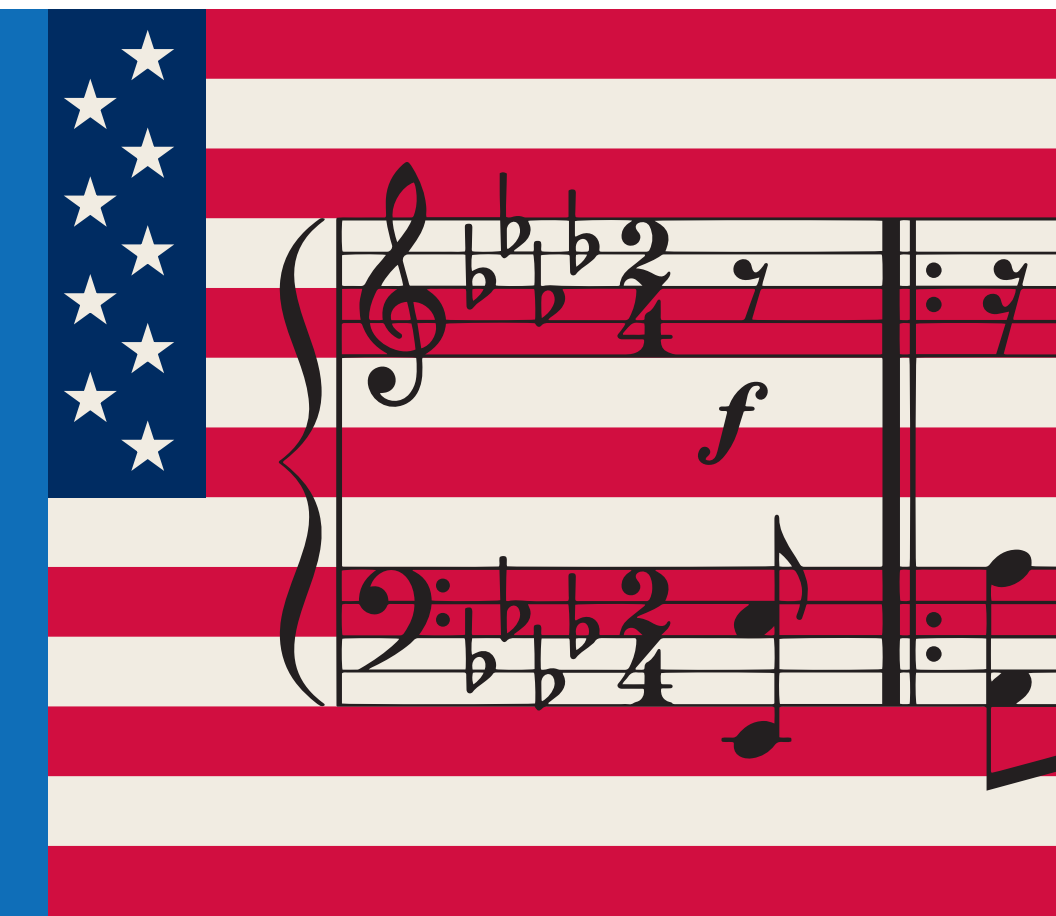


Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:

The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948



Juilliard

The Juilliard School
presents

37th Annual Focus Festival

Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:
The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948

Joel Sachs, *Director*

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Introduction to Focus 2022

by Joel Sachs

That this year's Focus festival is the 37th and not, alas, the 38th, is not a byproduct of missing a year of Focus. The theme began to gestate even before the 2020 festival, as I thought about a topic that was both older than and yet truly of our era, with a title such as "Music in Time of Troubles." It would reflect on the awful consequences of World War I, including the U.S. election of 1920, which ushered in American isolationism, destroyed nascent democracies, and helped propel the world into an even more-horrendous conflict. Then came coronavirus—only a bit late for the centennial of the great flu epidemic. So many historical analogies heightened my interest. An initial proposal pointed out the merit of a topic with no living composers to whom we would owe an apology if the festival had to be canceled. In fact, the topic was never even considered because of the worsening pandemic.

Eventually, the skies brightened. We were offering in-person performance instruction and gradually resuming performance activities, though without audiences. Health statistics were improving; we were headed back to in-person instruction; and even the political clouds seemed to be dispersing. The very concept of a "time of troubles" seemed too gloomy. A celebratory festival seemed much more appropriate, though I still liked the idea of a festival without living composers in case of a turn for the worse.

Having studied the history of American music and having performed so much of it since I was about 20, I knew that in the very beginning of the 20th century, American music began developing its own voice in the concert hall. American popular music already had its impressive history. In his short life, Stephen Foster, the composer of salon songs, earned the title "the father of American music." Although he died in 1864, his songs were still sung when I was young. (Many of his songs were minstrel songs, however; some are still performed, though with less racially charged words.) But his music apparently did not transcend the English-speaking world. Somebody must have propelled American music into the international musical world right at the beginning of the new century.

In fact, there were two key figures. The first was Scott Joplin, whose "Maple Leaf Rag" (composed in 1897 but, in modern terminology, "gone viral" upon publication in 1899) is believed to be the first piece of sheet music to sell more than a million copies. It spread wildly with the player piano, making Joplin the king of ragtime and "Maple Leaf Rag" the "Rock Around the Clock" of its time. Joplin was not alone, however. Only a year later, John Philip Sousa took his band to the Glasgow and Paris Expositions. Suddenly, we had internationally renowned kings of marching music and cakewalk, the style of ragtime made famous among Europeans by Debussy.

So 1899 became the starting point of my concept. (Later, I found out that Eubie Blake's astonishing ragtime hit "Charleston Rag," which became famous from his 1915 recording, was also first conceived in 1899.) For the festival's date, a number shone brightly: 1948, the year of John Cage's

monumental *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano, his last piece of fully composed music. The year 1948 kept coming up. There was Elliott Carter's *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, a major landmark; and only one year earlier, Milton Babbitt's first truly mature compositions appeared. It also turned out that in 1948 two American music publishers that made a huge difference to American composers were founded: Edition Peters/New York and Peer Music Classical—though gaining publishers was an enduring problem for women and Black composers. (For more on this topic, see Tuesday night's Preconcert Roundtable.) I began to feel that 1948 seemed logical because it marked the return of a peacetime culture and of military personnel, many of whom may have been musicians. Finally, 1948 was the 50th year after "Maple Leaf Rag" became a hit. Festival directors love such numbers!

A broader significance of 1899 lies in how it reminds us that "American Music" signifies more than what is performed in concert halls. In fact, the concept of "American Concert Music" was slow in emerging and finding acceptance even in the United States. It virtually did not exist in late-19th-century Europe—in contrast to American literature and painting, which basked in international glory. The slow empowerment of American composers with distinctive voices partly resulted from the confluence of assorted social forces in the prosperous sector of the population, who were at that time almost exclusively the descendants of Europeans. Only the prosperous could have afforded to attend concerts and operas; and there were not many potential concertgoers outside a few major urban centers. Symphonic orchestras and opera companies were slow to start in comparison with Europe, where the performance of opera had been an important focus of the rich since it began in the early 17th century; fully professional symphonic orchestras began in 1813 in London. The rising cult of "classical music"—including the spread of professional symphony orchestras and the mass worship of virtuosity—was a 19th-century phenomenon that can be clearly connected with the growth of railroads and inexpensive newspapers.

The U.S., however, lacked a royalty and aristocracy with endless resources to support culture. America left cultural life to free enterprise, which is to say that consumers themselves had to sponsor the arts. Fortunately, some of them were wealthy enough to use the promise of an urban culture to entertain themselves and to seed urban expansion. The politics of the national budget made it possible. In the early 20th century, a federal income tax was reestablished with the aim of raising revenue from high earners—the "robber barons" of American industry. The super-rich responded by establishing that charitable foundations would reduce their tax liability and improve their reputations. The age of private support of the arts and education was born, and the sociopolitics of buying the "best" flourished. When, for example, the Boston Symphony played at San Francisco's monumental celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal, cultural leaders decided that San Francisco could and should have its own orchestra.

And let us not feel too inferior; the Europeans found that the newest symphonies and operas needed larger venues, which meant more ticket buyers had to be found. As everywhere, it took some doing. In Europe, “classical music” attracted the attention of prosperous Americans who traveled abroad. Aware that Americans were considered uncultivated and obsessed with money, they wanted to prove their cultural credibility by demonstrating familiarity with the masterpieces of music. That, in turn, led to pressure on our few orchestras to keep playing the European masterworks, a habit encouraged by the European-born conductors who led our orchestras and opera houses. Needless to say, composers are not stimulated by an absent market. Americans who did compose, such as the Bostonian John Knowles Paine, did it in a very credible imitation of European style. But they could never overcome the listeners’ desire to know the masterworks. Such a situation obviously did not help American composers compose “Americanly.”

Nevertheless, truly American music flourished on a less exalted level. There were successors to Stephen Foster. America had musical theater (usually based on European operetta); Black America had spirituals and its own popular music, climaxing with Joplin’s invention of ragtime, which his successors gradually transformed into jazz. (Left out: Indigenous Americans, whose isolation from mainstream society was so total that composers as we think of them were almost nonexistent.) Musical education was changing: the first conservatories appeared in the 1860s at Oberlin College and in Baltimore; in 1905 Frank Damrosch created Juilliard’s ancestor, the Institute of Musical Art. The modern media—radio, recording, sound movies—spread music around this dispersed country. Depression-era music projects safeguarded American orchestras. Increasing numbers of adventurous performers made a difference to composers. Each wave of immigrants—Irish, Italian, Jewish (to name only three prominent groups in the 19th century)—brought its own music. Ironically, the very diversity of American music inspired the Nazis to claim that the U.S. had no music of its own because it was a “mongrel” culture. The Nazis’ suffocating vision of ethnic nationalism made it impossible for their adherents to even imagine diversity could be an asset. Furthermore, as America’s economy expanded, its educated classes grew in tandem. Its burgeoning urban centers were creating markets, a more diverse musical world in which Europhilia was not the only option.

The main obstacle was the residual tendency of too many “classical” composers and performers to consider American popular and religious music too lowbrow to be appropriate models for inspiration. The crowning exception was the astoundingly gifted son of a Civil War bandmaster who believed in the beauty of all music, no matter how modest its origin. After living in obscurity for decades, Charles Ives was discovered to be one of the greatest talents in the history of music. Although regarded as an eccentric amateur by American and European composers such as Pierre Boulez, Ives eventually became the model of an American explorer.

Ives was not the only improbable but quintessentially American product of later 19th- and early 20th-century American diversity. On the opposite coast from Connecticut, a pair of poor anarchists (an Irish poet and his American writer wife) spawned another extraordinary proponent of cultural broadmindedness: Henry Cowell, whose life would seem preposterously improbable if it were the subject of a novel. We shall return to both Cowell and Ives a few times this week. Suffice it to say for now that Cowell's activities included creating a publishing company and later a recording company almost completely devoted to helping American composers. Both were made possible by Ives' financial support. Thanks in part to Cowell's leadership, by the time the Depression kicked in, many American composers were debating what "American music" could be.

Unquestionably, the urge to compose and to be different was spreading, as listeners this week will see. The battle for recognition did not ease. The European press, however, insisted that jazz, the astounding art form of the 1920s and '30s, was the only legitimate American music. Cowell responded that what distinguished American music was a parallel to what distinguished American industry: we constantly reinvent ourselves. The Great Depression intensified the debate about Americanness in music as composers tried to find ways to connect with the larger, newly impoverished American community. Some of this process unfolded in the movies and in such public works of the Roosevelt era as the WPA Music Program, which gave birth to local orchestras. World War II had its own effects, first placing the cultural world on hold and then re-igniting it as peace returned. By then, the concept of American music had been established. There was, however, much more to be done. Milton Babbitt's much maligned and misnamed 1958 article "Who Cares if You Listen?" was above all a plea to universities to make jobs for composers so they could finally stabilize their lives. Even today, however, a tendency persists to assume that foreigners know more about composing than Americans. In my experience, the European musical world knows only a handful of American composers and has no idea what is really going on across the Atlantic. Most of my foreign composer friends know about Babbitt's article but have never heard a note by him or much of any other American composer. Clearly, the battle continues.

Making the 2022 Focus Festival

Once the topic had formed, I quickly realized how easily one can overlook important developments. The new dean of the Music Division, David Serkin Ludwig, and I decided to assemble a panel of colleagues and other people knowledgeable about the period to offer advice. Not wanting to consume too much of their busy lives, I proposed giving them something concrete to examine—a list of candidates for inclusion in the festival—and asked them if they saw conspicuous lacunae. It seemed easy enough to do. In 1986, Oxford University Press (OUP) issued *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, comprising four volumes and about 2,600 pages dedicated to a comprehensive view of music and musical life in this country. (In 2013, OUP published a second edition, with substantial updates, that is twice as big.) I blithely proposed to use that dictionary to assemble a list of *everyone* who composed between roughly 1899 and 1948. My previous experience suggested that I would not find much. I excluded jazz and pop artists who did not write down their music, since the central purpose of this festival is to give opportunities for our students to have new performing experiences. But I did want to embrace ragtime and early stride bass, as well as Tin Pan Alley and Broadway, and not just avant-garde composers but significant traditionalists. My list ended up with about 300 people! While many of them have slipped into obscurity, creating a list of composers to fill about 40 slots in the festival was far from a problem. But cutting it to the right size was hugely challenging. Composers who are best represented by choral music, church music, large-scale orchestral works, etc., had to be excluded. And as more facets of American music emerged, the more I had to conceive Focus 2022 as a sampler.

It was soon apparent that sticking fast to the borders was urgent, because American composition truly exploded around 1950, doubtless in part because of the educational boom at the war's end. From a predominantly rural country of 76.2 million persons in 1900, the U.S. expanded to about 160 million in 1950 and to a mostly urban-suburban population totaling 281.4 million in 2000. Surely, the post-war educational boom also produced more composers. It is a sign of the growing culture that a similar festival, covering from roughly 1948 to 1998, would have to be massively longer if it were to draw any kind of proper picture and would be virtually impossible to organize. About 30 years ago, Fran Richard, the vice president of ASCAP for classical music, told me that 30,000 Americans considered themselves composers of "classical music." That number must surely be larger now. A six-concert sequel covering 1949 to 1998 has become impossible. And that is a good sign of the health of American music.

Acknowledgments

The nature of this edition of Focus has facilitated the involvement, in addition to Juilliard's Music Division, of students from dance, historical performance, and jazz. (A plan to include drama fell before the onslaught of that division's rehearsal schedule, which was especially intense because of postponements resulting from the pandemic.)

For their assistance in making this festival possible, my thanks go to the members of our special advisory panel: David Serkin Ludwig, dean and director of the Music Division; Jonathan Yaeger, chair of the music history department; Fredora Hadley, professor of music history; and Jane Gottlieb, vice president for library and information resources. Ted Rosenthal of our jazz faculty was of invaluable assistance in co-creating the ragtime and jazz segments on Program IV. Mel Marvin, art professor at NYU and composer for stage and media, created the sampling of Broadway shows on Program V. For the recreation of Martha Graham and Henry Cowell's *Deep Song*, I express infinite gratitude to Terese Capucilli, the teacher of Graham technique in Juilliard's Dance Division; and the staff of the Graham Company, listed on Program III. Special thanks go to Aaron Sherber, former music director and conductor of the Graham Company, who originally provided me with the extant materials of Cowell's score and who, for this occasion, recopied the final version of that music.

More thanks go to Curtis Stewart, multifaceted musician, director of Juilliard's chamber music program, and the New Juilliard Ensemble manager, who created an electronic system so that volunteers for the chamber concerts could register their interest; Joe Soucy and the orchestra staff, who are listed on Program VI; Joanna Trebelhorn and Matthew Wolford, for overseeing logistics for all concerts; the heroic staff of the production department, for making everything happen smoothly in the Peter Jay Sharp Theater; and, in Public Affairs, Rosalie Contreras, vice president of public affairs; Susan Jackson, editorial director; and Boris De Los Santos, senior graphic designer.

Finally, I am incredibly grateful to our program editors, Kevin Filipksi and Thomas May, without whom this program book would not be possible.

Program I

Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:
The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948

New Juilliard Ensemble

Joel Sachs, Founding Director and Conductor

Britt Hewitt, Soprano

Sunday, January 23, 2022, 7:30pm

Peter Jay Sharp Theater

SCOTT JOPLIN
(1868–1917)

“Maple Leaf Rag” (1899)
“Sugar Cane, A Ragtime Two-Step” (1908)
“The Ragtime Dance” (1906)
(orchestrations by Joplin’s contemporaries)

CHARLES IVES
(1874–1954)

Ragtime Dances, Nos. 1 and 2 (c. 1904)

EDGARD VARÈSE
(1883–1965)

Octandre (1923)
Assez lent
Très vif et nerveux
Grave—Animé et jubilatoire

HENRY COWELL
(1897–1965)

Sinfonietta (1928)
Larghetto
Presto
Allegro non troppo

Intermission

RUTH CRAWFORD
(SEEGER)
(1901–53)

Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg (1930–32)
Rat Riddles
Prayers of Steel
In Tall Grass
Britt Hewitt, Soprano

IVES

Symphony No. 3 (“The Camp Meeting”) (c. 1904–10)
Old Folks Gatherin’
Children’s Day
Communion

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes, including an intermission

Laying the Foundations

Tonight's concert opens, appropriately, with the piece that sets the beginning of the 2022 Focus festival's timeframe, "Maple Leaf Rag," and then turns to the "coastal progressives," Charles Ives and Edgard Varèse (New York), Henry Cowell (California and New York), and Ruth Crawford (Seeger) (New York and Maryland). Although their place in America's evolving compositional world will last, one would like to hope, in the ranks of the composers whose music has left a mark, they all played additional roles in the larger development of American music. This story begins when the 1915 emigré from France, Edgard Varèse, quickly attracted attention as a conductor. A charismatic figure, he garnered underwriting to form a new orchestra that intended to serve as a vehicle to perform new music. (Let's recall that Debussy had just died.) Unfortunately, when the opening concert drew a small audience, its sponsors demanded that he conduct conventional music. Varèse resigned, protesting that with two orchestras playing standard repertory, New York City could not support a third. One more concert proved him right. The incident only increased his determination to bring new music to New York. In 1921, he created the International Composers' Guild, dedicated to presenting new music. Eventually, however, he antagonized his board by insisting that every performance be new, whereas some board members felt that repeated hearings could help listeners to absorb the new styles. Unable to convince Varèse, they departed.

Meanwhile, California-born Cowell had begun splitting his life between the Bay Area and New York, accumulating splendid notoriety as an ultra-modern pianist playing with his forearms and palms or directly on the piano strings. He could not have been more different from Varèse. Yet Cowell, the son of an Irish immigrant poet and a rural American fiction-writer, both of them philosophical anarchists, Cowell seemed like a natural ally for the sophisticated Frenchman. Varèse persuaded him to form a California branch of the International Composers Guild, modeling his programming on that of the New York group. When the guild collapsed, Cowell went his own way, founding the New Music Society of California in 1925. After beginning in Los Angeles, which was still a smallish town, he moved it to San Francisco, a center of the arts, playing to audiences that were devoted but minuscule. Cowell soon realized that his efforts to help composers could not accomplish much if they reached only those who attended the concerts. Composers need publishers, and commercial publishers would not touch Modernists. To meet the need, he founded *New Music Quarterly (NMQ)*, a periodical that comprised only one or two new compositions, which were published without descriptions or explanations. (Later, he allowed capsule biographies of the composers.) *NMQ* would finance itself through subscriptions. Adept at enlisting free labor, Cowell got his father, second stepmother, and friends in California and New York—including the wealthy patron of new music Blanche Walton—to handle the project. Predictably, the subscription base grew very slowly and the magazine struggled.

Cowell nonetheless persisted. What followed made him one of the most important leaders among America's Modernist composers.

By a strange coincidence, a *dea ex machina* led him to a *deus ex machina* with money. Margaret Nikoloric, an American pianist who knew Cowell and had performed his music, was married to a rich lawyer who brought her to a dinner with a wealthy insurance man named Charles Ives. When Ives mentioned that he was a composer, Nikoloric told him about her friend Cowell and his new journal. Intrigued, Ives requested a copy and more information about it. He quickly committed himself to contribute \$100 a month (which, in 2021, was estimated to be equivalent to \$1,460 in purchasing power, and by other measures much more). It made all the difference. Cowell also persuaded Ives, who had lost faith in the future of his music, to let him publish some of it, thereby making *NMQ* Ives' first publisher. Ives insisted on paying all of the costs of producing his scores in addition to his monthly contributions. Later, taking advantage of the low cost of labor in Germany, they added New Music Edition, which published orchestral scores, including a movement of Ives' Fourth Symphony. In the early 1930s, when electrical technology employing a microphone became available, they launched New Music Quarterly Recordings. Their governing principle was to remain open to any style as long as the quality of the composition was high.

Amazingly, there were other projects: most prominently, the Pan American Association of Composers (PAAC), of which Varèse was the nominal head and for which Cowell and some friends did all the work. Its mission was to increase the circulation of new music among the Americas. Alas, Varèse, who had dictatorial instincts and a touch of sociopathology, eventually sabotaged the PAAC and damaged some of Cowell's other projects. Yet the publishing and recording series lasted until about 1950.

It is almost impossible to imagine how much energy Cowell invested in helping other composers while composing prolifically himself and, until the collapse of the economy, touring extensively in the U.S., Europe, and the Soviet Union. Searching for a motivation, Sydney Robertson Cowell, who married him in 1942 (in Ruth and Charles Seeger's back garden!), believed that it grew out of a tragedy. In the early 1920s, Cowell was engaged to a brilliant, lovely, and wealthy young woman who was killed with her sister when their car was hit by a train. Having already sponsored the first publications of his music, she had also left him additional money that he could use toward his career. Sydney told me that she thought Henry always felt he had had an unfair advantage in the musical world thanks to his fiancée and was determined to help his colleagues. He continued to do so for his entire life. We shall hear more about him in the coming week.

Notes on Program I (Continued)

“Maple Leaf Rag” (1899)
“Sugar Cane, A Ragtime Two-Step” (1908)
“The Ragtime Dance” (1906)
SCOTT JOPLIN

Scott Joplin

Born:

November 24, 1868,
probably in
Texarkana, Texas

Died:

April 1, 1917,
in New York City

Sadly, the life of Scott Joplin can be written briefly because so little about it is known. He grew up in Texarkana, Texas; his mother was a free-born Black woman, his father had been enslaved. Joplin’s four brothers and two sisters were all musical, playing various instruments and singing. It is said that he had a German emigré piano teacher. At a certain point, Joplin began roaming, reportedly arriving in St. Louis by 1885, where, as music historian and Juilliard alumna Vera Brodsky Lawrence put it, he entered into the “sporting life fraternity” and performed in the area on the piano and in bands, playing various instruments. In late 1905, he left St. Louis, where he had been prolifically composing, arriving in 1907 in New York, soon remarrying after an unsuccessful first attempt. While continuing to compose for the piano, Joplin soon began his project for an opera, *Treemonisha*, the overture to which opens the final concert of this festival. It would be a full-length opera about a Black subject.

The turning for Joplin, according to Lawrence, was 1899. Before that, at least superficially, his career was typical of most Black musicians in late 19th-century America. Lawrence wrote, “It was neatly summed up by Eubie Blake, who had come along the same hard route as a boy. ... ‘There were only two places where a Negro musician could play in those days: in church or in a bordello. And you know you couldn’t make a living in a church!’ Joplin too had cut his musical teeth in low dives and saloons. Whatever his personal environments might have been, he always carried with him the special qualities which have set him and his music apart: He was a serious and dedicated composer, he believed in his talent, and he maintained all his life a flaming commitment to the concept of education—not only for the betterment of himself and his music but also for the salvation of his race.”

“Maple Leaf Rag,” the most famous of Joplin’s compositions, was actually composed in 1897 and named for a tavern where he played. But it only entered the world two years later when it was published in Sedalia, Missouri. Although it started slowly, within 10 years, half a million copies had been sold, establishing Joplin as the “king of ragtime.” Still writing for the piano, he was also trying his hand at stage works but never finding success. These included “The Ragtime Dance,” which involved a vocal part and elaborate choreography from contemporary and now obscure popular dances. Joplin supposedly published directions for the dances, but no copy has ever been sound. (The title “Sugar Cane Rag” is assumed to be fanciful.)

The orchestrations heard tonight came into the possession of Vera Brodsky Lawrence, who made them available to Gunther Schuller for a 1972 festival at the New England Conservatory. Lawrence said: “These were no ordinary instrumentations: Seven had been included in the almost legendary, early

20th-century collection of orchestrated ragtime ... affectionately known as the *Red Back Book*. The eighth rag, 'Sugar Cane,' was separately published, but was of equally authentic vintage." She had received them as she was compiling the *Complete Works of Scott Joplin*. The orchestrations were not included because they were not attributed to Joplin himself. Nor are the names of any other orchestrators known. Schuller had to edit them carefully, making adjustments such as thinning the orchestration after repeats to reflect what is known of standard practice at the time. My professional ensemble Continuum may have been the first to perform these versions in New York, also in 1972.

***Ragtime Dances, Nos. 1 and 2* (c. 1904)**
CHARLES IVES

Although Scott Joplin would not seem to have a connection with the Modernists, in fact the power of the new art of ragtime quickly captivated Charles Ives, who was passionate about the popular and religious essence of so much informal music in American culture. His interest is glaringly unusual because hardly any self-described "serious" American composers—who were almost exclusively white—stooped to consider such music as worthy of their attention, especially the music of a Black pianist, particularly one who spent parts of his career playing in brothels. Ives considered all music equal and treasured the results of energetic if flawed performances by "ordinary" people. He became remarkably good at capturing those flaws of informal performance, creating the kinds of moments that others considered amateurish composing. The ragtime dances are excellent examples, suggesting the times when he and other ragtime pianists would meet in a rehearsal hall, play different pieces simultaneously, and see how well each of them could stay on course. Such are the seemingly illogical interruptions that occur in these dances. Ives also enjoyed revisiting older scores and picking at them. In this way, the two dances we hear became the first scherzo of his monumental Piano Sonata No. 1. Other ragtime dances became the nucleus of the second scherzo. A keen eye and ear will also notice instruments absent from the *Red Book* scores, though they were normal components of wind bands.

***Octandre* (1923)**
EDGARD VARÈSE

Edgard Varèse's ensemble compositions, with instrumentations usually comprising winds and large percussion sections, but almost never any string instruments, eventually exercised enormous influence upon younger composers. (He felt strings instruments had less-decisive rhythmic qualities.) His dreams of extended musical horizons helped open up the world of electronic music, of which he was an early composer. The title *Octandre*, like other Varèse titles, sounds quasi-mathematical, although it is said to be derived from a flower with eight stamens.

Charles Ives

Born:
October 20, 1874,
in Danbury,
Connecticut

Died:
May 19, 1954,
in New York City

Edgard Varèse

Born:
December 22, 1883,
in Paris

Died:
November 6, 1965,
in New York City

Notes on Program I (Continued)

Sinfonietta (1928)

HENRY COWELL

Henry Cowell

Born:

March 11, 1897,
in Menlo Park,
California

Died:

December 10, 1965,
in Shady, New York

Henry Cowell's biography is so extraordinary that it cannot be encapsulated here. Suffice it here to say that he grew up in great poverty, the child of two anarchist writers who ended up in Menlo Park California, was home-schooled, discovered by a Stanford professor, nurtured by two other Stanford professors as well as some other extraordinary intellectuals, ended up at the University of California with only a third-grade diploma behind him, and quickly rose to international renown as a Modernist piano virtuoso-composer.

Much of Cowell's early output was for solo piano, employing the unconventional techniques that made him one of the world's most provocative musicians—playing huge “tone clusters” with his forearms, palms, or fists; or directly manipulating the strings. In addition to performing throughout the United States, he toured Europe five times and was the first American composer-performer to play in the Soviet Union. The music for which he is still best remembered is for piano, but he gradually expanded to writing more ensemble pieces, eventually becoming one of the most-performed American symphonic composers.

Around 1930, Ives proposed that he, Cowell, and their various friends organize concerts of American orchestral music in Europe, conducted either by Nicolas Slonimsky, a Boston-based conductor, composer, and writer, or by Europeans. Again, Ives would finance it; again, Cowell did much of the legwork. For a concert in Vienna, the goal was to enlist Anton Webern, a superb professional conductor now famous only as a Modernist composer. Cowell, who was living in 1931 in Berlin on a Guggenheim Fellowship to study world music, went to Vienna to meet him. It was immediately clear that he had to convince Webern to conduct Cowell's *Sinfonietta*. Over a very long evening, Webern went through every detail of the score, frequently asking Cowell why he put a certain note here rather than there. By midnight, they were both exhausted, but Webern had been convinced that Cowell was a serious, disciplined composer and agreed to conduct.

The three-movement *Sinfonietta* is composed in a style of thoroughly dissonant harmony and counterpoint that Cowell had developed from the teaching of his former mentor Charles Seeger. The methods of thematic development are, however, thoroughly traditional, giving the piece the kind of clarity that wins over the listener, just as his radical piano music also had a transparently traditional basis—if one takes the time to listen to it. The second movement scherzo is a sunny Irish jig, evoking his father's background.

Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg (1930–32)

RUTH CRAWFORD (SEEGER)

Some of the spade work for the European concerts that Cowell and Ives were planning was done by Ruth Crawford (Seeger), arguably one of the greatest talents of the early 20th century and certainly the first American woman to become a singular composer. She was born in 1901 in East Liverpool, Ohio, the daughter and granddaughter of ministers. Initially trained as a pianist in Jacksonville, Florida, she began studying composition at the American Conservatory in Chicago (1921–29), a city that was developing a lively musical life thanks to people like Crawford's teacher Diane Lavoie-Herz and pianist Georgia Kober, whose good friends included Henry Cowell. Through this new music circle, Crawford became aware of the latest developments in "ultra-modern" music, and her own works began to attract attention. Cowell, by the late 1920s one of the most important figures in new American music, encouraged her by publishing her piano preludes in his *New Music Quarterly* in 1928 and by arranging for her to study in New York with Charles Seeger, a composer and theorist of great originality who had taught Cowell in the 1910s. At first, Charles believed that women could not compose, but Cowell convinced him to try. Charles rapidly changed his mind.

**Ruth Crawford
(Seeger)**

Born:
July 3, 1901,
in East Liverpool,
Ohio

Died:
November 18, 1953,
in Chevy Chase,
Maryland

During these years in Chicago and New York, Crawford soon became a part of the American cultural scene, enjoying friendships with the critic Alfred Frankenstein; the poet Carl Sandburg; and composers Dane Rudhyar, Edgard Varèse, and, of course, Cowell. Ives, who got to know her music through Cowell, became another supporter. As the first woman to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition, Crawford spent 193–31 abroad, primarily in Berlin, where she was in contact with Bartók, Berg, and other leading European Modernists. She and Seeger married in 1932. Her music was included in many concerts here and abroad in the years just before Europe began to collapse; the remarkable slow movement of her String Quartet was on New Music's first recording. *The Three Songs* performed tonight were chosen to represent the United States at the 1933 Amsterdam Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music.

Crawford's adventurous mind led her to use the most-advanced techniques such as a form of serialism, tone clusters, *Sprechstimme*, polyphonic textures with rhythmically independent voices, and spatial separation of performing groups. She developed very quickly: because of the unusual course of her career, her mature works were written between 1929 and 1932. *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg* is virtually a "late" work, incorporating a dissonant harmonic style, a form of serialism in the second piece, and spatial separation of the "concertante" and the small orchestra. All of her music displays an unusual imagination for color, mood, character, and intensity, which Crawford honed by combining natural expressivity with a continuing search for methods of organization.

Rarely repeated, her methods could center on rhythm, texture, motives, pitches, and intervals or on dynamics. Crawford's ideas were never merely academic however; they spanned a range of poetic, emotional, and dramatic states. She died in 1953, having only recently returned to composing. In addition to the burdens of the household and children, she had become discouraged by the conservative turn of music during the 1930s.

Symphony No. 3 ("The Camp Meeting") (c. 1904–10) CHARLES IVES

Ives' Symphony No. 3 originated in pieces that he played as organist of Manhattan's Central Presbyterian Church in 1901 and 1902. When he began to realize that his music was—as he put it—unorthodox and not conducive to quiet meditation, he decided to search for another profession and entered the insurance world, where he became extremely wealthy but struggled to find adequate time to compose. He stopped composing almost entirely in 1926 as his health and exhaustion worsened.

The Third Symphony, Ives later recalled, was a turning point. His fantasy, now released from all constraints, brought him to a heightened stage of imaginativeness. Fate, however, proved unkind. Gustav Mahler, conductor of the New York Philharmonic, considered performing it but died before the plan could be realized. It lay unheard until 1946, when Lou Harrison conducted the New York Little Symphony in its premiere, which Ives did not attend, fearing being ridiculed. Luckily, he was wrong. It was a triumph that finally gave him a taste of recognition. Awarded a special citation of the New York Critics' Circle in 1946, it won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize and brought Ives his first real renown. Noticeably simpler in conception than his other major orchestral works, Symphony No. 3 remains an excellent introduction to the music of this visionary. Quoting freely from hymn tunes, Ives brilliantly recaptured the fervor of turn-of-the-century revival meetings.

Texts

Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg

Rat Riddles

There was a gray rat looked at me with
green eyes out of a rathole.
“Hello, rat,” I said,
“Is there any chance for me
to get on to the language of the rats?”
And the green eyes blinked at me,
blinked from a gray rat’s rathole.
“Come again,” I said,
“Slip me a couple of riddles;
there must be riddles among the rats.”
And the green eyes blinked at me,
and whisper came from the grey rathole:
“Who do you think you are and why is a rat!
Where did you sleep last night and why do
you sneeze on Tuesdays?
And why is the grave of a rat no deeper
than the grave of a man?”
And the tail of a green-eyed rat
whipped and was gone at a gray rathole.

Prayers of Steel

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls.
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars.

In Tall Grass

Bees and a honeycomb in the dried head of a horse in a pasture corner—a skull in the tall
grass and a buzz and a buzz of the yellow honey-hunters.
And I ask no better a winding sheet
(over the earth and under the sun.)
Let the bees go honey-hunting with yellow blur of wings in the dome of my head, in the
rumbling, singing arch of my skull.
Let there be wings and yellow dust and the drone of dreams of honey—who loses and
remembers?—who keeps and forgets?
In a blue sheen of moon over the bones and under the hanging honeycomb the bees
come home and the bees sleep.

About the Artists

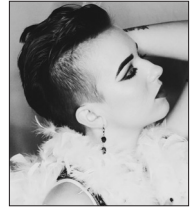


Joel Sachs

Joel Sachs, founder and director of the New Juilliard Ensemble, performs a vast range of traditional and contemporary music as conductor and pianist. As co-director of the new music ensemble Continuum, he has appeared in hundreds of performances in New York, nationally, and throughout Europe, Asia, and Latin America. He has also conducted orchestras and ensembles in Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, El Salvador, Germany, Iceland, Mexico, Mongolia, Switzerland, and Ukraine, and has held new music residencies in Berlin, Shanghai, London, Salzburg, Curitiba (Brazil), Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (U.K.), Helsinki, and the Banff Centre (Canadian Rockies). One of the most active presenters of new music in New York, Sachs founded the New Juilliard Ensemble in 1993. He produces and directs Juilliard's annual Focus festival and, since 1993, has been artistic director of Juilliard's concerts at the Museum of Modern Art. A member of Juilliard's music history faculty, he wrote the first full biography of the American composer Henry Cowell, published by Oxford University Press in 2012. Sachs often appears on radio as a commentator on recent music and has been a regular delegate to international music conferences. A graduate of Harvard, Sachs received his PhD from Columbia. In 2011, he was made an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard for his work in support of new music and received the National Gloria Artis Medal of the Polish Government for his service to Polish music. In 2002, he was presented with Columbia's Alice M. Ditson Award for his service to American music. He has recorded for Naxos and other labels. On May 28, he will give a recital in Oban, Scotland, featuring Charles Ives' Piano Sonata No. 1 and music by Ruth Crawford (Seeger), Aaron Copland, and Henry Cowell.

Britt Hewitt

Britt Hewitt (BM '20, voice) is a New York-based soprano and singer/songwriter. A devoted experimentalist, she can often be found working with composers on new works, writing and producing music of her own, and teaching voice and writing. While studying at Juilliard under the tutelage of Sanford Sylvan and William Burden, she performed roles including Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*; the Spirit in the French, English, and American tour of *Dido and Aeneas*; Blanche de la Force in *There's Blood Between Us*, based on *Dialogues of the Carmelites*; and Mistress Quickly in a devised work based on *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor*. She also worked with student composers to develop new works, performed in multiple new music-centric recitals, and started her formal music production education and work in Juilliard's Center for Innovation in the Arts. As a Gluck Fellow, she performed at dozens of care centers and hospitals across all New York City boroughs. Her culminating senior recital, *WOMAN*, featured work by female composers from the 20th and 21st centuries, including herself. Outside her academic activities, in 2018 she joined the New York Songwriters Circle, performed her first showcase at the Bitter End, and won second place in the New York City Office of Media and Entertainment's My NYC Song Contest. Since graduating from Juilliard, Hewitt has worked with virtual and in-person companies and projects to develop new works, including the American Opera Project, Opera Harmony, and Experiments in Opera, for which she will create the title role in *Everything for Dawn*, which will be televised and streamed in 2022. She was commissioned by the Peace Studio to translate, produce, and record an original song with Corsican artist Petru Canon, "Di Mi L'Amore," which can be heard during the end credits of a dialogue series, *Conversations that #OfferPeace*, in partnership with NowThis and PBS All Arts. Over the past two summers, she became the first vocalist to study at Blue Hill, Maine's historic Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival. Hewitt released her debut self-produced EP, *Unfastened*, last June. When not working on music, Hewitt can be found supplying New Yorkers with vegan sweets at Confectionery, practicing yoga, or teaching her cat new tricks.



About the New Juilliard Ensemble

Joel Sachs, *Founding Director and Conductor*
Curtis Stewart, *Manager*

The New Juilliard Ensemble (NJE), led by founding director Joel Sachs and in its 29th season, presents new music by a variety of international composers writing in diverse styles. The ensemble, comprising Juilliard players from freshmen to doctoral students, has appeared annually since 1993 at the Museum of Modern Art's Summergarden series, was featured four times at the Lincoln Center Festival, and has premiered more than 150 compositions. Members of the ensemble have performed in Israel, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and Russia. In the 2019-20 season, the ensemble featured works by Julian Anderson (U.K.), Oleg Felzer (Azerbaijan/U.S.), Jacqueline Fontyn (Belgium), Deirdre Gribbin (Northern Ireland), Alexander Goehr (U.K.), Balázs Horváth (Hungary), Magnus Lindberg (Finland), Elisabeth Lutyens (U.K.), Ursula Mamlok (Germany/U.S.), Narang Prangcharoen (Thailand), Shulamit Ran (Israel/U.S.), Alfredo Rugeles (Venezuela), Ruth Crawford (Seeger) (U.S.), Eric Tanguy (France), and Galina Ustvoloskaya (USSR). During the pandemic, the ensemble recorded two video concerts of music by composers from Azerbaijan, Japan, France, South Africa, and the U.S.; resumed live performances in October and reopened to the general public in a November concert featuring a new piece by Roberto Sierra with David Rockefeller Jr., as narrator. The ensemble annually begins Juilliard's Focus festivals, the most recent edition being 2020's Trailblazers: Pioneering Women Composers of the 20th Century. This season's final concert takes place on Monday, April 11, at Alice Tully Hall, in a program comprising four world premieres.

Program II

Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:
The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948

Monday, January 24, 2022, 7:30pm
Peter Jay Sharp Theater

MILTON BABBITT
(1916–2011)

Three Compositions for Piano (1947)
Tianyi Li, Piano

LEON KIRCHNER
(1919–2009)

Duo for Violin and Piano (1947)
In one movement
Elaine He, Violin
Ji Youn Lee, Piano

CONON NANCARROW
(1912–97)

Trio No. 1 for Clarinet, Bassoon, and Piano (1942)
Presto
Andantino
Allegro molto
Alice McDonald, Clarinet
Troy Baban, Bassoon
Ben Pawlak, Piano

Intermission

NANCARROW

Study No. 3a for Player Piano (Boogie-Woogie) (c. 1948)

VIRGIL THOMSON
(1896–1989)

Eight Portraits for Violin Alone (1928)
George Hugnet, Poet and Man of Letters
Señorita Juanita de Medina Accompanied by Her Mother
Madame Martha-Martine
Miss Gertrude Stein as a Young Girl
Cliquet-Pleyel in F
Mrs. Chester Whitin Lasell
Sauguet, From Life
Ruth Smallens
Max Tan, Violin

AMY BEACH
(1867–1944)

Quartet for Strings (in One Movement), Op. 89 (1921–29)
Raina Arnett and Lauren Conroy, Violin
Sean Juhl, Viola
Kelcey Howell, Cello

JOHN PHILIP SOUSA
(1854–1932)

The Stars and Stripes Forever (1896; arr. Vladimir Horowitz, 1944)
Biguo Xing, Piano

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, including an intermission

Three Compositions for Piano (1947)

MILTON BABBITT

Milton Babbitt

Born:

May 10, 1916,
in Philadelphia

Died:

January 29, 2011,
in Princeton,
New Jersey

Milton Babbitt's remarkable personality never failed to impress anyone who had the opportunity to chat with him. A man with a mind of legendary brilliance, a composer of music, and the author of theoretical articles renowned for their seriousness, he preferred discussing baseball, popular music, or the scarcity of really authentic bagels. It was almost impossible to get him to talk about his own music. His unique place in the musical world results from the happy confluence of his broad interests and his numerous skills. He grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, and by the time he graduated from high school at age 15, he was already taking professional engagements on several instruments, performing jazz and "pop." Studies at New York University and Princeton combined mathematics and music and private composition lessons with Roger Sessions. During the late 1930s and the war years, he was engaged in both fields at one time or another. After the war, Babbitt was for a few years involved in film and musical theater and, in 1948, he rejoined the faculty of Princeton University (where he had taught in the late 1930s), retiring in 1984 as William Shubael Conant professor of music emeritus. He was also for years a member of the composition faculty at Juilliard. A prolific composer, Babbitt wrote for orchestra, ensembles, solo instruments, tape, and especially singers, since poetry was one of his great loves. He was awarded one of the celebrated grants for creative genius from Chicago's MacArthur Foundation and received a Pulitzer Prize citation for his "life work as a seminal American composer."

As a composer, teacher, and writer on many musical subjects, Babbitt became the symbol of and spokesperson for some of the most crucial developments in Western music. In all his involvements, he maintained that composing implies infinite discipline and requires composers to take responsibility for every note they write. Like Schoenberg and Webern, Babbitt believed that the tighter the subsurface organization of the music, the freer is the composition's "surface" that the listener actually hears. Yet this in no way contradicts the mixture of classical and "popular" in his own musical makeup. Like the jazz player, he expects the listener to follow an ever-shifting expressiveness that bolts from one kind of gesture to another at almost lightning speed. (Those who conversed with him or heard him lecture will recognize that quality.) Though formidably difficult to perform, his music possesses a complexity that always serves the artistic end rather than being employed for its own sake. The rigor of organization enhances the expressiveness, flexibility of ideas, and sense of infinite variety possible in the traditional 12 chromatic tones of Western music. In fact, careful analysis of his works often demonstrates how the composition exists almost in defiance of the underlying organization. Like Webern years earlier, Babbitt found that discussions of the organizational principles of a piece frequently distract players from the musical job at hand.

To me, the miracle of the piano pieces heard tonight is that the structural intricacy serves to unify music of an improvisational liveliness that reminds one of Babbitt's original "home" in Mississippi jazz. Babbitt recalls his shock when he first saw the score of Webern's Concerto for Nine Instruments and discovered that the intervallic material stated in the opening measures was, by utter coincidence, identical to what he had used in his *Composition for Four Instruments* (1948) and the second of the *Three Compositions for Piano*.

Duo for Violin and Piano (1947)

LEON KIRCHNER

The following essay is edited from a discussion of Leon Kirchner written by Cheryl Seltzer, a student of his at Mills College who became a long-time friend of his, for Continuum's 1995 recording of his chamber music.

New music in the United States since World War II has been a spirited arena of diverse ideologies. Serialism, Minimalism, indeterminacy, New Romanticism, and other musical pathways have attracted their passionate constituencies of composers and audience. Of composers who have chosen to go their own way, working apart from the ever-changing mainstream, a major figure is Leon Kirchner. Single-mindedly following his own vision, he developed a powerful, inimitable language.

Kirchner was the son of Russian Jews. At age 9, his family moved to Los Angeles, which in the 1930s became a creative mecca with the influx of distinguished refugees from Nazi Europe. Family hopes for a medical career were dashed when Kirchner put his zoology major behind him and entered Arnold Schoenberg's seminar at the University of California Los Angeles. He received his BA in music from the University of California at Berkeley, where he had classes with Ernest Bloch. Awarded the Prix de Paris in 1942, he intended to go abroad but because of the war settled in New York and studied with Roger Sessions. After army service, he returned to Berkeley for graduate studies. Kirchner held professorships at the University of Southern California, Mills College, and, from 1961 until his retirement in 1989, Harvard University.

Kirchner was a man of the broadest artistic and intellectual horizons and an immensely perceptive teacher of both composers and performers. At Harvard, he created a unique music analysis/performance class, which had an enormous impact on such budding celebrities as Yo-Yo Ma, Lynn Chang, and James Oliver Buswell. A pianist and conductor of rare gifts, he was guest conductor with major orchestras and in residence at numerous festivals. He was especially proud of the Harvard Chamber Orchestra, which he founded to perform traditional and contemporary repertoire.

Leon Kirchner

Born:
January 24, 1919,
in Brooklyn

Died:
September 17, 2009,
in Manhattan

Notes on Program II (Continued)

His works include the opera *Lily*, concertos, string quartets, the song cycle *The Twilight Stood*, a monumental cantata, *Of Things Exactly as They Are*, and other orchestral, chamber, and solo works. Numerous major commissions and awards included the 1967 Pulitzer Prize and the 1994 Kennedy Center Friedheim Award.

Although Kirchner's music evolved subtly, the basic features of his musical language were apparent from the start. It tends toward the rhapsodic, with impulsive movement from lyric to dramatic and asymmetrical rhythm and phrasing. Works are conceived as organic wholes. (Generally, Kirchner's multi-movement works are "played without pause".) In his earlier music particularly, sectional contrasts are sharp, marked by clear tempo changes; in later compositions, the textural continuity becomes more homogeneous, the changes gradual and seamless. The tonal language is chromatic but not serially organized. Kirchner's score markings are detailed and sometimes unusual: "haltingly," "wild," "coming from nowhere, almost out of control." Each movement evolves from a single idea that typically generates themes of a probing, questioning character. Like a protagonist in a drama, the idea goes on an epic journey, carrying us along with propulsive energy until we reach a plateau of calm reflectiveness, after which the energy erupts anew. All this makes a work *feel* like a large experience even though it may not be particularly long.

His earliest compositions show the impact of his teachers as well as the influence of Bartók and Berg. The language, however, is distinctly his own. His first published composition, the Duo for Violin and Piano (1947), has an airy, playful tone but, typically, the seemingly lighthearted scherzando discourse ultimately enters mysterious, transcendent realms. The signs of his mature style appeared as early as the following year in his piano sonata.

Trio No. 1 for Clarinet, Bassoon, and Piano (1942)

***Study No. 3a for Player Piano (Boogie-Woogie)* (c. 1948)**

CONLON NANCARROW

Conlon Nancarrow

Born:

October 27, 1912,
in Texarkana,
Arkansas

Died:

August 10, 1997,
in Mexico City

Even in these early days the U.S. was already spawning composers so original that they were dismissed as eccentrics. Major examples are Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, John Cage, and Lou Harrison. For many years, rumor had it that such a musician was quietly composing some of the most explosive music of the century. This was Conlon Nancarrow, who attended the Cincinnati Conservatory (1929–32) and studied privately in Boston with three leaders of American new music: Nicolas Slonimsky, Walter Piston, and Roger Sessions. (Nancarrow considered the counterpoint studies with Sessions his only formal compositional training; he was an active jazz trumpeter.) After fighting in the Spanish Civil War's international brigade (1937–39), he found himself classified as politically unreliable by the American government, which rejected his next application for a passport. (This treatment of political nonconformism, especially purported Communists, was common until the Supreme Court declared

it unconstitutional in 1958.) Furious at such undemocratic treatment, he moved to Mexico City in 1940, becoming a Mexican citizen in 1956 and marrying the distinguished archeologist Yoko Segiura. He lived in Mexico City until his death.

Although Nancarrow had already been writing music that I once described as “the happiest music since Haydn,” he was having very disappointing results. New York musicians did not feel compelled to practice their parts. In Mexico City, where working with live musicians even more daunting, he tried to build an automated percussion ensemble. It failed. He then remembered reading, in Henry Cowell’s book *New Musical Resources*, the suggestion that extremely complex, correlated relationships of pitches and rhythms could be tested on the player piano. Astonished that Cowell had never done it, Nancarrow returned briefly to New York to buy a player piano and roll-cutting equipment and set to work composing a long series of rhythmic studies that reached unprecedented levels of complexity without sacrificing their humanity.

Until the early 1980s, Nancarrow was associated almost exclusively with that apparently “dead” instrument, to which he gave a new life through a compositional virtuosity probably never dreamed of by its inventors. But by rendering the live performer superfluous, he removed his name from the concert stage, limited the potential for recognition, and obscured the very existence of his earlier works. A MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant in 1982 finally brought him to the public’s attention.

Coincidentally, at about the same time Nancarrow began writing again for live performers. (That story is beyond the scope of our festival.) Tonight we present two pieces, the first from his productive early period and the other from the beginning of his exploration of the player piano. The “live” piece is a trio for clarinet, bassoon, and piano from 1942. Like other early compositions, the second and third movements had been lamented as lost. The recording that I made with Continuum in 1991 included only the first movement. The other two turned up miraculously in Nancarrow’s Mexico City home in a pile of trash. As in all his pre-player piano music, simple, direct melodies and harmonies, reflecting his years in jazz, are more apparent than the challenging complexities such as elaborate metric shifts among the three instruments and a fascinating retrograde canon forming the slow movement. It is unsurprising to learn that his most admired composer was Bach.

Nancarrow’s first compositions for player piano continued the style of the trio and other pieces of the early 1940s. *Study 3a*, thought to be his first piece for player piano, was part of a boogie-woogie suite comprising three *Studies*. Little needs to be said about its style, other than a suggestion that the listener imagine a single pianist attempting to play it. Such automated virtuosity is hardly Nancarrow’s invention; early ragtime was sometimes transferred to the player piano with extra, high speed, double-octave

Notes on Program II (Continued)

doublings of the notes and hypersonic speeds. That, however, was just window dressing. From the beginning, the *Studies for Player Piano* embodied an unprecedented use of polyphonic rhythmic layers. They were never mere arrangements.

Eight Portraits for Violin Alone (1928)

VIRGIL THOMSON

Virgil Thomson

Born:

November 25, 1896,
in Kansas City,
Missouri

Died:

September 30, 1989,
in New York City

Virgil Thomson was born to an old Baptist farming family. Although he always retained a love for the land, its traditions had an odd effect on him. He attributed to his seemingly gentle mid-Southern heritage his “arrogance and unhesitating disobedience.” He liked to cite religion as an example: “I have never felt inferior to the believers, or superior; I simply am not one ... The loyalties formed in my preadolescent years lie elsewhere than to Bible reading and preachers. They are to music, companionship, and hospitality ...” This disobedience made him a composer who always resisted compositional fashions and who retained a long-lasting aesthetic kinship with the almost naive simplicity of Erik Satie, as well as an extremely aggressive music critic.

After military service came Harvard. A European tour with the Harvard Glee Club in 1921 altered his life permanently by casting him into a love affair with Paris, that den of intellectual ferment packed with native and expatriate artists, poets, musicians, and wealthy hangers-on. Thomson spent most of two decades there, carefully avoiding “working” to support himself. A Harvard grant, commissions, a bit of freelance journalism, and, above all, contributions from private patrons kept him just above the poverty line and in Bohemian spiritual splendor. His circle included James Joyce, Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, Darius Milhaud, Aaron Copland, and countless others who shaped 20th-century culture with their sense of style and fun. Above everyone sat the celebrated American radical poet Gertrude Stein, Thomson's inseparable comrade, who was 22 years his senior. His two musical foci were the young Nadia Boulanger, who taught analysis and composition to the American students, and the irresistible Satie, who radiated irreverent wit and simplicity. He also enjoyed the Dadaists' preachings that all artistic conventions were equally valid (or invalid). Although not a true Dadaist, Thomson invented his own conventions, shedding bombast and borrowing Satie's aesthetic of tender humor. In his earliest music, he balanced Modernism, Classicism, and Romanticism in a way similar to Milhaud, Poulenc, and Satie, but with a totally individual sound.

Friends came and went, but Gertrude Stein was always there. Their first collaboration, the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1928), made Thomson's name at its premiere at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum six years later and featured the all-Black cast that he demanded; he had found that venue during a trip to the U.S. in the early 1930s. On another trip, he joined the Roosevelt-era culture by composing for three government-sponsored films that spread the word about the federal public works projects including the

Tennessee Valley Authority. But he kept returning to Paris even though that art-filled epoch was doomed: economic collapse, labor disruptions, and political strife bordering on civil war assassinated the old joyousness of Paris, to say nothing of the rest of Europe. Nevertheless, being there liberated him from German-dominated musical tradition and probably allowed a gay composer to live more securely than in the U.S. Paradoxically, although social change was now high drama, the wild early 1920s had already given way to neo-Romanticism with its return to “emotion” from the “objectivity” or Surrealism that had dominated the immediate post-war years.

By the late 1930s, the old foreign community was abandoning Paris, replaced by refugees from the ugly conflicts in Spain, Germany, and Austria. Thomson, Stein, and a few others stuck it out, however, stimulated rather than frightened by the dangerous ferment. Besides, where else could one have so much fun with so little money? Alas, when, in May 1940, the Nazis conquered France, it was time to go if one could.

In New York, when Thomson succeeded Lawrence Gilman as music critic of the *Herald Tribune*, his disobedient spirit gained a public voice, giving him a central position in the American literary scene through his brilliant, outspoken essays. He found new American friends and fellow rebels, especially Lou Harrison and John Cage. Life was fruitful, but when France was liberated, Thomson was off to Paris to write for the European edition of the *Herald Tribune*. He persuaded Gertrude Stein to write the libretto for a second opera, *The Mother of Us All*. Thomson left the *Herald Tribune* in 1954, returning to New York and concentrating on composing—even music with religious overtones. The end of his life, was, however, sad. When I last saw him—we were guests on a WQXR show not long before he died—Thomson told me that a hearing defect caused pitches to be displaced and he could no longer listen to music.

Eight Portraits for Violin Alone, composed early in 1928, was Thomson’s response to an idea coined by Stein. Man Ray had taken a superb photograph of the sculptor Jo Davidson working on a bust of Stein; Stein, said Davidson (according to an article in *Vanity Fair*) “returned [Davidson’s] compliment” by writing a portrait of him. It read: “You know and I know, I know and you know, you know and I know, we know and they know, they know and we know, they know and I know, they know and they know you know and you know I know and I know.” Said the reporter: “If there was something to be known, not even Davidson knew what it was. He wrote, in a 1951 memoir: ‘Gertrude did a portrait of me in prose. When she read it aloud, I thought it was wonderful. It was published in *Vanity Fair* with my portrait of her. But when I tried to read it out loud to some friends, or for that matter to myself, it didn’t make very much sense.’” The beginning of what might be called “sound poetry,” it became the essence of Stein’s libretto for Thomson’s opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Tonight’s audience is encouraged to listen to a recording of Stein reading her equally beautiful but meaningless portrait of Picasso. Such “portraits” also prompted Thomson to begin his own long

Notes on Program II (Continued)

series of portraits in music, “depicting” friends, who probably also had no clue of what the “portraits” meant. Many of these are for piano; we hear tonight his lovely solo violin portraits, whose “meaning” is almost certainly irrelevant. The kinship with Satie, and Thomson’s Midwestern simplicity, will be obvious.

Quartet for Strings (in One Movement), Op. 89 (1921–29) AMY BEACH

Amy Beach

Born:

September 5, 1867,
in Henniker, New
Hampshire

Died:

December 27, 1944,
in New York City

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach was born to a prominent family; her mother was a talented amateur singer and pianist. A true prodigy, she is said to have memorized 40 songs as a 1-year-old, to have read at 3, and to have played four-part hymns and composed waltzes at 4. Beach studied with her mother from age 6 and, a year later, gave a recital including Handel, Beethoven, Chopin, and her own music. When the family moved to Boston in 1875, she was taught by leading pianists, and she made her Boston debut at 16. Two years later, she played a Chopin concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Her marriage to Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a 37-year-old doctor, lecturer at Harvard, and amateur singer, changed her course, perhaps ultimately for the better. His desire that she limit her public performances, so typical of that era, refocused her on composing despite having had only a year of basic instruction in harmony and counterpoint. Now known as Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, she pursued her education independently, analyzing masterworks as models for composition and translating treatises including Berlioz’s book on orchestration.

In 1892—she was 35—the performance of her Mass in E-flat by Boston’s Handel and Haydn Society led to commissions for more vocal and choral works; that same year, a performance of her concert aria *Eilende Wolken* made her the first woman whose music was played by the Symphony Society of New York and the first American woman to win recognition as a composer of large-scale orchestral works. In the next few years, she fulfilled commissions for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha.

After her husband’s death in 1910, having officially returned to the name Amy Beach, she resumed touring as a pianist and composer, receiving excellent press in Germany. In 1914, she returned to the U.S., performing in the winter and composing in the summer, largely at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where she became a Fellow. A true citizen of the musical community, Beach was active in the Music Teachers National Association, the Music Educators National Conference, and the Society of American Women Composers, of which she was a founding member and first president in 1925. At her death, she had assigned all royalties from her music to the MacDowell Colony.

Her enormous portfolio includes an opera; symphonic, sacred, and secular vocal music; chamber music; songs; and solo instrumental music. She also wrote about her experiences as a composer, women as composers, and numerous other subjects. Publishers included G. Schirmer and Theodore Presser, and later, various reprint companies. Beach's early style followed the tradition of late-Romantic European composers, as was usual in the late 19th century. Unlike most women composers of her time, however, she did not confine herself to songs and short piano pieces. Keeping abreast of developments in new music, she gradually absorbed the techniques of Debussy and Ravel and eventually some concepts of post-tonal music. Although her powerful musical curiosity continued to the end, the conservatism of most of her music consigned it to obscurity for years. Even the very Bostonian-sounding name "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach" elicited chuckles when I was a student. Her compositions only resurfaced as the concert world became newly interested in American musical Romantics.

The Quartet for Strings (in One Movement) was begun at the MacDowell Colony when Beach was in residence in 1921 and completed in Rome eight years later. It is one of the few pieces not published in her lifetime; a publisher who had been showing interest was stymied by the shortage of paper during the Depression and World War II. The quartet was also one of the few works by Beach not to be publicly performed soon after it was completed; it was given only private performances and one professional reading. The true premiere came in 1942 at a two-day festival of her music that she could not attend because of her deteriorating cardiac condition.

Several qualities make the quartet unusual. That it is based on Inuit melodies—which Beach knew from a published collection—is by itself interesting but hardly unique. Using such material gained currency after Dvořák urged Americans to use Black and Native American music as inspirations. The 1893 premiere of his "New World" Symphony seemed to underscore his wisdom, but actually he had Europeanized Native American tunes, harmonizing them in the style of the time. Beach already had started using folk melodies in 1892 but, like Dvořák, did not feel an impulse to modify her style. She was not alone: Arthur Farwell and Edward MacDowell were also adapting such melodies.

Adrian Fried Block writes, in her introduction to the A-R Editions publication of the quartet:

By 1921, however, when [Beach] drafted the Quartet for Strings, she was seeking ways to set Native American tunes that exploited rather than obscured their starkness, angularity, and monophonic character. Perhaps her change in approach reflected a search for a new style and a recognition that Inuit tunes could aid in that search. Or perhaps, as [Carl] Dahlhaus wrote, precisely because the folk tunes resisted assimilation into the "well-worn formulas of major-minor tonality," they challenged

Notes on Program II (Continued)

her “to make experiments.” The many changes within the surviving versions show that Beach worked hard to meet that challenge.

Several features show how Beach met the challenge, observes Block. All the themes in Op. 89 are fashioned from Inuit melodies; by delaying resolution of dissonances until the end, Beach “normalized dissonance”; and her writing is newly lean, banishing the virtuosity and Romantic emotionalism that characterized her earlier music

The Stars and Stripes Forever (1896; arrangement for piano solo by Vladimir Horowitz, 1944)
JOHN PHILIP SOUSA

John Philip Sousa

Born:

November 6, 1854,
in Washington, D.C.

Died:

March 6, 1932,
in Reading,
Pennsylvania

While the date of composition of Sousa’s famous march slightly breaches this festival’s starting point of 1899, we are fortunate to hear it in Vladimir Horowitz’s famous 1944 arrangement for virtuoso pianist, itself a landmark of American music.

John Philip Sousa’s amazing life story seems as typical of American music as the music itself. Born to immigrant parents and originally educated at home, he learned multiple instruments, which he played in Washington’s theater orchestras and in chamber music; organized a quadrille orchestra at 11; and planned to run away from home two years later to join a circus band until stymied by his father, who enlisted him an apprentice to the U.S. Marine Band. Soon, the 13-year-old was also composing. Sousa’s career quickly blossomed, centering on conducting and composing. His own concert band, which played from 1892 to 1931, when the Depression and Sousa’s health brought it to an end, performed more than 15,000 times and at a profit.

Sousa made sure to attract the best musicians by paying them top wages. Despite the fame of Sousa’s marches, the band was not a military band but a wind orchestra. In the words of Paul E. Bierley and H. Wiley Hitchcock: “The technical excellence of the band can be gauged from the constantly varied programs, which the musicians frequently played without rehearsals, often using manuscript parts or transposing orchestral parts.” While we may associate the best conductors with classical music concerts, Sousa was considered one of the best anywhere. Because marches, like ragtime, were also used to dance the two-step, he became wealthy from the sale of sheet music. By the end of the 20th century, *The Stars and Stripes Forever* had been recorded by more bands and orchestras than any piece ever written. “Sousa had a passion for perfection, whether presenting a common street melody or a classic, and he did more to diminish artistic snobbery than any other conductor of his era. Soloists always played a prominent part in Sousa Band concerts, and he engaged established artists,” according to Bierley and Hitchcock. A progressive, musically, he introduced much new music, “including excerpts from *Parsifal* nine years before the opera was performed in New York.” Although Sousa disliked recordings, once radio was widely available, the Sousa Band gave broadcast concerts until his death.

By his last decade, he was regarded as an American institution, promoting school music, adjudicating at band contests, and frequently conducting massed bands. Sousa died of a heart attack after rehearsing the Ringgold Band of Reading, Pennsylvania. Fittingly, the last selection he had conducted was *The Stars and Stripes Forever*.

While Sousa is now remembered for his marches and his influence on the wind band world, he was an accomplished composer of operettas, songs, and miscellaneous works for wind band. He left a powerful mark on in the recording and sheet music industries; he introduced ragtime to Europe when his band played in Paris and Glasgow beginning in 1900. Fighting for composers' rights, he was a charter member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers and campaigned for the American copyright law that finally passed in 1909. He also wrote seven books and more than 100 magazine and newspaper articles. His former musicians later held positions in leading concert, opera, and ballet orchestras, adding to his legacy.

Sousa's more than 135 marches seem typically American "perhaps because of their breezy energy [and] ... distinctive swing, particularly in their second sections." *The Stars and Stripes Forever* became the official national march of the United States in 1987; *The Washington Post March* became popular for dancing internationally; *Semper Fidelis* became the march of the U.S. Marine Corps.

[With thanks to the *Grove Online* article by Paul E. Bierley and H. Wiley Hitchcock]

Program III

Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:
The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948

Tuesday, January 25, 2022, 7:30pm

Peter Jay Sharp Theater

6:30pm Preconcert Roundtable on Publishing American Composers

Peter Jay Sharp Theater

Kathryn Knight, President, Edition Peters/U.S. (founded 1948)

Ed Matthew, Director of Promotion, G. Schirmer/AMC

Todd Vunderink, Director, PeerMusic Classical (founded 1948)

Deirdre Chadwick, Executive Director, BMI Classical (Broadcast Music Inc.)

Joel Sachs, Moderator

JOHN CAGE
(1912–92)

Selections from *Sonatas and Interludes* for Prepared Piano (1946–48)

Sonata XI

Sonata XII

Fourth Interlude

Sonata XIII

Sonatas XIV and XV, “Gemini” (after the work by Richard Lippold)

Sonata XVI

Eden Chen, Prepared Piano

WALTER PISTON
(1894–1976)

String Quartet No. 3 (1947)

Allegro

Lento

Allegro

Sophia Werner and Pierce Wang, Violins

Lou Jantzen, Viola

Noah Chen, Cello

Intermission

Program III (Continued)

HENRY COWELL
(1897–1965)
MARTHA GRAHAM
(1894–1991)

Deep Song for solo dancer with oboe, clarinet, and percussion (1937)
Choreography and costume by Martha Graham
Recreated to the original score, directed, and staged by Terese Capucilli
Original music by Henry Cowell (*Canto Hondo*, 1937)
Arranged by Louis Horst and edited by Aaron Sherber (2015)
Music coordinated for Focus 2022 by Joel Sachs
Original lighting by David Finley; Focus 2022 lighting design by Leslie Lura-Smith
Premiere: December 19, 1937, Guild Theatre in New York City

Deep Song is not meant to portray the anguish of any one people in any one place but is a recognition of the plight of enslaved people the world over.

Jacalyn Tatro, Dancer
Joseph Jordan, Oboe
Yoonah Kim, Clarinet
Will Hopkins, Percussion
Shoshana Sklar, Dancer Understudy

ROGER SESSIONS
(1896–1985)

From My Diary (1940)
Dedications:
To Milton Babbitt
To Edward Cone
To Carter Harman
To Vivian Fine
Szuyu Su, Piano

AARON COPLAND
(1900–90)

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1943)
Andante Semplice
Lento
Allegretto giusto
Mitsuru Yonezaki, Violin
Krit Kosoltraku, Piano

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 25 minutes, including an intermission

Selections from *Sonatas and Interludes* for Prepared Piano (1946–48)
JOHN CAGE

John Cage

Born:

September 5, 1912,
in Los Angeles

Died:

August 12, 1992,
in New York City

Thirty years after his death, John Cage remains one of the 20th century's most controversial figures. Yet many people who know his name have heard little or none of his music or believe he never wrote any "real music." To them, he was a showman, perhaps even a charlatan. His output in fact can be divided into three types: works until 1948 composed in the normal way (though perhaps for unconventional instruments), fully written-out pieces using chance operations, and "indeterminate" compositions whose scores have to be realized by the performers using specified techniques of randomization and then practiced like any other composition. This controversial element and the changes Cage underwent after 1948 made *Sonatas and Interludes* a natural marker for the end of this festival's timeframe.

Born and educated in the Los Angeles area, Cage studied music, art, and architecture in Europe and then alternated for some years between the two U.S. coasts, eventually making his home in Manhattan and Stony Point, New York. The decisive impulse for his professional life came from his association with "ultra-modernist" composer-pianist and world music specialist Henry Cowell. Cage had been unable to find a real composition teacher in Los Angeles; his piano teacher Richard Buhlig urged him to contact Cowell in San Francisco. Cowell in turn recommended that he study with Arnold Schoenberg, who had recently settled in Los Angeles, but felt he needed more basic training, which he could get by coming to New York, working as Cowell's teaching assistant at the New School, and studying with Adolf Weiss, who had been Schoenberg's former assistant in Berlin. This Cage did, probably profiting most from listening to Cowell's lectures on non-Western music. He then entered the class of Schoenberg, who could not understand Cage's inability to think harmonically.

Over the next few years, Cage earned a living teaching percussion to dancers. The process leading to the prepared piano began in 1938, when he accepted a job at the Cornish School in Seattle, a small institution that offered both music and modern dance. There, Syvilla Fort, a gifted dancer, asked him to write music for *Bacchanale*, her new piece drawing upon African culture. Although percussion instruments were the logical option, the space was much too confined and there was no budget to hire players. Moreover, the sophisticated 12-tone basis of Cage's earlier music seemed inappropriate for a dance intended to be "primitive." A few days before the performance, still fretting about the problem, he recalled a piece by Henry Cowell—"The Leprechaun"—that utilized direct playing on the piano strings, the sound of which had been altered by assorted objects that Cowell held to the strings with one hand while playing the keyboard with the other. Cage, however, wanted both hands to be free for the keyboard. Alas, when he tried laying objects on the strings, they bounced around hopelessly. Inserting a screw between two strings, which gripped them

tightly, solved the problem and the “prepared piano” was born. By using a variety of objects—screws, bolts, bits of rubber, felt, coins, plastic, and other materials—he could alter the strings’ vibrations in different ways, each producing different overtones by their position along the strings. The resultant sounds suggest drums, gongs, bells, or other percussion instruments. Cage effectively converted the pianist into the leader and sole performer of an exotic percussion orchestra. It was to be a central feature of his early collaborations with Merce Cunningham, who became his partner in life and art.

Sonatas and Interludes (1946–48) is the culmination of that first period. One of the grandest of Cage’s fully composed works, it fused his extraordinary melodic gift with the rhythmic imagination that had generated his classics for percussion ensemble. The piece also is the product of a lifelong instinct for finding novel solutions, a skill that came naturally to this son of an inventor. The “prepared piano” is far more than an altered piano, however: it is truly a new instrument in which the insertion of objects between the strings changes not only the sound but also the physical feeling of the keyboard.

Sonatas and Interludes, a set of 16 one-movement sonatas and four contrasting interludes forming a suite lasting some 50 minutes, was written for the American pianist Maro Ajemian, a Juilliard alumna. The sonatas’ construction roughly resembles that of Domenico Scarlatti’s one-movement sonatas, with each part repeated. The 14th and 15th, built of the same material and played as a pair, together bear the title *Gemini*, after a sculpture by Richard Lippold (1915–2002), one of Cage’s good friends. In the program for his 25-year retrospective at New York’s Town Hall in 1958, Cage wrote:

After reading the work of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, I decided to attempt the expression in music of the “permanent emotions” of Indian traditions: the heroic, the erotic, the wondrous, the mirthful, sorrow, fear, anger, the odious, and their common tendency toward tranquility.

Cage said that the sounds themselves were obtained “experimentally,” that is, “by taste rather than reasoned relations.” (In most cases, the selection of preparations preceded the act of composition.) Although *Sonatas and Interludes* is fully composed—the score specifies the specific objects and their positions along the strings—Cage soon saw that the act of transferring it to other pianos meant that the actual sounds could virtually never be duplicated. This realization was another milestone along the path to music that is not pre-packaged but changes unexpectedly, and thus on the path to music generated by chance operations.

The prepared piano turned out to have enormous influence. When, for example, the young Karlheinz Stockhausen heard David Tudor play *Sonatas and Interludes* in 1952, he suddenly encountered an entirely new world of music lacking traditional pitch relationships. Stockhausen also saw that the

internal rhythmic structures of some movements suggested a solution to the problem of organizing sound in the absence of traditional pitch structures.

Above all, Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* is filled with unforgettable melodies, hypnotic rhythms, and an astounding range of colors. A worthy successor to the sonatas of Scarlatti, the waltzes of Schubert, and the programmatic cycles of Schumann, it also is a meeting place of worlds and a monument to a man with an incomparable love of sound. We regret not including the whole piece, but this excerpt, comprising roughly the second half of the cycle, should whet the listener's appetite.

String Quartet No. 3 (1947)

WALTER PISTON

Walter Piston

Born:

January 20, 1894,
in Rockland, Maine

Died:

November 12, 1976,
in Belmont,
Massachusetts

Walter Piston was one of America's most celebrated composers, a native equivalent of his contemporary Paul Hindemith. Piston, a pupil of Archibald Davison, Nadia Boulanger, and Paul Dukas, was for nearly half a century professor of music at Harvard University; his texts on harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration may be familiar to many members of this audience. In 1946 his former pupil Elliott Carter described him eloquently:

Through the years when the "avant-garde" moderns were busy exploring fantastic new sounds and sequences often under the inspiration of literary and theatrical ideas, through the early thirties when a new wave of nationalism and populism startled many into thinking that the concert hall with its museum atmosphere was finished as a place for living new music, down to the present more conservative situation, Piston went his own way. He stood firmly on his own chosen ground, building up a style that is a synthesis of most of the important characteristics of contemporary music and assimilating into his own manner the various changes as they came along. As a result of this tireless concentration combined with rich native musical gifts, his works have a uniform excellence that seems destined to give them an important position in the musical repertory.

Carter's comments held true even during the 1960s, when Piston employed some 12-tone techniques. In 1984, as I was planning the first Focus festival, I tentatively asked Milton Babbitt—a man whose composing is seemingly miles from Piston's—what he thought of including a Piston symphony. He replied with gusto, "You always got a good piece from Walter, and nobody plays his music around here." He also remarked that his music was, in the best way, performer-friendly and would get a fine result from the Juilliard Orchestra. In fact, Piston was at bottom an immensely practical man, who first foresaw a virtuoso violinist's career, became an accomplished draughtsman, learned saxophone in a few days to be able to join the Navy band in the First World War, and could communicate the essence of composition in a handful of words. His unusual ability to amalgamate the most advanced techniques

with his essentially conservative style has made the “secrets” of his music accessible to any good listener. A kind and gentle teacher—I was a student in his 20th-century music class—he criticized decisively yet never harshly. Famous for his dry Maine wit, he always enjoyed a joke, even at his own expense. (He loved to deprecate his own piano playing.) A story circulating when I was his student sums up his mischievous personality. At the premiere of one of his symphonies by the Boston Symphony, he sat with his colleague Randall Thompson. Two befurred women behind him were muttering words to the effect of “Who could have composed this awful noise?” Piston turned around and discreetly pointed to Thompson. This good humor is often a feature of his music and may explain why he won three New York Music Critics’ Circle Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes, and eight honorary doctorates, as well as election to the American Institute and Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His close relationship with Serge Koussevitzky resulted in important commissions from the Boston Symphony. It is a pity his music is now rarely heard.

The Third String Quartet, commissioned by Harvard University and first performed by the Walden Quartet, is dedicated to Diran Alexanian, a well-known cellist and associate of Pablo Casals. It communicates directly and needs no explanation.

Deep Song (1937)

HENRY COWELL and MARTHA GRAHAM

The story of our dance production this evening is also part of the story of the new American world of “modern dance.” Although it is easy to suppose that the cross-fertilization of dance and music has been a byproduct of Aaron Copland’s famous collaborations, some of the most unusual combinations of music and dance grew from partnerships between Henry Cowell and his student John Cage with choreographers—upon which the story of Henry and Martha sheds light. (For Cage, see the note about the prepared piano above.)

Since the late 1920s, Henry Cowell had been collaborating with choreographers and dancers in the nascent movement we now call modern dance. Among them was Martha Graham. How he met her is unknown; they seem to have had mutual friends in Santa Barbara. In 1930, he completed his share of a performance called *Synchrony of Dance, Music, Light*. Graham received the score with great enthusiasm, though she does not seem to have completed the project, most probably because of the financial catastrophe of 1929. (Cowell’s score has since been performed many times.) Even during the Depression, Cowell continued to work with young choreographers such as Doris Humphrey and dancers including the young José Limón, and found intermittent work teaching percussion to dance students; he got similar employment for his young students John Cage and Lou Harrison. Then came his own

Henry Cowell

Born:

March 11, 1897,
in Menlo Park,
California

Died:

December 10, 1965,
in Shady, New York

Notes on Program III (Continued)

catastrophe. Charged with a single act of oral sex with a consenting adult and stupidly pleading guilty without a lawyer, Cowell received a 15-year sentence to San Quentin, of which he served four years before being paroled and later pardoned.

Martha Graham

Born:

May 11, 1894,
in Allegheny City
(later part of
Pittsburgh),
Pennsylvania

In prison, he used his time productively, producing a huge treatise/handbook—still unpublished—called *The Nature of Melody*; Harrison has written about its influence upon him. Cowell also contemplated the ways in which music and dance could be combined. Deeply bothered by the common practices of writing a score so that a choreographer could set it, or of writing music to an existing dance, he proposed composing in “elastic form”—writing modules that could be fused in any way by letting the choreographer adjust, cut, and paste them as the dance took shape. Graham’s music director, Louis Horst, was very interested.

Died:

April 1, 1991,
in New York City

Graham was one of Cowell’s regular visitors at San Quentin (or as regularly as she could be while living 3,000 miles away in New York). Sometime in the winter of 1936–37, she asked him to work with her to commemorate the ghastly death toll of the Spanish Civil War. That piece, *Sarabande*, was meant to capture the spirit of the ancient Spanish dance and would feature the oboe, an ancient and very evocative instrument. According to Sydney Cowell, Henry’s widow, Graham would try out her movements in the visitor’s room at San Quentin, deeply alarming the guards! After Cowell sent her the modules for *Sarabande*, Louis Horst assembled them and she premiered the new dance entitled *Immediate Tragedy*, at Bennington College on July 30, 1937, apparently only nine days after Cowell completed it. Pleased with the result, Graham then asked for a piece to combine with *Immediate Tragedy*. This became *Deep Song* (which on Cowell’s manuscript score is called by the Spanish equivalent, *Canto Hondo*); the pair was premiered the following fall.

When writing my biography of Cowell, I knew about the pieces but had never seen any trace of them; they appear in the complete catalog of his music as “lost.” Any copy he retained, I supposed, must have disappeared in San Quentin, if he even kept a copy to begin with. A phone call to the Graham Company brought the welcome surprise that they had a copy of the score, which turned out to be *Canto Hondo* alone. The music director, Aaron Sherber, sent me a photocopy, which enabled me to complete my story of Henry and Martha. But there ensued a coda. About five years ago, I was chatting about the piece with our Graham teacher, Terese Capucilli, who informed me that, in the 1980s, the choreographer taught her the dance for *Deep Song* to revive it. But since the music had vanished, they substituted Cowell’s evocative piano solo *Sinister Resonance*, altering the dance somewhat to suit that music. Only later did Capucilli discover the original materials hiding behind a desk. (The score of *Sarabande* has not been found.) I immediately proposed including it in this festival if the dance could be restored on a dance student. The musical materials, as far as we can tell, are Horst’s realization of Cowell’s modular score—exactly what

Graham had danced to in 1937. As to the dance we shall see, Capucilli had to try to reimagine what Graham would have done using that music, since there is no film of Graham dancing the piece in 1937. Several years and one pandemic later, it is ready! Terese Capucilli writes:

In 1988, after nearly a 50-year absence from her repertory, Martha Graham reconstructed *Deep Song*. At the time I embarked on this journey with her, the original score was not found, and the only record of the work was photographs of Martha taken by Barbara Morgan. This solo, as seen in 1937, was an obvious and impassioned response to the devastation of the Spanish Civil War. In working with Martha in the reconstructive process in '88, I always felt that she was searching for the true essence of the *canto hondo* that is always present in our lives. Martha loathed looking back and, as all artists are, she was truly alive in the present. Graham's work requires the interpretive artist to look inside each character to the dramatic threads that bind and bring them to a "sense of place." The reconstruction process is no different for those of us who stood in front of this great master. Living in her words, "That which you do not want to do, is to fail in either clarity or passion," this meant spending endless hours alone researching and delving deep within the unknown fibers between the Morgan stills. Powered by Graham's physical language, I brought phrases of expression into rehearsals with Martha to be worked and reworked. This is a grueling process only dancers who have worked with Martha directly can truly know. With the rediscovery of Cowell's original score and the recently uncovered photos by Robert Fraser of Martha's first performance of this solo, after 34 years I once again delve into the past to bring *Deep Song* to the present. Thank you to Joel Sachs, who gave me the courage and platform to move forward with this recreation and to the dancers for being willing partners in threading the roots from 1937 to 1988 to bring *Deep Song* to 2022. They now become part of this rich legacy that I cherish.

Thank you to the Martha Graham Resources, Damian Woetzel, Alicia Graf Mack, and David Ludwig for their support of this project and to Aaron Sherber for his insight and gift of digital recordings throughout the rehearsal process.

From My Diary (1940)

ROGER SESSIONS

Roger Sessions

Born:

December 28, 1896,
in Brooklyn

Died:

March 16, 1985,
in Princeton,
New Jersey

Roger Sessions, whose presence in the corridors and classrooms of Juilliard is so warmly remembered by older colleagues, was prodigiously talented and entered Harvard at 14. Subsequently, at Yale, he was a composition pupil of Horatio Parker, whose earlier students had included Charles Ives. (See the notes to Thursday's concert.) Like other American composers, Sessions felt his whole musical direction change through his studies with Ernest Bloch. Beginning in 1921, he served as Bloch's teaching assistant at the Cleveland Institute, resigning in protest when Bloch lost his post. For the next eight years, he lived in Europe, enjoying the incredible vitality of its new music world while retaining connections in America. Despite his absence, he and Aaron Copland presented a series of concerts in New York (1928–31) that featured young American composers. Rising in esteem in the 1930s, Sessions served as president of the American section of the International Society for Contemporary Music (1934–42). Always devoted to teaching, he was on the faculties of the University of California at Berkeley, Princeton, and Juilliard, where he was active until very close to his death at age 89. Among Sessions' many outstanding pupils were Leon Kirchner and Milton Babbitt.

Sessions was immensely prolific in virtually all areas of composition. Although his music spanned a large range of styles, it was always characterized by an incomparable integrity of compositional detail. The piano suite *From My Diary* is a step along the road from his rather traditional First Piano Sonata (1927–30) to the Second Sonata (1946) and then to his embrace of the 12-tone method in the early 1950s. The four dedicatees in his *Diary* were all composers, the three men being students of Sessions at Princeton. Also a wonderful composer, but not a student at Princeton, which was then all-male, Vivian Fine may have been his friend and compositional colleague.

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1943)

AARON COPLAND

Although Aaron Copland is still considered a symbol of American music, he never identified himself as the founder or center of a school, and never had specific musical "truths" to teach. A composer whose music enjoyed solid popularity, he never pandered to the public. Instead, Copland considered his mission to be akin to that of the pre-Romantic composers, bridging the gulf between the inner inspiration of the artist and the artistic needs and impulses of the broader audience. His musical attitude was consistent with his desire to create a compositional culture. He played a major role in the establishment of an "American sound" through his film and ballet scores. The New York concerts he directed in partnership with Roger Sessions around 1930 were a huge help to his fellow composers.

Later in life, having become wealthy through his composing, he created and endowed the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, a major supporter of new music performance in New York.

Copland's intensive education in the masters of German music ended up repelling him and sending him to the French, English, and Russian modernists, including Debussy and Ravel. A four-year sojourn as a pupil of Nadia Boulanger at the new American Conservatory at Fontainebleau was decisive. There he came into contact with Roussel, Prokofiev, Milhaud, and Koussevitzky, and, traveling widely, heard the latest in Central European music, including composers such as Webern, Bartók, and Hindemith. Yet while his European experience gave him a broad stylistic outlook, it stimulated a desire to be "American" as Mussorgsky and Stravinsky were "Russian." In this spirit, Copland accepted jazz as a legitimate inspiration and in the 1930s he turned to the American rural song tradition. His music is, however, filled with elements of contemporary European thinking. His characteristic syncopations may reflect both jazz and Stravinsky's impact on the younger generation. In fact, many of Copland's most American traits are probably best seen as personal transformations of European modernisms.

Despite Copland's renown, he, like so many composers, tends to be known through a handful of compositions. The most conspicuous of these, such as *Appalachian Spring*, display the obvious impress of Americana. Other works that continue to find broad appeal employed aspects of jazz and other popular idioms, e.g., the Clarinet Concerto. The 1930 *Piano Variations*, which show his knowledge of the 12-tone method, is probably better known here than the 12-tone piano music of the Schoenberg circle. But many of his compositions remain relatively obscure. The limits to public awareness of Copland's music are partly explained by a tradition of concert programming: Most performers rely upon works that have been certified as safe; others lean toward the outrageous. Copland's later music is at neither extreme. Like the craft-oriented composers of the past (Bach, Haydn), he found his inspiration in his listeners. Thus, even in his most abstract works, such as *Connotations* (1962), composed for the opening of Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall, rhythmic elements of the American rural tradition can still be heard. Such stylistic crossovers can also be detected in the Sonata for Violin and Piano (which is also known in Copland's later transcription for clarinet and piano). Here, the sonata principle has been reshaped in a manner reflecting, in a highly abstract way, Copland's more familiar Americanism. The textural transparency is a far cry from traditional virtuosity, while the evocative songfulness draws a line between him and mid-century radicalism.

Aaron Copland

Born:
November 14, 1900,
in Brooklyn

Died:
December 2, 1990,
in Sleepy Hollow,
New York

About the Artists



Martha Graham

Martha Graham (1894–1991) is recognized as a primal artistic force of the 20th century, alongside Pablo Picasso, James Joyce, Igor Stravinsky, and Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1998, *Time* magazine named Graham “Dancer of the Century” and *People* magazine listed her among the female “Icons of the Century.” As a choreographer, she was as prolific as she was complex. She created 181 ballets and a dance technique that has been compared to that of classical ballet in its scope and magnitude. Her approach to dance and theater revolutionized the art form and her innovative physical vocabulary has irrevocably influenced dance worldwide. Graham served on the Juilliard dance faculty from the founding of the division, in 1951, to 1977.



Terese Capucilli

Terese Capucilli is one in the last generation of dancers to have worked directly with Martha Graham. A driving force of the Martha Graham Dance Company from 1979 to 2005—in roles ranging from principal dancer to artistic director and artistic director laureate—Capucilli is renowned for her performances of Graham’s own roles with a broad dramatic scope, from Joan of Arc to Medea. Since 1990, she continues a resonating collaboration as associate founder of Buglisi Dance Theatre, performing yearly in the *Table of Silence Project 9/11* at Lincoln Center. Honors include the *Dance Magazine Award* (2001), Presidential Distinguished Alumni Award (Purchase), Fini Italian International Lifetime Achievement Award, and Juilliard’s John Erskine Faculty Prize. She is a three-time Princess Grace Foundation (PGF) awardee, including a special projects grant for her film *The Sacrosanct Accompanist* about the late pianist Lawrence “Reed” Hansen, a Graham specialist and longtime Juilliard staff member. Capucilli now serves on PGF’s Arts Advisory Board. On Juilliard’s dance faculty since 1999, she has staged the Graham classics *Appalachian Spring*, *Deep Song*, *Dark Meadow*, and *The Rite of Spring*.

Program IV

Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:
The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948

Wednesday, January 26, 2022, 7:30pm

Peter Jay Sharp Theater

VINCENT PERSICHETTI (1915–87)	<i>Sonatine for Organ, Pedals Alone</i> , Op. 11 (1940) Recitativo Adagio Allegro molto Nguyen “Bobby” Nguyen , Organ
STEFAN WOLPE (1902–72)	Two Pieces for Piano (1941) Pastorale Con fuoco Isaac Foreman , Piano
ELLIOTT CARTER (1908–2012)	Sonata for Cello and Piano (1948) Moderato, tempo giusto Vivace, molto leggiero Adagio Allegro Iona Batchelder , Cello Tengku Irfan , Piano <i>Intermission</i>
WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1895–1978)	<i>Incantation and Dance</i> (1945) Mia Fasanello , Oboe Yihao Zhou , Piano
GIAN CARLO MENOTTI (1911–2007)	“Monica’s Waltz” from <i>The Medium</i> (1946) Sydney Dardis , Soprano Emma Luyendijk , Piano

Program IV (Continued)

From Ragtime to Jazz

EUBIE BLAKE

(1887–1983)

“Charleston Rag” (1899; 1917 version)

MARY LOU WILLIAMS

(1910–81)

“Drag ‘Em” (1944)

JAMES P. JOHNSON

(1894–1955)

“Carolina Shout” (c. 1918; 1944 version)

Joe Block, Piano

DUKE ELLINGTON

(1899–1974)

“Come Sunday” (1943; transcribed by Esteban Castro from the 1958 version with violin)

Esteban Castro, Piano

Abigail Hong, Violin

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, including an intermission

Notes on Program IV

by Joel Sachs

Sonatine for Organ, Pedals Alone, Op. 11 (1940)

VINCENT PERSICHETTI

Vincent Persichetti, who began studying music at age 5, had taken up piano, organ, and double bass, as well as theory and composition, well before high school. In his high school years, he performed on the radio and in concerts and churches. After graduating from the Combs College of Music in 1935 with a bachelor's degree, he chaired its theory and composition departments while studying piano with Olga Samaroff and composition with Paul Nordoff at the Philadelphia Conservatory, which awarded him master's and doctoral degrees. In 1941, Persichetti became head of the theory and composition departments there. Along the way, he studied conducting with Fritz Reiner at the Curtis Institute. He was also director of publications for the Philadelphia music publisher Elkan Vogel. In 1947, he joined the Juilliard faculty, becoming chairman of the Composition Department in 1963 and of the Literature and Materials Department in 1970. An amiable man much loved by his colleagues, Persichetti ferociously advocated for the composition students, whose needs for performances had been neglected in the pre-Joseph Polisi era. When he got wind that the former contemporary music festival would become a thematic festival for January 1986 (a concept jointly conceived and named by Joseph Polisi and me), he insisted that it include a concert devoted to works by composition students. Although we were protective of our vision to explore coherent themes and distribute new music throughout the year, we gave him his wish, simultaneously promising ourselves that, in the future, the new concept would be preserved and Persichetti's goal would be amply achieved by creating continuous opportunities for the performance of student compositions throughout the year.

Persichetti is probably best remembered for his *Parables*, a long series of solos for virtually every instrument, including carillon, but he also created a huge portfolio including an opera and many compositions for orchestra, band, chamber groups, solo groups, singers, and choruses. His music is noted for its astute combination of up-to-date compositional techniques and accessibility to listeners. Often very challenging for performers, his compositions frequently can be found among the requirements for performance competitions. The *Sonatine for Organ, Pedals Alone*, composed when he was only 25, is among his earliest mature compositions and dates from a period when he largely wrote for solo piano. In three relatively brief movements, he explored what could be done with no more than two notes at a time, presumably reflecting his own technique as an organist. The number of sign-out stamps in the Juilliard library's copy certainly suggests that the piece remains in the repertoire.

Vincent Persichetti

Born:

June 6, 1915,
in Philadelphia

Died:

August 14, 1987,
in Philadelphia

Notes on Program IV (Continued)

Two Pieces for Piano (1941)

STEFAN WOLPE

Stefan Wolpe

Born:

August 25, 1902,
in Berlin

Died:

April 4, 1972,
in New York City

In his youth, Stefan Wolpe was immersed in the broad cultural world of his hometown, Berlin—the epicenter of 1920s German culture. He studied with the composer-pianist-musical guru Ferruccio Busoni, simultaneously directing his ferocious energy to the worlds of the Bauhaus, Dada, jazz, German cabaret theater, and the Socialist movement, for which he wrote simple workers' songs that contrast vividly with the complexity of his “serious” compositions. All of this plus his Jewish background made him a target for the Nazis. He fled first to Vienna for lessons with Anton Webern, and then to Palestine, where he absorbed the rich culture of Middle Eastern folk and traditional professional music. In America from 1938, Wolpe became an esteemed teacher of adventurous, serious young composers and performers, including jazz players, all of whom wanted to explore the novel qualities of his music.

Although Wolpe’s compositional voice was formed in Germany and the Eastern Mediterranean, the U.S. offered a perfect environment in which his talent could flourish and expand. The performers who befriended and believed in him provided an ideal stimulus for his imagination, leading to a wonderful array of chamber and solo pieces. Unfortunately, he remained little known to broader concert audiences, having written very little orchestral music and no operas. Instead, he devoted himself to solo and chamber music that suited the growing stock of performers who wanted to meet the challenges of his music. He developed Parkinson’s disease—yet at the right moment, just as a pilot program for the experimental L-dopa medication was underway at Columbia’s Medical School. These treatments brought him about four years of miraculous relief. When I first met him, in 1968, at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital, he could scarcely speak or move, and could not use a pencil well enough to write. Not long afterward, he experienced a dramatic recovery that allowed him to compose some of his finest music, in a style that was a greatly simplified and clarified. An unforgettable moment came at the end of a Continuum concert of his music at Columbia’s McMillin (now Miller) Theatre. To the astonishment of all who had witnessed the devastation of his illness and were unaware of the promise of L-dopa, he walked unaided to the front of the hall to take a bow. Suffice it to say that many tears flowed. About a month later, unfortunately, his body gave up the struggle. The incredibly eloquent eulogy that Milton Babbitt delivered at the memorial service was ample evidence of his enormous respect for this giant of a composer and teacher, who was a guiding spirit in the American new music world of that time.

The two piano pieces heard tonight were composed only a few years after Wolpe arrived in the U.S., both dedicated to pianists who were close to him: Jack Maxin, who was well known in the new music world, and Irma Wolpe, his wife at that time. Although the pieces belong to the period before the emergence of the mature style for which he became known, they already

manifest Wolpe's amazing imagination for the variation and development of simple initial material.

[With thanks to writings by Austin Clarkson and Cheryl Seltzer]

Sonata for Cello and Piano (1948)

ELLIOTT CARTER

Elliott Carter was born to wealthy New Yorkers who took him abroad for extended periods in connection with their lace-importing business. Those childhood travels left him fluent in French and exposed to international culture. Of course, those travels could not continue once World War I had begun. When he was 11, he entered the elite, private Horace Mann High School, whose students received an excellent education that included exposure to modern art and literature. As for music, New York was about to be dragged into the 1920s by Edgard Varèse, Henry Cowell, the reclusive Charles Ives, and the Copland circle.

At Harvard, Carter studied English literature, Greek, and philosophy but, finding its music department stodgy, pursued music at the nearby Longy School. The larger environment was fruitful. An increasing number of new music performances in Boston was organized thanks to two Russian conductor-composers: Nicolas Slonimsky and Serge Koussevitzky, the conductor of the Boston Symphony, who also read some pieces for Modernist composers. For his master's, Carter stayed at Harvard, studying with Gustav Holst and Walter Piston. Feeling his skills were still deficient, in 1932, he left for Paris to begin three years of intensive lessons with Nadia Boulanger. As a result, although he developed a finely honed contrapuntal technique, he rejected the music that he wrote. Upon returning to America, he became music director for Ballet Caravan, wrote about new music for the journal *Modern Music*, and got a position at St. John's College, a distinguished small liberal arts school in Annapolis, Maryland. He married sculptor Helen Frost-Jones in 1939; they were together until her death in 2003. During World War II, Carter was among the musicians working in the Office of War Information, America's central propaganda unit; they designed music programming meant to attract the attention of listeners in enemy areas or countries which looked like they might tilt in either direction, aiming to keep the listeners tuned in for verbal propaganda. Once peace arrived, Carter taught briefly at Peabody, Queens College, Yale University, MIT, and Cornell. He joined the faculty of Juilliard in 1964, staying here for two decades. For years the senior American composer in many senses, he received most of the important awards in this country and abroad.

Carter's music passed through several important stages, beginning with early vocal and choral works in a traditional style. The landmark Sonata for Cello and Piano (1948) was a true breakthrough, setting in motion a decades-long process of differentiating contrapuntal lines so that they have entirely contrasting characters. His 1961 Double Concerto for Harpsichord

Elliott Carter

Born:

December 11, 1908,
in New York City

Died:

November 5, 2012,
in New York City

and Piano with Two Chamber Orchestras astonished listeners because the instrumental groups operate simultaneously in different worlds, an idea inspired at least in part by Carter's admiration for the multilayered music of Charles Ives. Some works of that period have a density that is daunting to performers and listeners, but in superb performances, one is bowled over by their extraordinary energy and vivid drama. His music reached a peak of complexity in the 1980s, after which it became less contrapuntal, increasingly transparent, and more lyric; age did not dampen his eagerness for adventures. The clarity of his later solo and chamber works often surprises listeners familiar with his earlier textures.

The Sonata for Cello and Piano shows Carter's style rapidly changing in the immediate postwar years, especially with respect to rhythm, meter, and contrast of ideas. The extraordinary complexity that marks his works of the late 1950s onward, however, was only in the formative stage; the underlying vocabulary was still an expanded Neoclassicism. The 1946 Piano Sonata is typical of that transition. Two years later, in the Cello Sonata, he made the two performers sometimes function in independent rhythmic/metric worlds—sometimes, seemingly, in spite of one another. One also finds the first stage in a hallmark of Carter's mature style: metric (or, as it was later called, tempo) modulation, an idea so influential that it merits a brief explanation. Tempo modulation is a technique for moving smoothly from one temporal context to another. A basic meter, which is easily perceived, is established, as in traditional music. Gradually, however, as selected notes receive increasing accentuation, the original meter and tempo are contradicted. Eventually these intrusive accents overwhelm the original meter, establishing a new tempo. A rudimentary example would be a minuet, whose meter is always triple (like its successor, the waltz), but in which every other beat is oddly emphasized until the minuet has become a march. In that way a new tempo has been established, since the principal beats come much more frequently than the strong downbeat of a minuet. The idea, which was rarely exploited before Carter, can be found in Haydn's Symphony No. 103 and has influenced innumerable composers. For the listener, however, such structural details recede into the substructure of a work like the Cello Sonata, whose outer drama is so powerful, whose melodic and harmonic language is so rich, and whose instrumental virtuosity is so dazzling.

Incantation and Dance (1945)

WILLIAM GRANT STILL

American composer, conductor, and arranger William Grant Still studied violin, oboe, and cello, but at the beginning of the 20th century, the widely publicized American tours of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, a young English composer nicknamed "the African Mahler," inspired him to compose concert music. Dropping out of school and marrying, he supported himself by playing in bands in Ohio, and at 21 he was working for W.C. Handy (the so-called "Father of the Blues") and published his first arrangement, which

was of one of Handy's songs. At Oberlin College, he studied theory and counterpoint until World War I erupted. Once it was past, he accepted an offer from Handy to come to New York, which became his home until 1934.

Still fit in well, working in the young mass medium of radio; serving as music director at Black Swan Records, the famous jazz label; and creating arrangements for famous singers and band leaders. After briefly studying with the conservative composer George Whitfield Chadwick, he became one of the few students of Edgard Varèse, who guided Still to compose more freely and, equally important, included his music on the concerts of his International Composers' Guild. (See the notes to Program I.) In 1931, the Rochester Philharmonic made Still's *Afro-American Symphony* the first by a Black American composer to be performed by a major orchestra. (Two years later, Florence Price became the first Black American woman whose music was performed by an American orchestra. See the notes for Concert VI.)

William Grant Still

Born:

May 11, 1895,
in Woodville,
Mississippi

Died:

December 3, 1978,
in Los Angeles

Awarded a fellowship by the newly created John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, Still resettled in Los Angeles in 1934 as the music world had realized that sound films opened amazing new opportunities. There he worked in film (and eventually television), while keeping his focus on composing "serious music." Soon he received commissions from the Columbia Broadcasting System—then one of America's nationwide radio networks—the 1939 New York World's Fair, the League of Composers, and orchestras in Philadelphia, New York, Cleveland, and Cincinnati.

The second of his eight operas, *Troubled Island*, was produced by New York City Opera in 1949. It became the high point of his career, after which interest in his music began to decline as tastes for new music shifted to become extremely progressive. He had a revival in the 1990s when, in a period of Postmodernism, styles expanded in every direction. Still's compositions include operas; ballets; a vast array of orchestral, chamber, and solo music (including two pieces for accordion); and solo vocal and popular songs. He frequently drew ideas from the blues, which he preferred to the spirituals that had nourished other many Black composers.

As the first Black American to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra, to conduct a white radio orchestra (1932), to conduct a major orchestra (the Los Angeles Philharmonic, in 1936), to have an opera produced by a major company, and to win a series of commissions and performances from major American orchestras, Still played an important role in the creation of an American musical culture. Unfortunately, like Florence Price, he slipped out of memory, only (and fortunately) to be revived in recent years.

[Biography adapted from the article in *Grove Online* by Gayle Murchison and Catherine Parsons Smith]

Notes on Program IV (Continued)

“Monica’s Waltz” from *The Medium* (1947)

GIAN CARLO MENOTTI

Gian Carlo Menotti

Born:

July 7, 1911,
in Cadegliano-
Viconago, Italy

Died:

February 1, 2007,
in Monte Carlo

Gian Carlo Menotti entered Milan Conservatory at age 13 with two operas already in his portfolio. At the Curtis Institute four years later, he studied with Rosario Scalerò and began his lifetime relationship with Samuel Barber. The two soon traveled together extensively in Europe. Menotti’s 1937 opera *Amelia al Ballo* was such a success that the Metropolitan Opera staged it almost at once. Then NBC commissioned a radio opera (Menotti’s first in English), *The Old Maid and the Thief*. Then, with a commission from Columbia University’s Alice M. Ditson Fund, he wrote *The Medium*, a short tragic opera for five singers. Immensely practical, it had 212 performances on Broadway in 1947 alone; a film version was highly acclaimed. *The Consul* (premiered in 1950), which won the Pulitzer Prize, has been widely translated and performed internationally. By then Menotti had firmly established himself as an opera composer. *Amahl and the Night Visitors* made history as the first opera by an American composed specifically for television. *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (1954) won awards from both the New York Drama Critics Circle as the best play and the New York Music Critics’ Circle as the best opera and received the 1955 Pulitzer Prize. He also wrote the libretto for Samuel Barber’s *Vanessa*. Menotti’s career slowed somewhat when he founded the Spoleto (Italy) Festival of Two Worlds in 1958. He started a second festival in Charleston, South Carolina, 19 years later. His music, sometimes hovering between opera and music theater, retains its popularity despite the reduced success of his later works. In addition to 28 operas, he wrote many choral and orchestral pieces and a small amount of other instrumental music for ensembles and soloists.

The Medium, the most dramatic of Menotti’s operas, has remained a staple of the repertory. It follows Baba (alias Madame Flora), her daughter Monica, and Toby, a mute who works with them, who have been running an elaborate swindle based on the lie that Madame Flora is in contact with the deceased children of various acquaintances. At one séance, however, Madame Flora becomes horrified at being touched by a cold hand in the darkness. It seems that the dead have actually been contacted. As her terror deepens, she copes by convincing herself that it was actually Toby who touched her in the hope of driving her mad. Toby, being mute, cannot defend himself. Ultimately Madame Flora, who has been drinking heavily, murders him.

Shortly after the beginning of Act II, Monica is given an extended solo, known as “Monica’s Waltz,” in which she has an imaginary “dialogue” with Toby—who cannot speak—either pretending or knowing that Toby is in love with her. The plot is now set for the conflict to come.

From Ragtime to Jazz

Ragtime and its child, stride bass, which became transformed into jazz, entail such a vast area of American popular music that this festival cannot offer much more than a sampling of their musical triumphs. The four pieces closing tonight's program pay tribute to some of the leading figures, to whom must of course be added Scott Joplin, who was heard on the opening concert and will be back Friday evening. Because this festival celebrates the composers of the earlier 20th century and not the improvising talents of modern performers, our sample includes only composers who wrote down their music or whose music can be transcribed from their own performances. The program was conceived in collaboration with Ted Rosenthal, professor of jazz piano at Juilliard. For practical reasons, it comprises only piano solos and a piano and violin duo taken from a Duke Ellington performance.

Let us also recall that these arts were largely not isolated from American concert composers. Sadly, whereas Europeans like Debussy, Hindemith, and Stravinsky quickly rushed to incorporate elements of ragtime and jazz into their own music, for American composers, the racial and social separation that they and their audience felt from this new and distinctly American world delayed their ultimate marriage. For Ives, who played ragtime and loved the popular end of music, unification was no problem. (See the notes for Program I.) His friend Henry Cowell, however, resisted the lure of jazz because he felt it was being stolen by white commercial interests. What changed his mind later is not known, but when he was invited to join the advisory board of the Newport Jazz Festival, he cheerfully accepted. Many others required a rethinking of racial attitudes, but jazz was eventually accepted as a crucial element of American music. For that, we can thank composers like Gunther Schuller, who, not long after the end of our survey period, was only in his 30s when he invented the term "third stream" and was already closely associated with leading jazz artists.

"Charleston Rag" (1899; 1917 version)

EUBIE BLAKE

James Hubert "Eubie" Blake, one of America's greatest ragtime pianist-composers, began playing at age 6 on a small home organ, showing such adeptness that his parents got him keyboard and music theory lessons. Despite his mother's disapproval, he began to play professionally in a Baltimore "nightclub" (almost certainly a bordello) at 15, and only a year later wrote his first piano rag, "Charleston Rag." With the singer Noble Sissle as lyricist, he began writing songs, striking gold with "It's All Your Fault," which became a standard for the renowned Sophie Tucker. Shortly thereafter, having moved to New York, Blake and Sissle joined James Reese Europe's Society Orchestra, later creating their own vaudeville act. Then came their hit musical *Shuffle Along*. With Sissle or other writers, Blake produced songs for Broadway and London shows in the 1920s and 1930s.

Notes on Program IV

by Joel Sachs

Eubie Blake

Born:

February 7, 1887,
in Baltimore
(some sources list
the year as 1883)

Died:

February 12, 1983,
in Brooklyn

During World War II, Blake became music director for USO productions for the troops. Retiring in 1946, he resumed studying the Schillinger system of composition at NYU. (For more on Schillinger, see the note about Gershwin in Program V.) Now better equipped, he engaged in writing out his previous compositions until a ragtime revival highlighted him. Then began a spectacular second career of touring, lecturing, and recording as well as creating his own recording and publishing company, Eubie Blake Music. Scott Joplin's return to public notice in the early '70s intensified the ragtime mania and further boosted Blake's career. He received music and theater industry awards; was hailed by civic and professional organizations; was bestowed with honors including the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1981), honorary degrees from Brooklyn College (1973), Dartmouth College (1974), Rutgers University (1974), the New England Conservatory (1974), and the University of Maryland (1979); and was the subject of a documentary film and a Broadway show.

In *Grove Online*, Eileen Southern and John Graziano write:

Blake's music is distinguished by an enormous diversity, reflecting tastes in popular music in the early and middle decades of the 20th century. Many of his more than 300 songs are infused with the syncopated ragtime rhythms that swept Tin Pan Alley between 1900 and 1920. His tunes tend to have a large melodic range and exhibit disjunct motion, while his harmonic language includes many altered blues chords and chromatic progressions. The broad range of Blake's music can be seen in his ethnic songs (*If You've Never been Vamped by a Brownskin*), which derive from the earlier coon song, in musical-theater ballads (*Love will find a way*), in spiritual songs (*Roll, Jordan*), or in *double-entendre* novelty songs (*My handyman ain't handy any more*). His piano music, which consists mostly of rags, displays many of the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic characteristics of the songs. With their use of broken-octave basses, highly embellished melodies, and arpeggiated figurations, they give a good indication of Blake's own virtuosity at the keyboard. His rags, along with works written in the 1920s by composers such as Fats Waller and James P. Johnson, had a direct influence on the development of the Harlem stride-piano school of the following decade.

"Charleston Rag" (originally entitled "Sounds of Africa"), which Blake said was his first piece, was composed in 1899. Joe Block plays it as it was published in 1917.

“Drag ‘Em” (1944)

MARY LOU WILLIAMS

Born as Mary Elfrieda Scruggs, Mary Lou Williams was exposed to music as a baby, listening to her mother playing in churches. When the family resettled in Pittsburgh in 1915, the lively street culture of Black people who had migrated north increased her devotion to music. At 12, she was already sitting in with bands and soon toured during summer vacations; at 14, she was part of a road show, where she met her future husband, the baritone sax player John Williams. When she joined him in Kansas City, Missouri, she made her name as a barrelhouse pianist, a power-packed style derived from boogie-woogie and stride, and joined Andy Kirk’s band, where she remained until 1942, simultaneously learning arranging. She finally came to New York, recording exclusively for Moe Asch’s eponymous label, reaching the top, and mentoring young jazz musicians. Her apartment in Harlem’s Sugar Hill became a meeting place for artists including Thelonious Monk, Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, and Tadd Dameron. Soon, she became a rare example of an established traditional jazz artist who supported modern jazz. She also began composing a series of pieces that she called *Zodiac Suite*, each of which reflected the personalities of 12 jazz musicians born under different signs of the zodiac. Other events of that period are too numerous to list. The piece heard tonight stems from these earlier years. She recorded “Nite Life” live in 1930 in Chicago; “Drag ‘Em” was a 1944 studio recording made for Moe Asch’s Folkways jazz project. It was transcribed by ear by master’s student Joe Block (BCJ exchange ‘20, piano) for Focus 2020, when an injury prevented him from performing and we substituted Mary Lou Williams’s recording.

The busy life became too much for Williams. In 1954, while playing at the Paris nightclub Le Boeuf sur le Toit, she suddenly walked out and retreated from the jazz scene. Three years later, she converted to Catholicism and devoted her life to the rehabilitation of addicted musicians. Other than a guest performance with Dizzy Gillespie at the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival, Williams dismissed all thought of returning to her career until the Catholic Church’s new vision of music following the Second Vatican Council inspired her to turn to composing religious music. Her crowning achievement was a Vatican commission, *Mass for Peace and Justice* (1969), which she soon re-scored and renamed *Mary Lou’s Mass*. Alvin Ailey then choreographed parts of it, which he toured under the same title. It became associated with a growing movement of Black Catholic composers striving to create a uniquely Black liturgical aesthetic.

In her last years, public interest in Williams’ composing increased. Her return to secular music began in 1974 with the album *Zoning*, which was followed by more recordings. She spent her last four years as artist in residence at Duke University, where she died in 1981. Her legacy and contribution to jazz have been frequently recognized, including the establishment of the Mary

Mary Lou Williams

Born:
May 8, 1910,
in Atlanta

Died:
May 28, 1981,
in Durham,
North Carolina

Notes on Program IV (Continued)

Lou Williams Women in Jazz Festival held annually at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Many of her recordings have now been reissued.

[Adapted from Tammy L .Kernodle's article in *Grove Online*]

"Carolina Shout" (c. 1918; 1944 version)

JAMES P. JOHNSON

James P. Johnson

Born:

February 1, 1894,
in New Brunswick,
New Jersey

Died:

November 17, 1955,
in Queens

Scott Joplin was not the only master of ragtime, nor was Mississippi River ragtime the only style. What Joplin represented for Midwestern ragtime, James Price Johnson was to its Eastern incarnation, known as "stride." Johnson was first taught by his mother, from whom he learned the "shouts" and other set dances and square dances of the Carolinas that were to evolve into his personal style. In 1908, the Johnson family moved to New York, where Johnson got to know the latest ragtime and realized, as he later related, that New Yorkers were used to hearing the piano played well. Working to build a personal style, he developed what he called "orchestral piano," studying classical music at the same time, and soon was known as the best of the Harlem stride players. In later life, Johnson worked with larger forms, but his most characteristic compositions are the piano pieces of the late 1910s and the 1920s.

Johnson's rags are similar in principle to the classic style of the Joplin generation and still bear the typical form of a refrain with contrasting trios. But in Johnson's rags, the final trio is often so elongated by internal variations that it takes possession of the entire form. He said that many of the rags originated as ordinary cotillion music, which can be felt in the brief repetitive passages of "Carolina Shout." Johnson's distinctive "orchestral" pianistic style can be felt in octave doubling, wide chords, and the use of strongly contrasting registers. His rags also have a strong relationship to early jazz: The melodic rhythm has a quality of "swing" rather than the evenness and balance of the Joplin generation; works like "Riffs" employ "blue" notes.

The relationship to jazz, the improviser's art, can be seen in Johnson's preserved performances. He began cutting piano rolls in 1916 and, the following year, making recordings ("Caprice Rag" was the first). These show that Johnson's pieces, unlike Joplin's, continued to evolve even after publication. In the various recordings of "Carolina Shout," for example, the characteristic bass line is preserved, but the melodic layers and even the form change noticeably. Tonight Esteban Castro plays the version published in 1944.

But great ragtime was overshadowed by mediocrity. The art was also damaged by propagation through the player piano, which permitted compositions to be performed at reckless speeds and with cascades of notes added mechanically. This contributed to the misunderstanding of ragtime by those who did not hear the great pianists and accounts for some

well-known parodies. Obstacles to broader acceptance were articulated by Joplin in his 1908 instructional pamphlet, *School of Ragtime*: “What is scurrilously called ragtime is an invention that is here to stay. That is now conceded by all classes of musicians. That all publications masquerading under the name of ragtime are not the genuine article will be better known when these exercises are studied. That real ragtime of the high class is rather difficult to play is a painful truth that most pianists have discovered. Syncopations are no indication of light or trashy music, and to shy bricks at ‘hateful ragtime’ no long passes for musical culture.”

“Come Sunday” (1943; transcribed by Esteban Castro from the 1958 version with violin)
DUKE ELLINGTON

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington’s most distinctive personal trait was to consider himself a composer, not an improviser or arranger. In this sense, he retained a connection with the old world of fully composed ragtime as well as with the classical composer. Until the late 1930s, and apart from a few isolated examples, virtually all his pieces were entirely his own work. Later, he sought help to improve his writing for strings. Ellington’s major achievement was the exploitation of traditional jazz forms, stretching their limits without breaking them, much as some 19th-century composers such as Schubert and Chopin worked within the framework of dances, especially the wildly popular waltz. Ellington mastered the use of contrasting instrumentations and their diverse ranges to create large-scale shapes. Even in works that were not fully written out, he could control the input of distinctive soloists, so that everyone contributed to a larger whole. (Jazz composers had normally provided background support for each soloist, rather than exploiting the soloist in the interests of the whole.) Some Ellington compositions have experimental, abstract qualities paralleling trends among his contemporaries in the concert world.

The son of middle-class, very musical parents, Ellington played piano for a while as a child but then became interested in commercial art. He was then drawn back to the piano by the splendid quality of the best ragtime and was soon composing by ear. In those days, however, playing in a band required the ability to read music, which he did not have. Because that lacuna resulted in bands firing him, he took theory lessons and eventually formed his own group. His elegant habits of dress had already led his friends to use the nickname “Duke.” In 1917, he founded a band—the Duke’s Colored Syncopators—married, and soon separated. In 1923, he moved to New York, where his band had some success. The breakthrough came three years later when he could finally record his most impressive pieces and launch a major career. From then on, with only brief lapses, Ellington’s fame soared; he toured internationally and became an icon of the jazz world, never resting but always studying hard and innovating to extend the scope of his vision.

Duke Ellington

Born:
April 29, 1899,
in Washington, D.C.

Died:
May 24, 1974,
in New York City

Notes on Program IV (Continued)

Because he wanted the whole ensemble to be part of the vision, it became increasingly rare for Ellington to play extended solos, making it difficult to represent him without a band. Juilliard Jazz faculty member Ted Rosenthal realized that one good option is the first half of “Come Sunday,” written in 1943 as part of the *Black, Brown and Beige Suite*, in a recorded 1958 performance to which he added a solo violinist. Esteban Castro’s transcription ends just before Ellington’s band enters, when both the transcription and performance become impractical. Even the first part alone, however, shows Ellington at his most elegant.

Text

“Monica’s Waltz”

GIAN CARLO MENOTTI

Bravo! And after the theatre, supper
and dance
Music! Ooom pah pah, oom pah ...

Up in the sky, someone is playing a trombone
and a guitar
Red is your tie, and in your velveteen coat, you
hide a star
Monica, Monica, dance the waltz
Monica, Monica, dance the waltz
Follow me, moon and sun
Keep time with me, one two three one

If you’re not shy, pin up my hair with your star
and buckle my shoe
And when you fly, please hold on tight to my
waist
I’m flying with you, oh ...
Monica, Monica, dance the waltz
Monica, Monica, dance the waltz
Follow me, moon and sun
Follow me, follow follow me
Follow me, follow follow me

What is the matter, Toby?
What is it you want to tell me?
Kneel down before me
And now tell me

Monica, Monica, can't you see
That my heart is bleeding, bleeding for you?

I loved you Monica all my life
With all my breath, with all my blood
You haunt the mirror of my sleep, you are
my night
You are my light and the jailer of my day
How dare you, scoundrel, talk to me like that!
Don't you know who I am?
I'm the queen of Aroundel!
I shall have you put in chains!

You are my princess, you are my queen
And I'm only Toby, one of your slaves
And still I love you and always loved you
With all my breath, with all my blood!
I love your laughter, I love your hair
I love your deep and nocturnal eyes
I love your soft hands, so white and winged
I love the slender branch of your throat

Toby! Don't speak to me like that ...
You make my head swim

Monica, Monica, fold me in your satin gown
Monica, Monica, give me your mouth
Monica, Monica, fall in my arms!

Why, Toby. You're not crying, are you? Toby,
I want you to know that you have the most
beautiful voice in the world

Program V

Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:
The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948

Thursday, January 27, 2022, 7:30pm

Peter Jay Sharp Theater

COLIN MCPHEE
(1900–64)

Two Balinese Gamelan Melodies
(transcribed for modern flute and piano) (1935–36)
Kambing slem (“Black Goat”)
Lagoe Sesoelingan Ardja (air for suling)
Gammi Eon, Flute
Ben Pawlak, Piano

CARL RUGGLES
(1876–1971)

Organum (1944–47):
composer’s version for two pianos (1946, rev. 1947)
Leon Bernsdorf and **Joshua Mhoon**, Pianos

SAMUEL BARBER
(1910–81)

Adagio from String Quartet, Op. 11 (1936)
Yuyu Ikeda and **Sory Park**, Violins
Graham Cohen, Viola
Elisabeth Chang, Cello

HORATIO PARKER
(1863–1919)

Festival Prelude, Op. 67, No. 1 (1910)
Rafael Vogl, Organ

CHARLES IVES
(1874–1954)

Variations on “America” (1891–92; 1909–10); 1948–49 version
by E. Power Biggs
Amelia Held, Organ

Intermission

LOU HARRISON
(1917–2003)

From *Six Sonatas for Cembalo or Piano* (1934–43)
II. Allegro
III. Moderato
V. Moderato
Carl Bolleia, Harpsichord

ALAN HOVHANESS
(1911–2000)

Mihr for two pianos imitating an orchestra of kanoons (1945)
Ryan Jung and **Lihao Li**, Pianos

Program V (Continued)

A Broadway Sampler

IRVING BERLIN
(1888–1989)

“Play a Simple Melody” from *Watch Your Step* (1914)

JEROME KERN
(1885–1945)

“All the Things You Are” from *Very Warm for May* (1939)

COLE PORTER
(1891–1964)

“You’re the Top” from *Anything Goes* (1934)

RICHARD RODGERS
(1902–79)

“People Will Say We’re in Love” from *Oklahoma!* (1943)

Erin O’Rourke, Soprano
Reed Gnepper, Baritone
Liza Armistead, Piano

GEORGE GERSHWIN
(1898–1937)

Variations on “I Got Rhythm” (version for two pianos) (1933)

Daisy Sun and **Jihao Han**, Piano

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes, including an intermission

Notes on Program V

by Joel Sachs

Kambing slem ("Black Goat") and *Lagoe Sesoelingan Ardja* (air for suling)
(1935–36)

COLIN MCPHEE

Among the striking changes of this century's music has been an eagerness to learn from non-Western music—from a host of cultures that had always perplexed European musicians. Claude Debussy, at the turn of the century, first showed how the very "foreignness" of Asian styles could inspire and refresh European composers. The question was, how to do it without simply harmonizing non-Western melodies. Colin McPhee is one of three composers we hear tonight to look for answers to that challenge.

Later, Asian music became a powerful influence in America, especially in California; on the East Coast, too, the impact of Asian music was strongly felt. McPhee received much of his musical education in the U.S. and settled in New York in 1926. There, he and Henry Cowell heard the Balinese gamelan (percussion orchestra) on the first recordings ever made of that music.

Captivated by the gamelan's exuberant sound, McPhee and his wife, Jane Belo, made two trips to Bali, where they remained for most of the 1930s, immersing themselves in Balinese life as they worked in part with Margaret Mead and her husband Gregory Bateson. McPhee was one of the earliest ethnomusicologists to examine Balinese music; Belo produced important publications on Balinese society.

After returning to New York from his first sojourn in Bali, McPhee also began to apply Balinese style to the Western orchestra, producing his most celebrated composition, *Tabuh-Tabuhan*. McPhee left Bali for good in 1939, living first in New York before settling in Los Angeles. He wrote extensively about Balinese music, approaching it in a manner similar to Bartók—taking a scholarly approach, while using it to inform his own compositions. His transcriptions number about 40, mostly for one or two pianos as well as the two for flute and piano played this evening. He did not compose for more than a decade but finally resumed in the mid-1950s, receiving many commissions. McPhee joined the faculty of UCLA in 1960 but died only four years later. His music largely comprises orchestral and chamber music as well as some songs and choral pieces.

Wishing to make the music of Indonesia better known, McPhee also created transcriptions for Western instruments, especially two pianos. Of course, it was impossible to capture the true nature of music existing outside the conventions of Western tuning. He therefore alerted the performers and listeners that the transcriptions only suggest the sound of the original. Low octaves on the piano, for example, were meant to capture the feeling of the low gongs. While most of his transcriptions were for two pianos, the pair heard tonight evokes the Balinese bamboo flute. Carol Oja writes, in her biography of McPhee, that two transcriptions mingle literal transcription

Colin McPhee

Born:
March 15, 1900,
in Montreal

Died:
January 7, 1964,
in Los Angeles

with free composition. These are *Lagu sesoelingan ardja* and *Kambing sem*. She cites a statement by the composer from years later:

I now come to the next step in my arrangements of Balinese music. I had already made a collection of little melodies which boys delighted in playing on the *suling* [Balinese bamboo flute] ... out in the rice fields or under a tree, they would spend hours improvising on these little tunes. As these had no accompaniment, I tried composing light, percussive accompaniments for the piano, choosing tones that would suggest gongs and other Balinese percussion instruments.

Both pieces remain unpublished. While the title *Kambing slem* is translated as "Black Goat" on McPhee's manuscript, he did not indicate the English equivalent of *Lago sesoelingan ardja*. Stumped by my inability to find it even with an AI translator, I wrote my Indonesian-speaking friend Rachel Cooper, the director of concerts and lectures at Asia Society. The problem, she replied, is that McPhee used older transliterations of Indonesian script. *Lago*, or *lagu*, is "song"; *sesoelingan* is probably an archaic spelling of *suling*, the bamboo flute; and *ardja* or *arja* is a genre of sung Balinese music drama.

Organum (1944–47)

CARL RUGGLES

Carl Ruggles

Born:

March 11, 1876,
in Marion,
Massachusetts

Died:

October 24, 1971,
in Bennington,
Vermont

In 1927, composer Dane Rudhyar wrote in *Musical America*: "Music which does not surge is not great music. The mysticism and vibrant emotions of a Whitman, nowadays apologized for by the greater number of our devitalized contemporaries, have evidently awakened a deep response in the heart of Ruggles, one of the three or four real pioneers of the music world." Sneering at the then-fashionable Neoclassicism, he added: "Ruggles is one of those rebels who did not join the march into the past, who refused to revive the corpse, Tonality, and are molding the musical substance of tomorrow."

Carl Ruggles, like his friend Charles Ives, was a New England original, the descendant of a distinguished family—crusty and with no pretenses covering his true feelings. Unlike Ives, however, he composed extremely slowly, and at his death at 95 had completed only about a dozen works. Another friend, Henry Cowell, observed this methodical slowness during a visit to the isolated Vermont farm that was Ruggles' home for decades. After waiting for an hour and a half while his host, seated at the piano, pounded out the same chord over and over, Cowell finally dared to ask what was happening. Ruggles replied that he was giving it the test of time! Yet if Ruggles composed slowly, it was not from inactivity. He had a lively career as a violinist and conductor; was a member of the circle around Cowell, Varèse, and Ives that brought the first life to American Modernism; and in his later days was consumed with painting. He remained alert to progressive tendencies abroad and shared his contemporary Arnold Schoenberg's linear, contrapuntal impulse and desire to combine expressive

freedom with cohesiveness. Avoiding the serial method, however, Ruggles relied upon his instincts to build free, dissonant counterpoint and to support evolving thematic ideas. Like Berg, whom he admired greatly, Ruggles wrote music romantic in spirit. Nothing is ever merely background; everything supports the long melodic arches.

Such was his search for perfection that Ruggles was nearly 43 before completing the first composition he would acknowledge as the true product of his inner vision. His music, however, did not bring him instant acceptance. When his trumpet sextet, *Angels*, was first played at a concert of Varèse's International Composers' Guild in December 1922, it reportedly elicited cheers from half the audience and howls and jeers from the rest. Louise Varèse wrote that the hilarity of the audience derived more from sight than sound: "Six trumpet players, all extremely stout, as trumpeters are apt to be, marching on in single file and sitting down in a row at the front of the stage (in an orchestra the brass section is happily less prominent) and blowing with inflated cheeks into their muted trumpets, would have been laughable even if they had been playing a revered classic. If I had not resented the titters for interrupting Carl's music, I should probably have laughed too. Afterward the applause was thunderous—[this was certainly a friendly exaggeration!]—and the now grinning trumpeters filed back and played it all over again. There was a wit present who was heard to say that he would have preferred six muted strumpets." By the time of its performance in 1949, the situation had changed. Virgil Thomson wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune*: "[*Angels*'] revival after more than 20 years was accompanied by the kind of intellectual excitement that has ever attended its performance, plus the deep joy of the young just making its discovery. Its plain nobility of expression and the utter perfection of its workmanship place Ruggles as one of our century's masters, perhaps the one from whom the young have the most to learn just now."

Unlike Ives' music, in which the composer's multifaceted personality bursts through, Ruggles' works have a unity of style and expressiveness that perhaps projects only one side of the personality of a man who told off-color jokes, smoked huge cigars, loved baseball, was fierce in his passions and loyalties and unabashedly anti-Semitic, and composed kneeling on the floor, where he wrote with crayon on enormous sheets of brown wrapping paper hand-ruled with staff lines an inch apart.

Organum is scored for large orchestra, but when Cheryl Seltzer and I, preparing a Continuum retrospective concert of Ruggles' music, learned that there was an unpublished version for two pianos in the possession of the pianist John Kirkpatrick—who brought Ives to world by performing the *Concord Sonata*—we quickly went to New Haven to see the unpublished score, of which Kirkpatrick generously gave us a copy. He also told us that Ruggles at first gave the piece a generic title, something like Piece for Orchestra. Varèse, when shown it, told Ruggles that it needed a better name and suggested *Organum*, a muscular type of early French polyphony.

Ruggles, whose knowledge of medieval music history must have been minimal at best, demanded to know “What the #\$\$%@\$ is that?” When Varèse explained, Ruggles agreed that it got the point of the piece. The two-piano version was made by the composer in 1946 and edited by Kirkpatrick the following year.

Adagio from String Quartet, Op. 11 (1936) SAMUEL BARBER

Samuel Barber

Born:

March 9, 1910,
in West Chester,
Pennsylvania

Died:

January 23, 1981,
in New York City

Samuel Barber remains one of the most performed of all American composers. Writing lyrical, dramatic music in a style relating at least superficially to 19th-century Romanticism, he was never among the progressives, but his work was so consistent in conception and so deeply felt that it drew the admiration even of Schoenberg, who recognized in Barber a composer of complete self-confidence. Barber was born into a musical family: His aunt was the contralto Louise Homer, wife of the composer Sidney Homer. The boy’s early interests included composition, keyboard (piano and organ), and singing. In 1924, when only 14, he entered the first class at the Curtis Institute, where, during eight years of study, he already was producing mature music. As a late teenager and young adult, he spent much of the 1920s and 1930s traveling widely and enjoying performances by major figures including Toscanini, who even gave two Barber premieres on one NBC Symphony program. After teaching briefly at Curtis (1939–42), he recommenced a success-filled life as a freelance composer, residing in Mount Kisco, New York, with his longtime partner Gian Carlo Menotti. He enjoyed innumerable commissions, honors, and the support of many distinguished performers.

In our time, Barber is probably best remembered through his many songs, which are still central to the repertory of American art song, and the Adagio for Strings, composed when he was 26, which has become an icon of American music. Tonight we hear it in its original form, as the second movement of the String Quartet, Op. 11, which he rescored for string orchestra after the premiere. In 1967, he reworked it again as a setting of the prayer “Agnus Dei” for chorus and organ.

Festival Prelude, Op. 67, No. 1 (1910) HORATIO PARKER

One can safely guess that to many of tonight’s audience—I include myself—Horatio Parker is at best a name, a conservative American composer who taught at Yale and managed not to damage the phenomenal gifts of his most famous student, Charles Ives. In his day, however, Parker was a composer and church musician of considerable repute. After piano and organ lessons with his mother, he studied composition with George Chadwick and piano and theory with other Boston teachers and took a position as church organist in Dedham, Massachusetts, when he was only 17. Soon he was composing prolifically. Wishing instruction in the great German tradition, he spent his

early 20s at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich, where his composition teacher was the celebrated Josef Rheinberger.

Returning to America, he lived in New York, occupying numerous posts as an organist, choirmaster, and teacher. With his reputation growing rapidly, in 1893 he produced the piece that brought him national attention and has sustained his reputation, the oratorio *Hora novissima*, written for the Church Choral Society of New York. That autumn, he became organist and choirmaster at the fashionable Trinity Church in Boston. But the job proved to be short-lived: in 1894, he received an honorary Master of Music degree from Yale University and accepted the Battell Professorship of music theory. Ten years later, he was made dean of the School of Music, which under his guidance achieved national renown for training composers. Parker also became prominent in New Haven by organizing and conducting the New Haven Symphony Orchestra from 1895 to 1918, as well as the New Haven Choral Society. He remained at Yale until his untimely death from pneumonia; his health had always been fragile.

Horatio Parker

Born:
September 15,
1863, in Newton,
Massachusetts

Died:
December 18, 1919,
in Cedarhurst,
New York

Concerning Parker's music, William Kearns writes in *Grove Online*:

During his lifetime, Parker was considered a craftsman without equal and was one of America's most highly respected composers, but since his death, the number of performances of his major works has declined steadily. Even his more imaginative works, in which he attempted to follow such composers as Wagner, d'Indy, Strauss, Debussy, and Elgar, are received no better than the more conservative pieces, which show the influence of Brahms, Dvořák, and Gounod. Parker's inability to achieve a strongly individualistic style and his reliance on chromatic formulae which are now considered too sentimental have undoubtedly contributed to the neglect of his music. *Hora novissima*, *A Northern Ballad*, and a few anthems are still occasionally heard, and several of his songs have a beauty which should rescue them from obscurity.

Variations on "America" (1891–92; 1909–10); 1948–49 version by E. Power Biggs
CHARLES IVES

One can scarcely imagine how Horatio Parker would have reacted to this piece, if Ives ever showed it to him! (For more information about Ives, see the notes to Program I.)

In view of Ives' virtuosity as an organist, it is surprising that only five independent pieces survive out of all his solo organ compositions. All of them date from his youthful days at the keyboards of church organs and may have been pieces that he later forgot or dismissed as products of his apprenticeship. In his unpublished writings, published as *Memos*, the only organ piece to which Ives refers is the *Variations on "America,"* and about that, he said only that one polytonal variation was omitted in church

Notes on Program V (Continued)

Charles Ives

Born:

October 20, 1874,
in Danbury,
Connecticut

Died:

May 19, 1954,
in New York City

concerts because it made the boys laugh and become noisy. Their most arresting feature is that very polytonality; the *Variations* may be the world's first piece to use polytonality so extensively. Ives himself gave the first performance in Brewster, New York (not far from Danbury), in 1892, at a time when he was still partly improvising it. Two years later, he entered Yale, studying with Horatio Parker. Even though *Variations* is European in spirit, its allusions to popular musical styles make it distinctly New World and off limits to traditionalists like Parker. But perhaps Parker never saw the score.

Variations on "America" is one of Ives' best known pieces, thanks to the proselytizing of the famous organ virtuoso E. Power Biggs and the orchestration by William Schuman. Jan Swafford, Ives' biographer, points out that the popularity of those versions—especially that by Schuman—probably rests on how they project through extremes of tone color. Swafford thought that Ives probably heard the piece without any sarcasm and with the affection of a young man who was at home in the popular culture of his day. I tend to think that Ives heard it if not with sarcasm then with a lot of wry amusement—especially when the boys laughed.

Excerpts from *Six Sonatas for Cembalo or Pianoforte* (1934–43)

LOU HARRISON

Lou Harrison

Born:

May 14, 1917,
in Portland, Oregon

Died:

February 2, 2003,
in Lafayette, Indiana

In 2003, Focus celebrated the life and works of Lou Harrison. Unfortunately, he had already agreed to be in residence at a festival at Ohio State University and couldn't attend Focus, but we went ahead anyway. Apart from my having performed his music, he and I had developed a warm relationship at England's Dartington Festival in the 1990s. The night before Focus opened, he left a message on my voicemail wishing everyone well and thanking them in advance. We were all shocked when two days later, on February 2, on his way to Ohio, he died from what appeared to be a fatal heart attack. (There was no autopsy.) After a few weeks, a misaddressed letter from Lou, which he had written just before leaving for the Ohio festival, finally reached me. In it, he related enthusiastically his coming projects. I was profoundly moved; it was like receiving a letter from "the other side." This essay is adapted from the one I wrote for the Focus 2003 program book.

Harrison, as much as any living American composer, realized the goal of a music that draws freely from many musical cultures. Though born in Portland, he was primarily associated with the San Francisco area, to which he moved as a child. From 1936 to 1939, he taught music and accompanied dance classes at Mills College in Oakland. In 1941, he moved to Los Angeles, studying with Arnold Schoenberg; two years later, he came to New York, where he wrote for the *Herald Tribune*, was an editor for New Music Edition, and conducted, including the first performance of Ives' Third Symphony. In 1953, Harrison returned to California, taking an assortment of jobs, composing, and designing instruments. Travels to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan in 1961–62, on a Rockefeller Fellowship, enabled him to study Asian music firsthand. In 1967, he accepted a position at San Jose State

College, and subsequently returned to Mills, where he was professor of composition until retirement. He continued to travel worldwide, teaching, performing, and expanding his ideas until his death. His music is available through numerous publishers, primarily Peermusic Classical, C.F. Peters, and Hermes Beard Press.

Harrison recalled that in the early 1930s, as a teenager living in Redwood City, California, he had been impressed by Cowell's books, *New Musical Resources* and *American Composers on American Music*. He was therefore delighted to discover that, in San Francisco, Cowell was giving a class on world music. Perceiving their shared interests, Cowell offered the young man a scholarship to be his class monitor, and Harrison became Cowell's pupil (1934–35). Their teacher-student relationship eventually turned into a lifetime friendship. From Cowell, Harrison learned a wealth of information about world music. Cowell showed him how to discover the joys of percussion music by finding "instruments" in unlikely places, such as the innards of the piano or on junk salvaged from the scrap yards. He introduced him to John Cage, an Angeleno a few years older, who also was to become immersed in the study of Asian cultures. While struggling to support himself during the Depression by working at odd jobs in many fields (among them as a florist, dancer, poet, and record clerk), Harrison increasingly constructed instruments from "found objects." Percussion ensembles had been attracting increased attention ever since Varèse's *Ionisation* (1929–31), but Harrison, Cowell, and Cage gave the concept special life through the ingenuity of their instrumental combinations and their exuberant music. Unfortunately, Cowell's recommendation for a position as a music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* worked out badly. A nervous crisis landed Harrison in the hospital, where Cowell's wife, Sydney, who had grown close, looked after him. Harrison never returned to journalism.

Although the diversity of Harrison's life is matched by the scope of his compositional styles and the instrumentations of his works, percussion music and music incorporating aspects of Asian cultures continued to exert a strong influence upon his diverse creativity. Much of his music has a distinctively non-Western atmosphere produced either by the incorporation of actual Asian instruments or by the creation of an exotic coloring; he also explored unusual tuning systems, and with his colleagues at Mills College built a gamelan, which he employed in his own compositions. He and Bill Colvig, a tremendously gifted craftsman, lived in Aptos, California, in the house they designed and built.

Harrison wrote his *Six Sonatas* as a young man in California and New York. Each is in a single movement. He commented as follows:

Along with my Mass and one or two other works, my *Six Sonatas for Cembalo or Pianoforte* are Mission-style pieces. They were directly stimulated by my studies about and feelings for the land, peoples, and history of California. Indeed, they are a part of the "Regionalist" school

of thought that was so prevalent and, for a young person, stimulating in the 1930s. These *Six Sonatas* reflect the romance and geometry of impassioned Spain, as well as the pastoral Indian imagery of native America in its Western life. The artistic model was, of course, Scarlatti and Manuel de Falla. The collection was first published by Henry Cowell's wondrous New Music Edition. It received wide distribution through the cultural offices of the United States Government abroad and became recommended teaching material within the country. Either in part or entire, these sonatas have been played by Sylvia Marlowe, Ralph Kirkpatrick, and a number of other harpsichordists.

Mihr for two pianos imitating an orchestra of kanoons (1945) ALAN HOVHANESS

Alan Hovhaness

Born:

March 8, 1911,
in Somerville,
Massachusetts

Died:

June 21, 2000,
in Seattle

Alan Hovhaness' place in this festival also highlights that early stage of American music when some composers began blending Western classical culture with a tradition from outside that orbit and adopting their own styles to make that process possible. (See also the note on Amy Beach's Quartet, Program IV, and tonight's notes on Colin McPhee and Lou Harrison.) Of Armenian and Scottish descent, Hovhaness began composing at an early age. In his 20s, he studied with Frederick Converse—a noted conservative composer at the New England Conservatory who had been the first American to write an opera produced by the Metropolitan Opera—simultaneously enjoying exposure to the music of India thanks to musicians in the Boston area. Despite his awareness of South Asian music, Hovhaness through about age 30 continued to compose under the influence of Renaissance music and/or the harmonic language of late Romanticism. This attachment to the bygone world may explain why, at Tanglewood in 1943, Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland both criticized his music severely and, apparently, rudely. As a result, he destroyed much of what he had written and began to study Armenian traditional music. One of the first pieces to emerge from this reorientation was *Mihr*.

Having found his voice, Hovhaness built a reputation by combining in varying proportions ideas from traditional Armenian music, experimental techniques, and other non-Western cultures, such as music of East Asia, especially Japan and Korea, to which he turned in the 1960s. Subsequently, he returned to more purely Western composing. The rest of his life was filled with commissions, travels, projects, and new horizons. After a period as composer in residence with the Seattle Symphony in the mid-1960s, he moved there, remaining until his death after several years of ill health. Immensely prolific, Hovhaness composed until his health broke down. His legacy includes more than 425 compositions, among them nearly 70 symphonies. (With that level of production, of course, one can expect some variation of quality, for surely some of it was composed extremely quickly.) He had several publishers; Edition Peters, which was creating its remarkable catalog of progressive American music, became his sole publisher in the later years.

Mihr, for two pianos, is the 25th of some 90 compositions for keyboard. It was probably written for pianist Maro Ajemian, with whom Hovhaness recorded it. (Maro and her violinist sister Anahid—both Juilliard alums—became two of Hovhaness’ most important advocates.) After hearing another piece by Hovhaness in a New York concert, John Cage took charge of the publication of *Mihr* in Henry Cowell’s *New Music Quarterly*. (See the Introduction and the notes to Program I.) Unfortunately, *Mihr* was never re-released by a commercial publisher and remains difficult to obtain.

The title refers to the god of heaven’s light and of the sun in Armenian mythology; the month of February, called Mehekan, was dedicated to Mihr. In the year 301, when Christianity became the official religion of Armenia, the worship of Mihr was one of the pagan rites adopted and adapted. It still remains part of Armenian culture. The reference seems eminently suited to this composition, but according to Sahan Arzruni, who has made a specialty of playing his friend’s piano music, Hovhaness remarked that only after he wrote a piece did he bestow upon it a fanciful title. A more directed connection with Armenian culture may be the subtitle that the piece “imitates the sound of the kanoon orchestra.” (The kanoon or qanun is an Armenian traditional instrument related to the dulcimer but played only with the fingers rather than with hammers.) Hovhaness’ webmaster told Arzruni that he thinks the main melody may have come from a song with Armenian words by the American author William Saroyan, but it was equally likely that the two-piano piece might have been first. In short, absolute clarity about the genesis of this piece is not possible.

A Broadway Sampler

Thinking about the concept of an “American music,” I knew that it had to include two of America’s most American media: ragtime/jazz and the Broadway musical. Although I have been interested in Broadway since seeing the New Haven previews of *Oklahoma*, *Brigadoon*, *South Pacific*, and others as a child, I do not consider myself that well-informed. As it happened, a friend of mine, Mel Marvin, the composer of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and many other scores for stage and broadcast media and professor of score composition at NYU, was the perfect consultant. Lacking any way to predict how many Broadway-competent singers might be available, I asked him to think of a group of about four songs. We excluded Eubie Blake and George Gershwin because I was already including their instrumental music. After considerable thought, Mel concluded that Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, and Richard Rodgers would represent that world effectively. (We decided to sidestep composers like Victor Herbert, who came more from the American transplant of European operetta.)

To keep the written matter from exploding uncontrollably, I have kept these short biographies to the composers’ early years. As to their mature careers, they all flourished, writing dozens of shows as well as film scores. Attentive readers will notice that Berlin, Kern, Rodgers, and Gershwin were Jewish

Notes on Program V (Continued)

immigrants or the children of Jewish immigrants, who began at various socioeconomic levels. Apart from giving strong support to the positivity of immigration, their histories show how for the poorest of them music was an effective means to propel themselves out of poverty. The Berlins were one of hundreds of thousands of Jewish families who emigrated to the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s, fleeing from discrimination, extreme poverty, and brutal pogroms. Other such families who became prominent in the entertainment world included those of George and Ira Gershwin, Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker (of MGM), Louis B. Mayer, and the Warner brothers.

"Play a Simple Melody" from *Watch Your Step* (1914)

IRVING BERLIN

Irving Berlin

Born:

May 11, 1888,
in Tyumen, Siberia

Died:

September 22, 1989,
in New York City

Israel Beilin, who became Irving Berlin, was one of eight children of a Jewish cantor in an impoverished Russian village. Like many Jewish families in that period—such as my own grandparents—they tore out their roots, arriving in America when little Israel was 5, with no idea how they would survive. He later said that he did not remember the family's abject poverty because that was all he knew. Upon arrival at Ellis Island, all the children were kept in a pen until they were declared healthy. That was also normal. After his father died when the boy was 13, he ran away from home in order to relieve his mother of one of her many burdens; lived in a shelter in the Bowery; sang for a handout outside cabarets; and worked as a chorus boy, a stooge in vaudeville, a song plugger, and a singing waiter. He had no formal musical training but taught himself to play the piano (if only in one key, F#). Spinning out songs, usually to his own words, he hit the big time in 1911 with "Alexander's Ragtime Band" at age 23.

"All the Things You Are" from *Very Warm for May* (1939)

JEROME KERN

Jerome Kern

Born:

January 27, 1885,
in New York City

Died:

September 22, 1989,
in New York City

Jerome Kern's circumstances were utterly different from Berlin's. He was born to a German-Jewish immigrant father—the German Jews were, in general, more prosperous than their East European counterparts—and an American mother of Bohemian-Jewish extraction. They had become prosperous; Jerome grew up on East 65th Street, a good neighborhood even then. Attending public schools, Jerome learned to play piano and organ from his mother, who performed professionally. In his Newark high school, he wrote songs for a student show and an amateur production but dropped out in the spring of senior year (1901–02). Kern's father responded by compelling him to work in his business and stop composing.

That was a mistake. When the father saw how incompetent a businessman his son was, he allowed him to pursue music. The teenager enrolled at the New York College of Music, studying piano, composition, and harmony and then spending 1903 to 1905 with private tutors in Heidelberg. Back in New York, Kern worked as a rehearsal pianist in Broadway theaters and a song plugger, especially for Harms, a major publisher of which he later became

part owner. At this early stage, he provided extra songs for adaptations of British musicals.

After Kern's trips to London beginning in 1905, an American impresario engaged him to provide songs for American adaptations of English shows. Soon more than 100 Kern songs were heard on Broadway, largely in European operettas adapted for American taste. He also began composing his own shows, using more believable plots and characters and achieving better integration of music and script. His most important musical, *Show Boat* (1927), with words by Oscar Hammerstein II, has been called the most influential Broadway musical, because it forced composers to work toward an integrated whole as opposed to writing songs to be inserted in the script. Unfortunately, he was only 60 when he died. *Very Warm for May*—for which Hammerstein again wrote the lyrics—is thus a late work.

"You're the Top" from *Anything Goes* (1934)

COLE PORTER

Cole Porter came from a completely different environment. Although the French word "colporteur"—which translates as "the peddler"—is the name of a once-famous opera, our composer's name combines his parents' surnames. They were both amateur musicians. His musical upbringing included singing at the local Lutheran church, studying violin and piano, and attending music school in nearby Marion, Indiana. Just after the turn of the century, he wrote his first song and published a short piano work. As a youth, he played violin in his school orchestra, accompanied silent movies on the piano, and acted the lead role in a school production. At age 14, he entered Worcester (Massachusetts) Academy, where he learned to apply his love of poetry to writing lyrics. As a Yale undergraduate, Porter wrote at least 300 songs—lyrics and music, among them the football perennial "Bulldog." Despite pressure from his wealthy maternal grandfather to study law at Harvard, he enrolled in its music program, returning finally to New York to pursue possibilities on Broadway, which, after the interruption of service in World War I, brought him a major career. Of the five oldest Broadway composers heard tonight (including Gershwin), Porter had the most formal training. After continual successes in the 20s and 30s, he suffered a horseback riding accident that left him disabled. A decline in his work ensued, but he recovered with his 1948 show *Kiss Me, Kate*.

Cole Porter

Born:

June 9, 1891,
in Peru, Indiana

Died:

October 15, 1964,
in Santa Monica,
California

"People Will Say We're in Love" from *Oklahoma!* (1943)

RICHARD RODGERS

Richard Rodgers' parents were Russian Jews but émigrés one generation earlier than the massive influx of poverty-stricken refugees from the Russian Empire. His parents were therefore already middle class when he was born; his father was a doctor and amateur singer of Broadway tunes accompanied by his wife. Although the son was clearly talented, he preferred playing by ear. At 14, he composed two songs at his summer camp and a year later

Notes on Program V (Continued)

Richard Rodgers

Born:

June 28, 1902,
in Queens

Died:

December 30, 1979,
in Manhattan

got his first copyright. The same year, 1917, Rodgers wrote the first of 14 amateur shows he completed in the next eight years. In 1918 or 1919, he met lyricist Lorenz Hart (who was 17 years his senior), with whom he shared a love of Jerome Kern. As luck had it, Hart had sought a creative partner. The soon-to-be-famous team was born. In a memoir, Rodgers recalled that he “left Hart’s house having acquired in one afternoon a career, a partner, a best friend, and a source of permanent irritation.”

Rodgers, Hart, and the later Rodgers collaborator Oscar Hammerstein II all attended Columbia, but Rodgers soon transferred to the Institute of Musical Art (now Juilliard). He and Hart worked together fruitfully for 20-odd years. Alas, after a successful final show, *By Jupiter* (1942), Hart, increasingly incapacitated by alcoholism and other personal problems, was unable and unwilling to collaborate on a new show, *Oklahoma!* He died in 1943. Rodgers then joined forces with Hammerstein and quickly wrote the show, which in addition to its record-breaking run of 2,212 performances, launched a new Broadway era of musicals featuring credible story lines, imaginative and sometimes serious subplots, complex characters who spoke in an authentic vernacular, and songs and ballets that served the whole. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s fully integrated musicals became the standard against which other shows were measured.

Rodgers’ daughter Mary also achieved distinction on Broadway. Under her married name, Guettel, she served Juilliard with distinction as chair of our board.

Variations on “I Got Rhythm” (1933)

GEORGE GERSHWIN

George Gershwin

Born:

September 26, 1898,
in Brooklyn

Died:

July 11, 1937,
in Los Angeles

George Gershwin, another son of poor Russian Jewish immigrants, spent much of his childhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. When he was 12, his parents obtained a secondhand upright piano, got him lessons in classical piano, and encouraged him to pursue a career as a concert pianist, which in those days could be a gateway out of poverty and to fame. Gershwin’s strong inclination toward the popular world won out, however. At 15, he dropped out of high school to become a song plugger, sitting in a music shop and playing the latest hits to encourage sales of sheet music. It was not long before he began writing hit tunes, especially in collaboration with many wordsmiths and eventually with his brother Ira, a gifted lyricist. Gershwin found fame and riches in the pop music field.

Unfortunately, crippled by not having studied the basics of music, he could not write down what he heard in his mind or hear written music in his head; he had to employ others to transcribe what he played on the piano. This information did not get into the best encyclopedia biographies but was told years afterward by Henry Cowell, who was in the center of what happened. According to Cowell, in the early 1920s, Gershwin sought help from Rubin Goldmark and Wallingford Riegger but did not gain much from the lessons;

he was, Cowell implies, too stubborn and insecure. He then turned to Edgard Varèse, who was at the center of the New York new music world. It is possible that the lessons never began, since Louise Varèse's biography of her husband ends in 1928 with no mention of Gershwin. Cowell, who knew Varèse very well, later said Varèse sensed that they were moving in opposite directions. Meanwhile, Gershwin had met Cowell in 1927 through his brother Ira and approached him for help. Cowell, a Gershwin fan newly astounded by Gershwin's ignorance of the most basic music theory and history, wanted to help him, but their busy schedules—Cowell's absences on tour, especially for long periods in Europe and California, and Gershwin's frenetic career—made lessons too sporadic. Seeing that he could not be effective, he connected Gershwin with Joseph Schillinger, a recent Russian émigré with a systematic approach to problems such as Gershwin's. (See also the comments on Eubie Blake in the notes to Program IV.) It was an excellent idea with good results.

Alas, here the story breaks down. Cowell says that Gershwin proudly informed him that he had just completed *An American in Paris* entirely by himself, including the orchestration. This is not possible, since the piece was premiered in 1928, when Schillinger had just arrived in America. Since Cowell related the story some 25 years later, he might have meant the Second Rhapsody or the *Variations on "I Got Rhythm."*

Although Gershwin's extraordinary instincts for popular music never left him, his later works also show the effect of his belated studies. His last compositions, especially *Porgy and Bess*, show an increasing ability to bridge the popular-versus-classical and American-versus-European gaps. His variations on his own song "I Got Rhythm" (from the 1930 musical *Girl Crazy*), written one year before *Porgy*, show how thoroughly he had absorbed his belated formal training. Hints of the 1920s-'30s European avant-garde can be seen in angular melodies, pentatonic scales, polyrhythms, polytonality, and retrogrades of the type made famous by Schoenberg. In a radio interview during which Gershwin analyzed the *Variations*, he mentioned that in one of them the theme is heard simultaneously in its original form and its inversion—"as if the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing."

Gershwin composed *Variations on "I Got Rhythm"* for piano and orchestra in 1933, apparently as an attempt to set on paper some of the ideas he had had in his many improvisations on the tune. It had its premiere at a gala Gershwin concert in Boston on January 14, 1934. The transcription for two pianos played tonight was made by Gershwin, perhaps to facilitate rehearsals should other pianists choose to play the piece.

Program VI

Focus 2022

From “Maple Leaf Rag” to the Prepared Piano:
The Making of an American Music, 1899–1948

Friday, January 28, 2022, 7:30pm
Alice Tully Hall

Juilliard Orchestra
Mei-Ann Chen, Conductor
Timothy Chooi, Violin

SCOTT JOPLIN Overture to *Treemonisha* (1911; scored by Gunther Schuller, 1975)
(1868–1917)

FLORENCE PRICE Violin Concerto No. 1 (1939)
(1887–1953) Tempo moderato
 Andante
 Allegro
 Timothy Chooi, Violin

Intermission

CHARLES IVES Symphony No. 2 (1897–1902; 1907–09)
(1874–1954) Andante moderato
 Allegro
 Adagio cantabile
 Lento Maestoso—Allegro molto vivace

This program was curated by Mei-Ann Chen.

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes, including an intermission

Notes on Program VI

by Joel Sachs

Overture to *Treemonisha* (1911; scored by Gunther Schuller, 1975)

SCOTT JOPLIN

[The following essay is condensed from a program note written by Vera Brodsky Lawrence for Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs' ensemble Continuum's performance of excerpts from *Treemonisha* at Columbia University in 1972. Lawrence, a music historian and Juilliard graduate (in piano), had spent years assembling the publication of Joplin's complete works. For general information about Joplin, see the note for Program I.]

Although for years Joplin was known only as the king of ragtime—implying that he wrote only for the piano—his first opera, *A Guest of Honor*, in ragtime, was copyrighted in Joplin's name after his publisher, Stark, refused to publish it. It has completely disappeared. "Both 'The Ragtime Dance' [see the note for Program I] and *A Guest of Honor* were undoubtedly the chief items in the repertoire of the Scott Joplin Opera Company, formed about 1903, which played in St. Louis and toured to nearby Missouri towns," Lawrence wrote.

Very little is known about Joplin's life between his departure from St. Louis in 1905 and his arrival in New York two years later; rumors included a possible trip to Europe. Upon arrival in New York, however, it was publicly stated that he had come there to find a publisher for the grand opera that he was writing. "Although incorrectly referred to as a 'ragtime opera' (the misrepresentation exists to this date), this opera was no doubt *Treemonisha*. It is not clear when he started the work but it seems to have been well along, if not completed in the piano-vocal version by 1907," Lawrence wrote.

In New York, Joplin was busy and productive, broadening his whole musical outlook; no publisher would consider issuing a full-length opera by a Black ragtime composer—despite Joplin's fame—and none was interested in an opera that set a story depicting the serious problems of a Black community. Lawrence wrote: "Joplin's attempts to find a publisher or producer for *Treemonisha* were futile. Perhaps the fate of *A Guest of Honor* motivated his decision to publish *Treemonisha* himself. In 1911, he brought out the piano-vocal score at his own expense. For the remainder of his life, he became increasingly obsessed with his efforts to have the opera produced, ultimately sacrificing his public playing, his teaching, and even his composing—only three more piano works were published after 1911. He threw himself feverishly into the task of orchestrating *Treemonisha*. All traces of this orchestration have disappeared—it may never have been completed."

Lawrence continued: "Joplin's last desperate effort to create interest in a production took place in 1915 when he presented an unstaged performance of the score at a private hall in Harlem with a small group of singers whom he accompanied at the piano. The invited audience (which included potential

Scott Joplin

Born:
November 24, 1868,
probably in
Texarkana, Texas

Died:
April 1, 1917,
in New York City

backers) responded with total indifference. Joplin never recovered from this crushing failure. From then on, his mental deterioration progressed rapidly and in 1916 his wife, realizing the hopelessness of his condition, was forced to commit him to the Manhattan State Hospital, where he died the following year.”

Treemonisha was finally given its premiere in Atlanta in January 1972. “Its reception by audience and critics justified Joplin’s unquenchable belief in his opera,” Lawrence wrote. In a program note for that premiere, she said the opera was both a unique work by a unique American composer and “its sociological, cultural, and philosophical implications have a particularly potent meaning for us today [1972]. In spite of its ingenuous plot—*Treemonisha* tells a simple tale rather naively in the form of a folk fable—it conveys a powerful and prophetic social message, an astonishing concept for an early 20th-century American opera: that through education (abolition of ignorance and superstition) would Negroes find their own road to true freedom.” Seeing it amid the pressures of the early 1970s, Lawrence considered it a valid basis for the beginnings of Black liberation defined broadly. The liberation of women also lives at the heart of this opera: The community is urged to follow the leadership of an 18-year-old woman (the title character), who accepts the role once the community has assured her that they would follow.

Treemonisha was orchestrated by the jazz scholar, composer, and conductor Gunther Schuller for the Houston Grand Opera’s world premiere full staging in 1975—58 years after Joplin’s death.

Violin Concerto No. 1 (1939) FLORENCE PRICE

Florence Price

Born:

April 9, 1887,
in Little Rock,
Arkansas

Died:

June 3, 1953,
in Chicago

Florence Price’s mother, a former teacher, owned a restaurant and worked other jobs; her father was a dentist. Clearly a prodigy, Florence played her first piano recital at age 4 and had her first composition published three years later; she also was valedictorian of her high school, graduating at age 14. At 16, she entered the New England Conservatory, pretending, on her mother’s advice, to be of Mexican descent rather than Black and receiving her bachelor’s degree in organ and piano. Subsequently, she held teaching posts in Arkansas and Georgia, finally returning to Little Rock, where she taught privately and began composing actively. In 1912, she married an attorney with whom she had two daughters.

In 1927, as racial tensions developed in Little Rock, Price and her family moved to Chicago, where she continued her education at the American Conservatory of Music, Chicago Teachers College, Central YMCA College, the University of Chicago, and Chicago Musical College (now Chicago College of Performing Arts of Roosevelt University), studying composition and orchestration with Carl Busch and Wesley LaViolette, and graduating

in 1934. She also became a member of the Chicago Music Association, where she met the organist Estella Bonds and her daughter Margaret, who later became Price's student.

In 1928, Price was signed up by publishers G. Schirmer and McKinley, who released her songs, piano music, and pedagogical piano pieces. In 1931, financial issues and abuse led her to divorce her husband and move in with various friends. Eventually, she and her children went to live with Margaret Bonds. Through the early 1950s, Price composed organ works, symphonies, piano concertos, chamber music, art songs, and arrangements of spirituals. In 1940, she was inducted into the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. Price died unexpectedly in 1953 as she was planning a trip to Europe.

In 1933, Price had become the first African American woman to have a symphony performed by a major American Orchestra, when the Chicago Symphony Orchestra gave the world premiere of her Symphony No. 1, which had won first prize in the Wanamaker Foundation Awards, created by the department store magnate to honor African American composers. Her Piano Sonata won third prize in the same competition. The remaining prize was won by Bonds.

[Biography by Odaline de la Martinez, from Focus 2020, revised by Joel Sachs]

Symphony No. 2 (1897–1902; 1907–09)
CHARLES IVES

We fittingly close this festival with a major work by Charles Ives, who was the senior creator of “an American Music” as both a composer and a benefactor. [See Program I for more about Ives.] The innovativeness of the Second Symphony is extremely strong but far less obvious than in a work like the “Holiday” Symphony or the Symphony No. 4. He wrote the Second Symphony during a period when he was also rapidly rising in the insurance industry. Jonathan Elkus, an editor of the Charles Ives Society critical editions of the complete works, recounts its curious background:

Charles Ives took up intensive work on his Symphony No. 2 in New York in 1907, at the time of his courtship and engagement to Harmony Twichell. It was Ives' first major orchestral work after his Symphony No. 1, written 10 years before at Yale College under the watchful eye of Horatio Parker. Symphony No. 1 was fully based on European models, owing much to Dvořák and Tchaikovsky. Ives later faulted Parker as being “governed too much by the German rule,” and clearly there had been disagreements between teacher and student over Ives' First Symphony. Parker discouraged Ives' kaleidoscopic key changes in the exposition of Symphony No. 1's opening movement—“hogging all the

Charles Ives

Born:
October 20, 1874,
in Danbury,
Connecticut

Died:
May 19, 1954,
in New York City

keys at one meal” was his expression. More telling, Parker rejected Ives’ proposed slow movement for the symphony, probably because it introduced gospel (or “camp meeting”) tunes. Yet from those very sketches come the most haunting passages in the central movement of Symphony No. 2, nearly encapsulating the way in which Ives’ Second Symphony both departs and draws from his First. It is also an early illustration of how Ives asserted his independence and forges his own style by drawing on the vernacular music of his childhood and college years. As J. Peter Burkholder puts it, Ives’ ambition in Symphony No. 2 was “to create a symphony in the European Romantic tradition that is suffused with the character of American melody, wedding the two traditions in a single work.”

Ives had the symphony fully and professionally copied out and arranged for one movement to be tried in 1910 or 1911 by Edgar Stowell at the Music Settlement School in New York. (Presumably this was the Third Street Settlement, which had been founded in 1894.) Later, Walter Damrosch, after conducting his New York Symphony in part of the Symphony No. 1, encouraged Ives to hire the group to play “another symphony,” possibly the Second. Ives did not follow through, however; perhaps the experience with his First Symphony was disheartening, because he liked to attack Walter and his brother Frank, the head of the Institute of Musical Art. Henry Cowell recalled visiting Ives at his New York home, which was across the street from the Damrosch house. Ives would go to the window, shake his fist furiously, and then collapse breathless from the strain on his heart. There was to be, however, a further problem, which was that the Symphony No. 2 did not attract the traditionalists who felt citations of American vernacular music “would not do,” and also lacked the obvious Modernist spirit of the time. Ives had to wait for Leonard Bernstein to conduct its premiere in 1951; he did not live to see Bernstein record it. That beautiful recording, which was released in 1960, has become permanently tied to the piece.

On the other hand, as Elkus writes, “Listeners familiar with Ives the Modernist ... could hardly have been disappointed by the symphony’s conclusion. Since the 1930s, Ives, who had given up composing, had been working out a tag compressing ‘Reveille’ and ‘Columbia, Gem of the Ocean’ to replace his original ending—the tried and true tonic unison. For Bernstein’s 1951 premiere and its publication soon after, Ives appended the tag’s ‘final terrific discord,’ as Cowell described it, which Ives had told him ‘was the formula for signifying the very end of the last dance of all: The players played any old note, good and loud, for the last chord.’”

About the Artists

Mei-Ann Chen

Praised for her dynamic, passionate conducting style, Taiwanese American conductor Mei-Ann Chen infuses orchestras with energy, enthusiasm, and high-level musicmaking, galvanizing audiences and communities alike. Music director of the Chicago Sinfonietta since 2011, Chen began her tenure as chief conductor of Austria's Recreation Grosses Orchester Graz at Styriarte this past fall after two seasons as the orchestra's first principal guest conductor, making her the first female Asian conductor to hold this position with an Austrian orchestra. She has been the first artistic partner of Houston's River Oaks Chamber Orchestra since 2019 and has been artistic director and conductor of the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra Summer Festival since 2016. A compelling communicator and an innovative leader both on and off the podium as well as a sought-after guest conductor, she has appeared with distinguished orchestras throughout the Americas, Europe, Taiwan, the U.K., and Scandinavia, and continues to expand her relationships with orchestras worldwide (more than 110 to date). Honors include being named one of 2015's top 30 influencers by *Musical America*; receiving the 2012 Helen M. Thompson Award from the League of American Orchestras and the 2007 Taki Concordia Fellowship, founded by Marin Alsop; winning first prize in the 2005 Malko Competition (she remains the only woman in the history of the competition, which began in 1965, to win first prize); and garnering ASCAP awards for innovative programming.



Timothy Chooi

Timothy Chooi (MM '19, Artist Diploma '21, violin) is sought after as much for his passionate performances as for his wide-ranging repertoire. Future engagements include returns to the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Montreal Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra Ottawa, and Belgian National Orchestra as well as debuts with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Russian National Orchestra, DSO Berlin, Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester Frankfurt, Saarländisches Staatsorchester, and Sichuan Symphony Orchestra. Upcoming recitals include a European tour with Anne-Sophie Mutter. Recent performances include engagements with the Belgian National Orchestra, Luxembourg Chamber Orchestra, and l'Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal; a live on-air recital on WQXR; and recital tours of Belgium and the U.S. In addition to performing with every major orchestra in his home country of Canada, Chooi has also played with the Brussels Philharmonic, Santa Barbara Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, and Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. He has also made an extensive recital tour with Jeunesses Musicales du Canada, appeared at the Ravinia Festival, and made his Carnegie Hall debut. As a founding member of the VISION Collective, an ensemble of musicians and composers that utilizes music to highlight refugee and immigrant voices and stories and raise awareness



About the Artists (Continued)

of the global refugee crisis, he was a recipient of the 2020 Harold W. McGraw Family Foundation's Robert Sherman Award for music education and community outreach. Chooi studied at Juilliard under the tutelage of Catherine Cho. His mentors include Ida Kavafian, Pamela Frank, Pinchas Zukerman, and Patinka Kopec. He is a professional studies candidate at the Kronberg Academy with Christian Tetzlaff and is a professor of violin at the University of Ottawa. He performs on the 1717 Windsor-Weinstein Stradivarius on generous loan from the Canada Council for the Arts and is a recipient of the Nippon Music Foundation Rare Instrument Project from the government of Japan.

Juilliard Orchestra

Juilliard's largest and most visible student performing ensemble, the Juilliard Orchestra is known for delivering polished and passionate performances of works spanning the repertoire. Comprising more than 375 students in the bachelor's and master's degree programs, the orchestra appears throughout the season in concerts on the stages of Juilliard's Peter Jay Sharp Theater, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall. The orchestra is a strong partner to Juilliard's other divisions, appearing in opera, dance, and drama productions as well as presenting an annual concert of world premieres by Juilliard student composers. This season an impressive roster of world-renowned conductors leads the Juilliard Orchestra, including John Adams, Mei-Ann Chen, Kevin John Edusei, Barbara Hannigan, Antonio Pappano, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Christian Reif, Xian Zhang, and faculty conductors Jeffrey Milarsky and David Robertson. Robertson is director of conducting studies and distinguished visiting faculty. Students from the Juilliard Orchestra have participated in recent virtual projects, including *Bolero Juilliard*; *Of Thee I Sing*, an expansion of Charles Ives' *Variations on "America,"* co-created by David Robertson and Creative Associate Kurt Crowley, and conducted by Robertson; and a performance of "Nimrod" (Variation IX) from Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, conducted by faculty member and alumnus Itzhak Perlman. The Juilliard Orchestra has toured across the U.S. and throughout Europe, South America, and Asia, where it was the first Western conservatory ensemble allowed to visit and perform following the opening of the People's Republic of China in 1987, returning two decades later, in 2008. In summer 2019, the orchestra traveled to London to perform alongside the Royal Academy of Music in Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. Other ensembles under the Juilliard Orchestra umbrella include the conductorless Juilliard Chamber Orchestra as well as the Wind Orchestra, Lab Orchestra, and contemporary music groups AXIOM and New Juilliard Ensemble.

Juilliard Orchestra

First Violin

Ria Honda,
Concertmaster
Raina Arnett
Cameron Chase
Sungmin Cho
Aileen Chung
Lauren Conroy
Tal First
Makenzie Hart
Aleksandar Ivanov
Aram Kim
Joshua Kim
Amy Oh
Sophia Su
Ziman Xu
Yanguang Bruce
Zhang
Yun Zhuang

Second Violin

Maya Kilburn,
Principal Second
Jeongah Choi
Miyu Kubo
Jasmine (Meng Jia)
Lin
KJ McDonald
Coco Mi
Julie Minn
Hana Mundiya
Kenta Nomura
Daniel Rafimayeri
Eleanor Shen
Alexandra
Woroniecka
Ashley Lee Yoon
Nicole Yun

Viola

Laura Liu,
Principal
Leslie Ashworth
Vincenzo Calcagno
Harmony Chiang
Bowie Ma
Torrón Pfeffer
James Preucil
Molly Prow
Trent Ransom
Andrew Shaw
William Sotiriou
Yihan Xue

Cello

Julia Lee,
Principal
Hsi-yuan (Elisabeth)
Chang
Christy Choi
Stacey Chung
Elizabeth Edwards
Nagyeom Jang
I Cheng Liu
Ian Maloney
Namisa Sun
Xinyue Zhu

Double Bass

Andrew Gantzer,
Principal
Michael Banks
Ruth Christopher
Patrick Curtis
Lindsay Donat
Thomas Green
Nicholas Payne
Michaella Tufariello

Flute

Audrey Emata,
Principal
Scotty Quirk,
Principal
Phoebe Rawn,
Principal

Piccolo

Phoebe Rawn

Oboe

William Dunlop,
Principal
Joseph Jordan,
Principal

Clarinet

William Foye,
Principal
Alec Manasse,
Principal

Bassoon

Troy Baban,
Principal
Sarah Bobrow,
Principal
Ricky Shi, *Principal*

Contrabassoon

Sarah Bobrow

French Horn

Yicheng Gong,
Principal
Emily Howell,
Principal
Colby Kleven,
Principal
Clinton Webb

Trumpet

David Green,
Principal
Jatin Himatsinghani,
Principal
Tianyu Wang

Trombone

Sarah Goldberg,
Principal
Connor Rowe,
Principal

Bass Trombone

Zach Neikens

Tuba

Deandre Desir

Timpani

Jake Borden
Sean C. Edwards
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