

Crawford and Ellington: Modernism III

6/1/17

Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901 - 1953)

- Early, high quality piano lessons from serious private teachers.
- After high school, takes a job teaching at the School for Musical Art in Jacksonville, FL.
- 1921: One-year trip to study in Chicago. American Conservatory.
- Arm trouble means less practice time and more theory → composition.
- Graduates from conservatory: *Kaleidoscopic Changes on an Original Theme*
- New piano teacher, Djane Lavoie Herz, opens new aesthetic frontiers for her; influence of Weidig fades somewhat. Dane Rudhyar and Henry Cowell.
- 1929 Guggenheim Grant - \$2500. Cowell publishes *Preludes 6-9*
- No real interest in jazz.
- Enrolls for MM degree as a Juilliard Scholarship Student (still in Chicago).
The Adventures of Tom Thumb
- How to make a living? *We Dance Together* – intended for commercial publication.

Ruth Crawford, continued

- 1929 MacDowell Residency.
- Patronage of Blanche Walton, studies with Charles Seeger, life in New York. Seeger introduces her to 12-tone Schoenberg.
 - **Pete Seeger** (collab. With Alan Lomax on the Archive of American Folk Music).
- **Rat Riddles**, setting Carl Sandburg's poem
- Leaves for Europe on Guggenheim Fellowship (first woman to receive one). Meets many important European composers (not Schoenberg).
- **Piano Study in Mixed Accents** (1930)
 - 2nd half retrogrades first half
 - Performer chooses among 2 dynamic profiles.
- String Quartet (1931)
 - **Movement 1**
 - **Movement 3**
 - Extremely original usage of dynamics

Depression

- Decrease in opportunities for musicians, especially avant garde.
- Interest in socialism. **Charles perceives the conflict between avant-garde aesthetic and social justice convictions.**
 - “Both Charles and Ruth felt constrained to make an effort to help those less fortunate than themselves and to try to discover music’s place in their lives.” (Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, p. 96)
- Composers’ Collective. Under leadership of Hanns Eisler, a belief in music that is active in labor movement, but grounded in the aesthetic of the elite. “Much of their music proved to be too intellectual to achieve its intended goal.”
- e.g. **Sacco, Vanzetti** and **Chinaman, Laundryman**
- Eventually, focus on folk music.
- Charles accepts jobs in DC working for government programs (Resettlement Administration, the Federal Music Project). Ruth’s efforts devoted to teaching and programming true folk music. **Musicology.**
 - “Essentially, Charles and Ruth spent many years of their lives trying to satisfy themselves of the relevance of all kinds of musical endeavors to all the other activities of man.” (Gaume, 109)
- Tradition and Experiment in 20th Century Music (“dissonant counterpoint”) never completed.
- **Peggy Seeger**
- **Mike Seeger**

Edward Kennedy Ellington (1899 - 1974)

- Born to middle class family in DC. Methodist, Baptist.
- In high school, plans to become visual artist (commercial artist?).
- Ragtime, stride. James P Johnson, **Carolina Shout** (1918, piano roll)
- Travels to NYC in 1923 with Wilbur Sweatman, for a gig at Lafayette Theater.
- The Washingtonians, **Rainy Nights**, **Choo Choo**
 - Good at exploiting his band: Bubber Miley (trumpet) and Tricky Sam Nanton (trombone)
- 1926 begins relationship to Irving Mills. Aggressive advertising:
 - Promoters must “sell Ellington as a great artist, and a musical genius whose unique style and individual theories of harmony have created a new music.”
- 1926 **East St. Louis Toodle-oo**
 - Final cadence based on **Chopin, op. 35, movement 3 (funeral march)**
- 1927 **Black and Tan Fantasy**
- 1927 Cotton Club
 - Radio broadcasts lead to many high profile engagements
- Criticism consistently infatuated with idea of Ellington as a “serious” composer. Frequent comparisons to Stravinsky and **Frederick Delius**.
 - “what is unusual in early Ellington criticism is the readiness of his proponents to characterize him as a ‘real composer’ and to compare his arrangements and compositions to the work of revered classical composers.

Afro-modernism: “beyond category”

- Emphasized the racial dimension of his work: search for “an authentic Negro music.”
 - “race records” ; no black musician can record anything that isn’t “black” music.
- Racial dynamics of performance environments
 - “Cotton Club”
 - “Plantation Cafe”
 - “Kentucky Club”
 - Also, “Africanist primitivism” (jeffrey magee)
- But these rigid categories are challenged in the ellington ensemble: personality of the performers, blend of New York urbanity and New Orleans influence. Strayhorn: “The Ellington Effect”
 - “a unique style **developed out of the tonal personalities of the band members.**”
- **The Mooche (1928)**
- **Immigration Blues (1926)**
 - Picture, or program? Folk/plagal section, then blues/urbane section?
- **Mood Indigo (1930)**
 - Crazy orchestration: “plaintive” style
- **Black Beauty (1928)**
- “built in paradox of musical contrast” (Jeffrey Magee)
- **Creole Rhapsody (1931)**
 - **Part ii**
 - First large, ambitious composition; designed to fill both sides of a 78.
 - “segregated” musical forms; pop (tin pan alley) and blues.
 - cf. **Can’t Help Lovin Dat Man**, (1927) where blues is mixed with tin pan alley specifically to connote mixed race.

Afro-modernism

- “While the racial assumptions of 1920s new york certainly restricted black musicians, they reflected a larger trend that also benefited the musicians: a surge of interest in all things African American. The historian Ann Douglas has written that ‘the 1920s were the decade in which the Negroization of American culture became something like a recognized phenomenon,” and few musicians showed a savvier sense of how to use that phenomenon to their advantage – and to forge an artistic synthesis from its unresolved tensions – than young Duke Ellington.”
 - Magee, “Ellington’s Afro-Modernist Vision in the 1920s,” p 102

1930s: swing era Ellington

- 1931 Cotton Club engagement ends; begins exhausting touring schedule.
 - Relative comfort; hires private train cars!
- 1932 reaches west coast; featured on Amos and Andy, several other films
- 1933 *Daybreak Express*
 - *No improvisation*; tension between individual and ensemble virtuosity
 - e.g. *Boy Meets Horn*, for Rex Stewart
- Culminating in “*Symphony in Black*” (1935)
- Struggle with “swing” aesthetic; e.g. *Tommy Dorsey*
 - With *Battle of Swing*, meets the swing aesthetic head-on

Postwar Ellington

- Important additions to the “ellington sound”
 - Jimmie Blanton, bass
 - Ben Webster, saxophone
 - Ray “Floorshow” Nance, trumpet
 - Arrival of Billy Strayhorn
 - “he was my right arm, my left arm, all the eyes in the back of my head, my brainwaves in his head, and he in mine.”
 - **Cottontail** (before strayhorn)
 - **Flamingo** (with strayhorn)
 - **A Flower is Lovesome Thing** (written by strayhorn)
- WWII, financial troubles, recording ban from AFM:
 - Composition of a “symphonic work”

Black, Brown and Beige: A Tone Parallel to the History of the Negro in America

- Premieres 1/23/43 at Carnegie Hall
- **BBB**
- Black – slavery
- Brown – Revolution – WWI
- Beige – contemporary USA
 - “The climax reminds us that even though the Negro is “Black, Brown and Beige,” he is also “Red, White and Blue,” asserting the same loyalty that characterized him in the days when he fought for those who enslaved him.”
- Corrective to “Porgy and Bess?”
 - “it’s time a big piece of music was written from the inside by a Negro.”
- Critically panned...what kind of musician was he?
- Turns to the Suite

Bebop

- “bebop also gave jazz unprecedented capital as an art music and signified its move into its current, albeit precarious, position at the intersection of high art and popular culture.” (Eric Porter, “Dizzy Atmosphere: the Challenge of Bebop” – 1999)
- Anthropology, Mohawk, Koko
- Fast tempos, complexity, self-conscious modernism, small ensembles
- Relationship to politics
 - Transgressive, assertive
 - But indirect?
 - Urbanization, Fair Employment Practices Committee, “widespread belief in expanding wartime economy” (Eric Porter), Black Nationalism
 - Relationship to the blues. *Now's the Time* and *Au Privave*, e.g., are blueses
 - cf. Can't Help Lovin That Man of Mine
 - Dizzy Gillespie on older styles (dixieland):
 - “That old stuff was like **mother goose rhymes**. **It was alright for its time, but it was a childish time.**” (quoted in porter, p. 431)

Edgard Varese: organized sound (1883 - 1965)

- Early studies in math and engineering; music at the Schola Cantorum and Conservatoire.
- 1915 arrives in NYC. (age 22)
- Founds, with Carlos Salzedo, International Composer's Guild
 - *Offrandes* (1922)
- 1933 fails to create a research center for electro acoustic work. Depression.
- 1936 *Density 21.5*

Varese continued

- “precursor” of electronic music
 - “we also need new instruments very badly”
 - Music is “art-science”
- Urbanism
 - Criticizes Italian Futurists for “anecdotal” imitation of mechanical sounds. e.g. Russolo’s 1913 *Intonarumoris*
 - *Integrals* (1924), contains no direct imitation
- Like Stravinsky, mistrust of strings and vibrato, preference for percussion and winds
- *Ionisation* (1931)

Olivier Messiaen (1908 - 1992)

- Early influence of Stravinsky (more so than Schoenberg, whom he barely knew outside *Pierrot*)
- Also Debussy:
 - *Eight Preludes* (1929)
- 1931 organist at La Trinite.
 - “whatever the genre, the declared purpose of his music was the same, and remained the same until his death. It was to manifest the doctrines of the Christian faith.” (Grove Music Biography)
- 1936 *Poemes pour Mi*
- Serves in military during WWII; captured as prisoner of war in 1940. *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, composed for himself to perform with an ensemble of fellow inmates.

Messiaen continued

- In touch with serial trends, toward “total serialism”
 - *Mode de valeur et d'intensites* (1949) (written at Darmstadt)
- Interest in birdsong
- Starting with *Le Merle Noir* (1951) but most famously with *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956)

“modes of limited transposition”

- e.g. B – C# - D - E - E# - G – G# - A# - B
- Thus, “continuity tends to be asserted rather than supported” (grove)
- Aesthetic of time dilation, contemplation rather than logical development.
 - “messiaen’s music does not so much elaborate a proposition as create conditions for mental excitation or reflection.” (grove)