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SOURCE READINGS IN MUSIC HISTORY

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ture of Western music and to unite many disparate elements in her music is well known. Sofia Gubaidulina is not interested in feminism, yet she composes as if she were a feminist: she is open towards all material. She is not stylistically bound, but concentrates on the contents of music. For her religion and music are just as much a unity as music and language, music and scenes. She combines folkloristic instruments like the bajan with classical instruments (violoncello); she is concerned with improvisation, is not interested in originality for its own sake, wishes to convert her audience from their "staccato" life style to a more meditative attitude, and she often stresses the unity of mankind with nature.

When one listens to music one cannot judge whether it has been written by a man or woman, one can only guess. It is possible, however, to trace female mentality and experience in the music of women. This is easy for instance in music of someone like Ruth Anderson, who in her piece, *I come out of your sleep*, uses electronic music to create the sound of breathing, which has a soothing effect on her listeners. On the other hand you will find that someone as rational-minded as Elisabeth Lutyens prefers to change time signatures, as she feels rhythm is more akin to breathing and spontaneous movement than to the military march. The music styles of Anderson and Lutyens differ hugely and prove that it would be useless to define a feminine aesthetic in the same sense of similarity; but we can trace their convictions back to their female experience.

I believe that women composers should get involved with women's traditions because they could then derive power and energy from them instead of ignoring or negating them. As to theorists and feminists, we should not forget that our Western culture is made to fit male requirements. If we continue to evaluate music written by women by male standards, we would have to define much of it as "deficient." As long as symphonic music is looked upon as more prestigious than chamber music, as long as functional music counts less than absolute (abstract) music, as long as the product is looked on as more valuable than the act of production, as long as music is defined by qualities such as loudness, virtuosity and greatest input instead of emphasizing heightened awareness and sensibility, as long as binary contrast such as body/soul, pop music/classical music, tradition/progression, functional music/absolute music etc. persist, music written by men will be looked on as superior. It will be necessary to attack conventional hierarchies and search for other values in which women can be represented. This can only be done satisfactorily, of course, if women's role is put on an equal basis with men's in society. In the meantime there are signs that male composers are changing their attitudes towards the role of music in society, and that they are taking over "feminine" traits in their music. So the challenge goes to both sexes, and it looks as if some exciting music is in store for us in the future.

26 William Grant Still

William Grant Still (1895–1978) was the first black composer to gain widespread recognition as a writer of American concert music. After receiving a degree in music from Oberlin College, Still moved to New York, where he studied privately with Edgard Varèse and became a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance Movement of the 1920s. Still's pioneering role in American music is reflected in numerous accomplishments: he was the first African-American to write a symphony and have it performed by a major orchestra, the first to conduct a major symphony orchestra, the first to compose an opera produced by a major American company, and the first to produce music for radio, film, and television. In this autobiographical passage from an address delivered at UCLA in 1957, Still discusses the diverse influences he encountered as a young black composer and speaks of his wish—contrary to the advice of those advocating a more traditional concert style or more emphasis on ethnic and vernacular materials—to remain receptive to all of them.

FROM Horizons Unlimited

(1957)

I speak as a composer who has, in a very real sense, been through the mill. In my early days, I studied at Conservatories with Conservatory-trained teachers. There I learned the traditions of music and acquired the basic tools of the trade. If I had stopped there, the sort of music I later composed might have been quite different. But necessity forced me to earn a living, so I turned to the field of commercial music.

Back in the days when America became aware of the "Blues," I worked with W. C. Handy in his office on Beale Street in Memphis. This certainly would not seem to be an occupation nor a place where anything of real musical value could be gained. Nor would nearby Gayoso Street, which was then a somewhat disreputable section. But, in searching for musical experiences that might later help me, I found there an undeniable color and a musical atmosphere that stemmed directly from the folk.

Any alert musician could learn something, even in that sordid atmosphere. W. C. Handy listened and learned—and what he learned profited him financially and in other ways in the succeeding years. He, of course, belongs in the popular field of music. But if a popular composer could profit by such contacts with folk music, why couldn't a serious composer? Instead of having a feeling

TEXT: *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music*, ed. by Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), pp. 114–16. Reprinted by permission of William Grant Still Music.

of condescension, I tried to keep my ears open so that I could absorb and make mental notes of things that might be valuable later.

As the years went on, and I went from one commercial job to another, there were always people who tried to make me believe that the commercial field was an end in itself, and who argued that I should not waste my time on what is now often called "long-hair" music. In this, I disagreed. I felt that I was learning something valuable, but only insofar as I could use it to serve a larger purpose.

The next important step was my study with Edgard Varèse. He might be classed as one of the most extreme of the ultramodernists. He took for himself, and encouraged in others, absolute freedom in composing. Inevitably, while I was studying with him, I began to think as he did and to compose music which was performed; music which was applauded by the avant-garde, such as were found in the International Composers' Guild. As a matter of fact, I was so intrigued by what I learned from Mr. Varèse that I let it get the better of me. I became its servant, not its master. It followed as a matter of course that, after freeing me from the limitation of tradition, it too began to limit me.

It took me a little while to realize that it *was* limiting me, and that the ultra-modern style alone (that is to say, in its unmodified form) did not allow me to express myself as I wished. I sought then to develop a style that debarred neither the ultra-modern nor the conventional.

Certain people thought this decision was unwise, and tried to persuade me to stay strictly in the ultra-modern fold. I didn't do it, but at the same time, the things I learned from Mr. Varèse—let us call them the horizons he opened up to me—have had a profound effect on the music I have written since then. The experience I gained was thus most valuable even though it did not have the result that might have been expected.

After this period, I felt that I wanted for a while to devote myself to writing racial music. And here, because of my own racial background, a great many people decided that I ought to confine myself to that sort of music. In that too, I disagreed. I was glad to write Negro music then, and I still do it when I feel so inclined, for I have a great love and respect for the idiom. But it has certainly not been the *only* musical idiom to attract me.

Fortunately for me, nobody tried to talk me out of the two things that strikingly influenced my musical leanings, possibly because those influences were not the sort which make themselves known to outsiders as readily as others. The first was my love for grand opera, born around 1911 when my stepfather bought many of the early Red Seal recordings for our home record library. I knew then that I would be happy only if someday I could compose operatic music, and I have definitely leaned toward a lyric style for that reason.

The second influence had to do with writing for the symphony orchestra, something which has deeply interested me from the very start of my musical life. Many years ago, I began to evolve theories pertaining to orchestration, and to experiment with them from time to time. Applying those theories has tended

to modify, perhaps even to curtail, the development of a contrapuntal style as it is known today. However, their use has enabled me to better achieve the result I sought.

Today the music I write stems in some degree from all of my experiences, but it is what *I* would like to write, not what others have insisted that I write. Some people have been kind enough to say that I have developed a distinctly personal style of musical expression. I hope they are right, and if they are, I'm sure it has come from keeping an open mind, meanwhile making an effort to select what is valuable and to reject what is unimportant, in my estimation.

27 Olly Wilson

In contrast to the relatively conciliatory tone taken by William Grant Still regarding his relationship to American music at large (see pp. 151–52), Olly Wilson (b. 1937), some forty years younger and writing in 1972 at the height of the civil rights movement, adopts a more aggressive, even accusatory manner. Traditionally trained, with degrees in music from major universities, and holding a professorship at the University of California at Berkeley, Wilson puts forward a somewhat bifurcated position. On the one hand, he responds to the historical suppression of black culture through racism with an essentialist stance (compare the essay by Eva Rieger, pp. 145–50), arguing that the black composer has a unique voice shaped by sources that lie "deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of his people" (Wilson himself studied music in Africa during 1971 and 1972). On the other hand, he eschews parochialism, encouraging black composers to make use of all the technical resources they have available in order to write music that, while culturally specific, is universal in reach.

The Black American Composer

(1972)

At a time when the collective consciousness of black people has been raised to a renewed awareness of the power and significance of their culture, the black composer finds himself in a vital though demanding position. The role of any artist is to reinterpret human existence by means of the conscious transformation of his experience. He does this by ordering the media that he has chosen in such a manner that his fellow men gain new perspectives on their shared

TEXT: *Readings in Black American Music*, 2nd ed., compiled and edited by Eileen Southern (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), pp. 327–32.