

**AMERICAN MUSICOLOGICAL SOCIETY CAPITAL CHAPTER  
SPRING MEETING**

**SATURDAY 11 OCTOBER 2008  
RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE**

**PROGRAM**

9:30 am        Coffee and Tea

**Session I: Rethinking the Standard Repertoire**

Anna Harwell Celenza (Georgetown University), chair

10:00 am        James Steichen (Princeton University), "J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and the Semiotics of Liturgical and Secular Performance Occasion"

10:35 am        Emily H. Green (Cornell University), "Music and the Multiple Author"

11:10 am        Andrew H. Weaver (The Catholic University of America), "Battling Romantic and Modernist Phantoms: Strauss's *Don Quixote* and the Conflicting Demands of Musical Modernism"

**Lunch**

**Session II: Popular Music**

1:30 pm        Andrew Flory (Shenandoah Conservatory), "The Motown/Stax Problem"

2:05 pm        Jeffrey Wright (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), "Constructing 'Russia's Greatest Love Machine': Disco, Exoticism, and Subversion"

**Break**

**Session III: Leonard Bernstein**

Alicia Kopfstein-Penk (The Catholic University of America), chair

2:50 pm        Philip Gentry (University of California, Los Angeles), "Leonard Bernstein and the American Symphony"

3:25 pm        Lars Helgert (Shenandoah Conservatory and the Peabody Institute), "Songs from Leonard Bernstein's *On the Town* as Jazz Repertoire"

**4:00 pm        Business Meeting**

**ABSTRACTS**  
(in program order)

**James Steichen (Princeton University), “J. S. Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* and the Semiotics of Liturgical and Secular Performance Occasion”**

Although many scholars have begun to shift the focus of musicological inquiry away from purely historical or hermeneutic music criticism in favor of attention to music as a live experience, one area that deserves more critical attention is how present-day classical music performance culture structures musical meaning for its canon of historical “works.” My paper provides a reading of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* that serves as a case study and model for such performance-focused analysis, incorporating research from historical musicology, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and theology to show how performances of the *Passion* function as complex moments of interaction between presenters, performers, and audience. It uses semiotic methods adapted from cultural anthropology to consider the piece as a simultaneously musical and cultural occasion and pairs historical and musicological sources with ethnographic analysis (of actual performances and program notes). By juxtaposing the experience of the *Passion* in the liturgical context of the Good Friday services in Bach’s Leipzig and in present-day North American concert culture, my study demonstrates that the conditions of specific performance occasions affect the meaning of the *Passion* much more than the piece in and of itself. This analysis shows how present-day performances of the *Passion* necessitate strategic negotiations with the liturgical and historical origins of the piece, resulting in a complex adaptation of an originally sacred object for a new secular occasion.

**Emily H. Green (Cornell University), “Music and the Multiple Author”**

The types of works most often published in the early to mid-nineteenth century were not entirely “original” by today’s standards; the musical marketplace was flooded with arrangements, transcriptions, fantasies, paraphrases, and variation sets, all of which use the material of others to varying degrees. We have forgotten the predominance of these genres and, more importantly, have overlooked the implications of that predominance regarding the construction of musical authorship.

Lydia Goehr has famously located the emergence of the work-concept at “around 1800,” not coincidentally the same historical moment that Michael Talbot places the attendant idea of “composer-centredness.” Both of these notions presuppose that composition was perceived as a solitary act. The popularity, as well as the marketing, of the above genres, however, reveals that an opposite paradigm was simultaneously in operation: musical authorship could also be a split enterprise, shared between a composer of source material—a secondary composer—and a composer of music in a newer incarnation—a primary composer. First, the visual appearance of these works was designed to highlight the roles of both authors, as the name of the secondary composer was often equally typographically prominent on title pages as that of the primary composer. Second, an examination of reviews and advertisements for these genres shows that the names of both types of composers could be invoked to sell a work.

Certainly each of the genres mentioned here uses the work of secondary composers to varying degrees. Transcriptions are closer to their source material, for instance, than variation sets or paraphrases, and it is for this reason that multiple authorship seems to exist more comfortably as a spectrum than as a tidy category. The author, in other words, can be promoted as being more or less solitary. Previous efforts to complicate our traditional notions of authorship have their roots in postmodern notions of multiple subjectivities—subjectivities that may be evident in the text itself through allusion or broader intersubjective references. I aim, however, not to deconstruct the centuries-old notion of solitary authorship, but to examine the construction of the equally powerful concept of the multiple author that arose in the same period.

### **Andrew H. Weaver (The Catholic University of America), “Battling Romantic and Modernist Phantoms: Strauss’s *Don Quixote* and the Conflicting Demands of Musical Modernism”**

It has only been within recent decades that, thanks to the pioneering work of such scholars as Bryan Gilliam, James Hepokoski, Charles Youmans, and Morten Kristiansen, Richard Strauss has begun to shed the somewhat pejorative label of “late Romantic” and has come to be understood as a full-fledged early Modernist. The critical reevaluation of his works initiated by these scholars has done much to reshape our image of the composer, but much work remains to be done to help us better understand the enigmatic Strauss, especially in light of his still controversial stylistic “regression” from *Elektra* to *Der Rosenkavalier*.

One work that played a pivotal, albeit hitherto unrecognized, role in Strauss’s compositional and aesthetic development is his sixth tone poem, *Don Quixote* (premiered in 1898), which today remains one of his most misunderstood works. Although many commentators from Strauss’s day until our own have offered valuable interpretations, analyses, and reflections on the work, the vast majority of these discussions are infused with a sense of perplexity and bewilderment. Strauss’s famous declaration, for instance, that “*Don Quixote* is only fully and entirely comprehensible at the side of *Ein Heldenleben*” is still open for interpretation. By situating *Don Quixote* into Strauss’s Modernist aesthetic and into his compositional path as seen in his tone poems as a whole, this paper offers an interpretation of the work that considers it not as a sympathetic portrayal of Cervantes’s hero (as it is often interpreted) but as an indictment of both the German Romantic tradition and Strauss’s own compositional approach to musical Modernism to date.

My reading is derived from two interlocking hermeneutic approaches. On one hand, the programmatic elements of the tone poem are examined for their metaphorical implications in light of Strauss’s Modernist aesthetic. On the other hand, the musical elements are analyzed in light of the compositional conventions present in the composer’s other tone poems. Despite its discursive, episodic large-scale structure (described by even Strauss himself as simply “fantastische Variationen”), an important sonata form convention is still present in the work, which carries significant hermeneutic implications. In my interpretation, the death of the protagonist at the end of the work marks none other than the demise of an aspect of Strauss’s compositional persona; the composer resolutely bids farewell to a flawed compositional past before striking out anew in *Ein Heldenleben*. With this pair of works, Strauss lays down his first challenge to the cult of musical progress that will continue to guide the development of musical Modernism in the next generation and beyond.

### **Andrew Flory (Shenandoah Conservatory), “The Motown/Stax Problem”**

It is common for historians of 1960s rhythm and blues to create a problematic binary using the two best-known independent record companies of this era, Motown and Stax. Taking into consideration a wide range of regional, social, and sonic factors, this paper will show how both journalistic and critical writings often filter musical evidence through a lens of reception that privileges rural, lower class stereotypes associated with Stax and misconstrues Motown's association with the black middle class as an attempt to shed its blackness. Close readings of several songs will support my findings by providing examples of the stylistic and ideological range of both of these companies. Although historians of popular music often view Motown and its competitor Stax as diametrically opposed, I will argue that it is difficult to neatly fit the music of these companies into this type of idealized formulation and will show how this particular “problem” is representative of a primary concern facing contemporary popular music research.

### **Jeffrey Wright (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), “Constructing ‘Russia’s Greatest Love Machine’: Disco, Exoticism, and Subversion”**

In 1978 the European disco group Boney M made history when they performed a series of ten concerts in Moscow as the guests of the Soviet government, the first Western popular music group to receive such an invitation. Where key Soviet bureaucrats had viewed rock and roll as a dangerous, volatile music that could incite rebellion, they considered disco to be an easily-manipulated, “frivolous” music that would both appease those yearning for a Western pop-culture product and offer a medium for the distribution of Soviet propaganda. Yet despite this apparent acceptance of disco, the government censored Boney M and refused to allow them to play one of their biggest hits at the time, “Rasputin,” a humorous portrait of a monk who served as Tsar Nicholas II’s aid in the early twentieth century and the one disco song that was arguably Russian in musical flavor.

In this paper, I explore how and why “Rasputin” provoked Soviet censorship, and, ironically, the way that censorship turned the song into a subversive anthem that found an enormous fan base in Russia. The foundation of this analysis is the musical and visual signifiers Boney M used in the song, which evoke an exoticized image of a geographically and ideologically distant Russia. Their depiction relied heavily on Western European and American re-interpretations of Russian culture. Those representations of Russian folk culture then became the catalysts for the Soviets’ censorship, as well as the motivation for audiences to transform “Rasputin” into a subversive, politically-charged work of art.

At each concert during their Soviet tour, Boney M repeated the government-issued explanation that they simply did not have the time to play all of their hits, but this superficial justification only fueled more interest in the song, both as a musical product and a means for underground rebellion and subversion among Soviet youth—the denial of access only fostering the desire to listen. The song became an avenue through which anti-Kremlin Soviet youths could subvert the government by embracing not only an outlawed product, but one that purposefully poked fun at Russia’s history as well. The political power of “Rasputin” came not from its basic musical content, but rather from the responses, fears, and passions that those musical references evoked. Ironically, the government’s censorship imbued disco with a subversive capital that the genre had not yet known in the Soviet Union or elsewhere. It resulted in a situation that was antithetical to what Soviet officials had wanted. This research shows the complex political implications resulting from the reception of an artwork that exoticizes the very peoples receiving it.

### **Philip Gentry (University of California, Los Angeles), “Leonard Bernstein and the American Symphony”**

“The symphony,” Leonard Bernstein famously said of Aaron Copland’s Third, “has become an American monument, like the Washington Monument or the Lincoln Memorial or something.” Spoken in 1958, one hears in that remark a bit of jest, and a critique of the genre of the symphony as something ossified in marble. After all, just a few years earlier, one of his “Imaginary Conversations” had been titled “What Ever Happened to the Great American Symphony?” and seemed to indicate that musical theater was the way forward. This was not always so. At the beginning of his career, Bernstein still believed that there could be a “Great American Symphony,” and that he could be the one to write it. His response to this challenge was *The Age of Anxiety*, a symphony for piano and orchestra composed in 1949. It was, he later wrote, “my most American work.”

This paper is in two parts. The first looks at Bernstein’s perspective on the tradition of American symphonies, such as the famous works by Roy Harris and Aaron Copland. Drawing upon a series of lectures Bernstein gave at Tanglewood in the summer of 1948, I will discuss how unlike later lectures on the subject, Bernstein at this point in time gave important credit to Soviet musical styles in forming the American symphonic sound, particularly the symphonies of Shostakovich, and the influence of his mentor Sergei Koussevitzky in shaping what Bernstein called the “Koussevitzky manner” of composition. I will

also show how Bernstein's devotion to this material was always somewhat ambivalent, with concerns for how this triumphal music would fare in the anti-heroic 1950s.

The second half of the paper is devoted to Bernstein's musical response, *The Age of Anxiety*. Based upon the Pulitzer Prize-winning poem by W.H. Auden, the symphony is an exploration of post-war apathy and exhaustion at the dawn of McCarthyism. The profoundly anti-heroic subject matter is matched by some of Bernstein's most modernist and alienating music, worlds away from his contemporaneous experimentation in music theater. Even in the work's finale, written expressly in the "Koussevitzky manner," I will show how Bernstein purposefully injected a sense of alienation in what was superficially a triumphant closing. "My original idea," he later remarked, "was to produce a mockery of faith, a phony faith." Or more succinctly, as he told a friend at the time, "the last movement is strictly Warner Brothers."

Bernstein's alienation was both musical and political, as he watched friends and mentors like Aaron Copland entangled in partisan politics, and institutions of classical music robbed of their timeliness and popular appeal in the face of mass culture. I argue that *The Age of Anxiety* was Bernstein's response to these times, and also his farewell to the Modernist tradition that had previously nurtured him.

### **Lars Helgert (Shenandoah University and the Peabody Institute), "Songs from Leonard Bernstein's *On the Town* as Jazz Repertoire"**

Jazz was a significant part of the musical personality and compositional approach of Leonard Bernstein, as reflected in his writings, the themes of his television broadcasts, and compositional style. The importance of Bernstein's works in the jazz repertoire is an aspect of his legacy that has not been examined by scholars. Many prominent jazz musicians have recorded jazz versions of his works from the 1940s through the 2000s. After presenting an overview of jazz recordings of Bernstein's works, I will examine kinds of arrangements, specific works by Bernstein most frequently treated, and notable jazz musicians who adapted and recorded Bernstein's music. This is a significant contribution to awareness of Bernstein's importance, since most of these recordings are not listed in the principal discography of Leonard Bernstein, by Jack Gottlieb (1998). Following this overview is an analytical comparison of the "original" versions of the songs "Some Other Time," "Lucky To Be Me," and "Lonely Town" from *On the Town* (a show that has been little studied in the secondary scholarly literature) with jazz arrangements by pianist Bill Evans, guitarist Kenny Burrell, and baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, respectively. The results of this analysis illustrate three techniques commonly used to transform a song into jazz repertoire: reinterpretation of the melody (primarily its rhythmic aspects), reharmonization, and simplification of form by reduction. This study reveals both the impact of Bernstein's music on jazz repertoire and the arranging techniques used.