CHAPTER24

CHAPTER 24: VERNACULAR MUSIC AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION IN AMERICA

Chapter Outline

Prelude. (CHWM 585)

Diverse classical and popular musical idioms developed in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I. Diverging Trends in Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century America (CHWM 585–90, NAWM 154)

Musical life in the United States was influenced by its ethnic diversity as well as by the rapidly emerging distinctions between classical, popular, and folk music.

1. ***Band Music***  
   The earliest American *bands*were attached to military units, but in the nineteenth century, amateur local bands became common everywhere.
   1. John Philip Sousa   
      The period between the Civil War and World War I was the heyday of professional bands, including one founded by the most successful bandmaster, *John Philip Sousa*(1854–1932).
   2. Repertory   
      The repertory of nineteenth-century bands consisted of *marches,*dances, arrangements of arias and songs, transcriptions of pieces by classical composers, and virtuosic display pieces. **Music: NAWM 154**
   3. African-American bands   
      Brass bands, black churches, and dance orchestras were among the main training grounds for African-American musicians.
2. ***Popular Song***  
   Songs also reflected the diverging tastes and needs of the American public.
   1. Art song versus popular song   
      In the later nineteenth century, there was a widening gulf between *art songs,*which had precisely notated parts and were meant to be appreciated as art, and *popular songs,*which were meant to entertain.
   2. Subjects   
      Popular songs were written on a variety of topics and were used for every possible cause.
   3. Form   
      Popular songs depend on the interplay of novelty with conventions, such as the standard form of verse and refrain. The refrain was sometimes scored in parts and became known as the *chorus.*The key to success was creating a catchy phrase, or *hook,*that could be repeated and varied.
   4. Tin Pan Alley   
      *Tin Pan Alley*is the name for a district in New York City where, beginning in the 1880s, numerous publishers specializing in popular songs were located.

**Innovations: Recorded Sound and Its Impact**  
Recording technology had the most significant impact on musical culture of any innovation since [**the printing press**](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/music/concise-history-western-music4/ch/24/outline.aspx). In 1877, Thomas Edison made the first sound recording with his mechanical phonograph, which he later modified with wax cylinders and a motor. In 1887, Emile Berliner recorded on a flat disc, which simplified the duplication process. This technology was not well suited to [**orchestral music**](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/music/concise-history-western-music4/ch/24/outline.aspx), but early discs featured famous singers, who achieved for the first time the kind of immortality only composers had experienced. In the 1920s, new electrical methods of recording and reproduction increased sales and competition. Companies continued to develop new improvements, including the LP (1946), the magnetic tape (1950s), and the CD (1983). The development of recordings irrevocably altered the way we listen to music and exposed composers (and others) to musical styles and ideas outside their ordinary experiences.

1. ***Music of African Americans***  
   Although African slaves came from many diverse ethnic groups, their music showed many common elements.
   1. Characteristic traits   
      Some common elements of African-American music that have been traced back to Africa are *call and response,*improvisation, syncopation, layered rhythms, and bending pitches.
   2. Spirituals   
      The African-American [**form of music**](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/music/concise-history-western-music4/ch/24/outline.aspx) with the greatest impact in the nineteenth century was the *spiritual.*
   3. Dissemination   
      By the end of the nineteenth century, spirituals were used as folk music, popular songs, and sources for melodic material for classical composers.

II. Vernacular Styles (CHWM 591–606, NAWM 155, 169, 171–72, 183)

The impact of prosperity and technology on music and the growing importance of African Americans were apparent in American *vernacular music*.

1. Ragtime   
   *Ragtime*, featuring syncopated rhythm over a regular, marchlike bass, was a style popular from the 1890s through the 1920s.
2. Scott Joplin   
   The leading ragtime composer was *Scott Joplin*(1867–1917), who was best known for his piano rags. A typical rag, such as Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag*(1899), uses a march form in duple meter and presents a syncopated melody over a steady bass.**Music: NAWM 155**
3. ***Popular Song and Stage Music***  
   The 1920s were an especially rich time for American popular music. The most successful songwriters of this period were equally at home writing for Tin Pan Alley, musical theater, and movie musicals.
   1. Musical comedy   
      The *musical comedy*(or *musical*), a show featuring songs and dance numbers, was introduced first by *George M. Cohan*.
   2. Characteristics   
      Musicals were collaborations, and some were primarily vehicles for star entertainers, but there was increasing interest in plot-driven musicals with close integration of music and story.
   3. *Show Boat*  
      *Show Boat*(1927), with music by *Jerome Kern*(1885–1945) and book and lyrics by *Oscar Hammerstein II*, is an integrated musical that brings together a number of traditions and musical styles to serve dramatic ends.
   4. *Oklahoma!*  
      *Richard Rodgers*(1902–1979) and Oscar Hammerstein produced some of Broadway’s best-loved shows, beginning with *Oklahoma!,*a musical about American rural life with dramatic and comedic subplots, portrayed through dialogue, song, and dance.
   5. Leonard Bernstein   
      *Leonard Bernstein*(1918–1990) was a conductor and classical composer as well as a major presence on Broadway, best known for his musical *West Side Story*(1957).
4. ***The Birth of Film Music***
   1. Sound in film   
      New technologies in the late 1920s made it possible to synchronize recorded sound with film. There are two categories of music in film; (1) music heard or performed by the characters in the film, called *diegetic music*or *source music*, and (2) background music, called *nondiegetic music*or *underscoring.*
   2. Movie musicals   
      The 1930s were the "golden age" of the Hollywood musical.
   3. Film scores   
      In the 1930s, the Hollywood studios fostered the rise of film scores that were fully integrated into the dramatic action, guiding the viewer’s emotional responses and giving depth to the events on screen. An important early example is the score for *King Kong*(1933) by *Max Steiner*(1888–1971), which used leitmotives and was coordinated with the action on screen.
5. ***The Jazz Age***  
   African-American music and musicians played an increasingly influential role in the 1920s, as blues and jazz gained wide currency and jazz became an emblem of social liberation.
   1. Blues   
      The *blues*express the feelings suggested by the words through a variety of elements including *blue notes*.
   2. W. C. Handy   
      Classic blues singers joined aspects of oral tradition with elements of popular song. In his publications, *W. C. Handy*(1873–1958) standardized what is now called the *twelve-bar blues*form, which is illustrated in *Back Water Blues*by *Bessie Smith*(1894–1937). **Music: NAWM 170**
   3. Jazz   
      The 1910s saw the early development of *jazz*.
   4. Jazz contrasted with ragtime   
      Jazz players extemporized arrangements that distinguished one performer or performance from another. Jazz style is marked by anticipated beats, swinging rhythms, and other features, as in the playing of *Jelly Roll Morton*(1890–1941). **Music: NAWM 155b**
   5. New Orleans jazz   
      *New Orleans jazz,*the leading style just after World War I, centered on group variation of a given tune and was developed in New Orleans by musicians such as cornettist *Joe "King" Oliver*(1885–1938) and trumpeter*Louis Armstrong*(1901–1971).
   6. King Oliver and Louis Armstrong   
      The recordings of King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band in Chicago embody the New Orleans jazz style. The ensemble is divided into the "front line" of melody instruments and the *rhythm section.*After presenting a tune, the group repeats its harmonic progression in a series of *choruses,*each featuring different instruments. **Music: NAWM 171b**
   7. Big bands   
      By the 1930s, *big bands*were popular. Big bands were divided into three sections (brass, reeds, and rhythm).

**In Performance: Jazz Improvisation**  
Improvisation is a crucial element of the musical language of jazz. In his performance of *West End Blues,*Armstrong transforms the tune composed by Oliver while retaining its original harmonic framework. His recording features both his virtuosic trumpet playing and his *scat singing.*

* 1. Swing   
     *Swing*was a popular dance craze in America, and the number of swing bands exploded in the 1930s.

1. ***George Gershwin***  
   *George Gershwin*(1898–1937) was a composer of jazz-influenced classical music, including the "jazz concerto" *Rhapsody in Blue*(1924) and his opera *Porgy and Bess*(1935).
   1. Musicals   
      Gershwin also wrote popular songs and musicals, and the harmonic progression from his song *I Got Rhythm*was used so often for new jazz tunes that the progression got the nickname "*rhythm changes*." **Music: NAWM 169**
2. ***Duke Ellington***  
   *Duke Ellington*(1899–1974) was a leading composer of the Jazz Age and one of the most influential American composers.
   1. Cotton Club years   
      From 1927 to 1931, Ellington developed his individual style and began to gain national recognition at the Cotton Club in Harlem. His compositions and arrangements highlighted the individual sounds of his musicians.

**Biography:**Duke Ellington  
Born in Washington, D.C., Ellington studied piano from the age of seven. By seventeen, he had formed his own band, which he moved to New York in 1923. His band was known around the world through its recordings and international tours.

* 1. The 1940s   
     The early 1940s is widely considered the peak of Ellington’s creative abilities. *Cotton Tail*, a *contrafact*based on *I Got Rhythm*, illustrates his music from this era. **Music: NAWM 172**
  2. "Beyond category"   
     Ellington believed that jazz could serve as art music as well as dance and entertainment music.

1. ***Later Developments in Jazz***  
   After World War II, financial support for big bands declined, and *bebop*(or *bop*) emerged, built around virtuosic soloists supported by small *combos*.
   1. Bebop   
      A typical bebop combo had a rhythm section and one or more melody instruments. Bebop combined traditional jazz elements with complex harmony and rhythm, chromaticism, and more improvisation, and it was meant for attentive listening, not for dancing.
   2. *Anthropology*  
      A characteristic example of bebop is *Anthropology* by *Charlie "Bird" Parker*(1920–1955) and *Dizzy Gillespie*(1917–1993). *Anthropology* begins with an introduction followed by the *head*(the primary tune) and then several choruses, and concludes with a final statement of the tune. **Music: NAWM 183**
   3. After bebop   
      In the 1950s, musicians pioneered new jazz styles, seeking paths for individual expression by extending the methods and ideas of bebop. *Miles Davis*(1926–1991) was a major figure in several trends, including *cool jazz*and *modal jazz.*
   4. Free jazz   
      *Ornette Coleman*(b. 1930) and his quartet introduced *free jazz,*and *John Coltrane*(1926–1967) developed a personal avant-garde style.
   5. Third stream   
      Some American composers merged jazz and classical music to create what Gunther Schuller (b. 1925) called "third stream."
   6. Jazz as a classical music   
      By 1970, the jazz world had developed its own roster of classics that were treated as a kind of classical music, studied in written histories and college courses, and performed by ensembles.

III. Modernism and Americanism: Charles Ives (CHWM 606–9, NAWM 168)

*Charles Ives*(1874–1954) composed in four distinct traditions—American vernacular music, Protestant church music, European classical music, and experimental music—and in his mature music combined elements of all four to convey rich musical meanings.

1. Traditional influences   
   Ives grew up surrounded by American vernacular music, and he composed many pieces in the styles of the day. As a child and later as a professional church organist, Ives sang, heard, and played all styles prominent in American Protestant church music.
2. Experimental music   
   Ives wrote *experimental music*, in which he preserved most of the traditional rules, but changed others in order to see what would happen. He wrote several pieces that were *polytonal*(in two or more keys) and others that explored unprecedented levels of dissonance and rhythmic complexity.
3. *The Unanswered Question*  
   Ives’s experimental pieces were private studies and were not published or performed for decades, but one, *The Unanswered Question*(1908), later became well known.

**Biography: Charles Ives**  
Ives began his musical training as a child, then studied music theory and composition at Yale with *Horatio Parker*. As a teenager and young adult, Ives was a church organist. When his music failed to attract positive reviews, he focused on his insurance business. He still composed in the evenings and on weekends, but published nothing until the 1920s. By the time of his death, most of his major works had been performed and published. Ives is now widely regarded as the first to create a distinct body of American art music.

1. Syntheses   
   From 1902 on, Ives wrote only in classical genres, but he brought into his music the styles and sounds of the other traditions he knew. In some of his works, such as his Third Symphony,Ives used *cumulative form,*which employs the procedures of thematic fragmentation and development of European sonata form but reverses the normal course of events so that the themes are developed before they appear in full near the end of the movement.
2. Programs   
   Many of Ives’s later pieces, such as *Three Places in New England,*are programmatic, celebrating aspects of American life and using American tunes and styles to convey meaning.
3. Collage   
   Some of Ives’s pieces layer multiple borrowed tunes in a musical *collage*to suggest the process of remembering experiences.
4. Variety   
   Ives frequently mixed styles within a single piece to evoke a wide range of extramusical references and also to articulate musical form.
5. *General Booth*  
   Ives synthesized all four traditions of his music in his song *General William Booth Enters into Heaven*(1914). **Music: NAWM 168**
6. Ives’s place   
   Although Ives had little influence on others until after World War II, his work had a tremendous impact on younger generations of American musicians.

IV. The Classical Tradition Through Midcentury (CHWM 609–20, NAWM 177–82)

During the period between the two world wars, composers of the Americas often found that creating a distinctive national style helped them gain attention from an international audience.

1. ***North and South of the Border***
   1. Canada   
      Canada had a thriving musical life that developed along patterns similar to those in the United States.
   2. Claude Champagne   
      *Claude Champagne*(1891–1965) was the first Canadian composer to achieve an international reputation.
   3. Brazil   
      *Heitor Villa-Lobos*(1887–1959), an important Brazilian composer, drew together traditional Brazilian elements with modernist techniques. In*Bachianas brasileiras*(1930–1945), he pays tribute to Bach with a blend of Baroque and Brazilian folk elements.
   4. Mexico   
      Beginning in 1921, the Mexican government supported bringing the arts to a wide public and promoted nationalism drawing on native Indian cultures.
   5. Carlos Chávez   
      *Carlos Chávez*(1899–1978), the first composer associated with the new nationalism, wrote ballets and symphonic works with Aztec elements as well as works that were not overtly nationalist.
   6. Silvestre Revueltas   
      *Silvestre Revueltas*(1899–1940) combined melodies modeled on Mexican folk and popular music with a modernist idiom. **Music: NAWM 177**
2. ***The United States***  
   American composers and performers developed new links with Europe, as many studied with *Nadia Boulanger* in France and several European composers immigrated to the United States.
   1. Ultramodernists and Americanists   
      The interwar period saw several new currents among American composers, including *ultramodernist*and Americanist trends.
   2. Edgard Varèse   
      Born and trained in France, *Edgard Varèse*(1883–1965) moved to New York in 1915 and composed music influenced by Debussy, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky.
   3. Spatial music and sound masses   
      Beginning in the 1920s, Varèse imagined music as *spatial*,with *sound masses*characterized by timbre, register, rhythm, and pitch changing and interacting in unconventional ways. In his music, percussion was on equal footing with other instruments.
   4. *Hyperprism*  
      *Hyperprism*illustrates how pitch, instrumental color, gesture, and rhythm interact to suggest sound masses colliding and changing. After World War II, Varèse used electronic means to create new sounds. **Music: NAWM 178**
   5. Influence   
      In Varèse’s music, the listener must put aside expectations and simply observe the interaction of bodies of sound. Varèse’s ideas had an enormous influence on younger composers in the United States and Europe.
   6. Henry Cowell  
      In his experimental pieces, *Henry Cowell*(1897–1965) tried out new techniques, (such as *tone clusters*and playing directly on the strings of the piano), new textures, and other new procedures. From the 1930s on, Cowell created a more accessible musical language, often incorporating American, Irish, or Asian elements. Cowell promoted and published music by modernist and ultramodernist composers. **Music: NAWM 179**
   7. Ruth Crawford   
      *Ruth Crawford*(1901–1953) experimented with dissonant counterpoint, rhythmic independence of parts, and serial techniques, then turned from composition to editing and arranging American folk songs. In her String Quartet (1931), Crawford combines the string quartet tradition with her constant search for new procedures. **Music: NAWM 180**
   8. Aaron Copland   
      *Aaron Copland*(1900–1990) became the most important American composer of his generation through his own compositions and his work for the cause of American music.
   9. Early works   
      Jazz elements and strong dissonances figure prominently in Copland’s early works.
   10. Americanist style   
       In the 1930s and 1940s, Copland sought to appeal to a larger audience by reducing his modernist technique to its essence and combining it with simple textures and diatonic melodies and harmonies.
   11. *Appalachian Spring*  
       Copland’s Americanist idiom is exemplified in the ballet *Appalachian Spring*(1943–44). His use of widely spaced sonorities, open octaves and fifths, and diatonic dissonance became an American musical emblem. **Music: NAWM 181**
   12. William Grant Still   
       *William Grant Still*(1895–1978) incorporated specifically American idioms into art music and broke numerous racial barriers.
   13. *Afro-American Symphony*  
       Still’s *Afro-American Symphony*(1930) includes African-American musical elements within the traditional framework of a European four-movement symphony. **Music: NAWM 182**
   14. Virgil Thomson   
       *Virgil Thomson*(1896–1989) was a composer and critic who sought to write music that was simple, direct, playful, and focused on the present.
   15. *Four Saints in Three Acts*  
       Thomson collaborated with Gertrude Stein on the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*(1927–28), an absurdist work that places a variety of musical styles and idioms in surprising juxtapositions.
   16. Americanist works   
       Much of Thomson’s other music is more overtly Americanist.
   17. Diversity of styles   
       Art music in America during the interwar period encompassed a variety of styles as composers sought a place in the crowded classical repertoire.

Postlude (CHWM 620)

Through new technologies, American popular music, jazz, and film music reached audiences throughout the Western world, and by the 1970s, canons of classics, centered around music that was popular between the wars, had developed. Many musicians emigrated to America during and after the World Wars, and American composers won international reputations by incorporating American styles and sounds into their music.