

# GLSG Newsletter

For the Gay & Lesbian Study Group  
of the American Musicological Society  
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## introduction

Welcome to the fall issue of the Newsletter of the Gay & Lesbian Study Group of the American Musicological Society (AMS). The GLSG is a recognized special interest group of the AMS. A list of GLSG officers and their addresses appears at the end of this issue.

Our objectives include promoting communication among lesbian and gay music scholars, increasing awareness of issues in sexuality and music in the academic community, and establishing a forum for the presentation of lesbian and gay music studies. We also intend to provide an environment in which to examine the process of coming out in academia, and to contribute to a positive political climate for gay and lesbian affirmative action and curricula.

*Subscriptions & Contributions:* Membership dues for the GLSG include subscription to the Newsletter, published in March and October. Please refer to the back cover of this issue for membership information. The financial burden of producing this Newsletter is not eased by any institution or grant. We welcome contributions in any amount. A Supporting Member subscription is \$25.00, which goes toward production of the Newsletter.

*Mailing List:* We encourage you to send names for the mailing list to Judith Peraino, membership secretary. Names and addresses of your colleagues are welcome, as well as addresses of lesbian & gay musical institutions. The GLSG mailing list is not offered to any other organization.

*Announcements & Articles:* We welcome news items, announcements of conferences, concerts and workshops, special bibliographies, syllabi, suggestions, and letters. Send submissions to Gillian Rodger or Ivan Raykoff, co-editors, by February 15th and September 15th of each year (e-mail submissions are preferred).

*Photocopying:* Libraries are authorized to photocopy materials in this Newsletter for the purposes of course reserve reading at the rate of one copy for every fifteen students, and may reuse copies for other courses or for the same course offered subsequently. Back issues are available on request from Judith Peraino.

*Esteemed Readers:* This issue of the Newsletter is going out a little bit early because it was filled already in August, and because the co-editors are currently preoccupied with leaving (or not leaving) the country. Prepare thyself for the End/Beginning of the Millennium! Use the handy renewal form at back to update your membership for calendar year 2000.

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## report from Suzanne Cusick, GLSG co-chair

Quiet -- and silence.

Since the flap about the planned AMS meeting in Cincinnati a few years ago, the GLSG has been a relatively quiet, well-organized group assured of three public (and well-publicized) events on every AMS program. We revel in our high-profile, well-attended, intellectually stimulating Friday afternoon lectures, featuring Sue-Ellen Case, Ellen Harris, and, this year, Howard Pollack. We beam with pride as the Brett Award winners are announced in the society's most public, institutional forum, the annual business meeting, for we know that each award's announcement enacts the AMS' ritual acknowledgement that we're here (and queer), with important things to say about music from the quite varied standpoints that exist within the domain of 'queerness'. We enjoy each others' company and welcome newcomers at our cocktail party every AMS

Saturday night. Yet we struggle--quietly. We struggle with a shrinking subscription list for this publication, and some of us wonder among ourselves over the shrinking number of papers concerned with gender and sexuality at recent annual meetings.

As a person who has been described as (socially) "quiet" all her life, I have spent many hours pondering the relationships--and the important distinctions--between "quietness" and "silence". For me, my social "quietness" is (like my queerness) a personal quality that seems both inborn and actively chosen, a comfortable, intentionally embraced condition. For me, "silence" is a very different thing, a condition more often forced on the quiet than on the noisy, and one that is uncomfortable and disempowering. I manifest "silence" when I feel that which I might say will make no difference to the (heedless) others in a conversation whose topics and tropes seem foreign to those of my experience. When I'm in a quiet mood, it is easy for me to be silenced by interlocutors who control the conversation by their own choice to talk. Once silenced, I find it hard to remember how to speak, much less what it was I might have wanted to say.

It is as a quiet person, then, that I find myself wondering about the relationship between the smooth institutionalization of our presence, with our three designated spots on every AMS program, and our paradoxical *quiet* everywhere else. I wonder, frankly, to what extent the hard-won prize of institutionalized visibility and voice might come to substitute for the less measured, less predictable, less 'professional' tone by which musicological queerness might be known. I wonder, that is, how our institutional successes might tempt us to a quiet that could swiftly be turned into silence by the determination of others to keep talking.

As I enter my last year as a (quiet) leader of this group, then, I want to urge everyone who reads my words to consider ways we can individually and collectively keep the queer sounds of our voices audible in musicological talk. Here are a few ways I can think of to resist the transformation of quiet into silence:

1. Each of us could think of the gay, lesbian, bi-, trans-, or queer subject we would like to be talking about with our musical and musicological colleagues, and each of us could turn that subject into an abstract for Toronto 2000, and/or a submission to JAMS (the editorial board of which includes several GLSG'ers, including me).

2. Each of us could think of ways we could use the occasion of Toronto's extraordinary multi-society program to create close, mutually beneficial relationships with the GLBTQ members of our sister societies. We your leaders could ensure that half our business meeting (and much of our cocktail party) be devoted to brainstorming and developing plans for Toronto.

3. Each of us could think of ways a pan-society coalition of GLBTQ musicians and scholars might *act* to improve

the real-life situations of GLBTQ people, musicians or not (for example, by creating collective pressure on music departments and schools to demand domestic partner benefits for GLBTQ faculty, graduate students, etc).

4. Each of us, all of us, could be talking on the GLSG list about any of these ideas, and more.

Thank you for listening.  
Suzanne

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AMS 1999

GLSG highlights at the upcoming AMS!

• Friday, November 5:

12:15-12:45 GLSG Business Meeting

12:45-2:00 "Some Thoughts on Gay Receptivity to Copland's Music," Howard Pollack (University of Houston)

8:00-9:30pm Panel on Career-Related Issues: Mentoring, with Chip Whitesell representing the GLSG

• Saturday, November 6, at 10:00pm: GLSG Party!

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Philip Brett Award

The Philip Brett Award, sponsored by the GLSG, honors each year exceptional musicological work in the field of transgender/transsexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay studies completed during the previous two academic years (ending June 30), in any country and in any language. By "work" is meant a published article, book, edition, annotated translation, conference paper, and other scholarly work accepted by the award committee that best exemplifies the highest qualities of originality, interpretation, theory, and communication in this field of study.

The award consists of the sum of \$500 and a certificate, and will be announced at the Annual Meeting of the AMS and conferred at the annual meeting of the GLSG. The committee will entertain nominations from any individual, and scholars are encouraged to nominate their own work. Individuals may receive the award on more than one occasion.

Nominations should include the name of the scholar, a description of the work, and a statement to the effect that the work was completed during the previous two academic years. By "completion" is meant the publication or commitment to publish from an editor in the case of articles, books, editions, etc.; delivery at a conference or the like in the case of a paper. The committee will contact the nominee for additional material as needed. Self-nominations should include any

unpublished material to be considered and a c.v. Questions regarding the award, the nomination and application process, or any other matter may be directed to the chair of the Philip Brett Award Committee, Todd Borgerding (member-at-large).

Please note that this call for submissions differs from the one published in the AMS Directory, and serves to correct information inadvertently printed there. The Award Committee apologises for any confusion it may have caused.

Contributions to fund the award (checks made out to GLSG/Philip Brett Award) may be sent to: Judith Periano, GLSG Sec/Treas, Department of Music, Cornell University, Ithaca NY 14853.

*feature article*  
*by Erik Leidal*

Aretha Franklin's "Mary, Don't You Weep":  
Signifying the Survivor in Gospel Music

I would like to make clear at the start that I cannot recall whether I've ever had an African-American woman in my home for any substantial length of time. Which isn't to say I wouldn't want to. But living in Los Angeles at age 28, it's awkward to realize how limited my social networks have been in that regard, especially given my obsession with Nina Simone, Sarah Vaughan and Aretha Franklin. I not only welcome these women into my home, I commune with them regularly, through their music. So as I reflect on my positionality and racial location within American culture and upon my distance from African-American women, I realize as well that I am "close" to them, especially to those who sing.

I also happen to be a gay white American, and know from social contact that I'm far from the only gay white American who compulsively collects African-American female vocalists and diva-fies them. That gay white Americans seldom avail themselves of the opportunity to have intimate social connections with African-American women neither explains nor contradicts a desire to regard them highly. After all, many groups in a multicultural society admire works of others who come from different backgrounds. And the practice of a metropolitan lifestyle is not often easily reconciled with various theories on diversity and multicultural values. Nevertheless (or perhaps because of this), the relationship between black female singers and gay men is a prominent one, and bears some reflection.

In *Music of the Common Tongue*, Christopher Small formulates a way to view the relations of different groups mediated through music as based on empathy.<sup>1</sup> Personal experience can engage with a musical object, and his studies locate a central issue in artistic consumption I find compelling, through acknowledgement of music's power to establish a space for this. Here I shall examine one kind of empathy in

music listening, in what might be regarded as a postmodern construction of the musical transaction. In my subjective analysis of this transaction, my personal history will present material from private experience to the public as a means of acknowledging the specific terrain involved in the empathetic process. Perhaps it goes without saying that empathy must involve personal emotions and experience. Yet in order to explore the richness of that process, and specifically to locate the power of music to move, I find confession necessary to ground aesthetic meaning in experience.

In this case, empathy involves the creation of a safe place for damaged ears. The damage results from traumatic life experiences that one records aurally; I have tended to file these experiences away into a part of my consciousness where memories are not easily recalled. On the impact of these memories in music listening, Elisabeth LeGuin has written:

One of the things we will bring to our listening is our memories. It is from memory, or its suppression, that the damage to our listening ability springs; but much of the richness we can hear in a work . . . arises from the same faculty.<sup>2</sup>

I believe Small's empathy must also enlist the faculty of memory, because personal recollection—especially of fears and pain—is a primary means of mutual understanding. This project seeks to find the motives of that empathy and explain what occurs when I use it in listening to music. What I have found in this analysis of my own damaged ear is an unusual intersection of music, spirituality and sexuality. (At least I find it unusual, as I have not yet read of a similar analytical project.) In relating a specific experience in my memory, I observe the construction of my own narrative, and of the narrative's basis in language that is not transparent. I will also recognize the persona of Aretha in this music, and attempt to configure its relation to my listening experience. Most of all, my awareness of these contingencies attempts to empower multiple receptions of Aretha in the empathetic process, and unravel claims of radical individuality in my own personal reception. My story is unique to some extent, but I believe there are many unique stories like this one worth contributing to the meaning of the act of music listening.

The first time I heard "Mary, Don't You Weep" was while parking my car in front of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. I had just turned to the University of Houston radio station on the way there, and caught their evening gospel program on this particular song. I was captivated by the sound of the music immediately, and knew it was Aretha's voice; but not as I had heard her before. This voice was somehow more intense, encouraged by the choir and keyboards' maintenance of a slow and easy groove. The interaction between Aretha and the choir supported her wail and gave impetus to her improvised narration. This music kept me motionless in my parked car for quite some time, and yet now the song's overall effect on me is difficult to summarize like this. I know there is more at

stake in my listening to Aretha, or in hearing this gospel tune, or in the narration of a story about Lazarus' resurrection. Beyond even the most insightful timbral, harmonic and/or structural analysis lies a world of musical meaning through personal association.

The type of experience Jann Pasler discusses in referential listening is apt:

Timbral values and what they evoke resist not only verbal translation but subjection to the will; there is always some possibility of an undesired experience of memory—resonance, of stumbling on the threshold between remembering and being *arrested by memory*.<sup>3</sup>

My memory is arrested by this song, and to explain why requires narration of a part of my personal history. On a Thursday morning of the third week of classes in my senior year of high school, I was in English class discussing the first act of *Hamlet* when my assistant principal walked in the door. She said I needed to get my things and come with her. As we walked towards the administration building, she said that my brother had had an accident on his bike and that she was going to drive me to the hospital where he was being treated. As a freshman, this had been his first couple of weeks riding to school, and I figured this was just another set of bad scrapes; he and I had had numerous accidents on our bikes before. The assistant principal didn't seem to know any details, but as we rode together I explained what a bummer it would be if he weren't able to play in the football game on Friday. She said she wasn't sure, but that she thought it might be more serious.

The next thing I remember is getting off the elevator and immediately being confronted by a hushed waiting room, with people from my mom's office there—not the normal visitors one would expect to support the healing of scrapes and bruises, or even broken bones. I saw my mother's back and called out to her while exiting the elevator. She turned around and suddenly in front of all of these people began to wail and run to me. She couldn't even speak as she clutched me in her arms, just let out this high-pitched, intense cry such as I had never heard before. It stopped only long enough for her to say something like "David's been hit, he's gone." He had been declared brain dead at the scene, and was on life support undergoing tests to find any brain activity whatsoever. He died the next evening. I remember very little about what followed, except the thought which dawned on me at the age of 17, more than four years before I would come out to her: I knew my mother had also just lost the only son who would have given her grandchildren. We had both, of course, suddenly lost much more than this, but those are the thoughts I now remember having had at the time.

In my attempt to narrate this I have reconstructed the scene in order to get to the point, but actually I have precious few clear recollections other than her wail. That is to say, I doubt the accuracy of what I have just related to you; only the sound of my mother's voice penetrates

the haze of shock and grief that was to surround me for weeks afterward. The shock I endured at the time has made my memory of that time frail, and its imprint in my mind is blurry—yet deep. Only her voice's sound made the tragedy of the situation clear to me. It is something I can still recall and hope never again to hear. In fact, when I am with her, I tend to become edgy when anything even faintly resembling such a sound comes out of her mouth.

When I listen to Aretha's voice, I recognize little that would directly remind me of my mother's wail; this may be my way of compartmentalizing the experience and bringing it to a place in my memory palace where it can sit safely isolated, with only long and winding roads to connect it to other experiences. But in thinking of the power of Aretha's voice, especially in the context of the gospel album, I have actively retraced some of the passageways in my mind back to this event in order to find how my experience with music relates to my history. This retracing is contrived in some way—since the relation of music to a specific experience cannot be explained through objectivity alone, and in relating them I must rely on some construction of a narrative. Why I attempt to find musical similarity between my mother's wail and someone else's is not the point, however. After all, I am trying to locate the significance of the relation, while having already admitted that I hope never again to hear "it." I am searching for meaning in a signature of Aretha Franklin's voice that connects me to my damaged past but is not an exact representation of that past. Yet my ear has been, and remains, profoundly damaged.

I regard my history with the wail as unique to a degree, in that I hope the opportunity for people to hear their mother as I have heard mine is, at least, rare. Moreover I am aware of my sensitivity to sound and timbre (I have had it since infancy, apparently). But we all experience pain and grief, and many look to music in some way to create a "safe" space that helps us to cope with that grief. Even if most are unaware of its significance, this function is far from uncommon. Therefore, much of what I find in this project is what others could find in their own experiences with music. Yet we musicians seldom devote critical attention to analyze the how and why of the experience. In a letter exchange on the very subject of Aretha's voice and the power it holds for the listener, Charles Keil wrote to Steven Feld in 1988: "I haven't written about Aretha . . . because words seemed a lot more inadequate than usual whenever I tried to describe those particular experiences in the 1960s."<sup>4</sup> Both men see a great deal of significance in Aretha Franklin, but each resists writing about her because they "risk" their personal histories confusing their professional obligations to respect the object of study. I sympathize with the issue of not knowing if my response to a work can be critical enough to engage fully my interpretive skills because of lack of perspective. In this case, I think I see enough around the event (the recording) and my association with it to contribute to a larger discourse. If for no other reason than not having been around when Aretha started singing, and not having known much

about her biography before having begun this project, I am freed by my lack of information. But more importantly, while Keil and Feld and I seem to agree on the necessity of the subjective presence in music studies, we disagree on the rewards to be gained in the risk of confusing subjectivity with objective analysis.

Aretha's wail is special even within the context of gospel singing, because it signifies pain exceptionally beautifully. She produces a sound based in anguish and makes it a pleasurable aesthetic experience. The power in Aretha's voice results from her ability to carry up enough "weight"—a vocal term that is used to describe the depth of the tone in one's chest voice—to a stunning height, where pitches can still be well-sung and sustained. Few other singers have achieved this so well in any genre: it is a feat of nature in itself, a training that requires conditioning and maturity, as well as a certain amount of raw talent. Aretha manages to carry that weight up "easily," keeping it corpulent and resonant, emphasizing a bright yet throaty sound which seems to link mind and body. She reaches for pitches, and at the same time allows her voice to physically (and spiritually) occupy a space. Through her voice, this space becomes resonant and expansive; at the same time, her mind and spirit (motivating the voice) maintain control and thus assure the listener of the lack of danger in this space. Together, these abilities explain why I am able to find Aretha's wail so pleasurable. For in approaching a place in my memory where I am likely to be most vulnerable, her voice offers a space with potential for catharsis.

Aretha's wail is, of course, different from a reflexive wail which regards pitch as unimportant, takes the body up in the voice as far as it can go, unconcerned with artistry and artifice. As communication, this reflexive wail expresses for the sake of being heard, not for being "read." For the listener, its power also involves spontaneity and lack of acknowledged connection to a surrounding environment. In contrast, when Moslem women ululate, their high pitch resembles a wail (and communicates similar feelings), but in the event's context their sound signifies differently: it ceases to be spontaneous and, through longer duration, establishes part of the environment in which it occurs.

There are many places in Aretha's "Mary, Don't You Weep" where she wails and represents grief. But at no particular time in the song does Aretha's voice actually *reenact* a wail. I have sought for her "real" wail in preparation for this paper, but am now confident that this is actually the wrong way to go about speaking of the music, especially in relation to my experience. Rather than reenact, her wail applies itself liberally to the situation as a whole, over the process of survivorship. As artistic representation, it is necessary that we be able to read her wail as a signifier of pain rather than pain itself: if she actually wailed we would stop being entertained and start being concerned. Aretha's power lies in her ability to signify convincingly, not in direct representation. In the same way this song's narration conflates the story of Lazarus with Old Testament stories

of the Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea, witnessing (to) the power of victory in a context of suffering signifies more than the authentic depiction of a Gospel lesson.

Listening to the song, I find strange and powerful references in the song to my personal experience: "Jesus, if you had a been here, my brother wouldn't have died," the uncanny resemblance in the chorus of the sound of "Mary" to my name Erik as they repeat "O Mary don't you weep," and the dreams I had shortly after my brother's death, where I went running to someone for help, as Aretha sings "then Mary went running to Jesus." The reflection of these events to my own experience creates a unique context. As a result, there are moments in the song when she wails that recall in my mind an image of pain, even deep pain, but the way my memory operates is definitely involved in this construction. In the interaction between her wail and my memory palace, her voice moves me because there is an "appropriate" mix of "artistry" and "truth" in her voice to send me signs of her experience of survivorship, and for me to accept those signs and enjoy that acceptance.

In my experience with Aretha's voice, I have looked for justification of a cultural condition of Afro-American women that might explain their ability to signify the survivor so well. Christopher Small's analysis of the rituals of survival in Afro-American culture relates slavery and racial oppression to the musical styles created in that community. Of course their ability to do this is a result of having survived so much, but how has this become a productive trait? Given the woman's central role in the familial structure, and the loss of men through infidelity, prison, and premature death due to enduring racism at all levels of business, government and society, it seems to me reasonable to assume a necessity to communicate and testify to the condition of survivorship. In listening to their musical testimonies, I listen to the masterful reclamation of the pain in the voice, as it transcends the normal body's limitations and loses its frailties. Beholding this transcendent voice is itself a phenomenon of seeing somehow through death, of healing our pain through vicarious reenactment of that condition.<sup>5</sup> Aretha's wail evokes the power of the whole experience of a loved one's death—the shock, the mourning, the anger, the healing—and involves us in it through visceral, corpulent spirituality. In essence, we shall overcome, through witnessing the performance of survivorship in vocal production and behavior.

In music this process is aided by the creation of a safe place, in which the listener may be situated to allow memory and the recollection of pain to enter the music. "Mary, Don't You Weep" is constructed on a blues form, taking advantage of the harmonic rhythm to establish a series of expectations for the listener. This structure enables improvisation, the spontaneity within a groove to create "realness" in Aretha's voice. We are able to let Aretha take over because the groove ensures us of the safety of the space. Her improvisation must stay within these boundaries as well, as evidenced by planned events occurring within the middle section, or "drive" of the song, that reveal the rehearsed aspects of even the

most "improvised" section of the performance—such as after her third call of "Lazarus" when two women in the chorus sing a descending three-note scale, harmonizing a fourth apart. Their stylized soulful event displays the constructed nature of Aretha's testimony and further assures our safety in this space.

The chorus in the background functions to maintain the structure of the event spatially, temporally and harmonically. They create the place out of which Aretha may rise, by surrounding her solo statements in the chorus of the song (Aretha, after all, must have a safe place to signify). Throughout the song, their articulation of "Oh, oh Mary," with its emphasis on the third beat of a slow four-beat measure (or, in 12/8, on beat 7), sets up a rhythmic groove that is hard to avoid falling into. The chorus also re-establishes the blues form: at the end of the break where Aretha narrates the story of Lazarus, it is the chorus (and keyboards) that return us to the blues cycle, descending from the tonic (where we have been for minutes) to the subdominant. When coupled with the rhythmic groove, a comfortable, physically-informed momentum develops where the body can fit easily into movements that emphasize the hips and torso gyrating slowly.<sup>6</sup> Yes, there is sexual gratification to be found in the beat of this gospel tune; to confirm this we would only need substitute secular lyrics. In this way, the music ensures the inclusion of the entire body in the listening experience.

This space of Aretha's voice enables a pleasure and sense of control that is, in fact, quite sexual. I am willing to relegate my control as a listener, suspending the critical faculties I often prize over all else, because I desire to be cared for in this space. Before I heard this song, I knew Aretha's voice to involve a different wail altogether; therefore, in whatever ways I respond to her voice in the context of "Mary, Don't You Weep," how she signifies a survivor is informed by my knowledge of music from her secular recordings as well. This is not to say that I don't feel moved especially by this song, or that my analysis fails to locate part (or even most) of the power in my connection to it. Yet her sexual and spiritual testifying are present in the same voice, and simultaneously signify meaning I value. I shall relate the involvement of sexuality in this space to attempt to locate my connection with a kind of emphatic declaration that is more about a mode of signification than it is about that act alone, because the way Aretha signifies the survivor resonates with my experience as well.

Watching a VH1 documentary celebrating Aretha's diva-ness, it dawned on me that she is completely (albeit unknowingly, perhaps) in touch with the coming-out experience. The biographical sketch that follows is clearly a subjective analysis of VH1's glowing assessment of her life. I have not sought information to judge the accuracy of this biography; nonetheless, I am skeptical of parts of it, as will become clear in my commentary. Pregnant at 15, Aretha dropped out of the ensemble in which she toured with her father, the Reverend C.L. Franklin, a well-known circuit preacher

in the Detroit area. While nursing her baby she stayed home and listened to Clara Ward and other gospel artists (creating a safe place for herself in which music defined her comfort zone). She also listened to pop music, and Aretha soon decided she wanted to cross-over from gospel to pop, and follow in the footsteps of Sam Cooke. To do this she would have to break the news to her father, and confess her worldly inclinations.

Her own description of the "coming-out" event (granted, to Dick Clark on *American Bandstand* in 1964) strikes me as remarkably similar to the kind of parental response given to many gay sons' coming-out: "He said, if this is what you want to do, then okay." What could not be told outright, but lies not so far underneath her reticent and awkward expression, is her father's disdain. His acceptance of the idea could only have transpired over time, and even after doing so he worked hard to make sure he wouldn't lose his daughter to sin: he took her to New York, supervised some demos, and got Aretha signed to Columbia Records. Soon Aretha would marry Ted White, who would become her manager and artistic advisor. White's dominance and manipulation of her inclinations brought complex and conflicted emotions into the studio. Before splitting with him, she moved to Atlantic Records and, with the help of Jerry Wexler and the Mussel Shoals musicians, recorded "I Never Loved a Man," followed soon after by "Do Right Woman."

The VH1 narrative continues by documenting the series of conflicts Aretha went through before finally establishing herself. In short, for her, freedom and success were linked. By the time she recorded the album *Amazing Grace* in January 1972, she had sung at Martin Luther King's funeral, had ten gold singles to her name and had become a national icon of what successful black America could be. Her return to gospel was a way to restore her presence in that genre, to exclaim (as her father does on the album), "She never left the church!" *Amazing Grace* seems to be timed perfectly with the process she herself was involved with: in "Mary, Don't You Weep," as she sings the words "for the benefit of you who don't believe in him this evening" we are to learn that she has managed to reconcile the conflicts of faith and the world, of duty to oneself and to one's family. This reconciliation, familiar to gays and lesbians, translates easily from a religious to a homosexual context involving the closet. Both are about the affirmation of an identity that acts simultaneously as and against the proclamation of a somehow "given" set of values, in the context of a society that cannot help but construct an exclusively inclusive or exclusive paradigm for the person in question.<sup>7</sup>

This translation is perhaps not so far-fetched here, because faith and sexuality are so directly linked in music; as mentioned above, gospel music tends to admit the body—in all its capacities—into the musical space. Nevertheless, in the VH1 biography, I was stunned to see Aretha share the piano bench with Ray Charles, as he exclaimed during their duet, "Got to find a woman tonight, cause I feel the spirit." Yet when listening to "Mary, don't you weep" I have also been struck by the

line in her narration of Lazarus' resurrection, "He got up walkin' like a natural man," a line resembling her hit "You Make Me Feel (Like a Natural Woman)." This view of Lazarus as a sexual being is perfectly reasonable (why shouldn't he now be all he was before his death?), but foreign to my notion of what belongs in a religious context. This recognition of sexual identity—which must ultimately be defined by behavior—in a spiritual context is more significant to me for the interpretive opportunity it allows. As I acknowledge Aretha's voice to signify faithfulness, I also recognize its potential to signify a type of sexual difference. Her "coming-out" experience conditions this performance as significant to both her and me, for as a gay man I am not more sexual than a heterosexual; rather, I am required to emphasize my sexual capacity in the very activity of declaring it different. The same is true for Aretha's faith: she is differently faithful, and in the act of explaining this she must emphasize it. In doing so, we must both perform our doubleness. The difference in performativity is only in degree and context, not kind.

Furthermore, in Aretha's case she is allowed to be, perhaps even expected to be, emphatically faithful to perform the role of signifier. For the sake of argument: were I to go back to my hometown and perform my straightness, my butchness would be allowed, even expected to be, emphatically butch to perform that role. Of course the duality is ludicrous, because in the culture of the closet we cannot easily imagine reading sexual identity as a signifying experience, much less engage empathy in the process. In any case, the act of coming out eventually involves situations where one must show to those *who knew you when* that you are still worthy of inclusion, and somehow negotiate demonstrating interest in recognizing their authority and the necessity for the system, and proclaiming individuality. I would argue that Aretha does this here in her performance, and repeatedly throughout her career, by invoking God's presence and her father as the source of her success, even in the most explicitly sexually-charged musical environments.

So Aretha and I are both strangely complicit in a culture that has caused us grief in many ways. I want to overcome these pains, and look to her for guidance, witnessing with pleasure her sexualized spirituality. Can I hear all of this in "Mary, Don't You Weep," even exclusive of her lyrics? Yes, I believe I can. Perhaps I hear it more when she wails in her soul music, reminding her secular listeners where her energy comes from. But to be honest, since my first hearing of "Mary, Don't You Weep," I have a lower threshold of acceptance for her use of the wail in a secular context. Only a small portion of her work applies to this issue I have: for example, when she wails about how "I Knew You Were Waiting For Me," her use of the wail clears a direct passageway to unburdened sexual gratification and the pangs of love and heartbreak, yet it often sounds artificial to me. It is as if her voice is not engaged in an authentic recall of experience but abuses its original meaning. I'm all for pleasure, but she and I have this history together, you see, and I get uncomfortable when

her decision to signify in this context endangers the sanctity of my connection with the "original." In my mind, has she really "never left the church"? No, I think my reaction is offense at having the spell broken that she herself cast over me. I have suffered and do not want to compromise the integrity of the safe place she created for my ear. Also, like watching George Michael trying to "play it straight," my connection to the performing personae will be cheapened and, ultimately, implicate my own self-worth if I acknowledge that connection to be contrived, motivated by emotions "less worthy" of that sign than grief and survivorship.

Obviously I prize Aretha's wail for its authenticity on many levels. I attach my authentic experiences to the sound of her voice, and prize this attachment. Having said this, I also acknowledge that I hear an emphatic desire to communicate survival as well as to reclaim territory, but I recognize that like the VH1 biography, I have constructed a narrative to acknowledge the process in which her music comforts me.

That narrative includes a way for me to feel closer to a woman I wish I knew—that I feel I *do* know to some extent. I think I admire many Afro-American female artists for their signification of doubleness and polymusicality—components in the identities of both gays and Afro-Americans. I recognize my racial and cultural position as different from that of the Afro-American woman, but see the axes of our oppression intersecting in ways that direct us towards appreciation of the signification of double-voicedness.<sup>8</sup> My empathy is based on a construction that in my mind may only be true to a certain degree, but this is true as far as I can reconcile my relation to this music I love. After all, Chris Small did not imply that the process of empathy was based solely on a "correct" understanding of meaning transmitted in music. But if what I have found about her "coming-out" story is as significant as I think it is, it may be that listeners without a direct relation to the closet may understand and value its effects on her signification as well. For the closet is emblematic of a range of sexual differences which include many other desires and instincts, and her sexuality can signify this for non-homosexual listeners as a result. Nonetheless, whatever the type of closet it is that I discern in gospel music, I have found an avenue through this construction to a "type" of person I do not know well. I think I could understand the person who is Aretha, if only because I think we share a type of damage, pain and survivorship often related to empathy, provided in her creation of a safe place for my ears.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music*, 2nd ed. (New York: Riverrun, 1994): 81. "Musical interactions do not occur at random, but are indicators always of an empathy, even across a social or cultural barrier, which is not necessarily or even usually conscious."

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth LeGuin, "Uneasy Listening." *Repercussions* Vol. 2/1 (1994): 14.

<sup>3</sup> Jann Pasler, "Postmodernism, Narrativity and the Art of Memory," *Contemporary Music Review*, 1993: 18.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Keil and Steven Feld, "Respecting Aretha," *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues* (Chicago, 1994): 224.

<sup>5</sup> In her work on this phenomenon in art, Carol Mavor invokes the recognition of the self in viewing photographs of children, especially photographs old enough to have subjects who have already progressed through life and have died, and finds a rich experience involving the acknowledgment of sexuality, mortality and the connections we tend not to make between them. *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> For discussions on rhythm and movement in regard to physical and sexual response, see Mitchell Morris, "It's Raining Men: The Weather Girls, Gay Subjectivity, and the Erotics of Insatiability" in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity and Music*, Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, eds. (Zurich: Carciofoli Press, 1999). See also the introduction to Barbara Browning's *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Bloomington, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California, 1990) for a more rigorous treatment of the closet and its role in defining identity for all of society.

<sup>8</sup> My terminology is derived from Ingrid Monson's discussion of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, in her "Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody and Ethnomusicology," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Winter 1994): 310.

book review

*Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical*,  
by D. A. Miller. Harvard University Press, 1998.  
Reviewed by Chip Whitesell

Miller, a professor of English literature and queer theory, has already proven to be a virtuoso of stylish personal criticism, and his latest book anatomizes the importance of the Broadway musical to gay men of a certain age. The volume is slim, but a dense read, sentences tightly coiled in ironic, self-reflexive, Jamesian convolutions, and peppered with references to show tunes. His method of interweaving cultural criticism with personal testimony in a precious, aestheticized web has the merits of evoking myriad delicate lines of connection between popular culture and identity formation with the subtlety and indirection they require; but for that reason, his insights do not easily transpose into the outlines of an argument.

Miller examines the personal join between Broadway and its gay audience from three standpoints: the solitary reenactments by artistic boys in post-War suburban basements; the teary bonhomie of post-Stonewall piano bars; and the mesmerism of the stage as epitomized by Miller's favorite show, *Gypsy*. In each of these three theaters, he probes the comic dramas of self-ignorance

and discovery, shame and flamboyance, displacement and belonging. Especially engaging is his exploration of the presexual aspects of queer youth, that bewildering time when something colorful strains inside the cocoon, when the need for idiosyncratic assertion has not yet settled into adult scripts.

Miller reads the psychology of the archetypal show tune as a vacuous gesture of elation, no less nurturing for its escapist energies or relaxed aesthetic pretensions. But then he doubles back and reads the gesture at a different level, where the very brittleness and brashness of Broadway's "would-be invulnerable subject" never quite hides the sufferings of the "radically pathetic subject" lurking beneath (8). In a similar double reading, he traces how gay meanings in the musical are ultimately rebuffed by the sign of heterosexuality, which nevertheless, as a mere sign, has less than convincing substance. The confidence and richness of Miller's multiple readings astound, while paradoxically reducing the reader's confidence in the existence of a bottom line of meaning.

The analysis of *Gypsy* includes a discussion of 'performance envy' as part of the dynamic between male characters/onlookers and female stars. It also uncovers a constitutional tension between the controlling hetero male gaze upon a feminized performing space, and the stage of the encouraging mother, who at one time called the (gay) child to performance. The show's book demonizes Ethel Merman's crazed stage mom, while the music uplifts her as adored star.

The closet is a looming presence throughout the book. Miller considers the compromises and constraints pressed on Broadway's many gay creators, Sondheim and Bernstein among them. He ponders the continuing psychic effects for post-Stonewall lives of the internalization of shame during youth, to which the secret, embarrassing love of musicals forms a structural correlate. He also on some level mourns the passing of the closeted world, for the necessarily complex ramifications and sublimations of knowledge in its cultural artifacts. Not all readers will appreciate this elegiac tone, but it's clear that for Miller, the tone fills a very personal need. For him, Broadway is now eclipsed. *La Cage aux folles* might at last acknowledge the gay meanings fueling the musical, but it does so by ghettoizing them, separating them from impact on the culture at large.

Personally, I also found that the book, though aiming at empathy for marginal narratives of self, depended too much on a congratulatory, knowing subject position as a group insider. That is, what seems for the author to signify adulthood and gay acceptance is membership in a particular generation and subculture of urban artsy men with avid recourse to a gym and a piano bar. This is supposed to balance the melancholy of not-belonging detailed in the book, but since I felt little identification with that group, my own melancholy was deepened. Such miscommunications will no doubt follow from Miller's insistence on the impossibility of an objective



standpoint for argument, free from personal formations. Even so, readers of all stripes should find resonance in this jewel of a book, whether they read it for a lyrical memoir of coming of age, a witty exposure of gay subtexts, or for the more ambitious theses embedded throughout: claims for the musical as mass culture's only gay genre (16), and for its status as an allegory of the "homosexual disposition of the world" (133).

book review

*Enclosure 3: Harry Partch*, compiled and edited by Philip Blackburn. American Composers Forum, 1997.

Reviewed by Dawn Culbertson

When Harry Partch (1901-74) was still a young man, he decided to turn his back on conventional Western music and start over. He developed a 43-tone scale based on ancient Greek modes and harmonic ratios, composed music based on this scale, and built a whole warehouse full of otherworldly-looking instruments on which to play it, with names like Cloud-Chamber Bowls, Chromelodeon, Spoils of War and Harmonic Canon. But, although his own writings are not too difficult to find, until recently his life has not been particularly well documented, particularly his homosexuality. Now the Midwest-based American Composers Forum has done both serious students and lovers of new music a great service by issuing this book, as unusual in form as its subject.

In place of a narrative biography, compiler Philip Blackburn has put together what he labels a "bio-scrapbook," an exhaustive collection of writings by and about Partch that range from elementary school report cards to newspaper clippings, programs, pages from scores, letters, photos, and production notes. There are also two significant documents Partch wrote during the 1930s, when he traveled throughout the West Coast as a hobo living in work camps: the "musical diary" "Bitter Music" and "End Littoral." The composer destroyed the originals of both these documents late in life, possibly due to their frank homosexual content (he speaks openly of his attraction for several of the men he encountered). In the back is a brief critical essay by Blackburn on Partch's life and work as well as extensive explanatory notes on most of the documents.

The picture of Partch that emerges is a mixed one. On the one hand, he was obviously a brilliant, innovative man determined to pursue his own vision regardless of what others thought, and one capable of attracting many friends and admirers. But he could also be petty and vindictive, and was often his own worst enemy, alienating many who were on his side. (Blackburn suggests that his frequently erratic behavior and often poor health could be due to an undiagnosed case of syphilis.)

The amount of material here is considerable, and it's so packed together, with scarcely a rest for the eye from page to page, that perhaps the best way to fully

appreciate it is to skip around in it, taking in a little at a time. For amassing and presenting all this material so well, Blackburn has done an invaluable service to any serious student of new music, and he deserves many accolades for it.

[Eds.] Indeed, Blackburn's production has been awarded an ASCAP Deems Taylor Award. *Enclosure 3* follows the two preceding *Enclosure* sets, no. 1 being a videotape of four historic films made by Partch, and no. 2 a 4-CD collection of archival recordings. *Enclosures* can be ordered from The American Composers Forum, 332 Minnesota Street #E-145, St. Paul, MN 55101. Tel. 651-228-1407. <<http://www.composersforum.org>>

publication news

Coming out this fall!

*Audible Traces: Gender, Music, and Identity*, edited by Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamesley (Zurich: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999)

In recent years, new fields of inquiry in music have blossomed, some more controversial and inflammatory than others, some overtly veering from the traditional affairs of the Academy. Among the variety of questions raised are those that explore the differences between "who we are," "what we do," and "how/what we experience." Such inquiry reflects our desire to discover the ways in which we identify with our music and the ways in which the music we make, listen to, and talk about identifies us.

Going beyond singular investigations of history, theory, gender, race, or culture, the contributors to *Audible Traces* complicate matters. They examine the ways that our supposed self-identity -- gender, race, sexuality, sexual orientation, and ethnicity -- intersects with our activities and our experiences. Their concerns also include dance, technology, societal forces, cognitive studies, poetry, fashion, sensory inputs, and politics. In a mosaic of approaches and viewpoints composers, musicologists, performers, ethno-musicologists, theorists of music and of literature, suggest and reveal traces of the ways that these complex matrices of identity affect us during the compositional, listening, or performing experience.

Contents and Contributors:

- Forum: Composing Women (Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner, Mary Lee Roberts, Carla Scaletti, Anna Rubin, Vivian Adelberg Rudow, Susan Parenti, Mara Helmuth, Catherine Schieve)
- On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex (Suzanne G. Cusick)
- Lesbian Skin and Musical Fascination (Martha Mockus)

• On Rebecca Clarke's Sonata for Viola and Piano: Feminine Spaces and Metaphors of Reading (Marianne Kielian-Gilbert)

• Voice, Race, and Sexuality in the Music of Joan Armatrading (Ellie Hisama)

• Singing for Myself / Carmen and the Rhetoric of Musical Resistance (Peter J. Rabinowitz)

• Redefining Yin and Yang: Transformation of Gender/Sexual Politics in Chinese Music (Su Zheng)

• Watching Our Step: Embodying Research, Telling Stories (Susan C. Cook)

• It's Raining Men: The Weather Girls, Gay Subjectivity, and the Erotics of Insatiability (Mitchell Morris)

• Hearing "Lulu" (Judy Lochhead)

• The Insatiable Banshee / Voracious vocalizing...Riot Grrl...and the Blues (Renee T. Coulombe)

• Rules of One's Own (Elaine Barkin)

• music/consciousness/gender (Benjamin Boretz)  
The collection also includes a CD of a performance of Benjamin Boretz's "music/consciousness/gender."

#### *invitations from cyberspace*

*Echo repeats the last words spoken, and gives back the sounds she has heard.* (From Ovid's *Metamorphoses*)

The desire to understand how music works is not the exclusive domain of musicologists; indeed, music is an integral part of cultural experience for all people. \*ECHO: a music-centered journal\* is a forum for discourse about music in which voices from a variety of disciplines speak.

ECHO explores our relationship to music in movement, time, and space, with the critical theories of dance, film, architecture, design, sociology, and cultural studies. Contributors amplify music's power by investing it with new meanings, and give back the sounds they have heard.

We invite contributions about musics and musical experiences from all disciplines. Possible areas of interest might include:

- The Urban Soundscape;
- Music and Migration;
- Music and the Body;
- Music-Public and Private.

Submissions may address musics from any historical, geographic, or cultural moment.

As a web-based journal, ECHO can include sound in its articles (rather than depending entirely on conventional notation), as well as movement examples and color

illustrations. New issues are put on-line biannually, and each issue contains articles and reviews of both music and artistic projects about music, as well as memoirs and interviews.

Submissions for articles follow The MLA Handbook of Style. A single hard copy of all necessary materials can be sent to:

ECHO: a music-centered journal  
Department of Musicology  
University of California, Los Angeles  
UCLA Box 951623  
Los Angeles, CA 90095

For instructions on electronic submissions, please email <echojour@humnet.ucla.edu>.

#### *upcoming conferences*

"Music Theory and Queer Issues" will be a special session at the 1999 Society for Music Theory conference, November 10-14 in Atlanta. The panel consists of the following papers and speakers:

• "Rethinking the Sexual Imaginary of Musical Modernism: Music, Queer Theory and the Concept of Inversion" (Martin Scherzinger, Columbia University)

• "Sexual and Musical Categories" (Fred Everett Maus, University of Virginia)

• "A 'French Connection': Modernist Codes in the Musical Closet" (Nadine Hubbs, University of Michigan)

• "Schubertian Confidences" (Charles Fisk, Wellesley College)

• "Christ, Queer Space, Shadows, and Gongs: The Voices of Claude Vivier's *Lonely Child* (1980)" (Steven Nuss, Colby College)

• "Respiration: Breathing and Sounding a Lesbian Musical Valentine" (Martha Mockus, San Francisco)

contributors

*Dawn Culbertson* holds degrees in composition from Towson University and the Peabody Conservatory, and has written over 50 compositions in various media, several of which have won awards. But she is also an award-winning journalist whose writings have appeared in both local and national publications, as well as a professional lutenist and singer and a wannabe choreographer.

*Erik Chenault Leidal* is a first year doctoral student in musicology at UCLA. He has studied in Austria on a Fulbright scholarship, and attended UNC Chapel Hill for a master's degree focusing on the art of rhetoric in Zarlino and Lasso's generation. He also performs regularly as a tenor soloist specializing in Renaissance and Baroque music, and has sung regularly with the Arnold Schoenberg Chor in Vienna and Salzburg.

*Chip Whitesell* is co-chair of the GLSG. Stay tuned for news of the queer musicology volume he is co-editing with Sophie Fuller!

your humble servants

Suzanne Cusick, co-chair

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g

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in future issues

The Theory Project: what theoretical tools do we use to frame our gay/lesbian/queer musicological inquiries? Is theory drawn from outside music able to accommodate music?

The spring issue promises Current Bibliography, as well as a kind of Discography with reviews of *your* favorite (?) recordings of GLBTQ music—with a focus on performers, composers, collections, genres, lyrics, particularly queer tonal progressions, whatever strikes your fancy...