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Jazz and Black Elements in Art Music

by David Baker

Dvořák: “These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American... folk songs, and your composers must turn to them. All the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people.” And: “In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music (Century magazine, February, 1895).

Ravel: “[Jazz] is the important contribution of modern times to the art of music” (Madeleine Goss: *Bolero: The Life of Maurice Ravel*, p. 225). And: “Jazz is a very rich and vital source of inspiration for modern composers and I am astonished that so few Americans are influenced by it” (Robert Rogers: “Jazz Influence on French Music,” p.64, quotes an interview with Ravel from *Musical America*).

These quotes—nearly forty years apart—from two famous European composers point to an odd phenomenon that persisted in varying degrees in American music until well into the nineteen-forties.

To the first statements Edward MacDowell, one of America's leading composers and musicologists, answered: “We have here been offered a pattern for an American national musical costume by the Czech Dvořák—though what Negro melodies have to do with Americanism in art still remains a mystery” (John Rublowsky: *Black Music in America*, New York and London, Basic Books, 1971, pp. 6-7).

It doesn't require much imagination to surmise that Ravel's statements were not any more graciously received. From the beginning most Americans were more concerned with genuflecting at the European cultural shrine than exploring their own native idioms. Until well into the twentieth century the acceptable music was that which most closely adhered to European norms and standards. There were many reasons American composers felt compelled to study in Europe, among them a lack of confidence in American schools and teachers, limited faith and conviction in a culture, a disdain for indigenous musical materials, and an overwhelming belief that the only legitimate road to success and recognition began with the inevitable pilgrimage to the great European centers of musical learning.

These composers went to Europe not to investigate new developments in the compositions of Schoenberg and his disciples or of Stravinsky but to learn how to imitate Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Ironically, at the same time many of the brightest young composers in Europe, having assimilated the language and techniques of the past, were looking to American music as a source for their own revitalization. Interest abroad in Afro-American music occurred as early as the mid-nineteenth century, when Louis Moreau Gottschalk took his Creole music to Europe (see New World Records 80257-2, *The Wind Demon*). The Boston *Evening Transcript* of March 22, 1930, stated that “. . . as early as 1896 Johannes Brahms was thinking of introducing the novel rhythmic effects of American Ragtime, which he had just heard for the first time,” into a “serious” piece of his own (quoted in Robert Rogers, op. cit., p. 53) Frederick Delius in his *Florida Suite* (1887) the opera *Koanga*

(1895-97), and *Appalachia: Variations on an Old Slave Song* (1902) drew heavily on Afro-American materials. Debussy (“Golliwog’s Cakewalk”) and Ravel (Piano Concerto in G; 1931) occasionally used jazz materials. In 1913 Erik Satie borrowed from jazz and ragtime in his “lyric comedy” *Le Piège de Méduse*, in which the instrumentation was patterned after that of jazz groups. His score for the ballet *Parade* (1917) was one of the earliest orchestral compositions of any importance to borrow from American popular music.

Members of Les Six, particularly Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud, were attracted to jazz, ragtime, and other American black music. Honegger's borrowings manifest themselves in portions of *Le Roi David* (1923), in *Prelude and Blues* (1925), and especially in his Concertino for Piano and Orchestra (1924). Milhaud enjoyed particular success with *Le Boeuf sur le toit* (1919) and *La Création du monde* (1923). Of Afro-Americans and their music he wrote: “Among the Negroes we find the source itself of this music . . . its profoundly human side, which can be as completely moving as any universally recognized musical masterpiece” (*Notes Without Music*, p.128).

Other important European composers of this time influenced by jazz include Paul Hindemith (*Suite für Klavier*, Op. 26, 1922), Kurt Weill (*Violin Concerto*, 1926), Ernst Krenek (*Jonny Spielt auf*, 1927; *Kleine Symphonie*, 1928; *Das Leben des Orestes*, 1930); Igor Stravinsky (*Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, 1918; *Piano Rag Music*, 1919; *L'Histoire du Soldat*, 1918), and Alexander Tansman (*Sonatine Transatlantique*, 1930).

Because the United States had no Bartók or Kodály to rescue American music, nationalistic-minded composers began grasping for the most superficial manifestations of jazz without any understanding of the aesthetic out of which the music grew. Bartók and Kodály not only understood the folk aesthetic but also were completely cognizant of the importance of investigating and studying the sources. They went into the countryside and recorded and transcribed raw materials that became part of scholarly publications as well as being interpolated into their works. This attitude was accompanied by a profound respect and deep and abiding faith in *das Volk*.

With few exceptions American composers neither understood nor respected the musical traditions from which they borrowed. Because the two major sources from which these composers drew were Indian (see Gilbert Chase's notes to New World Records 80542-2) and Afro-American, groups considered culturally inferior, the quality of research necessary to use the materials effectively, intelligently, and in a musically convincing manner was not forthcoming. It was entirely predictable that such an iconoclast as Charles Ives, whose style was so deeply rooted in the diverse musical traditions of America, would be virtually ignored until a scant few years before his death. The incorporation of hymns, folk melodies, ragtime pieces, country tunes, spirituals, patriotic songs, marches, and other materials of this nature was very difficult for the musical establishment to accept as valid in the context of “serious” composition.

Before 1900 only a few American composers sought to use indigenous materials, most notably Louis Moreau Gottschalk, who used Negro folk music almost fifty years before Dvorák’s admonition to American composers. Not again until after the turn of the century did the idea of incorporating American folk materials into art music become acceptable for respectable composers in the United States, and then only after its legitimization by the Europeans.

Some American composers who have consciously used musical materials associated with their native land include George W. Chadwick (1854-1931) in *Symphony No.2* (1886); Henry F. Gilbert (1868-

1928) in *Negro Episode* (1896), *The Dance in Place Congo* (1908), *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes* (1911), *Dances in Ragtime Rhythm* (1915); Charles Ives (1874-1954) in *The Circus Band* (1894), *First Piano Sonata* (1902), *Holidays* (1912-13), *Three Places in New England* (1903-14), *Sonata No.3 for Piano and Violin* (1914), *Concord Sonata* (1909-1915); John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951) in *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* (1915), *Krazy Kat* (1921), *Skyscrapers* (1926); Louis Gruenberg (1884-1964) in *First Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1922), *Creation* (1924), *Jazz Suite for Orchestra* (1925), *Emperor Jones* (1933); Wallingford Riegger (1885-1961) in *Triple Jazz* (1928), *New Dance* (1935); William Grant Still (1895-1978) in *Afro-American Symphony* (1931), *Lenox Avenue* (1937), *Suite for Violin and Piano* (1945); Aaron Copland (1900-1990) in *Music for the Theater* (1925), *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1927), *First Symphony* (1928), *Symphonic Ode* (1929), *Four Piano Blues* (1926-48), *Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra* (1948); and Morton Gould (1913-1996) in *Chorale and Fugue in Jazz* (1933), *Second Symphonette* (1939), *Spirituals for Orchestra* and *Latin American Symphonette* (1941), *Interplay for Piano and Orchestra* (1943).

George Gershwin (1898-1937) is a special case. Unlike the others, he was first a composer of popular music. Among his jazz-influenced art music are *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), *Concerto in F* (1925), *American in Paris* (1928), and *Porgy and Bess* (1935).

Despite the seemingly impressive number of composers using Afro-American materials, the overall proportion was miniscule and the results not terribly gratifying or convincing. These conditions were explainable in many instances by the fact that Afro-American music, like its creators, was considered inferior, imitative, and hardly a starting point for an art-music work.

The history of this hostility to black music and musicians can be traced back to the beginning of our country:

[Negroes] astonish you with strokes of the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated. But never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never saw even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture. In music they are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time, and they have been found capable of imagining a small catch. Whether they will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of complicated harmony, is yet to be proved. Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion, indeed has produced a Phyllis Wheatly; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism. (Thomas Jefferson: "On Negro Ability." In *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* [ed. H. A. Washington]. Washington, D.C., 1854, pp. 380-87.)

At a later time attitudes toward jazz were not appreciably more enlightened. Witness the following quotes by prominent educators. "In its original form, it [jazz] has no place in musical education and deserves none. It will have to be transmogrified many times before it can present its credentials for the Walhalla of Music" (*Étude*, August, 1924, p.515). "It is probably not going beyond proper bounds to say that musical culture is at a low ebb in our country; by culture is meant an understanding of the meaning of good music as distinguished from mere jazz" (James Mursell: *Principles of Musical Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1927, pp. VII-IX). In the *New York Times* jazz was maligned and denigrated in articles with headlines such as PRIMITIVE, SAVAGE,

ANIMALISM, PREACHER'S ANALYSIS OF JAZZ (March 3, 1922, 15:7), JAZZ FRIGHTENS BEARS (November 24, 1928, 16:5), and SAYS JAZZ THREATENS CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION (December 16, 1934, IV 2:7).

Considering the unenlightened social attitudes reflected in the preceding quotes, *any* serious composer daring to draw on Negro idioms as a source was to be commended, although most of these composers were abysmally ignorant of the aesthetic out of which the music came. That this state of affairs existed can readily be seen in the following statement by Aaron Copland, one of America's leading composers, acclaimed as a pioneer in the use of jazz materials: "I felt I had done all I could with the idiom [jazz], considering its limited emotional scope . . . all American music could not possibly be confined to *two dominant jazz moods—the blues and the snappy number*" (author's ital.). That a music as sophisticated, multifaceted, and complex as jazz could be characterized in such simplistic terms is proof of total lack of understanding of the music's essence.

Not until mid-century did artistically successful works in the genre begin to appear in any quantity. The rise of cultural pluralism and panstylism created an artistic climate conducive to the exploration of a wide variety of musical sources, resulting in such works as *Abstractions* and *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee* by Gunther Schuller, *Poem for Brass* by J. J. Johnson, *The Golden Striker* by John Lewis, *Music for Four Soloists and Band No.1* by Friedrich Gulda, and *Le Chat Qui Pêche* by the present writer.

But the traffic was not all one way; cross-influences did and do prevail. In retrospect these influences were at best superficial and most often quite naive until well into the fifties. Jazz musicians took what they liked and understood from art music and put it into a jazz context, and art composers took what they perceived as the essence of jazz and put it into an art-music framework. The result was usually somewhat less than successful—to put it mildly.

For the jazz musician the borrowing manifested took many different forms. One was simply the reorchestrating of some concert theme and adding improvisation (Chopin's *Revolutionary Étude* as played by the John Kirby sextet, Rachmaninoff's *Prelude in C-sharp minor* as played by the Nat King Cole trio, Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé Suite* as played by the Sauter-Finegan orchestra). Another consisted of turning the jazz band into a miniature symphony orchestra by adding strings, French horns, oboes, etc. Yet another involved the use of extended forms, for example sonata allegro. The use of sophisticated harmonies and elaborate orchestrations constitutes yet another manifestation of this phenomenon. More often than not, however, the borrowing consisted of nothing more than the use of such words as "concerto" or "sonata" in titles. (The subject of art music's influence on jazz is covered in Gunther Schuller's notes for New World Records NW 216, *Mirage: Avant-Garde and Third-Stream Jazz*, which contains works by Duke Ellington, Stan Kenton, and George Russell.)

The influence of jazz on art music was equally superficial and naïve. European and American composers flirted with the brash new music with varying degrees of understanding and success. The most readily discernible borrowings included first a new awareness of rhythm and its potential as a compositional device (in the opinion of many, Stravinsky and jazz are the main impetuses to the rhythmic developments of twentieth-century music). Next jazz added to the orchestral palette such instruments as the saxophone (not new, to be sure, but it owes its popularity to jazz), the vibraphone, and the jazz percussion set. The popularity of a whole profusion of sound-altering devices such as plungers and derby hats is attributable to jazz. Also traceable to jazz is the widening of the performance and expressive potential of many standard instruments by extension of range (particularly brass and reeds), unorthodox techniques (most of which grew

out of the imitation of vocal effects—growls, rips, shakes, moans, grunts, yelps, slides, falsetto, varied vibrato), and increased virtuosity (witness the liberation of trombone, string bass, and clarinet, for instance). (These observations sound remarkably like a description of the techniques used by the new virtuosos in the avant-garde of contemporary art music. See New World 209, *New Music for Virtuosos*.) Finally, improvisation, which until the late nineteenth century was an indispensable part of the language of all master musicians, was restored to respectability with the ascent of jazz.

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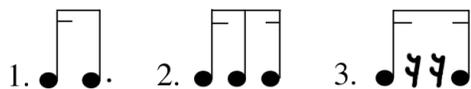
The Music Of Henry F. Gilbert, John Powell, John Alden Carpenter, and Adolph Weiss

by R.D. Darrell

If diversity and independence are definitive American traits, it would be hard to find four roughly contemporaneous native composers more unmistakably American than Henry F. Gilbert, John Alden Carpenter, John Powell, and Adolph Weiss. Markedly different in personality, each going his own stubbornly separate way, each spoke his uniquely individual dialect. They were born in successive decades (the last four of the nineteenth century) in different regions, and they were even more diverse in their musical training, affinities, and styles. Yet the homespun Yankee, the sophisticated Chicagoan businessman, the aristocratic Virginian gentleman-pianist, and the avant-garde Baltimorean-German bassoonist all sought—by a quadrivial route—to create music truly American in character as well as provenance.

Even when two of these composers mined much the same ore (black folk materials by Gilbert and Powell or purported jazz—usually ragtime and Jazz Age—materials by Carpenter and Weiss), the pairs' treatments were sure to be more or less polarized. This was perhaps especially true of Gilbert and Powell. Each approached black music from the outside, of course, but the abolitionist-bred New Englander for the most part used key motives derived from his analytical studies, whereas the unreconstructed Virginian apparently drew on his memories of hearing, "at the big house," family "nigras" singing "in the quarters." (The two quoted phrases are Powell's own subtitles for the first and last movements of his *"Sonata Virginianasque."*) Yet there also were striking incongruities between Carpenter's cultured quasi-Gallic handling of uninhibited comic-strip vulgarities and Weiss's intellectual and numerological approach to the mindlessly noisy activity of urban American life.

Despite all these sharp differences, however, there is *something*—a tiny but not insignificant technical device—used much the same way by all four composers. This is the syncopated rhythmic pattern found, despite its name, in the folk and art music of all countries, but particularly in Afro-American folk music and in ragtime and jazz. It is the so-called Scotch (or African) snap (illustrated in its simple form in Figure 1), used to some extent in all four of the present scores. But it is in what might be called its double Scotch-snap form (figure 2) that it is so prominent an idiomatic feature of the Weiss (especially), Powell, and Gilbert scores. And while I can't find its explicit use in Carpenter's ballet music, it does appear even there (right off the bat, in bar 3) in the implied form shown in Figure 3.



Henry F. Gilbert (1868-1928)

The Dance in Place Congo

The oldest of our four composers was in many respects the most quintessentially American—an *ur-Amerikaner*, indeed, as one German critic called him. Certainly he was our music's archetypal plain, rock-salty, crabbed, dryly ribald Yankee maverick—the poor-relation, bad-boy truant from the New England School, thumbing his nose at the establishment. Yet he was properly born in it as a descendant of Bay State colonists of 1631 (maternal side) and 1640 (paternal side).

Although Gilbert may have been as close as we've ever come to a musical Mark Twain, he never succeeded in winning even a remotely comparable status. Nor has his pioneering work yet earned even a belated acceptance remotely comparable to that of his more revolutionary, slightly younger contemporary Charles Ives. For that there were and still are two strong reasons: the lack of empathy with so rowdy a character on the part of the more gentlemanly, pre-dominantly European-oriented musicians and proper Bostonian audiences of Gilbert's time; and, more decisive, the lack of either daring innovation or beguiling richness in his often bare-bones textures and mainly diatonic harmonies. Despite a few years as MacDowell's first American pupil and apart from the largely ideological influence of the Russian nationalist Balakirev, Gilbert was basically self-taught. And given his own porcupine-prickly independent nature and the fact that for much of his life he was on his own, forced to make a hard living often entirely outside music, it is scarcely surprising that his musical training was in many respects eccentric and lopsided.

In any case, he was an avowed nationalist and folklorist from the first, contemptuous of the pervasive academic, usually German, orientation of most of his contemporaries, and one of the first to take fully to heart Dvořák's celebrated dictum, first voiced in 1893, that any truly American music must be based on Negro melodies. From his *Negro Episode* of 1896, many of Gilbert's pre-World War I pieces used black melodic and rhythmic materials. Besides the present major example, there were an uncompleted opera based on the *Uncle Remus* tales (1905-6), the *Americanesque* (later *Humoresque*) on *Negro-Minstrel Tunes* (1903), the *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes* (1905) (a reworking of the *Uncle Remus* prelude), and *Shout* (1912), later *Negro Rhapsody*. But Gilbert also worked with Indian, Irish, and other ethnic materials, and in later life he insisted that his "Negro phase was left behind years ago as I consider it only one element in our coming American music."

The Dance in Place Congo was composed as a symphonic poem in 1906-8, after Gilbert had abandoned the *Uncle Remus* opera, and revised in 1916.

When submitted for a Boston Symphony performance, the mighty Karl Muck contemptuously disdained it as “Niggah music.” So Gilbert prepared a ballet version based on the work’s original program, one suggested by an article, also titled “The Dance in Place Congo” (*Century* magazine, February, 1886), by George Washington Cable (1844-1925), noted author of the once best-selling stories *Old Creole Days* (1879) and of the novel *The Grandissimes* (1880), from which Delius drew the libretto for his opera *Koanga*. Cable’s article, together with its April, 1886, supplementer “Creole Slave Songs,” described, with pictorial and musical illustrations, the Sunday-afternoon revels of off-duty New Orleans slaves in a “no-count open space [Congo Square] at the fag-end of Orleans Street”—revels that, before they were suppressed in 1844, undoubtedly had some musical influence on the very young Louis Moreau Gottschalk before he left New Orleans for Europe. (See Robert Offergeld’s notes for New World Records 80257-2, *The Wind Demon*.)

Gilbert’s score, “dedicated in friendship to Otto H. Kahn” (the financier, who was a patron of the Metropolitan Opera), calls for an orchestra enlarged to include bass clarinet, double bassoon, a third trumpet, tambourine, glockenspiel, xylophone, and a big bell (tubular chime in E flat). It was first performed in its ballet version, with some added dances, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York on March 23, 1918. Pierre Monteux conducted then, again in the April 26, 1918, Boston performance of the same production, and in the first performance as a symphonic poem by the Boston Symphony on February 20, 1920 (from whose program notes by the composer I lift the quoted phrases in the following description).

Structurally the score is orthodox, with a “gloomy and elegiac” introduction and coda as “frame or tragic background” for the A-B-A “dances-pictures” body of the work. It opens, *Allegro moderato* in E minor, with “quasi-barbaric” rhythms and the working-up of first a fragmentary and then a fuller statement of the “poignant cry of rage and revolt” of the Creole slave song “Eh! pou’ la belle Loyotte.” The first main section is devoted to a “furious” dance, the *bamboula*, here in Gilbert’s composite of rhythmic and melodic motives drawn from two more Creole slave songs, “Quand patate la cuite na va mangé li” and “Musieu Bainjo.” Following the frenzied climax of the *bamboula* there is a *Quasi recitante, deciso* transition to the second main section, a lyrical *Quasi andante* in A flat with calmer, more gracefully lilting variants (flute, oboe, harp, strings, later solo violin) of the “Belle Loyotte” motives of the introduction. Gilbert, more reticent verbally than musically, describes this often quite rapturous section merely as the “more romantic aspects of the picture: love-making, etc.” Its *grandioso* climax is “rudely interrupted by a sudden and insistent reassertion of the barbaric element”—an *Agitato* third section redevelopment of, or “free fantasia” on, the two key motives of the *bamboula*, broken up when the six-o’clock big bell summons the slaves back to their quarters. The coda’s grim reminiscences of earlier motives work up to a final *Maestoso* return of the “tragic cry of the introduction: the cry of racial revolt against slavery.”

It is not at all surprising that music like this, “ripped out in all its triumphant vulgarity,” should have raised genteel eyebrows. And although most of Gilbert’s major works were performed at least once, few if any of the performances in his own lifetime did him justice. (“Give me a third-rate American conductor over the best European any day!”, I once heard him plead.) Yet that he could appeal to a wide public was shown by the success consistently scored by his “Pirate Song” (“Fifteen Men on a Dead Man’s Chest”) in recitals and recordings by David Bispham, Herbert Witherspoon, Reinald

Werrenrath, and others. And at least one characteristic work by this *ur-Amerikaner*, the *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes*, fascinated Russian audiences when Reinhold Gliere conducted it in the first two of a projected series of performances aborted by the onset of war in 1914. And in striking contradiction to the adverse verdicts or sheer obliviousness of both conservative and avant-garde native critics and musicians, there were such shining Gilbertian proponents as Olin Downes and Elliott Carter.

As a fervent partisan of recorded music as well as of Gilbert, I believe that the best of his works—perhaps the present one and his last major composition, the *Symphonic Piece* of 1925-26, in particular—well might win favor among today's less stuffy home listeners when skillfully presented by empathetic interpreters. Sorely his idiosyncratic expression of the American spirit (“energetic—optimistic—nervous—impatient of restraint—and, in its highest aspects, a mighty protest against the benumbing traditions of the past”) is more potently infectious nowadays than it ever was before.

Personal Apologia: It is only fair to make explicit my bias not only as an admirer of the relatively few Gilbert works I have had the opportunity of knowing well but as a onetime friend who had the privilege of knowing the extraordinary man himself in his last few years of life. That life, as the general public has never known, was in itself something of a medical miracle as well as a paradigm of courage. For Gilbert had to battle not only the usual handicaps of any artist and the special difficulties of so ornery a one as he chose to be but also the burden of a congenital cardiac defect—the tetralogy of Fallot, or “blue-baby's” disease, which first cripples and then usually kills its victims at an early age. The Bostonian heart specialist Dr. Paul Dudley White reported Gilbert's case as unique: both because Gilbert, at sixty, lived more than twenty-three years longer than any other known sufferer from the disease and because, despite its typical cyanosis and clubbing of the fingers, he was still able (in Dr. White's words) “to make of his life a great success . . . as a pioneer of American music.

Even when Gilbert's face turned a terrifying dark blue from the slightest physical exertion or when his clubbed fingers hampered his illustrating some musical point at the piano, he made light of his affliction: “It just means that I have to play with more feeling—for the keys!”

Over some fifty years I still have vivid memories of that and of the delighted relish he took in records like the young Duke Ellington's *Black and Tan Fantasy* and George Gershwin's playing his own “Clap Yo' Hands,” which I, then an apprentice record reviewer, brought along on visits. His lively interest in the opinions and activities of all his young musician, writer, and artist friends was almost literally inexhaustible. Only a day or two before his death, when he lay felled by a stroke that had left him immobile and tongue-tied, he was still able to recognize and greet me with a customary but now unintelligible query, which only his wife could interpret: “What's new now in the record world?”

Editorial Note: The following cuts (based on those instituted by the late Pierre Monteux for his Boston Symphony performances in the early 1920s) have been made in the present recording of Gilbert's *Dance in Place Congo*: pg. 12, bar 4, through pg. 17, bar 7; pg. 21, bar 4, through pg. 26, bar 4; pg. 27, bar 4, through pg. 42, bar 5; pg. 46, bar 1, through pg. 48, bar 6; pg. 65, bar 5, through pg. 68, bar 4; pg. 77, bar 1, through pg. 94, bar 7; pg. 95, bar 5, through pg. 95, bar 9; pg. 100, bar 2, through pg. 109, bar 6. Page references are to the full orchestra score published by H. W. Gray in 1922.

John Powell (1882-1963)

Rhapsodie Nègre

Powell, the epitome of the antebellum cultured southerner, proudly traced his ancestry paternally to a Welsh king of Alfred's era, maternally to Nicholas Lanier or Laniere, court composer to Charles I and Charles II. The son of a schoolmaster father and amateur musician mother, Powell was born and bred, and was to die, in Virginia. But on his graduation from the University of Virginia in 1901 he went to Europe for some years of study (with the pianist-pedagogue Theodor Leschitzky and the Czech composer Karl Navrátil) and a Berlin debut as pianist in 1908. On his return from a European concert tour he began the first of many American tours, and his earliest compositions were for his own performance or participation as a pianist. Among them the present rhapsody and the 1919 *Sonata Virginianesque* for violin and piano used Negro materials; most of his later works used or were influenced by Anglo-American traditional materials, of which he was an assiduous collector.

Several Powell works, the *Rhapsodie Nègre* in particular, enjoyed considerable success, especially while the composer remained active as a pianist. While he (like the others in our present foursome) never became closely associated with other composers in a definite coterie or school, he was a favorite of such a traditionalist as composer-critic-educator Daniel Gregory Mason; and his fellow Virginians honored him on an official "John Powell Day," November 15, 1951, with a performance of his *Symphony on Virginian Folk Themes and in the Folk Modes*. Outside his musical activities, Powell was an amateur astronomer, awarded honorary membership in the Société Astronomique de France for the discovery of a comet, and was the founder, in 1913 and 1916 respectively, of the Fresh Air Art Society in Europe and the Society for the Preservation of Racial Integrity at the University of Virginia.

The *Rhapsodie Nègre* was commissioned in 1917 by Modest Altschuler, conductor of the Russian Symphony, with which the composer was soloist in the work's first performance in Carnegie Hall in New York. The date was March 23, 1918, by one of life's unnerving coincidences the same day that Gilbert's *Dance in Place Congo* was first performed in the Metropolitan Opera House. The rhapsody was dedicated "To Joseph Conrad in appreciation of and gratitude for 'Heart of Darkness.'" The noted novella of 1899 had stimulated Powell to visit Conrad in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the author to sanction an opera-libretto version of his evocative African-jungle story. Instead, Conrad persuaded Powell to settle for a symphonic poem or, in the event, a piano-and-orchestra rhapsody loosely based on a program in which the novella's wild, cannibalistic African tribesmen became transported Afro-American slaves.

This program is elaborated in lurid detail in notes for the 1922 Powell/Monteux/Boston Symphony performances (and presumably other earlier and later ones)—notes provided by Richard Brockwell, an authorized spokesman for, if not the alter ego of, the composer himself. More significant than the music's purported story, however, well may be Brockwell's prefatory expression of what must have been Powell's, as well as his own, attitudes toward Negroes and their music. A few key sentences and the use, and non-use, of capitalization are representative:

. . . the negro. . . is, *au fond*, in spite of the surface polish and restraints imposed by close contacts with Caucasian civilization, a genuine primitive. His musical utterance, when really direct, not imitative, brings with it always the breath of the tropical jungle. . . . The negro is the child among the peoples, and his music shows the unconscious, unbounded gaiety of the child,

as well as the child's humor; sometimes Æsopian, often, unfortunately too often, Rabelaisian. But it has, also, the warm religious emotionality of the child, which at its best glows with naïve simplicity and deep fervor, at its worst descends to a nadir of frantic sensual fanaticism.

In somewhat less empurpled prose, the rhapsody (which is scored for a moderate-size orchestra, with winds in twos and threes, and solo piano) may be described as loosely constructed in three main sections. The introductory first section (in another wholly coincidental similarity with Gilbert's *Place Congo*) begins with a plaintive woodwind “Cry,” *Lento*, which leads immediately into an *Allegro moderato* based on a tom-tom-rhythmed dance theme first heard in the piano. After repetitions, developments, and a *Lento* transition, the *Andante con moto* second section begins with the work's principal theme announced by the piano over its own accompaniment of syncopated organ-point octaves featuring, as does the theme itself, the double-Scotch-snap rhythm. After some working-up, a *Sostenuto il tempo* recitative for clarinet introduces as the rhapsody's second principal theme a variant of the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” which is developed antiphonally and with floridly bravura arabesques for the soloist. After a pause comes the *Allegro* third section, based on another spiritual, the exuberantly syncopated “I Want to Be Ready.” It too is worked up elaborately, eventually together with a return of the first-section dance theme in what for Brockwell is the,

frenzy of a Voodoo orgy, which degenerates into a maniacal licentiousness. The flood of madness is interrupted for a moment by the “Sweet Chariot” theme, which is, however, incapable of maintaining itself, and is overwhelmed in a flood of primal sensuality. The Rhapsody closes with a shriek from the brass, accompanied by a tempestuous *crescendo* streaming up the full range of the pianoforte.

Alas, they don't write program notes like Brockwell's any more. For that matter, efforts to combine such inherently immiscible elements as black idioms, southern white accents, and European (here mostly Lisztian) rhetoric are no longer in vogue. Nevertheless, Powell's rhapsody remains a virtuoso's showpiece and a provocative example of one approach—once widely practiced—toward a distinctive American musical language.

John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951)

Krazy Kat

Like Gilbert and Powell, Carpenter could boast of a very old family tree, in his case rooted in this country's soil by the pilgrims Patricia Mullins and John Alden. Like Ives, he long practiced music only as an avocation: until 1936 he was engaged in a family shipping-supplies business in Chicago, which, however, gave him leeway and the means to study under John Knowles Paine at Harvard, with Edward Elgar for a time abroad, and back in Chicago with Bernhard Ziehn. Yet contemporaneous French Impressionistic styles played a more influential role than his formal studies, and he first established a reputation as a polished craftsman rather than a mere dilettante in his song cycles *Gitanjali* (after Tagore; 1913) and *Water Colors* (after Chinese poems; 1918). He was technically proficient even in his first major orchestral work, *Adventures in a Perambulator* (1915). What made this programmatic suite a unique if minor masterpiece was its delectable blend of fancy and humor in persuasively evoking, without sentimentalizing, a baby's impressions of the world.

It was of course so lively an imagination and sense of humor—all too rare in the world of “serious” music—that enabled Carpenter to recognize the ballet potential of the comic-strip exploits of George Herriman's quixotic *Krazy Kat*. Composed in early 1921 and first performed as an orchestral piece on December 23 of that year in Chicago, *Krazy Kat* was first done in its intended

ballet-pantomime form, with Herriman's rolling-backdrop pictorial scenery, on January 20, 1922, in New York's Town Hall with choreography—and the role of the eponymous protagonist danced—by Adolf Bolm, Georges Barrère conducting.

Although the work is subtitled a “jazz pantomime” and its relatively small orchestra includes a saxophone and piano and calls for occasional wa-wa trumpet and trombone passages, this is jaunty Jazz Age music rather than true jazz—such as was concurrently flourishing in Carpenter's city if not in his circle (by this time, according to Marshall Stearns, the “hypothetical peak of jazz intensity” had already “shifted from New Orleans to Chicago”). The typically episodic comic-strip story was told in full in the composer's program notes for the original ballet production and later reprinted as foreword to the published piano score and in the Krazy Kat chapter of Gilbert Seldes' *Seven Lively Arts*. It begins with the awakening of Krazy, for whom there's an expressive theme, from an afternoon katnap; he sights a grand-ball announcement poster and makes a serendipitous discovery of a ballet skirt hanging on a clothesline and of a conveniently dropped makeup kit; he succumbs to the temptation to make use of them while Ignaz Mouse (perky piccolo theme), with his brick at the ready, is frightened off by Offisa Pup; the now warmed-up Krazy does a one-man (or -kat) “zippy but languorous” Spanish dance, complete with castanets; he receives a bouquet of katnip from a mysterious stranger (betrayed by the piccolo as Ignaz in disguise); the soon stoned Krazy abandons all decorum in a “Katnip Blues” dance, at the conclusion of which Ignaz, throwing off his disguise, finally gets to fling his brick. The exhausted, masochistically ecstatic Krazy totters back to the base of his napping tree as Offisa Pup, swinging his club, passes by again. “The moon comes out. Krazy sleeps. Krazy dreams. Indomitable Kat!”

The stir this work caused in the dance world led the great Diaghilev to commission Carpenter to write a “ballet of modern American life,” *Skyscrapers*, belatedly produced at the Metropolitan Opera House on February 19, 1926. It too proved to be more characteristic of the Jazz Age than of jazz itself, but it did include (in its moments of merrymaking “at any Coney Island”) some notably invigorating use of ragtime materials.

After Carpenter retired from business in 1936, he composed even more prolifically, including the grandiose narrator-with-chorus-and-orchestra *Song of Faith* for the George Washington bicentennial of 1932. But although he was extensively honored (honorary Mus.D. degree, Knight of the French Legion of Honor, Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, etc.), and although his music was widely performed and recorded, none of his later works matched the charm of *Adventures in a Perambulator* or provoked as much publicity as *Krazy Kat* and *Skyscrapers*.

But in all likelihood *Krazy Kat*'s failure to hold a place in the orchestral repertory is in large part a consequence of the predominance of its visual over its sheer sonic appeals. Now that the score has been completely recorded for the first time, it still demands that listeners do it the justice of simultaneously seeing—actually or mentally—the incomparable Herriman scenes and karacters. The fourteen pages of these that are interleaved in the published piano score are embellished with appropriate thematic illustrations bearing such Herrimanic tempo specifications as *jazzando*, *pizzzi-kat-to*, *kurioso*, *kantando*, and the above-mentioned “zippy but languorous.” Next best is dipping at random into the book collection of Herriman comic strips while reading the pantomime's detailed story in the Seldes *Seven Lively Arts*.

Adolph Weiss (1891-1971)
American Life

The youngest of our foursome, Weiss was the only first-generation American—born in Baltimore of German parents, which well may have influenced his becoming a professional orchestral player as well as (for his time) avant-garde composer. He was only sixteen when he became first bassoonist of the Russian Symphony in New York. His later affiliations included posts with the New York Philharmonic under Mahler, the New York Symphony under Damrosch, the San Francisco Symphony, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. (It is tantalizing to guess what Gilbert, Carpenter, and Powell works he may have played in and what he thought of them.)

As a composer he became, after preliminary studies at Columbia University and in Chicago, the first American-born pupil (1924-27) of Arnold Schoenberg. Some, if by no means all, of his later works were written in the Schoenbergian twelve-tone system; all of them reportedly were first notated in a numerological technique all Weiss's own—a forerunner of the more elaborate no note notation schemes of later, more revolutionary composers. Yet although Weiss's music, like Schoenberg's, was generally considered unduly cerebral, it often had not only poetic connotations but distinctive poetic expressiveness. Witness his probably most widely successful work, the 1931 *Air and Variations* for large orchestra, which in its so far only recorded version won an accolade from the authoritative Alfred Frankenstein: "I know of no American twelve-tone piece, at least on records, that is as moving and eloquent as this."

Weiss's *American Life* was originally (1929) described as a scherzo for large orchestra: later, (on its 1932 publication in Henry Cowell's *New Music Orchestral Series*) it was subtitled, jocosely no doubt, a "Scherzoso Jazzoso." It has no explicit program (or at least none ever was revealed), but the composer's apodictic intention must have been to express musically the high-voltage tensions, restlessness, and motoric drives of contemporary urban life in this country. The work was first performed by the Conductorless Orchestra in New York on February 21, 1931, later in Paris on June 6, 1931, in a Nicholas Slonimsky concert (which included works by Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, Henry Cowell, and Amadeo Roldán) sponsored by the Pan-American Association of Composers. The *New York Times* reviewer of the premiere found the Weiss "strident and blatant and raucous" yet nevertheless an "intriguing novelty." The German critic Hans Stuckenschmidt described it as a "synthesis of jazz, tone-clusters, and twelve-tone row." And Slonimsky himself termed it (in his *Music Since 1900*) an "overture in an atonal jazz idiom."

Despite all this, the work is not a blend of true jazz and true dodecaphony—an oxymoron if there ever was one! The jazz elements are principally the inclusion of three saxophones (soprano, alto, tenor), wood block, pseudo high-hat suspended cymbal, and brushed snare drum in the scoring, and the prominent use of the double Scotch snap. The harmonic idiom actually is, as Gilbert Chase has pointed out, not twelve-tone but "quartal"—that is, based on the interval of a fourth (rather than the usual third and fifth), here in particular on the augmented fourth, the ancient forbidden tritone or *diabolus in musica*. This quartal harmonic technique doesn't burst the bonds of tonality to plunge into absolute atonality, but it is tonally highly ambiguous; and as practiced by such composers as Scriabin (in his "mystic chord"), Hindemith, Bartók, and others, it has served as an important way station on the road from post-Wagnerian chromaticism to serialism.

The two most markedly distinguishing characteristics of *American Life* are proclaimed in the double-Scotch-snap rhythmic and augmented-fourth melodic motives of the very first two bars, *Lento*, for trumpets, which crescendo into the third bar's *Allegro tutti*. These distinctive motives are twice repeated (saxophones and woodwinds, woodwinds and strings) before leading into the first of the work's two main sections. This is a *Fox Trot (slow tempo)*, *Allegretto grazioso*, with a muted-trumpet

dotted-note theme (of course featuring augmented fourths) later taken up, *molto ritmico*, by the violins and some woodwinds. Reminiscences of the opening *Lento/Allegro* materials lead to the second main section, *Blues Tempo, slow, rubato*, with a floridly flute-decorated English-horn theme (with more augmented fourths) later given to the soprano sax. After an *allargando* fortissimo tutti climax and a pause, there are final reminiscences of the opening materials in an extended rush to an emphatic triple-forte conclusion.

Weiss left an impressively large body of works, many of them for chamber ensembles, but also the large-scale *Air and Variations* and the “choreographic cantata” *The Libation Bearers* (after Aeschylus). Yet despite high critical esteem and such honors as a Guggenheim Fellowship (1931) and membership in the National Academy of Arts and Letters (1955), little of his music has commanded general attention. But now that the original difficulties of his Schoenbergian-accented idiom have come to seem negligible even to tender ears at least in comparison with those of more outré serialists and aleatorists there well may be a better chance for his arresting ideas and expert craftsmanship to achieve, however belatedly, a more favorable reception.

* *

This hope should hold good as well for the other members of our foursome, all of whom are properly memorialized in the cemeteries of standard and specialized music reference books but none of whom is adequately represented in current performances or recordings. For that matter, except for Carpenter and to a lesser extent Powell, their recordings never were many nor adequate interpretatively. Of the present works, the Weiss has never been recorded before; the single recordings of the other three date back to the late 78-rpm/early LP era and have been generally regarded as inadequate even by the technical standards of that time. Hence the genuine need for the present new versions—and of course for other new or first recordings of the best achievements of our four so disparate yet so unmistakably American composers.

R. D. Darrell *has been reviewing records since 1926 and compiled the first edition of* The Gramophone Shop Encyclopedia of Recorded Music (1936).

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John Powell

Sonata Teutonica, Sonate psychologique. (R. H. Johnson, piano). CRI 704.

LAWRENCE FOSTER, Music Director of the Houston Symphony, was born in 1941 in Los Angeles. He made his conducting debut with the Young Musicians' Foundation Debut Orchestra of Los Angeles in 1960, and was its conductor and musical director for four years. During that period he also became Associate Conductor of the San Francisco Ballet, a post which he held until 1965, when he was made assistant conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In 1966 Foster won the Koussevitzky Memorial Conducting Prize and the Eleanor R. Crane Memorial Prize at the Berkshire Music Center (Tanglewood). From 1969 to 1973 he was Chief Guest Conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London. In 1971 Foster accepted the post of Conductor in Chief with the Houston Symphony, and in 1972 he was elevated to Music Director.

ZITA CARNO joined the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1975. She has played recitals at Town Hall and the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium in New York, and has appeared as soloist, with the New York Philharmonic and the Omaha Symphony. Prior to her position with the Los Angeles Philharmonic she worked with the New Jersey Symphony and the Orchestra da Camera of Long Island.

CALVIN SIMMONS studied piano at the Curtis Institute and conducting with Max Rudolf. He made his debut as assistant conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic during the 1975/76 season. Simmons, who was born in 1950, joined the San Francisco Opera in 1967 as rehearsal pianist. In

1970 he became Assistant Conductor of the Merola Opera Summer Program, and in 197 Assistant Conductor of the San Francisco Opera. That same year he received the Kurt Herbert Adler Award. In 1974 Mr. Simmons joined the music staff of the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and made his European conducting debut with the company during the summer of 1975 directing *Gos fan tutte* and *Der Freischütz*. Mr. Simmons is also music director and conductor of the Young Musicians' Foundation Debut Orchestra of Los Angeles, a post previously held by Lawrence Foster.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra records courtesy London Records.

Thanks to Mrs. Jacob Baker and the Edwin A. Fleischer Music Collection in the Free Library of Philadelphia for their invaluable help and cooperation.

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Recorded at UCLA's Royce Hall Auditorium

Cover art: Morgan Russell. "Abstraction." Oil on Canvas. The Brooklyn Museum.

Cover design: Elaine Sherer Cox

Library of Congress Card No.77-750902

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