]

**KG:** Great soloists . . . Did you ever hear or meet Charlie Christian in your life?

**MR:** I heard him in person, but I never met him.

**KG:** What an experience! You know I've always thought he was the man who was swinging ahead of everybody.

**MR:** But you see we weren't looking at individuals like him as *ahead* of everybody. That's something coming out of another gray experience. Grays say, "He's the greatest, or he's way ahead of everybody." But you can't say that because . . . nature will always belie and erase that conception from minds.

**KG:** Well, this is more of an individualistic choice.

**MR:** I know it's individual, but someone could say, "Oh Charlie Christian! That's the end of guitar playing" [as far as the speaker is concerned]. This is not the way nature operates. No place on this planet! 'Cause nature say, "I endow this person with this." The reason I say it's a European attitude is because . . . they walk around with the assumption that their religion and their way of life and their education process is [the best]. [From the] Greeks and Romans on up until today, this is the one and only thing. Well that's one thing—period. That's one thing. But then they keep going from [one subject to another] and they ask you a question, "Who do you think is the greatest?" After so and so there are no more. [Some argue that] Bach said it all in music! But I can't agree . . . [tape inaudible]

How am I ever to say, "I'm after the greatest genre I've ever heard in my life." You'd say, "Where?" and I'd say, "Well, I've heard a whole lot of people, and some just play very simple, some much more complex, and some—maybe most—know the beats." When it's always perfect for the situation and the moment, that to me is the kind of musical perfection that I strive for. It hasn't anything to do with pyrotechnics and things like that. If you really fit the occasion, [that's fine.] This is what made Lester Young so powerful, what makes Thelonious Monk so wonderful. I've heard records where Monk—in his early music—sounds like a bit like Teddy Wilson. He was caught up in the tail end of the Teddy Wilson/Earl Hines kind of virtuosity. But in order for him to become an individual he had to simplify and concentrate on another ingredient, which to him was harmonic. Now what he does fits Monk's occasion and Monk's music. So, to break it down, it's good to be a great instrumentalist, and it's fine to be a good musician, but it's good just to be a simple artist.

**KG:** Yes, of course.

**MR:** To make people smile, cry if you will, or dance. This has nothing to do with razzle-dazzle; this has something to do with . . .

**KG:** A man and his art.

**MR:** It's much more human. That a person would take a calabash and just do something which makes you smile [*singing a rhythm*]. Then he changes all of a sudden and you get serious. . . . In fact we were taught that this is how you should look at things, so we would have a different perspective from the whole European philosophy. We had learned earlier that we couldn't fight the European thing and survive doing his thing.

[This would be] just like me coming into your house and trying to take over when I don't know where the corners are, you know? You turn out all the lights and . . . I take over this house and, you know where the cupboards are, where the openings are, where the closets are, where the locks on the doors are, so it's almost impossible [for me to find my way]. So philosophically, we go another way, you know? "So and so is the greatest." This was all hog-wash to us. You kind of grow up with it . . .

**KG:** Well, will you therefore rule out personal choice?

**MR:** Personal choice?

**KG:** Personal preference, let's say. Like we eat a lot of foods, different kind of foods. Do you have a preference for one or two particular kinds of food?

**MR:** I've been grazin' my head off! . . . I know that I shouldn't eat certain things. My taste buds betray that. [*laughs*] But I understand what you mean. I have personal choices to make. I try to look for the kind of personal choices that exemplify the things that I was taught and that I learned from just observing others who had made it in drums. My personal choice would be to say, "Oh, this man did something that really fit with the occasion instrumentally." What he did may not have been as spectacular as somebody else, but I can see from the reaction of the masses that it [had an effect]. No, a man can make a personal choice. [For example, I could say] I like Ella Fitzgerald better than I like Billie Holiday, but I don't make that kind of personal choice. I like Billie Holiday as *well as* I like Ella Fitzgerald because I get two beautiful things.

**KG:** That [shows] very good training.

**MR:** I get something from both of them . . .

**KG:** But I think that comes from self-training again. Because, you know if you don't train yourself like that, [taste and performance] tends to be average. Your [education] was a very detailed thing. You trained yourself to look at the world, and things in the world, and [to see] how things have moved. You trained yourself to take them as they come—cool-like or cool level—which is very good. I think you came to be this way by training, self-training. Would

you say that? To be so coolly and calmly aware of what you're saying comes from self-training. Because most of us just turn out to be robots. . . . It seems like you have sat down and thought and trained yourself to be positive, which is very good. The way you talk, the way you think, the way you do your things as I've known you over the years and more so since you've been here. It's not average. It's not average American. It's not average Afro-American.

**MR:** Why do you say that? . . . This whole attitude about [having to choose] a "best" is not an African Americanism! It doesn't come out of the black experience in America. That comes out of the white experience and has something to do with values and stained [?] values. If a person can say that you are the greatest, they also have license to say, "Well, you've lost your touch."

**KG:** Of course.

**MR:** Right? And be justified in doing that?

**KG:** Yes.

**MR:** We've never been really like that. We've never looked at people, like, you know, "Sidney Catlett, oh my goodness! Joe Jones, whew! Chick Webb, ugh!" There was always a sense of pride that there's so many of us doing something. We've had to stick together over the years. You know it's an interesting thing that I've noticed in my travels, and this is something that's a personal observation of mine when you were talking about preference. In any place I've been in, from the Far East and the Middle East, I've spent a lot of time really getting into these societies. I've gone back, you know, three, four, five, six, seven, in some instances maybe I've been in these areas twenty, forty times, and there's one thing about the United States. In order for us to survive we have had to erase all past problems and whatever systems that were devised to separate people. Whose identity was that? We were not white. You understand what I'm saying?

**KG:** Uh huh. Sure.

**MR:** We found ourselves, you know, hidden. It wasn't a matter of cutting across tribal lines or class lines. Of all the things that came out of America, to me that is one of the most positive things. When I go to the Far East to Japan, there is a caste/class, almost a tribal thing. Here they call it tribalism. In Japan they call it a class/caste system. In Europe of course [national divisions and even divisions within countries, like France] prevail. . . . So I'd say sometimes I get back home and I see so much going on within a society of the same people that it's amazing. It amazes me sometimes to hear a

Ghanaian say something negative about another Ghanaian and I find out, you know, as subtly as I possibly can, just by maybe listening, asking a question why? And it comes out: tribal. I'm always kind of amazed because that does not exist in the States. [In the U.S.] everybody's back was against the wall, and I think that might be one of the reasons why everybody does [seem to] have a chance . . .

**KG:** Of course.

**MR:** To reach that . . .

**KG:** . . . whatever level he's capable of.

**MR:** Sometimes the society and circumstances don't enable [someone] to go to the same height that you have gotten in music and in life. But nevertheless because this individual here didn't and he's a black man and he's in the United States of America you can't cast a downward eye on him, because there might be a lot of extenuating circumstances.

**KG:** No, I think it's wrong to do that. . . . You've got to experience whatever the other man experienced in order to talk with authority.

**MR:** Right.

**KG:** Tell me there, Maxwell, when and where did you meet Prince Charles [Charlie Parker]?

**MR:** I met him in New York at a place called the 78th Street Taproom. It was then considered a downtown spot. You see there was segregation then. There were white clubs downtown where black musicians played shows.

**KG:** Yes.

**MR:** Then there were places uptown, in Harlem in the case of New York. Jay McShann had come to town [with Parker] and came to the 78th Street Taproom where Victor Caroso was the straw boss, a wonderful cornetist. We worked there from 9 p.m. until 3 a.m. seven days a week. Since we worked two jobs, we had an hour to go up to Monroe's Uptown House and play from 4 a.m. until 9. Seven days a week. It was while we were at this particular gig, Victor Caroso came in—he seemed to be always abreast of everything—and at this time “Taps” Miller was the leader of the band. Tap dancers were not musicians, but they had the style and the flair and they knew enough about how to conduct a band. They sounded like James Brown does today but in tap. The musician who wrote the music and kept everything in order was always called the straw boss, but “Taps Miller” was the leader of the band . . .

**KG:** You were the leader of the Jay McShann Band by that time?

**MR:** Oh no, of this little band we had. Jay McShann came into town, like Basie and everybody else, and Charlie Parker was working with Jay McShann. We didn't pay too much attention to the fact that Jay McShann was coming to town you know, except that he had a very loose band. But as soon as Jay arrived the next night, Victor Caroso came up to us and said, "Tomorrow night I'm gonna bring down the greatest musician in the world." Now this is Parker. So Bird came down and played pretty much the same as he played through his life. He was just overwhelming, just as he [always] was.

**KG:** Uh huh.

**MR:** Indescribable.

**KG:** You were on drums?

**MR:** I was. Bird played with our little group—we were all just fresh out of high school! And there was a lot of young people, Bud Powell on piano [for instance]. In the McShann band. So Bird liked us so much that he left Jay McShann and decided to stay in New York, and he joined our little band and we began to work together. He later naturally went with Earl Hines, and then me and Dizzy both went with Billy Eckstine, and then we came and formed the band which moved downtown to Fifty-second Street. Of course the war and taxes prohibited [large] dance bands. So small groups became the dominant thing. That's where bebop so-called evolved. Which is another history altogether. But that's my first experience with Bird. From that point on Bird was always very generous, as Dizzy and everybody else is, giving you what they have in the music freely. We'd say, "How do you do this?" or "What was that you did?" and it was always explained to a brother. Your only obligation was that you had to grasp it fast.

**KG:** That's right.

**MR:** It would be explained to you once or twice. If you didn't get it the first or the second time then you [had to] go ask somebody else about it.

**KG:** That's right.

**MR:** That's the way it was. So it taught you a lot of things, to really listen and pay attention—carefully, at all times.

**KG:** Can you remember offhand, as a matter of history, what number he played with you that night?

**MR:** Well he played some standard things, "I Got Rhythm" and "Cherokee."

**KG:** Oh, yes.

**MR:** Ya! He played some blues changes with us [too].

**KG:** How did you come to develop your fluid style of drumming?

**MR:** Well, I'll tell you, I didn't know that I was doing anything wrong by just diligently plodding along, trying to develop the African American technique and approach toward playing multiple percussion instruments. (Multiple percussion means when you use both feet and hands on cymbals and snares, and include tom-toms, bass drums and so forth.) But I became aware of it, when I was playing—just jamming. We used to do a lot of jamming . . . [*long break in tape*]

I would like to make my point by letting you know that I'm doing much writing. So that if you say to me, "Max, what about such and such?", I have time to give you an answer with some historical facts. The frame of reference is an African American frame of reference, not any other frame of reference. Sometimes you have to search. I mean, I know I may have an idea, but I have to call someone who [really knows the facts] and can say, "Ah! That's how it really happened." Then I can send an answer—bam bam bam—off to you. We have to do that collectively so we can set the record straight. . . . You know when an African man walks up to an African American or vice versa, they look at each other as if they are from two . . .

**KG:** . . . different worlds.

**MR:** As if they really are! I mean both may have an elitist attitude or one may have one toward the other no matter where that is. You know? "Oh man, I went to a village up in the North and it was really crammed and you know that is disgusting." Or the African who says, "Oh, I saw a lot of black people in Harlem."

**KG:** [*laughs*]

**MR:** You know what I'm saying?

**KG:** Yes!

**MR:** That kind of attitude is always disturbing.

**KG:** I want to rekindle our little conversation we started a while back. You are planning a tour of a sort for us, for you and me, our sounds in America. Could you give me, for historical purposes, an idea of what this tour is going to be like. What do you think, primarily, is going to be its use?

**MR:** Well, first, physically, we would arrange tours wherever possible. Concert halls for the masses of the people and [at] colleges for students. We

could also add to that lecture-demonstrations which [ought] not happen at the time of the concert, because most times that's exhausting. . . . The next day then you do a lecture-demonstration. Then you do another concert. So there could be a series of concerts for the general public, for college people and also lecture-demonstrations for elementary school kids, if you will, on up. Or to people who are interested in the music, professionals, teachers and [so on]. [*Roach explains his tour idea to alternate concerts and public school lecture-demonstrations on successive days.*]

**KG:** How did you come by this idea?

**MR:** I came by this idea years ago. I've always had a great deal of respect for your conception even though it didn't come off at that time [in the 1950s] in the States. . . . You are a revolutionary—although I hate to use the word revolutionary because it sounds like a revolver. But you *are* revolutionary in the sense that you were talking about cross-fertilization at a time when all the powers that be found it easier to control everything by dividing people.

**KG:** Of course.

**MR:** So you were talking about that [then] only on the musical level. [Marcus] Garvey was talking about it socially, politically, and economically. Yours was something of the same thing in a cultural spirit. I envision that you will fit in well with the African American musical situation. You would also bring, now that you've been back here for seventeen years, all of the experiences that you've come home to and begun to recognize yourself.

How vitally important this all is—becoming an “influence” and what this means. You have seen the affinity, the hookup [between Africa and America]. This is why you embraced the music [in the States] even though you came by it through the front door. The white door that is. You came to it by the VIP entrance.

**KG:** But I didn't. Goddamn it!

**MR:** [*laughing*] Well, but in that context . . .

**KG:** You came through the front door, Maxwell. I didn't come through the front door! The front door was shut to my color, man. It was shut to my person.

**MR:** No, no, no, it wasn't. You were exposed to all the white so-called jazz people [in Ghana]. That was [what I meant by] the front door. You weren't exposed to the back door until you got to the States.

**KG:** No, I wouldn't say that either, man . . .

**MR:** Okay. I'm just saying I know that you heard everybody because you came to the States looking for us. You came to the States and plunked yourself right down into Harlem. I know that. But I'm saying—and you don't have to believe this argument—when you said earlier we heard Gene Krupa and Benny Goodman before we heard Duke or whoever, that's what I meant by the front door, the VIP entrance.

**KG:** Yes, yes.

**MR:** So we understand all that. But I think it's important that you do come back to the States because of what you have developed with me, being here with you these two weeks. You have so graciously opened your doors, your mind, your talent, your art, and the culture of your people. I mean, you just made sure that . . .

**KG:** . . . it was all heard?

**MR:** Right. To see how it all culminates in what you are doing on the instrument and musically is something that I think we are ready for in the United States. In fact, you are ready too in a sense. You've developed as we have developed.

**KG:** Ah ha!

**MR:** A lot of things have happened in the past seventeen years that will make it feasible for [a collaboration] to happen. Secondly, because of your experience as a producer, to use that experience [in a specific way], maybe with the cooperative record company we have started in the States.<sup>13</sup> That means that you will have to engage yourself and use your experience, because you have been producing all along here. You will be the person who will say, "Okay, we will bring African culture and use African instruments out and around the world like the Europeans have done with their string instruments . . . rooms full of violins everywhere." Why is it that I can't go to the University of Massachusetts and see a room full of *gyil* and percussion, a solid percussion core?<sup>14</sup> This is something I think we are bound to do, and the only way to do it is to make a start with people like you.

**KG:** Yes, we should write our own story.

**MR:** Very good! Thirdly, I think it is historically important to reveal the fact that you have written what I would consider one of the first scholarly and critical books on African American music by an African. You're still working in that area. This is valid because we are doing the same thing in the States. You should come there, look and reevaluate as we are coming over here to look and reevaluate. You see? It's time, as you just said, to set the record straight.

**KG:** Uh huh.

**MR:** I think that is all very important.

**KG:** Don't you think the rhythm section as represented by the normal percussion system in Afro-American music has come a long way from keeping time to playing a chorus or accompanying chorus by itself?

**MR:** That is another thing that came out of your being exposed through the front door first. Prior to the fame of Benny Goodman and Paul Whiteman and Dave Brubeck, whites believed that the drums should be felt and not heard. When there were no cymbals, Baby Dodds and Baby Lovett played like this. [*Roach beats out a pattern*] They still play like that in Kansas City. There were no *chigga chang, chigga chang, chigga, chang*.<sup>15</sup> That was something altogether different. Whites couldn't understand that at all. When you bring that up, you always tune me into what a white concept of the music is, not what a black concept of the music is. You see?

**KG:** I agree. So would you say that the vitality of the rhythm section was there right from the start?

**MR:** You should have heard Chick Webb!

**KG:** Well I've got a few records . . .

**MR:** No, that's not indicative. In those days they had white engineers. The first thing they'd say [in a recording session] is the drums are too loud. "Muffle them, cover them. The microphone, the [mechanism], can't stand it. We are getting distortion." So [inaudible percussion on early recording] doesn't mean anything. But if I put you in a small room and put a man like Chick Webb in there—whose bass drum sounded *bum bum bum bum bum bum*. [Imagine] this for hours, just rattling all over the place. No, you never hear that on records!

**KG:** Of course not, of course not.

**MR:** You have to witness that.

**KG:** So that form has more or less then re-asserted itself as up to date. I'm talking about the consistent, flowing, ever moving style of Chick Webb.

**MR:** Yeah. When you came to the States, when we sang *chik chik chik a chik a chik*, you heard Brownie [Clifford Brown] and [Teddy] Wilson, and we had Philly Joe [Jones] ringing all over the place constantly. That never reflected itself in records at all because on records the drums are always, as you know, subjugated to some corner area. Even if you were Chick Webb or Guy Warren. You know your records. You really are a person who loves the instru-

ment and understood what you were doing. The quality of the recorded instrument was nothing like what I hear you sound like in person.

**KG:** Of course.

**MR:** Of course the engineers were white, and they didn't understand a damn thing you were doing down there at Victor or at Decca. You were trying to adjust to that sound setting. They were saying, "What we gonna do with that sound? Drummer is a leader and [he's] written all the music?"

We are going to have to look at occasions and situations, and how it was that everybody came to believe what they believe. [For example,] Basie was always looking for just a *chan chan chan* [a ride cymbal sound], with elasticity. When you heard Basie's band in public, Jo Jones danced all over the place. They settled down to this little crap—this *chan chan chan*—only when they got to the studio where John Hammond said, "Oh, listen. Too much drums and too much of breaking this, that, and the other." Cecil Payne used to take air shots, like old time recording artists took air shots.

**KG:** I have a few of those historic things too, you know.

**MR:** Jones was dancing all over the place because of the person he was. But when they made the records he kicked the rhythm section lightly. Everybody cooled down. That was it you know? So I'm thinking that we have a lot of misinformation on both sides of the ocean.

**KG:** And all these things will have to be cleared up and rewritten.

**MR:** Right. That is a fair point. You put it very well, and that is why I think you should come to the States. Now we should sit down.

**KG:** I feel extremely lucky that you've chosen me for this work.

**MR:** If there is anybody else, I'll get them. Because, believe me, you are a difficult man to deal with!

**KG:** Ah hah, hah [*continues to laugh*]

**MR:** I mean you are opinionated, you're biased, you're egoistic, and even elitist, and you're a nationalist. A Black Nationalist, a Black Nationalist!

**KG:** Yes, yes, yes.

**MR:** You understand what I'm saying? You are a militant; with all that shit, you are a militant black. That's what you are and I have evidence of it. Suzie, that sweetheart of yours, says so. You are a militant black: not a black militant, a militant black.

**KG:** What is that? I'm in the military?! I'm your black military brother? [*Roach laughs*] We are two of the same feather you know?

**MR:** I think the climate is right for us to go on an adventure like this.

**KG:** Already I see a little bit of fusion being imported by His Grace [The-lonious Monk]—taking after African musicians who play the music instinctively without going out of the way to explain it.

**MR:** I know.

**KG:** I think we can take these worlds together to do something for Mother Africa, and we will do it very well. The gods in Africa will be blessing us.

**MR:** Also for the indigenous brothers and sisters of Africa, those of us who have been displaced for the last five or six hundred years; something has to be done for our soul. It is as if Africa herself were foreseeing [far-seeing?] and reaching her tentacles in every area for protection. Because that's the way the world is today, you know. Africa has satellites in the United States of America, Africa has a satellite in Cuba, Africa has satellites in South America. [*Ghanaba assents*] That's what is going on!

*[A long political digression has been omitted here]*

**KG:** Exactly. . . I've taken a lot of your time and I think we will break it up now. Thank you immensely, Maxwell Lemuel Roach of Newland, North Carolina. I thank you very much. You have something else to say?

**MR:** Well, I just want to thank all the people here. They are so kind and have opened up their hearts to me. I want to extend an invitation for all of you to visit us over there. I'm talking about other people who may hear this; [they should] come over. We want to be as hospitable although we don't own as much land as you folks over here do—and I say that out of total jealousy and envy, because we don't. But we will do the best we can to show you a side of the African who has been away from his home for four or five hundred years. I think you will feel at home.

**KG:** Yes, yes, I'll take you up on that. Okay.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> My field work in Ghana was funded with grants from the Graduate Council on the Humanities and the Office of Diversity's Implementation of Multicultural Perspectives and Approaches in Research and Teaching Award, both at the University of Colorado Boulder. My deepest appreciation to Kevin Richey (now with Leo Burnett, Chicago) for transcribing three-quarters of the conversation and Damani Phillips (a recent doctoral graduate of the University of Colorado and now professor of jazz at Grinnell College, Iowa) for reading the transcription and making valu-

able comments. I converted the tape from analog to digital sound file and then burned a CD copy. Damani Phillips used the WavePad software by NCH Swift Sound to upgrade and boost the sound quality.

<sup>2</sup> The above title was later re-titled “Beyond Categories” and reprinted in *Keeping Time*, a collection of essays and interviews edited by Robert Walser (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Alisa White, “‘We Insist! Freedom Now’: Max Roach’s Transatlantic Civil Rights Imperative,” *Jazz Educators’ Journal* (2007) gives a comprehensive analysis of the work.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed biography, refer to Ghanaba’s autobiography, *I Have a Story to Tell* (Accra: Guinea Press, 1966). Royal Hartigan’s article, “Ghanaba and the Heritage of African Jazz,” in the *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 9 (1997–98): 145–164, goes beyond what I present here. There is a brief entry on Ghanaba in the *Encyclopedia of Jazz* (ed. Leonard Feather; New York: Horizon Press, 1958, 1960), and in *ASCAP Autobiographical Dictionary* (ASCAP, 1966)

<sup>5</sup> Orlando Julius was originally scheduled to be part of the line up but he pulled out at the last minute due to what has been described as a misunderstanding between him and the producers.

<sup>6</sup> See Kwasi Ampene, s.v. “Mensah, E. T.” in the *New Encyclopedia of Africa*, ed. John Middleton (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2008), 534–536.

<sup>7</sup> His first trip to the United States was with the Office of Strategic Services, a specialized department of the U.S. Army during World War II.

<sup>8</sup> See Royal Hartigan, “Ghanaba and the Heritage,” p. 147 for the list of drums.

<sup>9</sup> In 2003, Randy Weston performed with Ghanaba at the Ghana National Theatre.

<sup>10</sup> Ghanaba’s original title on the *Africa Speaks* LP is “Eyi Wala Dong” (My Thanks to God).

<sup>11</sup> Ghanaba is featured in the 1994 movie *Sankofa*, by the Ethiopian film director Haile Gerima. He was in Washington, D.C., and New York in the same year during the premiere of the movie in the United States.

<sup>12</sup> For Roach and many other jazz musicians, it is considered undesirable to align yourself with the style or music of any one particular musician. In their view, to do this would promote too much mindless imitation and enhance the likelihood of a musician becoming a carbon copy of his or her idol instead of actively pursuing one’s own, individual style and musical voice.

<sup>13</sup> Roach is referring to Ghanaba’s label, Safari Records and Tapes, and Debut Records, which Roach co-founded with Charles Mingus.

<sup>14</sup> *Gyil* refers to the Lobi xylophone in Northwestern Ghana.

<sup>15</sup> A ride cymbal pattern in swung bebop.

Thomas Riis

## American Music: Three Interviews

Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.

Richard Crawford

Carol Oja



Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., born in 1937 in Tallahassee, Florida, was trained as a music educator and earned a bachelor of science degree from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in 1957. He taught at the Smith-Brown High School in Arcadia, Florida, as its band director between 1957 and 1962, and then attended Southern Illinois University, where he earned both a master's degree (1965) and a doctorate (1969). He taught courses in the undergraduate honors program, graduate courses in musical aesthetics, and applied percussion at Southern Illinois until 1978, when he was appointed director of the Institute for Studies in Black Music at Fisk University. In 1983 he became the founding director of the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College, Chicago, a post he held between 1983 and 1990 and from 1993 until his retirement in 2002. From 1990 to 1993, he served as an academic dean at Columbia College and as interim vice president of academic affairs and provost at the same institution between 1999 and 2001.

While at CBMR Floyd unearthed an extraordinary amount of all but forgotten black music, amassed an impressive archival collection, edited the *Black Music Research Journal* and *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interartistic Inquiry*, and served as artistic director of the Black Music Repertory Ensemble. The author of more than a dozen major articles and monographs, he has received numerous awards and grants and the Society for American Music's Irving Lowens Award for his book *The Power of Black Music* (New York, 1995).

# Writing and Making Black Music History: An Interview with Samuel Floyd

**Tom Riis:** You grew up in Florida, I think. What was the first music you remember?

**Samuel Floyd:** The first music I remember, believe it or not, was an old 78 [RPM disc], with Mario Lanza singing an Italian aria. It was a recording that my father had left in the house while he was on a tour, singing. It didn't inspire me very much. [*audience laughter*] But that was the first instance. That's aside from people singing around the house—my father was a singer, my mother sang and she played the piano.

**TR:** And your siblings?

**SF:** My brother was rather resistant. He wouldn't take piano. I had started playing piano when I was five years old, when I'd had my first lessons. My brother waited until he got into junior high school to pick up the saxophone. And it so happened that he had perfect pitch—and I didn't. He didn't go into music—and I did.

**TR:** What was your main instrument?

**SF:** My main instrument—well, it depended. When my mother was in the house it was the piano. When she wasn't in the house, it was first drums, then all the percussion instruments. Later on I took up trumpet, in high school, but only briefly. I couldn't play it well and would have hated to have my schoolmates laugh at me.

**TR:** You went on to college in music education?

**SF:** Yes, and I never had a favorite anything. I liked what I was doing when I was doing it, and I liked continuing to do it until I couldn't do it anymore because I was doing too much.

**TR:** Do you still play at all?

**SF:** No. I promised myself that I was going to start playing again when I retired. But that's not working out.

**TR:** Who are your heroes? Personal, musical, intellectual [heroes]?

**SF:** Well, like I said, I don't think I have a favorite anything, but there were two people who came closest to being an influence on me: one was my college band director, who stressed excellence in everything; the other was the philosopher John Dewey.

**TR:** Talk a little more about that, for those students here who aren't up on their Dewey.

**SF:** Well, I encountered Dewey by the way of *Art as Experience*, his book on aesthetics. I had been studying philosophy and I had been looking at a lot of different people in the field of aesthetics. Dewey's work rang powerfully with me. It had an immediacy for me, and I think I was taken by a kind of big-inclusion idea in his work.

An example would be his philosophy of religion. Dewey didn't support religion as such. He believed in the religious, but he rejected denominations. The fact that he would embrace everybody, and not necessarily focus on this or that denomination rang a bell with me. It still does, especially with respect to the Caribbean where you've got all these different religions from all these different places, and some of them conflict, and most of them—almost all of them—conflict with Christianity. But with Dewey as a guide, it's all there, because he deals with the religious experience rather than particular religious denominations. I've also found that in music, despite the fact that Dewey didn't talk about popular music at all—almost everything he said had to do with “fine art”—you could still look at Dewey and presume that his ideas apply to popular music also.

**TR:** What would you consider to be high points, turning points, or “light bulb moments” in your time—both before and after going to CBMR? You spent quite a while teaching in Southern Illinois, right? And you were at Fisk for a few years? And Florida A & M?

**SF:** Well, I don't remember any real light bulbs that had any kind of lasting impact, until John Dewey. The next one was in 1970, when Eileen Southern's book, *The Music of Black Americans*, was published. At the time I was teaching a graduate course in music aesthetics and some other things also. When that book came out, I wanted to do two things: first, I wanted to teach a class in black music, and I started looking for material. I knew I couldn't use the

book; it's a magnificent tome but I didn't feel I could use it as a text. So what I wanted to do then was to start with the music itself and assign readings from that book, that kind of thing. But what I found was that the [works] she was talking about were not in print—many of them not accessible. And recordings weren't available either. So I said, I've got to find some of this stuff.

At the time, somehow, perhaps it was serendipity, I ran across an announcement of a fellowship at the Newberry Library [in Chicago]. I also learned around that same time that the Newberry Library had recently acquired a sheet music collection of American music, 84,000 pieces. I applied to the Newberry Library for a fellowship to go through that collection and try to find as many pieces as I could about black music, or by black composers. I touched every one of those 84,000 pieces of sheet music, and I had some enormous experiences going through it. But what I ended up with was an article called "Black Music in the Driscoll Collection." (The full name of the collection is the J. Francis Driscoll Collection of American Sheet Music.) I wrote that article and had it published.

Then, after finding so much there, I wanted to look around in other places. So I applied to the NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] and got a grant that allowed me to visit various collections. The biggest find, of course, was at the Library of Congress, in the Music Division. There I discovered something uncatalogued anywhere else, called the Whittlesey file. Wayne Shirley, the music librarian, said, "Maybe you want to look at this." I thought nobody had ever cared about black composers, except Eileen Southern. But here was a database, we would call it today, where Mr. [Walter Rose] Whittlesey, who had been a music librarian there, had kept all this information about black music and musicians in a drawer of file cards. Eventually I found several collections in many locations.

The next thing I wanted to do, though, was hear how it all sounded. So I started using graduate students with recitals to play this music. That wasn't enough—I needed more players. I had this grant that allowed me to do many things that I wanted to do. (It was a lot of money at that time. I was intending to publish a huge anthology—but that's another story.) But by 1977 at an AMS [American Musicological Society] meeting in Washington, D.C., having published an article in Eileen Southern's journal *The Black Perspective in Music* and about four or five pieces since the Newberry article, I met Dr. Southern and I was telling her how frustrating it was to be doing all this work and how it had taken me away from planning the course I wanted to teach. I'd also decided that I wanted to write a book—a different kind of book on

black music, one that would be short enough for people to use in the classroom. I couldn't do either one; I was too busy with the collections, and with the performances. She said to me at that time, "Well, I think you need to institutionalize this; this is the only way you're going to get it all done." I resisted her suggestion and tried my best to do what I could. But it got to the point, [with] all this stuff I was collecting, where it was just impossible *not* to follow her advice. So I decided that I would start a research center.

**TR:** You started in Chicago?

**SF:** What happened after I got that grant and was doing a lot with it, was that the person who was in charge of development—the development director who had helped me prepare my first big proposal for that grant—was on a committee to approve research programs. He suggested that I make a proposal for a research center at Southern Illinois University. I did prepare it, and it was approved by the institution. Then the next place it had to go was to the state board of higher education. The board approved it—but with no funding.

**TR:** That feels very familiar.

**SF:** So I figured I had to try to find some money, and the first thing I wanted to do was put together a good board that could help me raise money. In the process of putting that board together one of the people that I asked to do this was the president of Fisk University. He said, "Well, why do you want to do it [at Southern Illinois]? Look at Fisk's tradition." Anyway, [I decided to go there] because of that invitation, and because my father had been a Jubilee Singer, and because at the time I was living in a neighborhood that was almost all white, and my children hadn't seen any black intellectuals. There was another thing, too—Fisk offered free tuition.

While I was there Fisk ran into excruciatingly hard times money-wise. It was awful, and I felt pretty bad about it because I had just raised some money to start a journal. I had money for a secretary—grant money, you know—and I started feeling very funny. I lived very close to the campus, and one morning I was headed toward my office. The president lived on campus also, just beyond the library where my office was. There was this long line of people, and I wondered what they were doing. I got closer and closer, and I saw that each one of them had a white towel on their arms. As I got closer, I saw that they had a bar of soap in their right hand. And I asked one of the people, "What is going on?" and he said to me, "We want to use the president's shower because there's no hot water in the dorms." At that moment I said, "I've got to go." Because I did feel very strange; people knew I was starting

up a new journal and they didn't care where the money came from, but I just didn't want to stick around.

In the meantime, I was asked to come to Chicago to serve on a committee. The mayor at the time was a woman whose name was Jane Byrne, and she was planning an international arts festival. She wanted me to serve on the committee, so I agreed and I went to Chicago. I was to be there all summer, and when I got there they had found an office for me, in a little upstart college called Columbia College.

I went there, and I worked at my desk when we weren't having committee meetings elsewhere and I got to know the president of Columbia College. I had also been asked to come back to Southern Illinois University, but this time in an administrative position. The same person who had helped me to get the grant, and who had encouraged me to send the proposal for the research center wanted me to come back there. So I was going to do that, because he told me also that if I did so, it would be easy to have the Center [for Black Music Research] there.

But I had gotten to know the president of Columbia College pretty well, and while I had no intention of going there at first, I finally realized two things: one, that Chicago was a place where I could do what no other city would allow me to do, and, two, this was a man that I trusted. There were several reasons that I trusted him. This will sound funny, but he was extremely down to earth and he liked to talk about intellectual matters all the time, especially after a few drinks. At lunch with him, I had to wait before I started eating—he put three martinis down and I didn't drink. But, anyway, he was a lively man with a lot of different experiences. He had been a bodyguard for Paul Robeson in the 1940s and '50s. Mike, the president, was a Russian Jew who was very unorthodox, but he prided himself in supporting Jewish causes and African American causes. I felt that [with] someone who had that kind of cultural interest it could work out. So I agreed. Now, he said, "I can hire you, but we don't have any money for anything else." He said, "But every time you get a grant, I will increase your operational budget." I found that to be interesting, because most people say you go out and get money, and we will *reduce* your operating cost. This was just the opposite. And so I went there. The first year in Chicago I got a grant for \$20,000 and a secretary along with it. Then I got another grant, and I was able to hire another person. Over the years, as grant money came in, I ended up with an eleven person staff and 7,500 square feet of space by the mid 1990s because of that formula. I couldn't have done this at a public institution, and I couldn't have done it, I guess, probably anywhere else. To show you the genius of this man: when I

went there the college had three buildings, and about 3,000 students. Now, there are 12,000 students and twenty-one buildings in downtown Chicago, in the south Loop, because of the way he handled the building of that institution. So anyway, that's what happened.

**TR:** That's phenomenal. I had heard about your relationship with the president, but I hadn't known the details. That's really beautiful. Maybe this is a good time to open up for audience questions.

**Audience member:** Were there other attractive features about Chicago that drew you to Columbia College?

**SF:** Yeah, there were some black millionaires there, and there weren't any in the other towns, and corporations run by African Americans. And then there were corporations run by European Americans as well. There were a lot of places I could go to try to get money to support this effort. That [made the city attractive], coupled with the fact that every single black music genre ended up going through Chicago and having an impact, so that the musical aspect and cultural aspect were also paramount. This could not have happened anyplace else.

**William Kearns:** How did you balance everything that you've done—as a scholar, writer, and grant writer?

**SF:** I guess one reason I could do it was the fact that I liked everything I was doing. I didn't feel like I had a job—it was a playpen. Every morning I wanted to get up and get to it. I stole time. I'd be at my desk and I'd have an idea, and I'd open up my computer and I would put some stuff in it. I made a habit of getting up early every morning and going straight to my computer. If I didn't have an idea about what I wanted to write, I would make up something. But I would always write at least one sentence, or one paragraph. I didn't have time to sit down and start writing. Later I started to pay more attention, and because my staff was growing I could get away and do some writing.

Then I got a fellowship to spend some time at the University of Michigan in the Humanities Institute. So I was able to spend time writing there. After that, (as I was telling Tom earlier today) I had spent a lot of time in the Caribbean writing. My first visit there was in 1976 and I've gone back every year since—sometimes several times. I could get away from everything, and just sit down and put something on paper. I wrote an article about music in the Caribbean at that time—that was back probably in the late seventies or early eighties—and I would come up with something else and then I would write it. I don't know how I did it. It just happened. I managed to get grants [for projects] like the *International Dictionary of Black Composers*. Then I had staff to help. I

didn't do nearly as much as I wanted to do, and that's one of the reasons I finally retired—so I could get some writing done. But there's no secret there. I don't know how [I did it].

**Elissa Guralnick:** What's your opinion on Richard Powers' novel, *The Time of Our Singing*? Have you read it?

**SF:** Oh yeah, but it's been a long time since I read it. I tried to read his other book too, but I couldn't wrestle with it. All that I remember is that it was a wonderful read.

**Laurie Sampsel:** Do you have a favorite collection or a favorite story about the collections at the CBMR?

**SF:** Yes, there was a favorite collection. I'll have to go back to the first time I went to the Caribbean in 1976. The reason I went, the first time, is that I was doing some research and I ran into a note in the *Indianapolis Freeman* that claimed Alton Augustus Adams was the first black bandmaster in the United States Navy in 1917. I didn't believe it. Everything that I knew about blacks in the Navy, period, was that blacks could serve only as mess attendants and stewards, and nothing else. So I just put it aside. But then later I was in New York City and I was looking at another newspaper and I saw the same thing. I looked everywhere else, and I could find nothing about this man at all. I mean nothing. It said: the first black bandmaster in the United States in 1917 [was from] St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. So I called the Virgin Islands, I called the public library and asked them if they had ever heard of a bandmaster in the United States Navy with that name. So the woman said, "Just a minute, sir," and came back a few seconds later and said, "Here's his phone number." [laughter] The next day I was on an airplane.

I got there—he told me how to get to his home—and I was walking up the slope to the entrance. It was a big old Danish home; the Danes used to own the islands. He was standing out on a kind of deck. When he saw me, he came to attention and saluted. So I came up and did something like that [salutes]. He said, "Come on up," and so I went in. When I first walked into the living room there were photographs of W.E.B. Dubois, Philippa Schuyler, John Philip Sousa, W.C. Handy—all these people. Autographed photographs this man had. That was my first shock, to see that he knew all these famous African Americans. I interviewed him all day, and all day the next day. He kept going back into a room to pull out more stuff to show me.

By the way, I had also checked Navy records—found nothing. Absolutely nothing. He started to bring out newspaper clippings of his activities. He brought out papers about his induction into the Navy, and pictures of the

passing of the Virgin Islands from the Danes to the United States. And he told me stories as he was doing this. This man kept everything in duplicate and triplicate! Now they didn't have modern copying machines back then, so you know every time an advance was made he made some more copies. I called the United States Navy—they had never heard of him. I called the United States Navy Music School and they said, "Who?" And I said, "Yeah, he was the first black bandmaster in the United States Navy"—and there was silence. I said, "Have you ever played that march, the 'Spirit of the United States Navy?'" The man on the telephone said, "Sure we play it all the time." I said, "He wrote that march." And there was another silence.

Adams had a little band, called the Adams' Juvenile Band, when the United States took over the Islands. In 1909 he started that band made up of kids. In 1917, when he was inducted into the Navy, those kids were now grown men. Adams had been taking correspondence courses, and he had been assigned to transcribe Sousa marches and all kinds of other stuff. That's the way he learned to play. The wife of one of the Navy officers heard the band playing, so she went and got her husband, and he heard it. He went to the admiral, and then the admiral heard it. He said, "We've got to induct this great band into the Navy." And he did.

By 1921, that band was known as the best band in the United States Navy. This guy had all these newspaper clippings, all kinds of stuff, coming from strange places. He had met Sousa, and he'd met Edwin Franko Goldman. In 1927 Sousa had recommended Adams to do a column in *Jacob's Band Monthly*, a magazine distributed to professional bands and college bands. So Adams was writing for that publication. Each one of the column writers had his picture at the head of his column, except Adams. Everybody was reading his stuff, and they liked it, so they decided to recommend him for induction into the United States Navy. They put his name up and he was turned down. There is a letter in the Adams collection from Goldman, telling Adams that he had been "blackballed by the southern contingent." Goldman and Sousa were ready to put him up again, but he asked them not to. He didn't want to be involved.

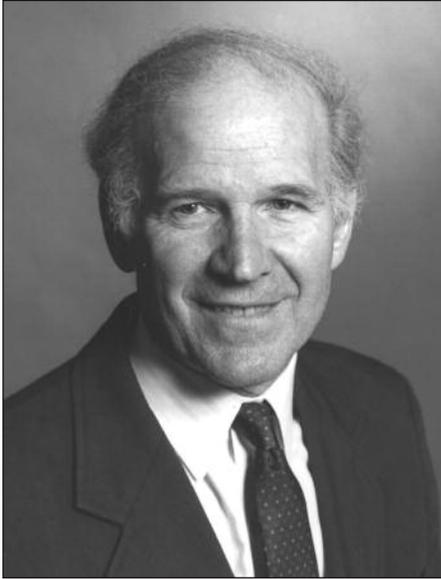
The reason I'm so familiar with all this is because in 1980 I brought Mr. Adams to Fisk University to get an honorary degree. By that time I had sent the Navy enough material that they invited him to come and conduct their band. I asked Mr. Adams about giving his collection to Fisk, but he had already promised it to the University of Arizona. I didn't know why, but that's what had happened. So I forgot about it. Then, I think it was 1990, I was in the Caribbean again and I stopped by his son's firm—he's an engineer. We

talked a little bit, and when I got ready to go he said, "Wait a minute, what are we going to do about my father's collection?" I said, "What do you mean? I thought it was at Arizona." He said, "No way." I said, "I'll tell you what we're going to do with it." [*laughter*] Well, it's in Chicago now, after having been sent straight to Michigan to this real deep-freeze place to kill all the larvae and bugs that were in the collection. It took three years to process it all, but it's now in shape.

**TR:** Thank you, Sam, and thank you in the audience for joining us this afternoon.

### **Major Publications of Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.**

- 1983 *Black Music in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Reference and Research Materials*. (Millwood, NY)
- 1987 *Black Music Biography: An Annotated Bibliography* (White Plains, NY)
- 1990 *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York), edited by Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.
- 1992 *New Perspectives in Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern* (Warren, MI), edited by Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., with Josephine Wright.
- 1995 *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York).



Richard Crawford was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1935 and, with the exception of sabbaticals and visiting appointments at Brooklyn College, the University of California, Berkeley, and elsewhere, has spent nearly his entire academic career in association with the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where he earned his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. He began teaching there in 1962 and became a full professor in 1975. He is currently the Hans T. David Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of Musicology, having retired from active teaching in 2002.

As editor-in-chief of the *Music of the United States of America*, Professor Crawford has shaped this monumental 40-volume project since 1993. He is a past-president of the American Musicological Society and in 1999 received the society's highest honor, an honorary membership, which recognizes long-standing members who have made outstanding contributions to the advancement of research in music. He received a prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship early in his career and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

# Discovering American Music: An Interview with Richard Crawford

**Tom Riis:** So what was the first music you remember in your life?

**Richard Crawford:** You know, I can't answer that. I don't think I've ever been asked about it, although it would be a logical thing to be able to say. I think it was tied to my mother. She loved music and sang to me a lot. She also took piano lessons and played. Mom was a creative person who was not afraid to try new things. I think probably Mom playing the piano was the first music I ever heard, but we also had recordings in the house. I remember that early in World War II she wrote a song, a patriotic song, that had a couple of lines in it that said, "We're gonna beat their proverbial pants off. The blow that we throw is not gonna glance off." Somehow that stuck in my mind, and years later, for some reason, I sang it back to her. "You remember THAT?" she said. "I wish I could forget it!" or words to that effect, and we had a moment of mutual understanding. By that time, though, I already knew that Mom was a good sport.

**TR:** Thus began the slippery slope to musicology?

**RC:** Well, you could say the slope was slippery but indirect.

**TR:** Which is actually my next question.

**RC:** Well, I grew up in Detroit. I took piano lessons as a kid and began to play the saxophone, getting lessons through the Detroit Public School system. I got to be a fairly accomplished sax player and by high school was starting to play jazz. But it never occurred to me to get into musicology—I didn't even know there was such a thing as musicology. I went to the University of Michigan as an engineering student, but I got involved in a living unit where they needed a song leader. The guy that was trying to do it just didn't really have a clue, and I said, "I think I can do this," and it turned out I could. I knew what I wanted voices to sound like—I'm not sure why—but I did. So I began

to get a little serious about music and then I found out that there was such a thing as musicology. I was not a good performer and I didn't fancy myself a conductor, and so after getting a degree in music education I started a master's [degree] in musicology and just continued to do that. Sort of found my comfort zone that way.

**TR:** When did you end up on American music, as opposed to Bach or something else?

**RC:** I ended up on American music when my mentor at the University of Michigan, H. Wiley Hitchcock, told me that a library on campus, as part of the University of Michigan library system, had recently acquired the papers of an early American musician by the name of Andrew Law. He was a Connecticut native who lived in the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. He was a tunebook compiler and a singing-school teacher. This collection of papers had about 500 letters in them—some from him, some back and forth with other people—and a huge collection of other documents. I took a look at the stuff and I had no idea what it might add up to, but I thought, "Gee, I'm kind of interested in this." I had no thought of going into American music at the time, but I looked at all this material. I have to say there was a pragmatic aspect to it. I was already a father and I was not anxious to uproot my family and go to Europe to look for the manuscripts of Antonio Lotti (who wrote some fantastic music, I must say). So I started figuring out what I could do with these papers. Eventually I wrote a dissertation based on them, and I just stayed in the field.

**TR:** Your Andrew Law book is very thick. It's actually the book that got me into American music, because I was compiling a bibliography for my senior seminar in music history at Oberlin College in 1972. It was a very attractive book, and I thought, "Oh these Americanists, they do these very cool things."

**RC:** When you thought "these Americanists" who did you think of? I wasn't aware there were very many.

**TR:** I think I'd read an article by Irving Lowens, and I believe I turned up Allen Britton's dissertation on early American tunebooks. There was you and H. Wiley Hitchcock at that point. It was not a big crowd.

**RC:** The ranks were very thin then. I should say that at the time that I got into American music there were three people—distinguished men in their, I'd say, late forties early fifties—who were doing great work in American music. Hitchcock was one, William Austin of Cornell was another, and Charles Hamm at the University of Illinois was a third. Each one of these men had

gotten his degree in a European subject. Hitchcock worked on Marc-Antoine Charpentier, a French composer of the Baroque who wrote Latin oratorios. Hamm did his dissertation on Guillaume Dufay, a Renaissance composer. And Bill Austin did his on twentieth-century rhythmic techniques—twentieth-century composers, mostly European. So they all made their reputations in other fields, but they all were people who realized how wide open a field American music was for musicological research. The idea then was that you won your spurs as a musicologist by working on a European topic and most probably a composer of one kind or another—often an obscure one. The idea was to find someone who hadn't been “done.” The idea was that you keep filling in these gaps in the edifice and that somehow there was an edifice to be built. We musicologists kept “filling in” missing parts of history, but there turned out to be more and more gaps.

**TR:** Since we're talking bibliographically—in a good musicological fashion—your book *William Billings of Boston* was published in 1975. This was the book that, in a way, took a lot of the background that you got from the Law experience and expanded on it. What I see, as I look over what you've done, you've gradually moved into different aspects of American music—and so, given us a sense of what this building might look like in the bigger sense. Billings is, of course, a much more—I think it's fair to say—a more important composer than Andrew Law.

**RC:** William Billings was *the* American composer in the New England, Protestant tradition 200 years ago. I mean he was a really talented composer; as far as we know, [he was] pretty much self-taught. One of the things that attracted me about this early period was the notion that before these composers there had been no native-born Americans who are known to have written notes down on the page and actually composed pieces of music. These were the first people who did it. The question that really got me going on a kind of crusade—no, wrong word—something systematic, was to try to find out and reconstruct the framework within which American musicians found a way to exercise their musicianship.

Now, at that time—and we're talking about the Colonial period and early Federal period, 1750 to 1825, around there—there was a concert life, but it was carried on entirely by Europeans in the United States, mostly people from Great Britain. [Musicians were] coming over and seeing opportunities, economic opportunities, becoming teachers, and doing this kind of thing. There was very little room for native-born Americans, and there was no way for them to get educated in music except through the singing-school movement, which was [where] you learned your fa-so-las, maybe put a few things

down on the page, and compiled a bunch of sacred music and went ahead from there. I got obsessed with bibliography, and I got obsessed with repertory.

I worked for years to try to engage with every single sacred music thematic index of all the pieces that had been published here. Turns out there are about 7,500. I've got to tell you, this would have been a trivial thing if computers had been there, but I did this all by hand, writing down everything. It was absurd in a certain way, but I really did find out every single piece of music that had been published in that era with the idea that, once I knew these things, my mind would have generated a bunch of questions that would be interesting. I didn't necessarily go into it saying, "I'm going to count every last psalm tune ever." I just moved ahead with the faith that, somehow, by doing a complete bibliographic accounting of all this stuff I would learn something—and I did.

I should tell you one more thing—I know some of you [in the audience] are teachers and some, aspiring teachers—I found that the work that you do has to come out of the life that you're living. At the time that I was embarked on this study we had kids in the house. When you have a lot of young children around and you want to do your work, you have to find two things: you have to find a way to be awake when no one else is, and you also have to find a kind of work to do in which you can be interrupted. If I had been trying to write a multidimensional history or something like that I think I would have turned into a curmudgeon. In this kind of work, though, you're cataloguing, you're checking accuracy, or you're creating this bibliographical network. That's stuff that can be done in small spurts. That's why I took on a great deal of, you could say, mindless work, which it was in a certain way. But somehow, it isn't mindless after a while, because your mind is hovering above the whole thing, and it's asking questions and it's seeing patterns. Pretty soon you've got all this stuff that you've recorded down on the page, but then you also have these moments when you think, "Yeah, there's something about this that needs explaining." You see similarities or make comparisons between different kinds of information.

**TR:** That's interesting, Rich, because I've often thought that since we have all these amazing computer applications and, of course, an infinite amount of photocopying capacity—it's exactly that process [you've described] that we're depriving our students of today—or they're depriving themselves of. Because if they see something, they think, "Oh, fine. We just do a quick search and we'll get 20,000 hits and we'll have our data, so to speak, in a self-contained and seemingly orderly place." But, we've just skipped over

on important point. I often thought as I was following a similar process [of obsessive data gathering] during my dissertation, pouring through microfilms, looking for certain items day after day and year after year, that my brain was working faster than my hands.

So we're looking at these things and saying exactly what you just said, "Oh, hm, all of these people were in the same place," or "all of these tunes were made around the same set of circumstances." You see patterns that you wouldn't just see if you were either simply reading the data out of a chronology or, on the other hand, if you were reading someone else's work on it, and because you haven't been touching the sources.

**RC:** I've talked to students about this fairly frequently, and I assure you their remorse at being deprived of this experience is under control. [laughter] Research is a whole different kind of a thing because what [our students] inherit now is a world in which a lot of things have been mediated in this way. Now different questions can be asked.

I have to say, though, that I did get a lot out of sitting day after day in a room in a rare book library where the only sound was the grandfather clock tick-tocking. The sources are in front of you, and they're eighteenth-century sources. The paper feels a certain way and it smells a certain way. You get something of the spirit of the age. I wouldn't want to sentimentalize it, but if I'd been able to take advantage [of modern tools], if the thing that I did on notecards had been converted into electronic formats—as Nicholas Temperley's has in his *Hymn Tune Index*, in four volumes [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997]—I would have been asking different questions.

**TR:** Of course, you did move on to larger questions. What year did you do the Bloch lectures?

**RC:** That was 1985. I was invited to the University of California at Berkeley to give what they called the Ernest Bloch Lectures, a series of six. The title that I chose was "The American Musical Landscape." The first lecture was about historiography, a word I didn't know anything about at the time. It was the history of the writing of American music history. Then I gave one on American music economics because I learned in my study of early American music that a very important question for musicologists at any point is how are these musicians making a living? So I followed that question through. Then I thought I would write an essay on one composer of the eighteenth century, one of the nineteenth century, and one of the twentieth century. I wrote the eighteenth-century one on William Billings, the psalmist. I wrote the nineteenth-century one on a songwriter and music educator named George Frederick Root, who was pretty much a contemporary of Stephen

Foster and a very interesting figure—author of the “Battle Cry of Freedom,” if you happen to know that [*singing* “The Union for ever! Hurrah, boys, hurrah!”]. He was a great Civil War songwriter as well as some other things. The twentieth-century composer that I chose was Duke Ellington. Then, the last lecture was about one piece of music. I chose a song by George Gershwin, “I Got Rhythm,” because I felt that that song sort of gathered into it a whole lot of impulses in twentieth-century music. That was the Bloch lectures. It took a while before they came out [published in 1993] and that turned out to be a good exercise for writing a complete history of American music. Once I read all the old histories of American music, I started thinking “Yeah, there are some things that could be done differently.”

**TR:** And by this time your kids were in college?

**RC:** Two were in high school and two in college or graduated. It was sort of like the baseball player telling the manager, “Look, how’s a guy supposed to think and hit at the same time?” Well, I learned that I could think and write at the same time when I was doing those sorts of things.

**TR:** There is another large volume written by you, along with two co-authors, Allen Britton and Irving Lowens, both of whom are interesting figures in American music history as well. Britton was a music educator, president of the Music Educators’ National Conference from 1960 to 1962 and dean at Michigan’s School of Music from 1971 to 1979. Irving Lowens was a music critic and writer about music history who was also a devoted amateur collector of psalmody. Their combined work, which Rich kind of inherited and then completed, as he said, is called *American Sacred Music Imprints, 1698–1810* and published in 1990. Do you remember when Lowens started on this?

**RC:** 1949 was the beginning of this thing. This is a project started by older people. They got involved in other things, and I was working hot and heavy in bibliography, so I said, “Well, I’ll take this over.” This was about 1968, and Irving said, “Yeah, you ought to be able to finish this in two years.” Well, twenty-two years later the thing came out. Bibliography is one of those things you must get right. The last half percent is what takes up five years because you keep looking for the things that you missed.

**TR:** The “general index” in small print is 70 pages long! This is absolutely extraordinary work. It all speaks to how one gets a hold of every piece of psalm-related material and every piece of published music.

By the way, there’s a very important institution to know about in the middle of this, the American Antiquarian Society, which is located in Worcester,

Massachusetts. [They] have offered study fellowships for years. It is absolutely heaven to work in—to get this kind of context. A wonderful place with a very high level of integrity, and the folks are there to serve you. It's one of these major archival zones. They claim to have, I believe, 90 percent of everything published in America before 1875 and 100 percent of everything before 1825 or something like that. It's pretty close to that.

**RC:** Pretty close. They're very interested in the history of printing. This in one of the things you get involved with when you do work like this.

**TR:** I just happen to have another a volume on the table here, an edition of music called *The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody*. It contains the hundred most famous pieces—is that right? This was done mostly during your Guggenheim Fellowship year, but it started before that?

**RC:** “The one hundred one most frequently printed hymn tunes in America between 1700 and 1810.” It's a quantitative thing that came out of my obsessive collecting. It was published in 1984.

Since we've gone this far let's mention what came after *American Musical Landscape*, when I was asked to write a textbook on American music from the time of European arrival up to the present—that was 1993. I started working on that and did complete a manuscript but it was too big to be a textbook. So then I cut it down and made a textbook out of it. This is a narrative history that tries to interweave stuff together. . . . That was the endpoint of all this specialized work. I tell you, there was an advantage in starting out with the eighteenth century because almost nobody knew anything about the eighteenth century at that time. Having imagined the American musical landscape as being largely devoid of music that could be recovered, I was able to go from—silence would be too strong a word but—near silence to a gradual musicalizing of the nation. So I was able to follow that thread.

**TR:** And this title is *America's Musical Life: A History*, published in 2001. It came in at just under a thousand pages.

So let's move along here beyond your books. We talked over lunch about the decades of musicology and the attitudes toward American music, and I think that would be a good thing to fill in now. You told us about these lone pioneers early on in the sixties and seventies. Where do you see our field, both musicology and the smaller slice of American music research, having gone on since then?

**RC:** Having been around on the musicological scene since the fifties, I wrote down the way I see each of the decades—this will be in real brief terms. In the 1950s and '60s: I think the issue, at least as I took it in as a musicology

student and a young faculty member, was historically important composers and context. That's what the field of musicology in America at that time was, basically—with a strong antiquarian leaning. There was not much interest in recent music. So this meant that Renaissance music and Baroque music particularly were in the forefront of musicological studies. As I said before, the idea was to kind of corral an unknown composer. A lot of emphasis on sources, bibliography, and edition making. That's how I experienced the fifties and sixties. In the 1970s I think the field, at least in the United States, returned to great composers. The kickoff event was the bicentennial of Beethoven in 1970. And suddenly—I remember there was an issue of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* that was all about Beethoven, new scholarship on Beethoven. I remember as a young faculty member thinking, “Gee, they're writing about Beethoven!” I had thought that the great composers had already been “done.” Another thing in the seventies that was a big concern of historical musicologists was performance practice.

The use of historical instruments had really gotten going in Europe during the 1960s, and in the '70s it came over to this country. So the idea of writing about sources caught on—how do you perform a lot of this music (that we had been performing all along) being more observant of historical sources? —I think that was a very vital development at that time. I should also mention something else, another anniversary to go along with Beethoven's: I mean the United States Bicentennial in 1976. This was a big boon for people who were interested in American music because many institutions, not to mention the intellectual establishment, were suddenly quite interested in the question, “Is there anyone around here who knows what kind of stuff was being performed in America two hundred years ago? What was American music like in 1776?” Well, people like me had some answers. So suddenly we were being asked to get involved, and our musicological skills were being drawn upon. We were asked to write essays; we were asked to give lectures. One thing I can tell you is that if a bunch of librarians or art historians or groups like that invite *you* to be the musician on the scene, they think it's really cool that somebody knows about the music. “Oh that piece, that was really nice! Who did that?” Generally speaking, the intellectuals in those years had no knowledge of or interest in music.

**TR:** That's still true on tenure and promotion committees, by the way. My young, untenured colleagues will be pleased to know that. Your peers in physics and sociology are just thrilled to be able to look at your dossier and listen to the records or CDs that come with it.

**RC:** As musicians we're used to being the entertainers. Those of us who perform all have that.

**TR:** The woman who was responsible for creating the American Music Research Center Collection that is now resident here [was also inspired by the Bicentennial]. Her name was Sister Mary Dominic Ray, a Dominican sister in California. The Bicentennial strongly fed her curiosity about all of this as well. That spirit is still alive here in a sense.

**RC:** It was the first time that need was ever cited vis-à-vis American musicology in my experience. So suddenly there was some value attached to what we had been doing. In the 1980s I think the thing that stands out for me through that decade is new critical approaches. Subjects like race, class, and gender, which were really starting to get traction in the humanities around that time, were slow to arrive in the field of musicology. But by the end of the decade there was a lot more work in thinking along those lines: critical studies, feminism, sexuality as a factor in music-making.

I remember—I think it was during this period too—the whole idea of methodology suddenly became something that you talked about. Now, for ethnomusicologists that's old hat, of course. They've been talking about methodology for years. But I remember the editor of the *Journal for American Musicological Society* wrote an editorial, one of the very few that had been in there. He said, "Methodology. You know, I've been in the field for a long time, I've written a lot of stuff, and I was never aware that I had one." Well, it was an absolutely true thing. Why am I doing this the way I'm doing this? Why am I approaching these things in the way that I'm doing? It didn't occur to him that there was another way to do it. A self-consciousness about the way we think about things and the way we approach our research, that definitely came in here.

I should say that in the seventies there began to be—at the University of Michigan, anyway, where I was teaching—there began to be the occasional student, like Tom—who was one of the early ones—who came to graduate school with the idea of maybe doing something in the field of American music. This was looked upon as a very chancy, iffy move because there weren't exactly a lot of jobs out there. In fact, I don't remember any being announced until the late 1990s.

**TR:** I was first hired for a nineteenth-century position; about ten years of my dissertation happened to fall in the nineteenth century.

**RC:** Oh, that's how you finessed it?

**TR:** Slipped in the door there, yeah.

**RC:** There's a thing that started happening in American music during the 1980s that I think is interesting. Let me double back to the Bicentennial just for a minute—1976. That was the occasion for the founding of the Society for American Music, originally the Sonneck Society. It was founded in 1975, but it was the surge of interest in the Bicentennial that sparked that. That also will tell you something about what the people in the Society at that time were interested in; they were engaged with *early* American music. That whole corps of people was especially interested in the eighteenth century, some in the nineteenth. There was almost nobody coming into the Society for American Music at that time interested in the twentieth century. If you go back and look at the papers that were read then, they are virtually all [on] antiquarian [subjects]—early American music. That interest was feeding off the bias of historical musicology at the time.

But in the 1980s you began to get a surge of interest in popular music studies, which comes out of this whole methodological thing, “critical thinking” type of stuff, where people are starting to say, “You know, this tune by Elvis, it's okay! It's got three chords! Not interesting from that point of view, but look at all the issues of another kind that are being raised here, about where this might be situated in cultural background.”

This sort of thing began to be talked about in jazz scholarship too. By [the 1980s] jazz had begun to be valued more and more by people in the academy. I once told somebody—in fact, this was just a couple weeks ago when a friend and I were talking—about the [music] theory department at the University of Michigan in the 1960s. I think there were twelve people, no let's say ten; eight of them were jazz pianists but they *never* did anything about that in the university, and they hid it from the head of the theory department! Now this was the pits, you keep your dirty laundry somewhere else. Definitely a strong prejudice against it at that time.

**TR:** Now we have a theory department chair [at the University of Colorado Boulder] who admits to being a jazz pianist, Professor [Keith] Waters. He is quite a good one, in fact.

**RC:** We get into the eighties and all of a sudden we begin to get musicologists interested in jazz. Nowadays it turns out that students are willing and able to draw on their vernacular experience rather than having to remake themselves into a Renaissance scholar or a Baroque-nik if they don't want to be.

Actually, I saw a kind of funny development here. At Ann Arbor we had dissertations on Duke Ellington, Earl Hines, Fletcher Henderson, and Bud Powell, but each of the four—these were all students that I was working with—had started a dissertation there, and in every case the title of the dissertation that came out was “The Early Years of”—Duke Ellington, Earl Hines, and so forth. They were going to do the whole “life and works” thing, but they had to stop early on because they found so much to do in working on those people’s early years. That was a really important development at that time. It gave me a chance to go back and reactivate my own longtime interest in jazz, which I had turned my back on when I was trying to figure out stuff about symphonies and oratorios and all those things.

The 1990s definitely saw a rise of the job market in American music and—a really important thing here—growing emphasis on the twentieth century. I saw a summary within the last two weeks—I think it may have been in the American Musicological Society newsletter—where the president looked over some recent papers. I think they were the papers that had been submitted for the upcoming meeting in Nashville next month [November 2008]. Over 50 percent of the submissions were on twentieth-century topics! It’s totally astounding when I go back and look at the field from this perspective. Having been there in the fifties and sixties, I recall when Renaissance and Baroque music dominated, there was a little bit of Medieval, maybe a little bit of nineteenth-century repertory, maybe something on Schoenberg in the twentieth century—a longtime favorite musicological topic for a small group of analysts only. Anyway, the twentieth century absolutely became king during the 1990s. Also, media and technology-based studies really started to become more and more interesting and important.

In 2000, you all are probably in a better position than I am now to be able to judge—especially the younger folks who are coming into the field. [*To audience*] You haven’t been there that long, but what does the field look like to you? What are the things that seem to be emphasized?

Oh, you know something I forgot; in the eighties another really important thing we saw was more of a rapprochement between historical studies and ethnomusicology. Ethnomusicologists don’t seem to me to be terribly interested in historical musicology, but I can tell you that most historical musicologists are very interested in certain aspects of ethnomusicology—partly because of the methodological sophistication that that field has brought to the table. Ethnomusicology has moved away from exotic repertory pursuits—that is, where you go off and study a musical culture that hasn’t been academically vetted before.

I'll just wind up by saying we're much more in the business of trying to make connections between things that don't seem to be connected, or didn't seem to be connected before. That's where a young person has particular opportunities. The air is different depending on our age in a way. I mean you've all had computers since you were knee-high to a grasshopper. All these sorts of things change your perceptions. The idea that almost all music is available. It's already been performed. What does music mean? It means records—it means recordings. Pre-existent sound: look at all the stuff that can be done with pre-existent sound. Composers [are] working with pre-existent sound more and more. It's a very different world for a person like me. I don't pick up the vibes the way I used to be able to. So I think taking this vast interconnected world and trying to put some rigor behind the kinds of connections that you make is maybe the challenge of this decade and maybe the next one as well.

**TR:** Thank you, Rich. You anticipated my last question, which had exactly to do with media shifts and our perception and change. Again, just to mention, Rich was involved with the New World Records series, a very important series in the 1970s to get music into a medium that could be heard—music that previously existed only in manuscript but had not come out in any other way.

**RC:** That was another Bicentennial project. The Rockefeller Foundation bankrolled a set of one hundred LP recordings, each one with hefty [liner] notes, to be given away to every school of music, every cultural institution in America, every library of a certain type, every prison, every embassy, and so forth. Eight thousand copies of the New World recordings were produced.

**TR:** We have two complete sets upstairs in the Waltz Music Library.

**RC:** All American music, some of it archival. There were fifty archival—that is previously made—recordings brought together for this thing—and fifty new recordings representing a wide swath of American music. I was lucky enough to be part of that endeavor.

**TR:** We are almost out of time, but I would like to ask if there are any questions out there [in the audience].

**Steve Bruns:** Regarding the idea of connections between scholarly disciplines—I'm wondering what hope might we have for more dialogue—serious dialogue—between performers and scholars? That seems to be shifting toward the better in some ways, but it doesn't seem to be moving in an especially noticeable a way, at least from my point of view.

**RC:** That's always a tough one. Two things strike me, Steve: one is, that there was a big movement in this direction from the seventies on in the early music world. The issue is whether the performer thinks he or she has anything to learn from scholars. Often [the answer] comes up negative. But if you're talking about early stuff, there are all these treatises that talk about, say, how in 1759 one ought to play the violin. Mozart's father [wrote] a big treatise along that line. So the need to examine [historical documents] is recognized from time to time. I saw an article as recently as yesterday morning on the *New York Times* music page. The featured person was a violinist, composer, singer, countertenor. It showed a picture of him playing his violin and premiering his new piece, and then it showed a picture of him in the church choir singing and so forth. He was offering this as the model for the contemporary musician who composes—he writes, he plays, he sings. He is going back to a sort of eighteenth-century type, or seventeenth-century one, doing all these different things.

I think schools like this and the one I used to teach at before I retired are perfect incubators for this kind of contact, except that the curriculum is stacked against it. The curriculum takes no interest in these things because we've got these little modules called "theory" and "musicology" and "piano," etc. It's up to the student to study them individually and then try to bring them together. But I would say if you had leaders, academic leaders, who were interested in this particular thing, it would be simple. All the elements are there; there just needs to be a catalyst.

**SB:** There are numerous faculty who I would say are perfect examples of this blending [of scholarship and performance]. I'm sitting next to someone who is very active as a performer. Some who study in a very serious way create that relationship. I sent a message to all the graduate students before today's events urging them to attend, and I'm not sure I see anyone here who is not a musicology major. We all have some past history as performers. I was hoping to see a few performers here and I'm not seeing any. I guess that's why I'm asking that question.

**RC:** You know it's a great question, it really is. In the name of seriousness, we each in our own little sphere try to put as much pressure on the students to deepen the knowledge of our subject. So we've got everyone trying to grab a larger and larger piece of each student.

**Jeremy Smith:** I was wondering if I could make an objection, as an early music historian, to say that great music had happened before Beethoven?

**RC:** Oh, absolutely! I would have said, actually, that when this sort of anniversary stuff got going I think a big movement was the *Neue Bach*

*Augsgabe* [New Bach Edition] which began in 1950 right after World War II. You began to get these heroic editing projects of the great composers back then.

**JS:** I was just teasing.

**RC:** Always nice to get a little knife right in there. It doesn't hurt a bit.

**John Galm:** I'd like to add to Rich's bibliography here. A publication that really influenced me appeared—was it in the 1960s? Richard Crawford put out a little blue pamphlet with an article called "A Point of View and Case in Point."

**RC:** That was from Wiley's [Hitchcock] Institute [for Studies in American Music at Brooklyn College], in 1975.

**JG:** [As an ethnomusicologist] I am curious about the history of things. The Smithsonian spent all this WPA money with [Alan] Lomax and struggled all through the thirties and forties amassing masterful recordings of the American heritage. Yet it wasn't until the eighties that Americanist [scholars] started to get into this at all. Why do you think that was?

**RC:** That's a good one. I think ethnomusicology, which would have been the logical investigative body, had a bit of resistance to American music at that time. I think it was partly because the model for ethnomusicological research then was to learn a foreign language, to go overseas, to live in another culture, and to write a dissertation about that experience. I think the feeling was that to stay home in this country was doing scholarship lite—L-I-T-E—maybe. That attitude is pretty much gone now. I think there are a lot more ethnomusicologists studying music in America. Actually, it was the Library of Congress that mostly funded Alan Lomax. [There are still] these government projects, and there's still stuff that hasn't been brought out. You make a good point.

**Audience member:** Along that same line, I think in the late twentieth-century American music experience we do see more of an international or global view where non-Western elements are impacting American performance. I haven't read any studies about why these people who are American citizens, natives born in the United States, take up things like the [Javanese] gamelan or music of a different culture here in this country. So that's part of our American musical landscape, too, I guess.

**RC:** As is Beethoven and Mozart and so on and so forth. They're all part of American music. I would say that my history book [of 2001] is written with the idea that music should be approached from the standpoint of *perform-*

ance in America. Not the creation of music in America. Creation is part of the performance, but if you only write about pieces that were invented in this country you end up with a gerrymandered hole. I'm married to a performer who educates me constantly in the beauties of Schumann, Schubert, and Mendelssohn; she's playing all this stuff—and also music before 1800.

**TR:** And on that note—that very inclusive note, let's thank Professor Crawford once more.

### Major Publications of Richard Crawford

- 1968 *Andrew Law: American Psalmist*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Press.
- 1975 *American Studies and American Musicology: A Point of View and a Case in Point*. Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College.
- 1975 *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth Century Composer*, by David P. McKay and Richard Crawford. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 1977 *The Civil War Songbook*. New York: Dover.
- 1984 *The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody*. Madison, WI: A-R Editions, Inc.
- 1990 *American Sacred Music Imprints, 1698–1810: A Bibliography*, by Allen Perdue Britton and Irving Lowens, and completed by Richard Crawford. Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society.
- 1990 *A Celebration of American Music: Words and Music in Honor of H. Wiley Hitchcock*. Co-editor with R. Allen Lott and Carol J. Oja. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- 1992 *Jazz Standards on Record, 1900–1942: A Core Repertory*. Chicago: Center for Black Music Research.
- 1993 *The American Musical Landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2000 *The American Musical Landscape and the Business of Musicianship from Billings to Gershwin*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2001 *America's Musical Life: A History*. New York: Norton.
- 2001 *An Introduction to America's Music*. New York: Norton.



Carol J. Oja was born and raised in Hibbing, Minnesota. She attended St. Olaf College and earned a master's degree from the University of Iowa. From there, she went to the Graduate School of the City University of New York, where she studied with H. Wiley Hitchcock and became closely associated with the Institute for Studies in American Music at Brooklyn College. She received her PhD at CUNY in 1985, with a dissertation on the cross-cultural musical odysseys of the Canadian-American composer Colin McPhee. That same year she was hired to the faculties of Brooklyn College and the Graduate School of CUNY. She was appointed director of the Institute for Studies in American Music in 1993, where she focused especially on global music traditions represented in Brooklyn's diverse immigrant populations. From 1997 to 2003, she taught both American studies and music classes at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, and in 2003 she was named the William Powell Mason Professor of Music at Harvard University, where she also serves on the faculty of its Program in the History of American Civilization.

Oja's research focuses on a broad span of twentieth-century American musical traditions, with a special interest in interracial and transnational intersections. She is past-president of the Society for American Music, and she collaborated with Lucius R. Wyatt and the late Mark Tucker to establish the Committee on Cultural Diversity of the American Musicological Society (which became a standing committee of AMS in 1992). Her book *Making Music Modern* (2000) won the Irving Lowens Award from the Society for American Music, as well as an ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award.

# Making Musicology Modern: An Interview with Carol Oja

**Tom Riis:** [*To the audience*] In 2007 Samuel Floyd reminisced with us about his early days in music, his strong interest in musical aesthetics, and the path that he followed into music research. We also talked in 2008 to Richard Crawford, a longtime friend and mentor of both Carol's and mine. These interviews were so successful that I decided to continue this tradition with our current Robert and Ruth Fink Lecturer, Dr. Carol Oja.

What we're doing today is a little different from the formal, official lecture that will take place tonight in this same space. It is, in my view, a kind of a conversation but also a chance for the students to hear about the path our guest has traveled over her career. I'll begin with a question I sprang on Rich last year: What was the first musical experience you had or the first one that you remember?

**CO:** Oh my! [*pausing*] I say that in part because I've always been a musician, so it's hard to think of a "first." I started piano when I was in second grade, and I would guess all the students in this room have a story like that—of a childhood that was filled with music. I became a church organist in junior high. From then through high school, I was essentially the town pianist, performing in lots of piano recitals, playing in the pit band for high school musicals, accompanying my high school chorus, and also playing for a wide range of musical activities in my family's church.

**TR:** So music was always a part of your growing up. I should add here that Carol is from northern Minnesota. When we were talking a couple of weeks ago I began to hear a little bit about your early experiences in Minnesota. You attended St. Olaf College; is that right?

**CO:** I did.

**TR:** A wonderful Minnesota school famous for its music. It seems almost predetermined that you would attend? You were the young town musician, so St. Olaf was the logical choice?

**CO:** Well, that was the case in part, but not entirely. My grandparents were all immigrants from Finland. They were homesteaders on the Mesabi Iron Range of northern Minnesota during the early twentieth century. I was the first person on this side of the Atlantic to go to college, and enormous family energy was poured into giving me a solid education. Being Finns, they were Lutherans. Curious as it might seem to outsiders, the various Scandinavian immigrant groups each have an individual sense of identity, so it felt like a cultural stretch for a Finn to go to a school of Norwegian heritage. Nonetheless, St. Olaf was a fabulous place for music, and I lived in the practice room. At that point in life I thought I was going to be a church organist.

**TR:** Which leads, naturally, to the next question. What drew you to musicology . . . the fateful choice?

**CO:** Well, I don't know that there was a defining moment. I had excellent music history classes as an undergraduate, and I discovered I liked to write, which I was aware of in high school but didn't fully realize until college. From the vantage point of northern Minnesota, I had never heard of musicology. The professional models I had in those early years—especially among women—were church musicians and school teachers in the public schools. In college, everything changed. I suddenly learned that people actually make careers out of studying music history and teaching it at the college level.

**TR:** That was at St. Olaf. Then you went and did your master's in Iowa?

**CO:** At the University of Iowa, yes. I was in Iowa City for a couple of years. Then I went on to New York City.

**TR:** That was obviously a huge change.

**CO:** My mother was concerned about having me move to New York! It was a major change, and it was incredibly stimulating. I knew then that musicology was thoroughly my thing. At the University of Iowa, I had done some archival research under the supervision of Frederick Crane, where I traced the careers of Buena Vista and Wallace Atkinson, two Iowa musicians who worked on the vaudeville circuit in the early twentieth century. That project convinced me that archival research was fascinating, and it also drew me toward working on American traditions. In the late 1970s, there were few PhD programs in musicology where a person could explore American music. I chose to go to the Graduate School of the City University of New York because H. Wiley Hitchcock was there. Looking back, it was an amazing opportunity. Lots of people have careers with a more traditional trajectory, where they start at an Ivy League undergraduate institution, with a solid sense of the path that is unfolding before them. My life has not been like that.

I received a fellowship to study at the City University before I even had a chance to meet Wiley, so there was a leap of faith involved. I didn't actually get to shake his hand until my second semester at CUNY, when I went out to Brooklyn College to attend a conference he was running on "The Phonograph and Our Musical Life." Looking back, that event represented an early stage of recognizing media studies as important for musicologists. Anyway, I walked in on the "keynote address," which wasn't a lecture but rather a performance of *49 Waltzes for Five Boroughs*, which had been commissioned from John Cage. In the piece, as I recall, the audience and a cluster of panelists migrated around a small concert hall putting recordings on turntables. It was like a community of DJs having a spin session. This imaginative, free-wheeling musical event was my introduction to Wiley, and over the years I found him to be consistently experimental and open-minded. He played within the rules of the academic system and achieved success by doing so, but he also created a safe space for students to follow their imaginations.

**TR:** That's great. I'd heard about that conference. We were in graduate school at about the same time. I was at the University of Michigan then, and I remember Richard Crawford coming back and talking about this conference on the phonograph and thought, drat, I missed something important.

**CO:** The University of Michigan was one of the other graduate programs in the late 1970s and early 1980s where a person could study American music and be taken seriously. I can still quite easily drift back to that formative era in my professional life and feel the unpleasantness of being excluded by "mainstream" musicologists. At American Musicological Society conferences, most strikingly, sessions on American music were usually scheduled in back rooms with low ceilings—rooms where you had to squeeze a hundred people into twenty seats. There was lots of not-so-admirable behavior toward Americanists in the profession at large—a kind of ostracizing that is hard to imagine in today's much more open scholarly environment.

**TR:** Rich spoke about that a bit last year. It's certainly worth underlining. Of course Bill Kearns remembers this situation as well I think. If you were not a specialist in some preferably long-dead, preferably male, preferably non-English speaking figure you were pretty much in the outer circles of acceptability. In the 1970s and early 1980s, doing something as unusual as investigating John Cage or Charles Ives, or your doctoral work on Colin McPhee—all this was tough going. If you are an anthropologist or ethnomusicologist here, you'll probably know that Colin McPhee was very instrumental in the whole exploration of Balinese and Indonesian culture. He wrote a very

famous book called *A House in Bali* published in the 1940s. Although he had many skills and talents, that book probably did more than anything to found a whole field of study. So, for Carol to have written her doctoral dissertation on a figure like him, not someone you could call a mainstream concert composer, was quite unusual.

**CO:** Actually I was told—not by Wiley obviously, but by someone else on the faculty of the City University doctoral program—that if I persisted with a dissertation on Colin McPhee, I would never get a job.

**TR:** What made you persist? You sensed there was a topic there that needed to be pursued? You eventually made a book version of the dissertation, titled *Colin McPhee: Composer in Two Worlds*, published by Smithsonian Institution Press in 1990.

The timing is interesting here too. This is another subject, in a way, but it's an important one for students of musicology to be aware of. Think about the work you choose to do and then the publication gap. One does the work and then life happens and things intervene. Paths take interesting turns, as does the road to publication and ultimately finding your niche.

**CO:** I do think timing is crucial in looking at our generation of scholars in American music. In a positive sense, we came into the field right after the Bicentennial when there was a lot of activity. New World Records had issued its hundred-record series that covered an ecumenical range of American traditions; the ragtime revival was in full swing; Eileen Southern's book on African American music had been published. There were new texts coming out that challenged the status quo. There was a lot of new energy. Wiley had founded the Institute for Studies of American Music at Brooklyn College [now called the H. Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music]. What was then called the Sonneck Society [now the Society for American Music] had been founded. So those of us who were graduate students in the late 1970s and early 1980s really gained a lot from that momentum, and it turned out to be transformative.

**TR:** That excitement was, I think, one of the reasons we both pursued our subjects and had support from our mentors.

**CO:** We also loved the music and the broad-based cultural histories we were shaping. For those of you in the audience who are students, it is crucial to choose a topic that focuses on musical repertoires and contextual issues that really grab you. It has to be something that you're willing to wake up with at dawn, and go to sleep with at 2:00 a.m.—and live with for many, many years. Long after a dissertation is finished, you will be asked to do work relat-

ed to your topic. So it needs to wear well. That kind of passion—you can't just intentionally decide to choose it. In a way, it finds you. When things go right with finding a compelling topic, there can be something magical about the process.

**TR:** Let's come back to a publication that Carol was very involved with, in fact largely responsible for. I am referring to the discography of twentieth-century American composers, which was published by the Institute for Studies in American Music [*American Music Recordings: A Discography of 20th-Century U.S. Composers*; published by ISAM and the Koussevitzky Music Foundation]. I was looking at this book the other day in our library, and I was reflecting on where we've come with respect to sound (recording) formats, how one gets access to music, and the fact you can google anything now and everything seems to be on YouTube.

Your discography was compiled in 1980 and 1981; it was published in 1982. Some of you in the audience probably weren't around then, but 13,000 commercially distributed records are listed in this collection, 8,000 different pieces by 1,300 American composers. "American" was defined in this case as United States composers or people who had immigrated from the age of thirty on; they were essentially U.S. resident composers, in other words—composers who were active in this country for the first three quarters of the twentieth century. This was an amazing collection of data. There *were* computers in those days, but my recollection was that computer work at that period was pretty minimal. It was really more work to input computer data than to copy it down by hand.

**CO:** Well, Tom, we've witnessed a digital revolution in a very brief span of time. You're right: *American Music Recordings* was compiled in a pre-Internet era. There was a huge need then for scholars of American music to gain control of basic information, and there was no way to quickly determine what concert works by Americans had been recorded—not to mention when or on what label. The only way to retrieve that information was to turn to the Library of Congress catalogs—enormous printed volumes of catalogue cards, which have essentially been replaced today by the online source WorldCat. So you had to look through a gazillion books to assemble a basic discography. You could go to the *Schwann Record and Tape Catalog*, which was also a major source—a monthly publication that listed all the LPs and tapes currently on the market. We compiled our discography with a team of graduate students using three-by-five-inch index cards. I was a graduate student at the time, and I was asked by Wiley to head up the project. Ultimately, the information was computerized on a mainframe computer, and we had a couple of com-

puter terminals set up at ISAM All the data was stored on reel-to-reel tapes, which probably have been destroyed by now. The late Phillip J. Drummond, another CUNY PhD candidate in musicology, worked as a computer programmer for *RILM*, and he did the programming necessary to sort and manage the discographical data. R. Allen Lott poured himself into the project, putting in hundreds of hours and contributing an extraordinary eye for detail.

**TR:** I was really impressed when I looked at all the things that were included in your discography, and it underlines for me the value that I hope we still have in our field, which is this careful attention to detail and looking at details in context. Here is a collection of recordings in all the available formats at the time, which would have included 78 RPM records, 45 RPM discs—the little ones with big holes in them—as well as 33 RPM long-playing vinyl, but no jazz, folk, or pop music. We're talking about 13,000 recordings of concert music or classical music, which pales by comparison with the number of recordings of more popular commercial items.

The information in this discography includes—and I really love this—the release date, the delete date, that is if it had once been available but was no longer on the market, and whether it was currently in print. Now that may seem like just so much trivial information, but if you were seriously interested in trying to find this material, given the communications network limitations of the day, this is a wonderful book. I had not opened its pages in many years. I realize now what a delightful collection of information it is and its value as a cultural resource.

For example, if you want to find out what was being recorded in many fields or by certain individual composers, this is an indispensable reference tool. There are only, by the way, seven entries for Steve Reich, who we think of as one of the great composers of the twentieth century, but this was relatively early in his walk to fame. Jean Berger, who taught in this very room many years ago, has eleven entries—eleven different pieces with multiple recordings in this collection. This discography is a rare photograph, in a sense, of what was happening in classical American music during the 1980s.

Carol is not only a fine author of many books that make up her solo work, so to speak, but she is one of the most productive editors in our field. My hands fell onto another book, which is a *Festschrift*, although using a German word for an Americanist is probably a slight misnomer. It's called *A Celebration of American Music*, and it's a collection of essays, articles, musical pieces, and poetry in honor of H. Wiley Hitchcock, her mentor. She did this in collaboration with Richard Crawford and R. Allen Lott. I'm impressed over and over by the high quality of editing of so many brief segments. This is one of these

things that they don't tell you about in graduate school. You know that you have to write a dissertation and other articles and books in order to achieve the glories of tenure or whatever. But there is a whole category of publication that involves assisting other people with their work.

**CO:** OPW, as a colleague of mine often says: Other People's Work.

**TR:** Other people's work. And OPW doesn't necessarily get a lot of respect in the field. Truth to tell, you need to know that Carol is a supreme commander in doing OPW! Believe me, we owe her a lot of debts for this. I'm looking also at a more recent OPW, her 2005 publication, co-edited with Professor Judith Tick at Northeastern University, *Aaron Copland and His World*. These kinds of collections are often very important for young scholars.

I think our modern field of musicology is much more open to a variety of perspectives. Ethnomusicologists are writing history now. Historians are looking at cultural context. Where you often find very interesting, very seminal articles or provocative ideas being tried out are in these edited collections. An author may not have the resources or the time to do a full-tilt book on a new and cutting-edge subject, but maybe she has been asked to contribute to an anthology. She might say, well, I'm going to write a little article about this archive that I've discovered or this little twist in a composer's life or a performer's career. I think it's from these seeds that often we get some of the most interesting work that's going on in the field. Carol is certainly an important contributor in this networking process, which is very much a part of being a successful and a useful academic citizen.

**CO:** Thank you for that lovely compliment! Collaboration is essential for humanists, because our work otherwise tends to be quite solitary. Speaking for myself, I am happiest when I'm at my computer, buried away like a mole and doing my work. At the same time, writing about subjects that involve people who are still living means that a person needs to extract herself from the archive and do ethnographic research—that is, talk with actual people! So those are two of the dimensions in which musicologists can interact productively with others: by collaborating on research projects, and by doing fieldwork and interviews.

**TR:** That's really important. I think your most recent solo book, *Making Music Modern*, is in many ways a demonstration of a kind of combination of those techniques. One of the things we didn't mention in the introduction this afternoon was that Carol was the director of a core center for the study of American music; it was essentially contemporary with our own American Music Research Center. This was the Institute for Studies in American Music

at Brooklyn College, founded by H. Wiley Hitchcock. One of the advantages of being in Brooklyn as opposed to Boulder is that you are in a place where a lot of very active cutting-edge musicians are working. We have to do a little more air-flight planning and travel arranging for guests to come to us. Because of Carol's interests and support from ISAM, we're talking about a sort of envy about where you are located at a certain time. There are many instances when being in New York makes it possible to talk with musicians who are young and emerging or perhaps who had been otherwise forgotten.

**CO:** Or another way to look at it, I think it is important for any scholar—especially Americanists—to take advantage of the musical culture in their immediate environment. Writing local history is important. In the early stage of my career, I happened to be in New York City, and New York obviously has a lot of musical activity going on. Nonetheless, I think that an attention to the local can move with a person to any geographic location. There's always something interesting to discover.

**TR:** Tell us a little more about local history research. You really are experienced in the whole realm.

**CO:** I enjoy building a sense of community wherever I'm living. In the case of New York City, I got to know a lot of composers and was lucky enough to be a graduate student when the generation of Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson was still living. So I seized the opportunity to work with a number of those figures. More recently in Boston (in 2006), I led a hands-on research seminar together with a Harvard colleague of mine, the ethnomusicologist Kay Kaufman Shelemay. We titled the class *Before West Side Story: Leonard Bernstein's Boston*. I had already started my work on Bernstein's early experiences on Broadway, and when I moved to Harvard I realized: I'm living in Lenny's home town! So Kay and I collaborated to shape a course where students could do research in the local community, exploring Bernstein's childhood, education, religious roots, and early years as a professional. As a kid, Bernstein studied piano at the New England Conservatory. His family's synagogue, Congregation Mishkan Tefila, continues to thrive, and it has an archive. During Bernstein's childhood, that synagogue was located in Roxbury in the heart of an immigrant-Jewish enclave; in the 1950s, it moved to the suburb of Newton, not far from where I now live. So there were lots of local opportunities for research.

When Kay and I were first planning the class project, we attended services for the High Holy Days at Mishkan Tefila, and we didn't call ahead or anything. At the end of the service, when we were putting on our coats, we heard people a few rows behind us talking about Leonard Bernstein. Amazing! So

the legend of Bernstein is very much alive in that temple, and Kay and I focused our course on Bernstein's position in local history. Not all local music history has a broader resonance; but usually there is something of the sort to find.

**TR:** Over lunch we were talking about Denver, and some of you here may know—or maybe don't know—that the father of Paul Whiteman, the famous jazz conductor for George Gershwin, was the director of public school music in Denver. So there is an example of a link between a very important national musician and individuals in Denver. Of course, we've already mentioned the composer Jean Berger, who taught here at the university for many years. But there are other popular musicians who came through or who at some point lived in the city of Denver. George Crumb taught at CU and lived in Boulder decades ago, but has visited us many times since his move to the University of Pennsylvania. Don't underestimate the chance for a topic to be lurking in your front yard. This is a message to graduate students looking for thesis topics; sometimes there are amazing riches quite close by. Although it's wonderful to travel to exotic locations, there may be surprisingly rich sources very near at hand.

**CO:** We need a balance of both, don't we, in our world? We need people who are studying far-off places, and we need those of us who are looking at the scene closer to home. Plus we need people who are actively linking the local, the national, and the global.

**TR:** We have quite a bit of time. I'd be happy to take questions from the floor.

**Audience member:** Could you comment, please, on the current state of affairs in terms of the acceptance of topics in the scholarly community and of preparation (hopefully!) for a job.

**CO:** Well, there are various ways to cut into that question. It seems to me that the field of musicology has become very decentralized. There used to be a clear hierarchy of topics and methodologies—or to put it another way, it used to be super clear what was “important” to study and what was the “best” means of doing so. But that isn't the case anymore. As a result, all sorts of doors have opened up, and job descriptions have shifted accordingly. With the current economic climate, it's hard to know what the future will hold; we're in an evolving scene. At this point, it's hard to tell whether we have entered an era like the early 1980s, when for quite a long period it was very hard to get a university position, or whether our current economic woes will turn out to be a blip on the screen. Let's hope the latter is the case. Basically, it seems to me that for young people who are trying to choose topics based

on their probability of yielding professional success . . . well, I get back to saying that you are best off doing something that you really, really care about. If that means choosing a topic (or methodology) that extends beyond the norms of the moment, there is certainly a risk. But I also think there can be a risk in grasping the safety of the status quo. Scholarly trends change, as do hiring patterns, and there is no way to predict what will get you a job in five years—or ten or fifteen or twenty. This could be advice that bites a few people, perhaps, but there's little good in choosing a topic because you believe it is sanctioned by other academics. Somehow, the most important thing is to do work that moves your soul in some way—although, obviously, you don't want to be wildly impractical. You have advisors around you to help with the selection process. Would you like to add anything to those thoughts, Tom?

**TR:** I think you're absolutely correct about the diverse scene nowadays. I was just speaking to a student this morning and thinking about the fact that there's quite a bit of serious scholarship these days related to the movies. Ten or fifteen years ago most discussion of film music rose to the level of a mediocre music-appreciation paper. I do think there is now a whole lot more acceptance within musicology of studying popular culture. So, the porousness—the interpenetration—of different topics is having positive results. Also tied to that is a certain confidence about asserting the importance of music in more broad-based academic discussions. There is a great deal of scholarship in related humanistic fields that brings in music, but it isn't always so well done. We're beginning to see more musicologists step up to the plate and say I'll take my chances with art history but I really have to talk to you about the music connection here and maybe you won't like my art history or my anthropology or my literary criticism, but at least I'm going to say something that I think makes sense about the music. Many of the more interesting scholars today have been able to combine different disciplinary perspectives.

**CO:** Bouncing off your question in a slightly different direction: in some ways Americanists have consistently been interested in outsider studies, whether that has to do with women's studies (now mostly dubbed gender studies), African American studies, ethnic studies—or any of the interdisciplinary areas that focus on communities that were previously marginalized in scholarship. The field of musicology used to deal exclusively with the music of white, upper-class males of European descent. In recent decades that's been altered radically, and I count myself among the beneficiaries of a more open-minded field in which to take chances.

**Audience member:** It seems that musicologists have been slow to catch up with serious rock scholarship, but they're now beginning to do so.

**CO:** That's true, and the musicologists who work on rock today often do so within the context of cultural studies. Those theoretical strategies have added a level of sophistication to the study of popular music; they've also played an important part in validating that scholarship. It's not so long ago when scholars were groping for a scholarly language to analyze popular music, and we now have lots of people who are extremely skilled at doing so. The next trick, it seems to me, is to find ways to deploy sophisticated theories in comprehensible prose that will speak to a broader readership—also to achieve tolerance among methodologies. New strategies can enhance older ones, but they don't need to trump or disparage them, as can sometimes be the case.

**TR:** Good point.

**Audience member:** What are the next big new waves in American Studies?

**CO:** That's hard to answer. Right now there are a lot of young people doing work on popular music. That's striking. As Tom just pointed out, there's a lot of interest in film music and media studies. As I said earlier, I don't think that scholars feel pressure to focus on one area or another, but there is a lot of varied activity. Among my current graduate students at Harvard (as of 2009), Drew Massey is writing about John Kirkpatrick, who was an activist editor of American composers, especially Ives and Ruggles. Kirkpatrick left a massive collection at Yale, which reveals a fascinating tale of how an influential music editor and pianist played an important role in shaping prominent works by modernist composers. Sheryl Kaskowitz is writing about Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," shaping a cultural history that stretches from the song's composition during World War I straight to 9/11, when it was sung on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Ryan Bañagale is exploring Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*'s fundamental construction as an arrangement. He has selected a cluster of ever-shifting versions, including arrangements by Duke Ellington, Larry Adler (the famed harmonica player), Leonard Bernstein, and the "original" arrangement by Ferde Grofé. Glenda Goodman is exploring music, immigration, and belonging; she has shaped case studies that begin with Native Americans singing psalms in Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, and she ends with the music-making of immigrant children at Hull House in Chicago. With all of these wonderful young people, they're fusing archival research with some sort of ethnographic perspective.

**Audience member:** What are we supposed to do with our underdog status as Americanists in the modern world?

**CO:** As opposed to our hangdog status, I suppose. [Laughter] It's a very good question. Today, Americanists are by no means powerful within the academy, but we're certainly not outsiders any more. Attitudes have shifted dramatically. Yet I can say that it's challenging to shed a feeling of the underdogged-ness of it all because not too long ago there was so much exclusion in so many dimensions. I've talked about being an outsider in terms of American music. It also had to do with being a woman. As a graduate student I was in many seminars where I was the only female, and I was made painfully aware of the fact. That's all changed radically, at the same time as things aren't necessarily equal on all fronts in all places. But that's the key: any individual's personal or professional position is all about context. Within musicology, American music is in much better shape. The AMS panels for Americanists are now in regular-sized conference rooms. Richard Crawford, Charles Hamm, and H. Wiley Hitchcock have all been presidents of the American Musicological Society. There's a real sense of being part of the ballgame.

**William Kearns [professor emeritus, University of Colorado Boulder]:** It was 1955 and I was the horn teacher at Ohio State University, but I was interested in music history. I called it music history then [as opposed to "musicology"]. We had a regional AMS meeting in Columbus. Wiley Hitchcock read the last paper at that meeting, and it was about jazz. Well, every other paper had been on the typical subjects of the time, largely from the Renaissance, Medieval, and Baroque eras. I said to my mentor at Ohio State, Herbert Livingston, that it was interesting to hear a good paper on jazz. He said: that's sort of the whipped cream of the conference. So there was an attitude that if you did something on American music it was lightweight, superficial—whipped cream. The other thing I want to bring up is that, when I think of Wiley's career and his books on the history of American music (I think I've taught all three editions of that book), I watched his thinking progress. In the second edition [*Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, 1974], he started talking about hillbilly music. He actually used the word "hillbilly." I was afraid to call it "hillbilly"—I called it "Appalachian rural music." Wiley straight out used the word "hillbilly." It had become a little bit more respectable. Those are two memories I think about.

**TR:** What I'm reminded of is how much the vocabulary of the field has changed overall. A term like "folk music," for example, which meant something to me as a teenager in the 1960s, has now been rejected—that is, you can't now use the term in certain circles without being assumed to be completely out of touch. "Traditional"—or better yet "roots music"—are the operative terms now. Yet "folk" used to be a rather broad and somewhat

undefined category, and the shift in terminology has imposed a much narrower view. Also, it's disturbing how terms can get sort of turned and twisted in a way that can become patronizing. You can say the same word with a different tone of voice, and it can become ironic or positive or an implied comment or criticism. The moral lesson here is to watch your language and also have your best scholarly and personal antennae up as you pursue your careers.

**CO:** All this has to do with continually finding new ways to articulate the particular nature of American culture and the extreme variety—the wondrous variety—of people who have been brought together in this complex nation. The history of slavery remains with us, as do the racial issues that it provoked. As a result, I feel that Americanists have an obligation to a kind of social responsibility in what we choose to do. I don't mean that I select a topic with a particular agenda in mind, but rather that I want to be alert to musical voices that haven't been recognized at the core of the discourse. For all our good intentions, we are programmed to hear certain voices. Often that has to do with social class, it has to do with race, it has to do with gender and many other aspects of personal and communal identity. I've become increasingly intent on trying to subvert the normalized perspective and pay attention to voices that haven't been attended to as much as they might be. I think that's one of the major gifts of being an Americanist—that is, a drive to be a social activist through scholarship and a commitment to honoring outsider studies.

**TR:** Thank you. I think that's a great place to end. Thanks all!

### Major Publications of Carol Oja

- 1982 *American Music Recordings: A Discography of Twentieth-Century U.S. Composers*. Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music.
- 1990 *Colin McPhee: Composer in Two Worlds*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- 1990 (with Richard Crawford and R. Allen Lott, co-editors). *A Celebration of American Music: Words and Music in Honor of H. Wiley Hitchcock*.
- 1994 "Gershwin and American Modernists of the 1920s." *Musical Quarterly* 78/4: 646–68.
- 1997 (with Ray Allen, co-editor). *Henry Cowell's Musical Worlds: A Program Book for the Henry Cowell Centennial*. Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music.

- 2000 *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 2005 (with Judith Tick, co-editor). *Copland His World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Oja's projects in press include *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art, Race, and Progressive Politics in a Time of War* (to be published by Oxford University Press) and *Crosscurrents: American and European Music in Interaction, 1900–2000* (edited with Felix Meyer, Wolfgang Rathert, and Anne C. Shreffler; to be published by the Paul Sacher Foundation and Boydell Press).





Sister Mary Dominic Ray

Sister Mary Dominic Ray

With Editorial Notes by William Kearns

## The American Music Research Center: Some Vignettes from the Early Dominican College Years

*Editor's note:* At the time (winter 1988–1989) the American Music Research Center was moved from Dominican College in San Rafael, California, to the College of Music at the University of Colorado in Boulder, I asked Sister Dominic to write a history of her AMRC stewardship during the Dominican College years (1968–1988). My request was imposing, because Sister Dominic was ill and the AMRC written records had already been moved to Boulder. Nevertheless, she was able to produce a sixty-page monograph that not only is a tribute to her remarkable memory but also a demonstration of her enthusiasm for music in the United States and its history. I have chosen excerpts illustrating Sister Dominic's dedication, perseverance, and faith that led to the establishment and function of the AMRC.

In the very last two days of December 1958, thumbing through a *Musical America* (February 1958), I alighted on an article, "Moravian Music—Neglected American Heritage," by someone I had never heard of: Irving Lowens. Having always supposed that we Americans had no more musical heritage than folk songs and a few patriotic airs, I poured into this startling article with considerable skepticism and disbelief. Oh, I did recall having played a few of MacDowell's *Sea Pieces* during my high school days, but they had made only a momentary impact on me. Other piano music, bearing fanciful titles such as "Silver Mists," seemed nice for the moment, but were, I felt, best relegated to the attic.

My incredulous attitude toward this article was a result of my musical experience to this point, which had been directed solely toward preparing for, and

thoroughly enjoying, a modest career as a pianist, steeped mostly in the classics and romantics, with a sprinkling of the impressionists. In addition, I thought, if we are said to have “a rich musical heritage,” WHY hadn’t my five years at a major Midwest conservatory brought something of this to light? I couldn’t even recall that any of my professional musician friends had even so much as mentioned anything of the kind.

Reading on, however, I suddenly realized that I should be crawling under the carpet—nay, under the varnish on the floor itself—in humiliation, for here was something not only thrilling but tremendously significant. I devoured the whole article and reread it fervently; a myriad of light bulbs were flashing wildly within me. To think that we Americans *really* had forebears who truly loved profound spiritual music *and* even composed it as well, living it from morning to night! This was almost unbelievable. From that moment on, my life took a totally new turn. I was ablaze with excitement and HAD to find out more. Those lights never went out.

I ran to the encyclopedias and music histories, but they didn’t reveal enough. I had to get hold of some of the actual music. One of those funny little gremlins that seem to help us in a time of crisis kept nudging me to write to the author of the article. My four-page letter told of our various student groups who would be able to perform reasonably difficult works and begged earnestly for help in obtaining some of the music. Very soon came an airmail letter from Mr. Lowens thanking me for my letter and stating that he was “taking the liberty of forwarding [it] to Dr. Donald McCorkle,” the founding director of the Moravian Music Foundation—WHICH MADE MY DAY! For the next six years, Dr. McCorkle and I were in regular correspondence. He was a great inspiration to me, and I shall never forget all he did to help and encourage me.

*During the next decade, Sister Dominic grew from novice to expert in American music history. She embarked on an ambitious program of self-instruction, acquired numerous materials, at first Moravian music but soon American music of all types, which she displayed in her piano teaching studio at various “exhibitions” and informally to visitors. She visited major libraries on both coasts in order to study, acquire materials, and meet other scholars. She performed and encouraged the performance of American*

*music at Dominican College and in the community. She began teaching American music courses and, for a period of three years, broadcasted local programs on American music. She turned to California history, acquiring Spanish mission music materials and honoring a commission from the California Historical Society of San Francisco to do research on music for the Gold Rush period. Her own narrative resumes with the events that led immediately to the establishment of the AMRC.*

By 1965, the idea of putting on an American Music Festival came to mind. Thanks to the college president and Sister Antoinette, chair of the music department, I obtained permission to go ahead, *provided I was willing to manage the entire festival myself!* It was scheduled for the spring of 1966. As a performer, I had always relied on a manager, but this time the tables were turned and I was going to *have* to make good myself.

Fortunately everything began to fall into place. Hollywood actor-singer-pianist Charles Lampkin, who, at the time, was giving programs on American music, accepted an invitation to present a program of work songs, slave songs, and perhaps a few “hollers.” Dr. W. Thomas Marrocco, of the University of California at Los Angeles, agreed to speak on American music if I would play one of the Latrobe sonatas and some lively Gottschalk as part of his lecture. Finally, composer Lou Harrison, whom I had known a little in high school, seemed overjoyed that we wanted him to do his *Four Strict Songs*, for eight baritones and orchestra (waterbowls and all).

The three events were scheduled approximately ten days apart, thus providing a welcome respite for both audience and producer! It was the only way I thought any of us could survive. In summary, the whole festival was very exciting and was also a success; the local and San Francisco papers gave us wonderful publicity. I believe the whole thing stimulated a very considerable amount of interest in American music and in our musical heritage.

One more activity that played a part in what was soon to become the official American Music Research Center was a most productive and fascinating summer in 1967 doing newspaper research at the Missouri Historical Society for Professor Ernst C. Krohn. (I had met this remarkable eighty-year-old bibliophile some six months earlier during an eight-hour train stopover in St. Louis on my way to the New Orleans conference of the American Musicological Society.) Professor Krohn wanted me to do all the reading and “leg-work” that he was no longer able to do; hence, I spent that hot summer climbing stairs and combing through all of the 1817–1832 St. Louis newspapers, looking for every conceivable evidence of musical life and making meticulous notes for each reference. Once a week, Professor Krohn, in his

short sleeves and green eyeshade, would examine every little notation I had made—very much like a KGB officer on the hunt. This was my first experience working over an extended period of time with such a demanding scholar, and I loved every moment of it.

As a result of my St. Louis work, early musical theater attracted my attention. My curiosity was aroused at seeing so many advertisements for such comic operas as *The Agreeable Surprise*, *Poor Soldier*, *The Mock Doctor*, or *The Dumb-Lady Cur'd*, *The Devil to Pay*, or *Wives Metamorphos'd*. My theatrical appetite was more than thoroughly whetted. If only I could get to some of the East Coast libraries, or even to Southern California, surely I could find some of this music. Clearly I needed funds, more than the college would be able to give me. Convinced that the field of early musical theater needed prompt attention, I set forth on a quest for funds.

*Sister Dominic's quest eventually led her to England. She made several trips there, two primarily for early comic operas, acquiring photocopies of 100 in 1969, another 86 in 1973, and having "wonderful, long sessions" with Roger Fiske, Anthony Milner, Charles Cudworth, Adrian Sunshine, and the Rev. Joseph Stratman. The English operas, plus others acquired in United States libraries and through book dealers, brought the collection to some 200 works. Dominican College produced six comic operas between 1969 and 1988. But the immediate quest to which Sister Dominic refers above led to a different, more inclusive happening.*

Filled with confidence and determination, I set out to appeal to the local Northern District of the California Federation of Music Clubs (CFMC). I conferred with its President, June Weybright Reeder, who convened a meeting that proved to be a very significant turning point in my work. I presented my understanding of the generally indifferent attitude toward our musical heritage, my ideas and needs on how to change it, and the work that we at Dominican College were trying to do in order to stimulate interest in and appreciation of American music. Apparently the members present really took fire; they called for another meeting the following week, which brought forth, to my great surprise, the resolution that (1) Sister Dominic's American music collection be SPONSORED BY THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF THE CFMC, PROVIDED (2) that it be housed in a special room of its own in the music building (at the time parts were in my studio and the remainder on shelves and in bookcases of other rooms), and (3) that the collection be known as the AMERICAN MUSIC RESEARCH CENTER. The conditions were taken to Dominican College officials; all were heartily approved and THE SHOW WAS ON. That was late fall of 1967.

*CFMC sponsorship did not mean direct financial support to the AMRC, although individual members contributed funds. In fact, Sister Dominic requested in 1973 that the CFMC withdraw its official sponsorship because it inhibited acquiring funds from other sources. As early as 1970, Dominican College informed Sister Dominic that the AMRC “must be self-supporting,” although it continued to provide space for the center (three rooms in the college library after 1974), some student help, and some production costs for the comic operas. Sister Dominic displayed considerable ingenuity and hard work in securing donations from individuals, corporations, and agencies that provided funds for the AMRC during its twenty-one year residency at San Rafael.*

*During this time Sister Dominic served as consultant for a number of regional and national commemorations. The final vignette is about such activity during the United States Bicentennial.*

The M. H. de Young Memorial Museum’s [San Francisco] principal offering was an exhibition of 100 American paintings from the private collection of John D. Rockefeller, the 3rd, some of which had never been publicly shown. Coinciding with the painting exhibition was a six-month educational lecture series conducted by well-known faculty from nearby universities and colleges. The three-hour, biweekly lectures were presented as colloquia, and each colloquium was conducted by three speakers. The subjects covered were early American literature, dance, music, amusements, architecture, theater, and social life. At first I was asked to be a music consultant—nothing more; however, I soon realized at an early meeting that my sole duties were to provide some background music and offer any incidental advice that might be needed. A GREAT BOMB SEEMED TO EXPLODE WITHIN ME! Here was a major San Francisco museum dealing with every aspect of America’s cultural history EXCEPT MUSIC! I STOOD UP AND VOICED MY OBJECTIONS EMPHATICALLY! There followed a stony silence. Gradually they began to realize that such an omission would be a grievous mistake. They asked me what sort of music I had in mind. (Now they were all very distinguished university professors supposedly cognizant of our cultural life.) After I told them about some of the early Moravians and New England’s first indigenous composers, they unanimously concluded that I should bring to the next meeting a couple of recordings for them to hear.

The following week I came well-armed with an excerpt from one of John Antes’s trios and another very carefully selected excerpt from a John Knowles Paine symphony. *They were all aghast, struck with amazement.* Never had they even dreamed of such beauty and skill in earlier American

music. They immediately decided to have me participate on both the opening and closing symposia as a lecturer and performing artist. I was also to provide a half hour of music, together with program notes, for each of the other colloquia. Finally, I was responsible for furnishing exhibit materials for the showcase in the foyer. The last assignment gave me the opportunity to show the AMRC's Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter from 1622, our 1737 edition of the Bay Psalm Book, our Geneva Bible and Psalter of 1599, and several of our eighteenth-century tunebooks—all with appropriate legends. In all, it was much work, but I felt it to be a great triumph for American music.

*Sister Dominic was a familiar, gracious, and enthusiastic participant at Sonneck Society [now the Society for American Music] meetings up to 1984, after which time illness restricted such activity. She attentively inquired after her collections once they were moved to Colorado. She died in San Rafael, California, in January 1994.*

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