**Winter 1999 Program and Abstracts**

**Program**

9:30-10:00 refreshments and conversation

10:00 - 12:00 Morning Session: Thinking about Music and Social Hierarchies, Chair and Discussant: Karen Ahlquist, George Washington University

1. Katherine Preston, College of William and Mary  
   "Against the Aristocratic Grain: English-Language Opera Companies in Late 19th- Century America"
2. Kathleen Pierson, Towson University  
   "Class Dismissed
3. Ethyl Norris, Virginia State University  
   "Exploring Diversity Through the Study of African American Music and Musicians: A Not So-Hidden Agenda"

LUNCH 12:00 - 1:00

BUSINESS MEETING 1:00 - 2:00

AFTERNOON SESSION: 2:00-4:00

1. Carl Schmidt, Towson University  
   "Distilling Essence: The Influence of Art and Artists on the Life and Music of Francis Poulenc"
2. Karen Desmond, New York University  
   "The Songs of Angels"
3. Anthony P. Westbrook, University of Maryland  
   "Harmonia: Musical Symbolism at the Heart of Western Thought"

**Katherine Preston, College of William and Mary, "Against the Aristocratic Grain: English-Language Opera Companies in Late 19th Century America"**

The history of opera performance in the United States has recently attracted increased attention from scholars in various disciplines. Most scholars have focused on either the performance history of more "elite" companies (such as the New York Metropolitan), or on the increasingly aristocratic nature of audiences and supporters of foreign-language opera in the United States during the late 19th century. Many have assumed that English opera--which clearly functioned as a major component of the American popular theatre during the first half of the century--had completely disappeared by the 1870s and 1880s. This supposition, however, is based to a large extent on a scholarly lacuna: there is no published research on English-language opera troupes active in the United States during the post-bellum period. When one begins to look at the sources, however, it becomes clear that English troupes remained both active and popular during the period; this suggests that an appropriation of opera by the upper classes in the late 19th century is only part of the story.

In this paper I will discuss the activities of these troupes. Numerous English-language opera companies continued to perform in the US during this period; their audiences included working- and middle-class (as well as upper-class) Americans. Further, English-language opera companies performed a mixed repertory. This evidence muddies the waters for many scholars, who tend to like clear distinctions between art-music (opera) and popular-theatre (operetta, variety shows, spectacle) repertories. Finally, I explore the importance of gender to the continuing cultural fluidity within English-language opera performance history. Several women associated with the more popular English troupe--in particular Clara Kellogg, Emma Abbott, Emma Juch, and Euphronsyne Parepa-Rosa-- took a great deal of interest in the practical, day-to-day operations of their companies. These prima donnas/impresarias, as a result, were part of a tradition in the American theatrical world of female management of theatres and theatrical troupes.

In attempting to provide a clearer understanding of late 19th -century operatic performance history, I will help to explain the continued importance of opera to Americans of various social and economic classes. Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate that this continued popularity of English opera complicates recent hypotheses about the appropriation of opera by the upper classes and the role of this appropriation in the definition of an emerging cultural hierarchy in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Kathleen Pierson, Towson University, "Class Dismissed"**

One of the groups often treated as "a class" in western art music is Women. Occasionally, something vaguely positive is implied in this, but most remarks about women as a class are clearly (blatantly or subtly) dismissive. Far from being a purely historical phenomenon, dismissive attitudes and practices persist. Conductor Thomas Beecham, 1946: "Women in symphonic orchestras constitute a disturbing element...if the ladies are ill-favored the men do not want to play next to them, and if they are well-favored they can't." In a 1996 German radio interview, sociologist Roland Girtler and members of the Vienna Philharmonic supported one another's openly sexist and racist remarks, maintaining that "it is worthwhile to accept this racist and sexist irritation in the name of standards, it is rational to fear that women will only taint and ruin music, and that one of the many justifications for specifically excluding women from the orchestra is that they distract men. Not the older women. No one gives a damn about the older ones. It is the younger ones." Meanwhile, once again this year, not a single woman - young or old - appeared in the televised Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra's New Year's Concert. In the realm of composing, where author-ity is at issue, it has long been (erroneously) reported that there were no women composers--or at least no great one--and that due to one or another permanently disabling flaws women were simply not able to compose. A succession of women composers whose momentary public presence could not be denied were falsely labeled as "the first." As an example, influential critic Hanslick in 1884 wrote " . . . the larger chamber forms that Fraulein Le Beau is the first of her sex to cultivate," completely dismissing Clara Schumann and others, regardless of his escape verb "cultivate." Aaron Copland wrote in 1960, explaining why as "everyone knows...there are no world-famous women composers: Is it possible that there is a mysterious element in the nature of musical creativity that runs counter to the nature of the feminine mind?"

In music, where work does not exist until performed, without having heard a note of women's music many people simply accepted such ideas without question. The total absence of women from canon and performance supported this assumption. Little wonder that women composers sometimes appear ambivalent or bitter. Such ambivalence is what Citron describes as "anxiety of authorship." Similarly, Bowers and Tick articulate "women's crippling internalization of their culturally determined marginality," as they consider how gender has "affected the opportunities women as a class have had," asking "How have prejudice and discrimination-roughly parallel to belief and behavior-shaped the history of women in music?" I will draw from a variety of resources to explore that question.

**Ethyl Norris, Virginia State University, "Exploring Diversity Through the Study of African American Music and Musicians: A Not-So-Hidden Agenda"**

The strength of African Americans is diversity-diversity of political perspectives, cultural backgrounds, educational experiences, economic status, and religious beliefs. This diversity and all of its ramifications can best be investigated through a study of the musical activities of African Americans. As music educators in this technological age, we are responsible for introducing concepts of diversity and encouraging students to develop an awareness of and sensitivity to humanity. We are gravely remiss if we present the term "Black Music" with no discussion of the various interpretations of the term. We cannot restrict the study of the spirituals, the blues, jazz, or any other genre without exploring the myriad attitudes that these genres have engendered at divers points in time. The study of African American musicians must extend beyond the expected biographical information into the realm of introducing difficult issues, such as how African Americans denied the heritage of the spiritual and how they assisted in the deprecation of their own race by participating in Minstrelsy. The perspectives presented in this paper are based on my research, but also on my experiences in teaching a college-level course titled "Blacks in American Music" and witnessing student revelations about African American diversity.

**Carl Schmidt, Towson University, "Distilling Essence: The Influence of Art and Artists on the Life and Music of Francis Poulenc"**

Francis Poulenc showed a lifelong interest in art and artists. Having grown up in Paris, he had ample opportunity to meet and interact with some of the century's most important and influential artists. Still as a teenager, Poulenc had his first works performed in Montmartre venues where artists, poets, and musicians worked together to present entertainments of astonishing originality. He was personally friendly with Picasso, Cocteau, Derain, Blanche, La Fresnaye, the Hugos, Lagut, Berard, and other contemporary artists. Moreover, in stage works he collaborated with Laurencin, Erte, Brainchon, Wakevitch, Lalique, and Cocteau among others.   
Poulenc's absorption with art went far beyond the simple act of working with artists. He frequently spoke about his own music, comparing it to works by painters he admired. His devotion to certain artists was so strong that in 1956 he honored seven of his favorite painters--Picasso, Chagall, Braque, Gris, Klee, Miro, and Villon-in a song cycle entitled Le Travail du peintre using poems by his beloved Eluard. He was deeply influenced by the working methods of Matisse, a point which will be explored in some depth. This paper is liberally illustrated with slides, and through tape the audience will hear Poulenc himself discuss his favorite artists.

**Karen Desmond, New York University, "The Songs of Angels"**

In Book 1 of the early fourteenth-century treatise Speculum musicae, James (of Liege?) examines musica caelestis (heavenly music), adding this category to the traditional Boethian division of musica into mundana, humana and instrumentalis. For James, musica caelestis has three manifestations: it arises from the proportions existing between the heavenly spheres and the Intelligences that move them; it is a form of angelic praise; and it is a music possessed most perfectly by all the citizens of heaven. In this paper, I investigate why James felt it necessary to add this category to the pre-existent divisions. Sources examined include the texts of medieval music theorists and philosophical and theological discussions of heaven and its inhabitants. James's division of music has an analogy in the division of the speculative sciences, where musica instrumentalis corresponds to mathematica, musica mundana and musica humana to physica (or scientia naturalis) and musica caelestis to metaphysica (or scientia divina). His examination of musica caelestis synthesizes theological discussions of heavenly praise, as transmitted in Christian commentaries throughout the Middle Ages, and cited briefly by many medieval music theorists, with later scholastic formulations that take account of Aristotle's Metaphysica. Musica caelestis is found to be the final cause of intellectual speculation: it is the harmony achieved when one has immediate apprehension of the nature of things, as they angels do, or the soul when it reaches heaven. Through intellectual endeavor in this earthly life, we may approach this perfect state of existence.

**Anthony P. Westbrook, University of Maryland, "Harmonia: Musical Symbolism at the Heart of Western Thought"**

At the origins of Western culture stands the figure of Pythagoras, whose teaching revolves around the concept of Harmonia, the divine order at the heart of the Cosmos. This concept flourished throughout the classical period, particularly in the work of Plato and Plotinus, influenced trends of thought as far afield as Hermeticism, Kabbalah and St. Augustine, and came to full bloom during the Renaissance. Intriguingly, the germ of this philosophy was a discovery in the field, not of arithmetic or geometry, but of music.

Nothing of Pythagoras' own writing has come down to us, and he advised his followers to couch their own writings in obscure symbolism. A prime example is the Timaeus which is both the most Pythagorean, and the most obscure of Plato's dialogues. However, it is possible to gain some insight into the Timaeus when we find that Plato follows the ancient practice of investing the full meaning of the dialogue in its first sentence. And the key to unlocking this cypher is music. Once its meaning is revealed, it shows that Pythagorean cosmology mirrors more ancient, mostly oriental, teachings. Again, these parallels are revealed through music which composer Dane Rudhyar has called "the clearest mirror of civilization."