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## **AMRC Collections Enhance Course Offerings**

As well as serving specialists, the American Music Research Center tries to involve the undergraduate student body, even non-music majors, in learning music research procedures. On this premise, William Kearns, AMRC Director, asked AMRC research assistants Linda Davenport, Dennis Loranger, and myself to devise projects which would (1) necessitate student work sessions in the AMRC, (2) provide students with a close view of the music or lyrics/libretto, and (3) encourage subject and content knowledge by including questions pertaining to the various aspects of the materials. Thus far, three projects have been developed for a course entitled History of the United States' Folk and Popular Music. Projects 2 and 3 were also used for another course, History of American Popular Song, although different titles and questions were chosen for the sheet music project. Each project culminated with a two- to four-page paper which summarized the student's observations and research.

### **Project 1: Early American Church Music Project, originally prepared by Linda Davenport**

The AMRC tunebook collection is fairly extensive, numbering over 200 tunebooks. This made possible the tracing of a particular hymn-tune, in this case "St. David's Tune," a hymn-tune of English origin, which was first published in Thomas Ravenscroft's *The Whole Booke of Psalmes, with the Hymnes Evangelicall, and Songs Spirituall* (London, 1621). "St. David's Tune" was a popular common-meter melody in the American colonies. Seven different versions of "St. David's Tune," found in the AMRC tunebook collection, include:

1. Manuscript tunebook with syllable notation on the music staff (c. 1726) — no text
2. *The Bay Psalm Book*, 24th edition (Boston 1737) — contains notes plus solfege designations above the music staves — The psalms are printed in the front of the book with 39 tunes after the psalms.
3. Thomas Walter's *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained*, 4th edition (Boston, 1740) — no text.
4. William Tans'ur's *The Royal Melody Complete* (Boston, 1767) — no text.
5. *The Psalms of David* by Isaac Watts and *A Valuable Collection of*

*Sacred Musick, adapted to the various metres in Watts* (Exeter, NH, 1818) — unique split-page book with the tunes printed in the lower third of the book and the psalms in the upper two thirds.

6. Lowell Mason's *The Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music*, 9th ed. (Boston, 1830) — includes figured bass.

7. Charles Zeuner's *The Ancient Lyre, A Collection of Old, New, and Original Church Music*, 11th ed. (Boston, 1840) — The upper two voice parts are cued in small notes on the staves of the lower two voice parts in order to facilitate keyboard accompaniment.

The majority of the materials for this project were arranged in the glass-enclosed, locked AMRC display case. (Even with this precaution, the eighteenth-century original tunebooks were not displayed. Rather, photocopies were made of the desired pages. This proved advantageous, because the pages could be somewhat enlarged for better visibility while still retaining the appearance of the actual tunebook.) Students were instructed to view the displayed materials, read the captions, and write an essay about the contents of the display, relating it to what they had learned about early American church music from class lectures and reading the text.

After viewing the display, each student was expected to visit the AMRC reading room to see two original tunebooks at close range and to ask the staff any questions pertinent to the project. They were shown the 24th edition (1737) of *The Bay Psalm Book* and William Billings's *Continental Harmony* (Boston, 1794). Each student was encouraged to contemplate how this music was used in eighteenth-century New-England life and to incorporate personal impressions of the AMRC visit into the project essay. The overwhelming response to this project was a realization that America's eighteenth-century cultural milieu was quite different from that which exists today.

## **Project 2: Early Anglo-American or Comic Opera Project,** originally prepared by Joanne Swenson Eldridge

The AMRC houses an early Anglo-American opera collection which contains some originals; however, many of the nearly 200 comic operas are in the form of photocopies of the original scores or librettos owned by various British and American libraries. Three operas were chosen for study:

*Flora or Hob in the Well* John Hippley

*The Haunted Tower* - Stephen Storace

*No Song, No Supper* - Stephen Storace

The plan included having the students read a segment of the libretto from an opera scene, examine the music associated with that particular scene, and answer questions pertaining to the materials viewed.

Before a specific scene could be meaningful to the students, an understanding of the opera plot seemed necessary, so a plot synopsis of each opera was prepared. The scenes and associated music chosen for study, plus the list of

characters, were photo-copied. Lastly, the questions to be answered were devised.

The solution to the logistical problems which could result from making this project accessible to 110 students is detailed below in a reproduction of the one-page handout received by each student.

### 18th-Century American Opera project

1. Ask for the opera project folder (by course #) at the music library desk or in the AMRC. This project folder contains the opera synopses and background readings in folder #1 and three other folders, one for each of the operas labelled by opera title.

2. Read the plot synopses in folder #1 and choose **one** of the three comic operas to examine. Then, request the folder (by opera title) for your chosen comic opera. It will contain 2 or 3 excerpts.

3. Choose **one** excerpt from the opera folder you have selected. Read the script and the words to the 'airs.'

4. Answer the questions below, relating those questions to comic opera in general and to your chosen excerpt in particular.

Questions based on the excerpts:

1. What do you learn about the character of the person from his or her air?

2. Are there any expressive markings in the music? If none, what speed or expression do you think could be associated with the airs?

3. Both prose and poetry are used in these excerpts. Discuss how and where they are used. Normally, prose propels the plot; whereas, poetry offers lyrical comment. How does your chosen example treat prose and poetry?

4. In comic opera, the dialogue often conveys rather clearly the character's nature. Describe what you discover from the dialogue about the nature of **one** character from your chosen excerpt.

Questions based on readings:

1. Sister Mary Dominic Ray's article, "Drums, Wigs, and Six Wax Lights," *Musical America* (Aug., 1975) (located in folder #1 with the plot synopses): What basic difference is there between grand opera, as we know it today, and comic opera? What musical form common today is more like comic opera?

Reflection: Incorporate in your writing one item from the reading which caught your attention, or cite information of particular interest or relevance to what you have learned in the History of American Folk and Popular Music class.

2. "Ballad Opera," *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*: Why was *The Disappointment* not performed on 20 April, 1767, as had been announced by the *Philadelphia Gazette*? How do we know the contents of this comic opera, even though there wasn't an 18th-century performance of it?

Questions regarding the display in the AMRC display case:

1. Who was Stephen Storace?

2. Of what significance is Charleston, South Carolina in comic opera history?

3. **Briefly** convey your impressions of the exhibit. (Suggestion:

Use your impressions as introductory or concluding comments to your paper.

The display referred to in the last set of questions included a picture of Stephen Storace and pertinent biographical information, the score to his *The Haunted Tower*, and some photographs of comic opera productions.

Despite the three facets of the project and the complexity of reading comic opera synopses and excerpts, the students seemed to grasp the material without great difficulty. Since we appear to have a workable project, a goal for the future is to continue creating synopses of other comic operas in the AMRC collection for use in the large, non-major classes.

### **Project 3: Sheet Music Project,** originally prepared by Dennis Loranger

The entire project involved a three-part process: (1) study the materials in the AMRC display case, (2) review the sheet music in a topic category and answer the associated questions, and (3) find a sheet music title using the PAC (public access catalogue).

Part one of the project involved perusing samples of sheet music in the AMRC display case, which also contained a display on the recently acquired Charles Krolek Sheet Music Collection, including a brief biographical sketch and pictures of collector Krolek himself, and some sample pages from the collection catalogue—the contents of which are divided into songs, waltzes, rags, fox trots, Latin-American, Classical, and professional copies for song pluggers. The students were asked to begin the writing assignment with a paragraph about the display, noting the trends in American sheet music (1890-1914) depicted by the frontispieces and represented by the visible titles and lyrics. Particularly noticeable are the exquisite sheet music covers, which exhibit a profusion of associations ranging from flowers, musical instruments, angels, and cozy cottages, to a black nanny holding a white child in her lap, alluding obliquely to the numerous coon songs of the period.

Topical categories of money, love, ethnicity, and nature, addressed in sheet music of the early twentieth century, provided a framework for part two. Two to four pieces, which fit each topic category, were chosen from the Krolek Sheet Music Collection, containing some 16,000 pieces, and placed in separate topic folders. Students came to the AMRC reading room, asked for the folder associated with the topic they chose to examine, and spent 15-30 minutes studying the music's lyrics, frontispiece, and advertising schema. One example of the questions is printed below:

Money and its lack are topics in "I Can't Give You Anything but Love" and "On the Sunny Side of the Street." Love compensates for this lack, but do the songs imply that it is an adequate compensation? Provide reasons which support your argument.

Many students expressed fascination with the variety of extraneous information printed on the sheet music, including advertisements for other music published by that publisher, other songs written by the same composers, or other songs introduced by the same musicians. The assignment associated

with the sheet music display had clearly helped to focus their attention on these details. Also, many students had purchased or used contemporary sheet music before, so, by being able to study sheet music from an earlier period (1892-1938), they gained a distinctive sense of historical change.

The final aspect of the assignment included looking up a piece of sheet music using the public access catalog at one of the terminals in the Music Library, which also houses the AMRC. This task was devised as a way of acquainting the students with how to access the Music Library's large sheet music collection, including original copies of many popular songs from mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Specific directions for access procedure were included with the project handout. Once the chosen music was in hand, the students were asked to describe briefly the frontispiece, the text, the tempo and expression markings, and anything else which they considered important to the song's significance.

Even though these non-major projects took considerable implementation time, they proved meaningful. Graduate level music majors also benefit from having regular access to the AMRC collections for a course entitled Studies in American Music, a comprehensive course whose subtitle could well be From Psalters to Tin Pan Alley and Beyond. Since the course content includes cultivated and vernacular American music, the rich array of AMRC resources and collections is invaluable for a wide variety of research projects in American music.