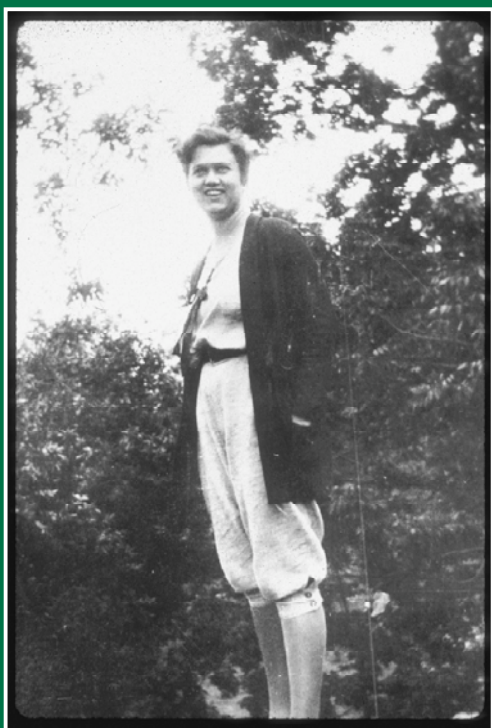


Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds

Innovation and Tradition in
Twentieth-Century American Music



Edited by Ray Allen and Ellie M. Hisama

Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds



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*Ruth Crawford
Seeger's Worlds*

*Innovation and Tradition in Twentieth-Century
American Music*

EDITED BY RAY ALLEN AND ELLIE M. HISAMA



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Foreword

Carol J. Oja

With its 2001 Ruth Crawford Seeger Centennial Festival, which inspired this book, the Institute for Studies in American Music (ISAM) at Brooklyn College once again galvanized exploration of a crucial area of American music. In the case of Crawford Seeger, the career of a strikingly original composer provided a focus for discussion about a nexus of issues: gender and compositional style, aesthetics and politics, modernism and populism, and the legacy of one of the most prominent American families in folk music performance and preservation. At the same time, ISAM marked its own thirty-year anniversary. The tale of how Crawford Seeger's reputation rose during the late twentieth century intertwines intriguingly with that of ISAM's pioneering work in bringing scholarship about American music into the academic mainstream.

During her heyday as a composer in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Crawford Seeger received both performances and critical attention, mostly within the highly specialized modernist community. She stood out as being especially gifted, and her flair for innovation was valued in a climate that prized newness and experimentation. She was also notable as one of the few females on the American compositional scene. Remarkably, an entire essay about her music appeared in Henry Cowell's historic *American Composers on American Music* of 1933, authored by her mentor and husband Charles Seeger, who rigorously stacked her music against that of male colleagues. "Especially in respect to rhythm," Seeger wrote, "we may note a variety of invention scarcely to be seen in the work of any other composer. . . . One can find only a few men among American composers who are as uncompromisingly and successfully radical."¹

A period of relative eclipse followed. After Crawford's marriage in 1932, she gave birth to four children, at the same time as her attention and Seeger's turned from the avant-garde to folk music. Modernist impulses were under siege during the Depression among American artists in general. By the time of her premature death in 1953, Crawford Seeger's compositions had faded from view, waiting to be discovered gradually. This process began in 1960, as a confluence of forces brought attention to her work, including postwar composers seeking an ancestry for their own second wave of modernist experiments, scholars fascinated with the American ultramoderns, and feminist historians in search of lost female voices.

Crawford Seeger's reemergence as a composer was tied firmly to the rediscovery of her *String Quartet 1931*, which was recorded by the Amati String Quartet in 1960 and again by the Composers Quartet in 1973. Writing in the *New York Times* in 1961 after the first of those releases, the composer and critic Eric Salzman recognized "an extraordinary composer," observing that Crawford Seeger was then "principally remembered as the editor of several American folk-song albums."² He had been preceded in this awakening by George Perle, who in an essay published the previous year, had credited Crawford Seeger's quartet with anticipating some of the major compositional innovations of the 1950s.³

Not long after this, ISAM came into being with the goal of fostering an intellectual environment receptive to the study of all sorts of American musicians, whether Crawford or Cowell, Joplin or Hendrix. Founded in 1971 by the visionary scholar H. Wiley Hitchcock, ISAM appeared at a moment when American genres of all sorts—jazz, rock, blues, musical theater, folk, concert music—faced a glaring disjunction between their status in the culture at large and in the academic study of music. "Every so often a young American graduate student in musicology discovers North America," wrote Donald McCorkle in a call-to-arms from 1966. "When he does he finds it to be an experience both exhilarating and frustrating, for his educational background has left him almost totally unprepared for it. . . . His curriculum has been oriented entirely toward studies in European music. . . . He must be stoic if he is an Americanist."⁴ At the time, the disciplines of musicology and music theory were locked in a postcolonial grip; the older the music and the farther it originated from home (ideally in Europe), the more it was valued. Added to that, masterworks were the cherished commodity, and the study of music within broad-based social or cultural contexts was reserved largely for ethnomusicologists. Male composers provided the sole focus for inquiry.

Against this backdrop, ISAM aimed to provide a forum for the exploration of "American music in all its diversity," as an inaugural flyer put it. Its 2001 conference about Crawford Seeger followed an illustrious series of such events, including the "Ives Centennial Conference" (1974), "The Phonograph and Our Musical Life" (1977), "Island Sounds in the Global City" (1994), "Henry Cowell's Musical Worlds" (1997), and "George Gershwin at 100" (1998). At the same time, ISAM was publishing bedrock resources.⁵ Today as the Web brings bibliographies, catalogues, primary sources, and journal articles into easy reach of our desk chairs, it is becoming hard to imagine a time when the "essence of the challenge" for a scholar venturing into American music was "the unknown quantity and quality of American music," to quote McCorkle once again.⁶ But the situation was acute, and ISAM assumed leadership in meeting that challenge.

Looking back on all this, it is useful to peer through the lenses of both a cultural historian and historiographer. The year that ISAM started up, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell* rocked across Broadway, John Cage's *Silence* was only ten years old, President Nixon ended a twenty-year trade embargo with China, and

the women's movement was in full force, with the first edition of *Our Bodies, Our Selves* reaching bookstores. At the same time, early twentieth-century titans were passing away. Louis Armstrong died that year, Duke Ellington in 1974. The Amati's recording of Crawford Seeger's *String Quartet 1931* was then a decade old, but much of her music remained in manuscript, and biographical essays about her were just beginning to be imagined. During that same period, however, scholarly activity in American music as a whole was ramping up remarkably with a string of major historical surveys. These included general overviews by Wilfrid Mellers (1964) and H. Wiley Hitchcock (1969), together with a new edition of Gilbert Chase's *America's Music* (1966), as well as Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz*, Bill Malone's *Country Music U.S.A.*, Alan Lomax's *Folk Song Style and Culture* (all three in 1968), and Eileen Southern's pathbreaking *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (1971). In 1975, the Sonneck Society (now known as the Society for American Music) was founded, as was New World Records, and in 1979, *Women in American Music: A Bibliography of Music and Literature* appeared, edited by Adrienne Fried Block and Carol Neuls-Bates.

In short, the 1960s and 1970s marked a discipline-altering juncture. Major synthesizing scholarship about American traditions was emerging, at the same time as the institutional infrastructure to support that work was taking shape. The Bicentennial turned out to be a major catalyst for all of this, especially in awakening funding agencies to their own cultural heritage.

With the resultant rise of scholarship in American music in the ensuing decades—a rise in quality and quantity, breadth and depth—the so-called ultramodern group of American composers that had been active during the 1920s and 1930s began gaining attention, and Crawford Seeger's distinctive body of work slowly earned special notice. ISAM played a major role in chronicling the legacy of the ultramoderns, focusing especially on Henry Cowell. It released multiple bibliographic publications about Cowell, and its longtime Research Associate, Rita Mead, authored a major study about Cowell's New Music Society.⁷

Eventually, Crawford Seeger, too, enjoyed her day in the academy. During the 1990s, she became the focus of a cluster of major books—or parts of them—culminating in Judith Tick's richly contextualized biography.⁸ And recordings of her music have proliferated, featuring artists such as Lucy Shelton, Dawn Upshaw, Virginia Eskin, Alan Feinberg, and Oliver Knussen. In fact, a "WorldCat" online search in December 2005 for "Crawford Seeger" and "sound recordings" yielded 175 hits.

All signs at the moment suggest that Crawford Seeger's music will continue to be valued in the years ahead. She offers a work widely acknowledged as brilliant—that is, her string quartet—amid a compelling body of compositions. And her story continues to draw us in, speaking to our desire to understand the mysterious intersections of life and art. That ISAM should have hosted an exploration of Crawford Seeger's legacy—led by feminist music theorist

Ellie M. Hisama and folklorist Ray Allen—seems totally right. Her art and ISAM's mission had been traveling side by side for quite some time.

Notes

1. Charles Seeger, "Ruth Crawford," in *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium*, ed. Henry Cowell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1933), 116.
2. Eric Salzman, "Distaff Disk: Ruth Seeger's Work Ahead of Its Era," *New York Times*, April 16, 1961.
3. George Perle, "Atonality and the Twelve-Note System in the United States," *Score* 27 (1960): 51–59.
4. Donald M. McCorkle, "Finding a Place for American Studies in American Musicology," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 19 (1966): 73, 74. McCorkle's use of the masculine pronoun is striking in retrospect, reflective of an era when creative and academic success was largely a male preserve.
5. Selected titles among ISAM monographs include. Gilbert Chase, *Two Lectures in the Form of a Pair: Music, Culture, and History* [and] *Structuralism and Music* (No. 2, 1973); Rita H. Mead, *Doctoral Dissertations in American Music: A Classified Bibliography* (No. 3, 1974); Richard Crawford, *American Studies and American Musicology: A Point of View and a Case in Point* (No. 4, 1975); Carol J. Oja, ed., *American Music Recordings: A Discography of 20th-Century U.S. Composers* (no number, 1982).
6. McCorkle, "Finding a Place for American Studies in American Musicology," 74.
7. Rita H. Mead, *Henry Cowell's New Music 1925–1936: The Society, the Music Editions, and the Recordings* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Press, 1981). (This was a revision of Mead's dissertation from 1978 at the Graduate School of the City University of New York, advised by H. Wiley Hitchcock.) Mead died in 1986 of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. Meanwhile, ISAM published a number of resources about Cowell: Bruce Saylor, *The Writings of Henry Cowell: A Descriptive Bibliography* (No. 7, 1977); Martha L. Manion, *Writings about Henry Cowell: An Annotated Bibliography* (No. 16, 1982); William Lichtenwanger, *The Music of Henry Cowell: A Descriptive Catalogue* (No. 23, 1986).
8. Landmarks in scholarship about Crawford Seeger include Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memoirs, Memories, Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986); David Nicholls, *American Experimental Music, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Although ISAM played no direct role in this scholarship, its home institution, the City University of New York, was a central location. Mead, Tick, and I did doctoral work there with H. Wiley Hitchcock. In a subsequent generation, Hisama worked there with Straus.

Introduction

Ray Allen and Ellie M. Hisama

It is absurd to expect all composers to write for the same audience and absurd to expect one and the same audience to appreciate all music. There must be music for the many and music for the few. . . . The next few years will decide whether this most promising young woman will rest content in the rather narrow, but *recherché*, field in which she has hitherto moved . . . or whether . . . she will enter into the already brisk competition among men in the larger fields.

—Charles Seeger, “Ruth Crawford” (1933)

Over the past quarter century a cadre of scholars, critics, performers, and arts programmers have worked to stretch the contours of America’s cultural canon to include the musical activities of women. Thanks to their focus on an array of practices ranging from the compositions of Amy Beach and Margaret Bonds to the revolutionary vocalizations of Billie Holiday, Mahalia Jackson, and Bessie Smith, to the postmodern performance of Laurie Anderson and Pauline Oliveros, our understanding and appreciation of women’s musical creativity has vastly expanded. Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–1953) occupies a unique position in the pantheon of twentieth-century musical women, for her work as an ultramodernist composer and a folk music transcriber/arranger presents a provocative challenge to conventional notions of “the cultivated” and “the vernacular” that have historically served to divide, rather than connect, America’s rich musical heritage.¹ Indeed, her efforts to traverse the male-dominated domain of modern composition and the female-centered worlds of children’s folk music and teaching have inspired a new generation of scholars and critics to reexamine the complex dimensions of gender and cultural hierarchy in her work and in our larger society.

Ruth Crawford Seeger’s Worlds: Innovation and Tradition in Twentieth-Century American Music presents new perspectives on the life, music, and legacy of Ruth Crawford Seeger by scholars from a range of disciplines including musicology,

music theory, music education, folklore, history, American studies, and women's studies. The following explorations of Ruth Crawford Seeger's prescient contributions to American modernism and of her advocacy of traditional music contest the assumption that high modernism and traditional music are diametrically opposed. To straddle both worlds was by no means unique, but her lasting and unusual musical legacy—one that comfortably embraces Elliott Carter and Pete Seeger; serialism and socialism; dissonant counterpoint and children's songs—deserves and demands such an interdisciplinary inquiry.

* * *

Ruth Crawford was born in East Liverpool, Ohio in 1901.² She studied piano as a child in Florida, and in 1921 moved to Chicago to study at the American Conservatory of Music. There she worked with the pianists Heniot Levy and Louise Robyn and the composer Adolph Weidig. Djane Lavoie Herz, who taught Crawford piano, significantly shaped her musical and aesthetic sensibilities. Herz introduced her to Henry Cowell, who vigorously promoted her music; Dane Rudhyar, of whom she became a "rapt disciple";³ and the music and ideas of Scriabin, whose harmonic language is strongly reflected in Crawford's evocative *Nine Preludes for Piano* (1924–28). In Chicago, she became a friend of the poet Carl Sandburg and taught piano to his three daughters. Her work in arranging folk songs began with her association with Sandburg, to whose collection *The American Songbag* (1927) she contributed several exceptional piano arrangements.

Crawford's compositions impressed Cowell, who generously assisted her professional career. He recommended her as a pupil to his friend Charles Seeger, a noted pedagogue, theorist, and philosopher of music, published several of his compositions in his influential *New Music Quarterly*, and insisted that Henry Allen Moe, director of the awards program at the Guggenheim Foundation, give her application serious consideration. Her *Nine Preludes for Piano* received performances in New York at the noted Copland-Sessions concert series, and her strikingly angular *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1926) was performed by the League of Composers in New York and at the Chicago chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music.

Crawford moved to New York in 1929, and became a vital participant in the "ultramodern" school of composition, a group of composers that included Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Marc Blitzstein, and Earl Robinson. Through her studies with Seeger, Crawford became increasingly interested in linear writing and "dissonant counterpoint," a twentieth-century approach to counterpoint that turned traditional contrapuntal rules on their head. Her *Diaphonic Suites Nos. 1–4* (1930) demonstrate her departure from Scriabin-inspired harmony and her growing inclination toward vigorous

linear writing; while her brilliant *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (1930) illustrates her interest in writing music using precompositional systems. Crawford received a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition in 1930, establishing her as the first woman to receive this honor. She spent the fellowship year, 1930–31, in Berlin and Paris, and met with both Bartók and Berg.

Her best-known work from this period is the *String Quartet 1931*, a striking example of modernist musical experimentation, which established her brilliant and inventive musical mind, and was admired by Edgard Varèse, Virgil Thomson, Pauline Oliveros, Elliott Carter, George Perle, Alvin Lucier, and many other composers. Her *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg* (1930–32) for contralto, oboe, percussion, and piano with optional orchestral ostinati—commonly referred to as “Rat Riddles”—unites her earlier interest in Sandburg’s work and her by now finely honed modernist compositional abilities. But because she was not able to complete the large work she had promised the Guggenheim Foundation, her fellowship was not renewed, and she returned to New York in the fall of 1931.

In 1932, Crawford wove her political sympathies with the ethnic immigrant working class into her powerful musical settings of two radical texts by the writer H. T. Tsiang, “Sacco, Vanzetti” and “Chinaman, Laundryman.” Paired as *Two Ricercari*, these songs were performed at the First American Workers’ Music Olympiad at New York’s City College as well as at new music venues including the MacDowell Club in New York and the Mellon Gallery for the Society of Contemporary Music in Philadelphia.

Crawford and Seeger married in 1932, and their first child, Michael, was born in 1933. After the birth of Margaret (Peggy), their first daughter, in 1935, the Seeger family moved to Washington, D.C. so that Charles could begin a position as a music specialist with the federal government’s recently created Resettlement Administration. With four children in all (Mike, Peggy, Barbara, and Penny) to raise and a demanding schedule of teaching piano, Crawford stopped composing ultramodern music, and turned to the work of teaching music to children and of transcribing, arranging, and publishing folk songs.

* * *

Ruth Crawford Seeger’s discovery and embrace of American folk music was marked by passion, commitment, and a degree of frustration. More than any other American composer of her generation, Crawford Seeger immersed herself in the study and transcription of folk music in hopes of traversing the voids that separated the compositional practices of high-minded urban modernists from the grassroots musical expressions of America’s common folk. Although she did not unite these worlds in her own

compositions, her decade-and-a-half involvement with folk music provided fresh insights that would inspire subsequent generations of musicologists, folk music specialists, and urban folksingers including her own children.

Crawford Seeger's involvement with southern American folk music began in the mid-1930s following the family's move from New York to Washington and her husband's discovery of a vibrant southern folk culture during his work with the Resettlement Administration. Seeger's experience led the couple to reassess their views on the nature and import of "people's music" and inspired them to undertake various projects to document that music and make it accessible to urban audiences. In 1937 Crawford Seeger compiled "Twenty-two American Folk Tunes," a collection of piano arrangements of southern ballads, play party tunes, and African American songs, which she hoped would "acquaint the piano student with at least a small part of the tradition (i.e., 'folk') music of his own country."⁴ That same year she would begin work as the transcriber of John and Alan Lomax's field recordings, a project that eventually resulted in the 1941 publication of the Lomax folk song collection *Our Singing Country*. The proposed preface to the 1941 Lomax volume, published only recently as *The Music of American Folk Song*, reveals Crawford Seeger's struggles to squeeze the sounds of performance-centered folk music into the language of Western music notation, as well as her keen observations regarding folk song structure and performance style.⁵

Based on the success of the Lomax project, Crawford Seeger would later compile her own collections of children's folk material in *American Folk Songs for Children* (1948), *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (1950), and *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (1953), each including song arrangements for voice and piano accompaniment. The material for these collections was assembled and edited during Crawford Seeger's experiences as a music educator, beginning as a volunteer at her daughter's nursery school and continuing in various positions with private schools in the Washington area throughout the 1940s.

Part of folk music's attraction for Crawford Seeger was the irregular rhythms and dissonant melodic and harmonic patterns that, like the modern music she had previously composed, stood in opposition to the lavishness of Romantic concert hall music. Not surprisingly, Crawford Seeger tried her hand at combining her newfound interest in folk music with her desire to continue to compose. The effort resulted in her first and only orchestral piece, *Rissolty, Rossolty* (1939), a three-minute work that drew from two traditional folk songs and the fiddle breakdown "The Last of Callahan." Crawford Seeger's strategy, according to Judith Tick, was not simply to quote borrowed folk melodies, but rather to "fragment and recombine elements from them in a sophisticated polyphony."⁶ The resulting fusion of folk materials and modernist technique was more in keeping with the spirit of Béla Bartók and Charles Ives than the orchestral settings of folk tunes that Aaron Copland was

popularizing during this period. But the demands of family and teaching left precious little time to create, and it was not until 1952 that Crawford Seeger produced another complete work, her *Suite for Wind Quintet*. Although the quintet's final section includes dance-like rhythms that may be suggestive of fiddle tunes, the work's complexity and overall contemplative mood owes far more to modernist sensibilities than folk influences.

Ruth Crawford Seeger's elusive dream to combine her passion for folk music with modern composition was never fulfilled due to her untimely death from cancer in 1953. Thus music historians have chronicled her achievements as an ultramodernist composer rather than a writer of folk-inspired art music. But her contributions to the field of folk music are not insignificant, for among students and lovers of traditional music, she is venerated as a pioneering scholar, innovative teacher, and successful popularizer of American folk music, as well as the stepmother and mother of three of the postwar folk music revival's key figures, Pete, Mike, and Peggy Seeger.

* * *

The chapters in the opening section provide new insights into Ruth Crawford's ultramodern compositions. Fifty years after Crawford's death, her legacy as a significant modernist composer seems assured, as measured by the plethora of recordings, performances, and scholarly treatments of her life and music that are now available. Yet biographer Judith Tick's meditation on the meandering pathways by which Crawford the composer has been inscribed in music history—in Tick's words, transformed from "nobody to genius" through the attention of performers and composers, record producers and concert programmers, critics and scholars over the past seventy-five years—reminds us of the sometimes arbitrary flights of historiography and the ways by which one body of artistic works can make their way into mainstream accounts, while others are relegated to the dustbins of music history.

Crawford's eighteen ultramodernist works composed from the early 1920s to the mid-1930s are gems in their conception, construction, and emotional impact, and anticipated and enabled the achievements of subsequent generations of American composers. Rejecting the forms and sonorities of traditional European art music, including its triadic basis, Crawford created a new musical language that favored dissonant intervals, promoted the radical independence of the parts in a polyphonic texture, explored new sound combinations, and sought innovative ways of structuring rhythm and timbre. Joseph N. Straus identifies four strategies she used to construct pieces around a predetermined musical idea and its repetitions—ostinato, retrograde, rotation, and other types of designs—and considers the ways in

which these strategies underpin many of her compositions, including her Sonata for Violin and Piano, *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*, Diaphonic Suite No. 1 for solo oboe or flute, Diaphonic Suite No. 4 for oboe and cello, and the Suite for Wind Quintet. His analysis of the final movement of her renowned *String Quartet 1931* elegantly demonstrates the imagination that ignited the conception, and the brilliant structural basis for its powerful musical statement.

Crawford's *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* has challenged generations of pianists and theorists through its intricate use of accents, rhythmic groupings, large-scale organizational plan, and tempo. Lyn Ellen Burkett relates Charles Seeger's theory of dissonant counterpoint, as presented in his treatise *Theory and Experiment in (the New) Music*, to the *Piano Study*. With its arched contour, the piece seems grimly determined to travel to the top of the keyboard and back down, stopping for only four frustrated pauses. With irregular accents jutting out from the monophonic line, Crawford creates an effect of formidable pianistic virtuosity. In contrast to its disorienting affect, the *Piano Study* contains an elegant and meticulous proportional framework superimposed upon two simultaneously occurring palindromes: a pitch palindrome and an accent palindrome. Through a close reading of several musical elements, including the pitch palindrome, beam-group palindrome, and pitch aggregate structure, Burkett uncovers aspects of Crawford's unique compositional voice, and argues that the intricate proportional design of the *Piano Study* offers particularly compelling insight into the technical and aesthetic underpinnings of Crawford's approach to dissonant composition.

Crawford's 1932 song "Sacco, Vanzetti" stands as a rare musical experiment in which she attempted to compose what her husband Charles Seeger called "proletarian music." Believing music to be a cultural medium through which a dehumanized society could become more compassionate, Seeger argued that music composed specially for the proletariat would make such humanizing possible. Ellie M. Hisama argues that with "Sacco, Vanzetti," Crawford aspired to reconcile the modernist musical idiom in which she was so rigorously trained with her growing leftist political consciousness of the early 1930s. She interprets the significance of the relationships among structure, text, and historical context of "Sacco, Vanzetti," and explores Seeger's notion that music may express revolutionary content through experimental modernist compositional techniques in relation to Crawford's song.

An understudied period in Crawford's compositional career is the mid- to late 1930s, after which she stopped composing in the ultramodernist idiom but during which her music received several important public performances. Melissa J. de Graaf explores Crawford's experience in 1938 in the New York Composers' Forum, a series of contemporary music concerts sponsored by the Federal Music Project and Works Progress Administration, as a

modernist whose music was presented to a sometimes hostile audience. De Graaf sets the programming of Crawford at the Forum within the context of women represented at the Forum's concerts, and considers Crawford's responses to questions from audience members as a way of understanding her musical goals.

Nancy Yunhwa Rao examines the imprint of Crawford's modernist works on a diverse group of composers active in the 1930s to the present. She considers Crawford's influences on her contemporaries such as Charles Seeger, Henry Cowell, and Johanna Beyer in relation to her music, and explores how Crawford's devotion to the aesthetics of heterophony through her treatment of three musical dimensions—rhythm, dynamic, and pitch structure—enabled her to re-hierarchize various dimensions of musical sounds. Her study explores aesthetic issues in the second and third movements of Crawford's *String Quartet 1931*. Her examination of Crawford's impact on a wide-ranging group of composers, including Elliott Carter, John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, and Larry Polansky, weaves a rich tapestry of modernist voices that are indebted to Crawford's musical imagination and legacy. Rao argues that the inspiration from Crawford is both musical and social, arising not only from her music but also from the uncompromisingness and integrity conveyed in both her music and her work on music.

* * *

The second half of the book examines Ruth Crawford Seeger's folk music legacy from a variety of new perspectives. Crawford Seeger's initial collaboration with Alan Lomax in the production of *Our Singing Country* is recounted by Bess Lomax Hawes, the younger sister of Alan Lomax, who assisted her brother and Crawford Seeger on the project during the summer of 1938. Lomax Hawes provides an insightful personal account of Crawford Seeger's immersion in the Lomax field recordings of southern folk music, and her attempt to balance concerns over accurate tune transcriptions with Lomax's fascination for folk song style and the culture context that shaped that style.

When *Our Singing Country* was first published by Macmillan in 1941, the eighty-page appendix that Crawford Seeger had written on transcription and folk song style was not included because Lomax and the publisher felt it was too scholarly for the collection's intended popular audience.⁷ Recently published by the University of Rochester Press, the Appendix presents Crawford Seeger's most thorough commentary on folk music structure and style as well as her efforts to develop a precise methodology for folk music transcription.⁸ Taylor A. Greer compares Crawford Seeger's Appendix with Charles Seeger's *Tradition and Experiment in the New Music*, a compendium

of criticism, philosophy, and compositional theory that Seeger began in 1929, which was published posthumously in 1994.⁹ Greer argues that in both works, the authors employ a philosophical model of oppositional meditation—Seeger attempting to reconcile his penchant for theoretical speculation with his abiding faith in artistic intuition, and Crawford Seeger seeking to describe with scientific rigor the performance practice of a neglected oral tradition while, at the same time, trying to make that tradition accessible to the general public.

Crawford Seeger's years as a music teacher resulted in three volumes of children's songs published between 1948 and 1953, the year of her death: *American Folk Songs for Children*, *Animal Folk Songs for Children*, and *American Folk Songs for Christmas*.¹⁰ Roberta Lamb examines the impact of these collections on the field and traces Crawford Seeger's efforts to integrate American folk music into the elementary school curriculum against the backdrop of the progressive education movement. Reviewing Crawford Seeger's pedagogical philosophy and teaching practices as outlined in the introductions to the three song collections, Lamb draws parallels between Crawford Seeger's approaches to music education and her principles of composition as described in her compositional credo of 1948.

Crawford Seeger's *American Folk Songs for Children* of 1948 was published only four years after Benjamin Botkin's landmark collection from 1944, *A Treasury of American Folklore*, had become a national best seller.¹¹ Both works were, as Jerrold Hirsch points out, the result of a "cultural strategy," a liberal/left vision of the role America's diverse folk traditions could play in the public culture of the nation and a search for practical ways to put America in touch with its folk heritage. Hirsch examines the intersection of the lives of Botkin and Seeger families between 1938, when Seeger and Botkin met in Washington, and 1953, when Crawford Seeger died. Through various government-sponsored folklore projects and publishing endeavors, including Botkin's folklore treasuries to which Seeger and Crawford Seeger contributed song annotations, the three supported each other in their campaign to disseminate folklore to the American public.

In the final years of her life, Crawford Seeger knew that her two oldest children, Mike and Peggy, were interested in traditional music and the burgeoning folk music revival that their stepbrother Pete was helping to foment in New York City. But she probably could not imagine the impact that Mike and Peggy would have on the revival in the years following her death. Ray Allen's chapter presents a critical biographical essay on Mike Seeger, a pioneer in the revival and preservation of traditional southern folk music. Allen traces Mike's career as a performer with the influential folk trio, the New Lost City Ramblers, as well as his solo work as a performer, folk music collector, and promoter of traditional musicians. The common threads of thought and practice that bind Mike to Ruth and Charles are explored

through their shared commitment to “authenticity” in folk music style, their belief in the dynamism of the folk song process, and their unflagging mission to bring folk music to broader urban audiences.

Crawford Seeger’s eldest daughter, Peggy Seeger, grew up singing American folk songs, but in the mid-1950s she moved to England where, in collaboration with songwriter and actor Ewan MacColl, she became a mainstay in the British folk music revival. Lydia Hamessley presents Peggy’s life as a series of ongoing boundary crossings through which she straddled the worlds of folk and classical music, negotiated aesthetic and political concerns, and forged a career performing traditional music and writing contemporary songs. Hamessley focuses on a number of Peggy’s best-known songs as a window into her beliefs about folk song composition, the folk process, and the political dimensions of folk song writing and performance.

Hamessley’s emphasis on the boundary crossings that informed the musical lives of Peggy Seeger and her mother reminds us of the shortcomings of Western musicology’s attempts to demarcate music making into discrete categories such as “classical,” “popular,” and “folk.” Contemplating the contributions of Ruth Crawford Seeger and her family to twentieth-century American music calls into question the validity of those very categories. Her legacy challenges us to find new ways to conceptualize musical experience in an increasingly interconnected world in which new forms of communication have worked exponentially to erode the boundaries of class, race, gender, and geographic region that once divided America and the world into more discrete music cultures. The collaboration of musicologists, music theorists, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and cultural studies specialists will be necessary if we are to forge fresh paradigms for understanding the complexities of American music making, ones that Ruth Crawford Seeger faced decades ago.

* * *

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Elebash Endowment, the Office of the Provost at Brooklyn College, and the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities at Brooklyn College.

Notes

1. Ruth Crawford Seeger is known both as Ruth Crawford, the name under which she composed her modernist chamber works, and as Ruth Crawford Seeger, the name she assumed when she married Charles Seeger in 1932. We shall normally use "Ruth Crawford" when referring to her life and music up through 1932, and "Ruth Crawford Seeger" when referring to her after her marriage and to her entire musical career. Some of the chapters refer to members of the Seeger family by their first names.
2. Biographical information presented here is drawn from Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
3. Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144.
4. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 241.
5. Ruth Crawford Seeger, "The Music of American Folk Song" and *Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music*, ed. Larry Polansky with Judith Tick (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2001).
6. *Ibid.*, 261.
7. John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, eds., *Our Singing Country: Folk Songs and Ballads* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).
8. Crawford Seeger, *The Music of American Folk Song*.
9. Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929-79*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
10. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948); *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1950); and *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953).
11. B. A. Botkin, ed. *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads and Traditions of the People* (New York: Crown, 1944).

Chapter One

Writing the Music of Ruth Crawford into Mainstream Music History

Judith Tick

My mother was exotic, she was like a gypsy queen;
I'd pretend she wasn't mine when I was fifteen;
Her voice was loud, she wore men's shoes, she braided up her hair;
Men would stop and stare.
Her clothes were few and seldom new, she was always out of style;
She was always nagging me, she would treat me like a child;
Sometimes I wished I had a mother like the rest—
Sometimes she was so lovely that it took away my breath.
—Peggy Seeger, "Different Tunes" (1988)

We begin with the first stanza of a ballad composed by a daughter, Peggy Seeger (b. 1935) about her mother, Ruth Crawford.¹ Memory and reconciliation fill its poignant lyrics; a lingering modal tune makes them Anglo-American-timeless. Little did the daughter know the extent of her mother's "different tunes," for Peggy Seeger, who has a long and distinguished career as a folk revival singer and songwriter, came to her understanding of Crawford's importance as a composer later rather than sooner, as an adult rather than a child.

That process of understanding has its parallels in the larger world of music history. To take one case in point: in 1964 no mention was made of Crawford in Wilfrid Mellers's *Music in a New Found Land*. Twenty-three years later, Mellers remedied his initial omission in the preface to the second edition (1987) of this highly regarded book, with a tribute to Crawford as "a composer of genius who, though a woman, might have stood craggily with the grand American eccentrics who were really central—Ives, Ruggles, and Varèse."²

How did this transformation from nobody to genius happen to "though a woman"? Looking back at the past seventy-five years or so, how has

Crawford's historical reputation been constructed, her legacy assessed? What can be learned by exploring patterns of recognition, advocacy, and preservation? In answering these questions, my overview, which is suggestive rather than comprehensive, traverses several categories of music literature, including analytical literature, national surveys, recordings, and reviews. While it focuses on one composer, it sheds light on parts of a larger story. It documents ways in which performers, as much as composers, become advocates, and it includes interview commentary from some key players. It shows how scholars and publishers both shape and respond to new ideas and intellectual movements. The fragile enterprise, through which a neglected composer is inscribed into the retrieved and reframed past of the present, has a drama of its own.

Trends in the Reception Literature in Crawford's Lifetime

Crawford's significant productivity as a composer spanned about fifteen years from ca. 1924 to 1939, although her career as a musician lasted her lifetime. Her output of original compositions (excluding student works) was small—about ten songs, eleven piano pieces (including nine preludes), eight chamber works, one piece for chamber orchestra, and one short orchestral work. In her active years she received a fair number of reviews, most of them in the 1920s, a period when modernism in its various manifestations held sway. Then her reputation was linked to the group of American composers known as the “ultramoderns,” the most prominent among them being Edgard Varèse and Henry Cowell. By the early 1930s this group was increasingly overshadowed by the ascendancy of neoclassical modernism. Nevertheless, the high point of Crawford's career came in 1933, when her *String Quartet 1931* was premiered in New York on November 13, and its slow movement was recorded the following month.³ Also, in 1933, Crawford's husband, Charles Seeger, published a brilliant analysis of his wife's music, praising the “joyous play of intellect in it” and its “uncompromising successful radicalism.” His forthright coda, however, acknowledged its limited audience:

There must be music for the many and music for the few—quite a number of distinct musics for various fews. Music such as Miss Crawford's could very well find a permanent place in a small repertoire of an intellectual sort for a particular group of people who were interested in that sort of thing. Eric Satie was not widely known, but he had a profound influence upon the history of music.⁴

In the 1930s, as she retreated from composing, Crawford virtually disappeared from the scene. The only reference work to include her was Marion

Bauer's influential survey *Twentieth Century Music*, which contained the most extended discussion of Crawford for the next twenty or so years:

Ruth Crawford, the first woman to have received the Guggenheim Fellowship, has done some interesting experimental work in dissonant counterpoint and dissonant rhythm combinations. Before coming to New York, her work in piano pieces, songs, and a violin sonata showed an unusual talent. Her *Three Songs* on poems by Carl Sandburg for voice and chamber orchestra, and her *String Quartet 1931*, reveal evolving and original gifts of exceptional caliber. Although distinctly in a cerebral stage, her warm emotional nature threatens to break through, and when it does, we may expect splendid things from this highly individual thinker and student.⁵

Little did Marion Bauer know that Crawford had virtually finished her composing career, eventually to write only two other works in 1939 and 1952.

Thus, already in the early 1930s a certain attitude about Crawford's music had crystallized, namely that it was "cerebral" and elitist, the former a charge the composer would have repudiated, the latter, one she accepted. As she wrote in 1931, "Music must flow. It must be a thread unwinding, a thread from no one knows just where. It must not be a problem in mathematics, writing music."⁶ Since she acknowledged the "experimental" nature of her music, she admitted the limitations of her audience appeal, but at the same time asserted the right of an artist to follow her inner direction, wherever that took her.⁷

In the 1940s Crawford's music fell into even greater obscurity in the literature. It was a time of avant-garde retrenchment and populist ascendancy. When Aaron Copland published *Our New Music* in 1941, he omitted Crawford (whose music he definitely knew) in his list of nineteen composers who comprised the "entirely new generation of [American] composers" fostered in the 1920s.⁸ John Tasker Howard, the most prominent historian of American music before 1950, ignored her as well in his general survey of modern music in 1942. In his specialized book on contemporary American composers published in 1943, he opened his discussion of her work with the statement, "The music of Ruth Crawford, which is constructed in elaborate and intricate patterns, is not intended for a mass audience."⁹ However, Howard's treatment of Crawford reflected greater respect because he placed her in his mainstream narrative, not the separate category of "women composers."

Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* kept her name alive. The importance of its publication in 1941 through Henry Cowell's New Music Society should not be underestimated, with Cowell once again as Crawford's professional aide-de-camp. When in 1941 Cowell resumed the editorship of *New Music Quarterly*, it was the first score he published, thus stabilizing the future of this work.¹⁰ To the small extent that Crawford's music received more generous recognition in the 1930s and 1940s, the *String Quartet 1931* was responsible for it. Some critics noted its spiritual and emotional power, thus softening

the charge of hyperintellectualism. More important, in 1949 the quartet won Crawford an ally in the composer Virgil Thomson, a prominent American music critic. Reviewing a performance at Columbia University, he praised the work as “thoroughly absorbing. It is in every way a distinguished, a noble piece of work. It is also a daring one and completely successful.”¹¹ His assessment foreshadowed the magnitude of that piece to Crawford’s historical survival.

At the time of her death in 1953, most of Crawford’s music lay unpublished. Only those works associated with Cowell’s *New Music Quarterly* were in print: the *String Quartet 1931*, *Three Songs* for voice, piano, oboe and percussion, four *Preludes for Piano*, and one *Diaphonic Suite for Solo Oboe or Flute*. Nothing beyond the faulty recording of the slow movement of the *String Quartet 1931* was recorded. Her career as a folk music specialist overshadowed her original compositions. The brief obituary in the *New York Times* under the listing “Mrs. Charles Seeger” read: “Mrs. Ruth Crawford Seeger, composer who wrote several books of children’s folk songs, died yesterday at home. Her husband, Charles Seeger, is a retired chief of the music division of the Pan American Union.”¹²

The Role of the *String Quartet 1931*

A few interrelated factors contributed to Crawford’s slow climb from obscurity. As the composer Ross Lee Finney wrote, “The 1950s were years of change. The impact of science on the artist increased the acceptance of the experimental over the drudgery of mastering traditional craft. Neglected figures in the American past who had championed the experimental in art became the new heroes.”¹³ Already in Gilbert Chase’s landmark history, *America’s Music* (1955), one sees this process at work, and Ruth Crawford described as an innovator of significance.¹⁴ The composer-theorist George Perle also paid serious and indeed transformative attention. Unlike his influential colleague Milton Babbitt, who had little interest in linking his work to 1920s American experimentalists, Perle acknowledged Crawford’s *String Quartet 1931* as an important predecessor of serial procedures.¹⁵ In a pioneering article about the origins of American atonal practices, he underscored her prophetic approaches:

The *String Quartet 1931* (1931) of Ruth Crawford is an original and inventive work whose numerous “experimental” features in no way detract from its spontaneity, freshness, and general musicality. . . . In some respects serial procedures are suggested.¹⁶

Trying to balance the scales of historical justice, Perle further noted how her music anticipated

a type of procedure that is now the exclusive technical basis of the compositions of a certain European composer who, because of it, has acquired international fame as a remarkable innovator, and whose works, in spite of the enthusiastic critical acclaim they have received, do not seem to this writer to show any marked advance in technical complexity, and certainly none in musical interest, compared with similarly conceived pieces written by Miss Crawford thirty years ago.¹⁷

Perle had never forgotten a performance that he had heard at a concert at Columbia University in New York on March 15, 1949.¹⁸ He later recalled how he “knew nothing about Ruth Crawford Seeger,” first encountering her name only on an edition of music [unnamed] by her pupil, Vivian Fine. “It mentioned that she had studied with Ruth Crawford Seeger. That was the first time I heard of her. Remember in those days if you ran into somebody that heard of Alban Berg, you got excited. People have no idea of the isolation of composers.”¹⁹ Ten years later, in 1959, Perle oversaw a performance of the *String Quartet 1931* at the University of California at Davis, communicating his enthusiasm for this work directly to Crawford’s husband, Charles Seeger. Seeger told him about a forthcoming recording, and Perle responded, “I am delighted to learn that Miss Crawford’s Quartet will be recorded. Apparently there are other people who share my interest in this work!”²⁰ In fact, this recording would prove to be a watershed for the piece and for Crawford more generally.

The circumstances of the recording deserve some comment. In 1953, with the assistance of an advisory committee of American composers, Goddard Lieberson, the head of Columbia Records, inaugurated a series called “Modern American Music,” devoted to contemporary chamber music.²¹ When Crawford’s string quartet was chosen for the series, a number of her old friends and admirers were on the advisory board, among them Virgil Thomson, Lou Harrison, and Henry Cowell.²² Thus in 1960 the *String Quartet 1931* joined the ranks of this important recording series. The Columbia producers enlisted Charles Seeger’s help, and he drafted the LP album jacket notes. Reviews of the first complete recording of Ruth Crawford’s *String Quartet 1931* performed by the Amati String Quartet appeared in a few mainstream publications. *Time* magazine’s critic wrote that she “was one of the U.S.’s few women composers to develop a voice of her own.”²³ In the *New York Times* in 1961, the composer-critic Eric Salzman headed a rave review of the Amati Quartet’s recording with the title, “Distaff Disk. Ruth Seeger’s Work Ahead of Its Era.”²⁴ To what extent the Amati Quartet continued to perform the work is not known at this time.

Five years later, a new dynamic ensemble began to champion the *String Quartet 1931*. At their debut concert in Carnegie Hall in 1965, the Composers Quartet programmed the piece, which predictably received a review praising its modernity.²⁵ The ensemble, formed at the suggestion of

Gunther Schuller, included the cellist Seymour Barab, who had played Crawford's work with the Galimir Quartet at the Columbia concert in 1950.²⁶ Back then Barab had written to the composer for clarification of details in the score and therefore provided a direct link to the composer.²⁷

In 1973 the Composers Quartet made a new recording of the *String Quartet 1931*, which gave Crawford's reputation an unexpectedly dramatic boost. Released on the adventurous Nonesuch label, along with quartets by George Perle and Milton Babbitt, it was added to the LP after the fact. According to Teresa Sterne, the company's director from 1965 through 1980,

The Ruth Crawford quartet certainly wasn't what we started out with as a concept for the record. The recording started off with the Milton Babbitt String Quartet no. 2. (The Composers Quartet were the only ones who could play it at the time.) The Ruth Crawford quartet was an afterthought. They were going to do the Babbitt and it was Josh Rifkin who suggested the Perle. We needed more music, and I just said "Ruth Crawford" to Anahid Ajemian, and she said, "What a marvelous idea. It's a great idea. We've played it." We used that just as a filler, and it turned out that it became the spark that brought attention to the other works.²⁸

Close to the release of the recording, the Composers Quartet played the work at a concert of modern American music in Carnegie Recital Hall. They could not have foreseen how it would upstage everything else on the program in the review by the influential critic Andrew Porter in the *New Yorker*. There he widened the frame of reference for the piece by linking it to the most contemporary trends:

Influences are harder to discern than pointers to the future. Some of Elliott Carter's rhythmic procedures are foreshadowed in the first movement, and while the softly shifting cluster-chords of the slow movement may owe something to Berg's *Lyric Suite*, closer parallels can be found in Ligeti and Lutoslawski compositions of recent years.²⁹

After the release of the recording, other reviews followed suit. John Rockwell wrote in *High Fidelity*:

The quartet lasts about ten minutes and is in all ways a masterpiece. To our ears what might seem most immediately striking is the uncanny anticipation of later developments, particularly in Carter's independent part-writing and metrical explorations. But strictly on its own terms the quartet makes extraordinary expressive sense.³⁰

This thread of influence between Crawford and Carter had been spun; it has proved to be increasingly important as Carter's own reputation has grown in subsequent decades.³¹ A small thing, it might seem; yet not, as we shall see. Had Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* not been reissued in the early 1970s, the continuity between her work and later modernist trends might not have been noted.³²

The Composers Quartet took Ruth Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* around the world. As its first violinist, Matthew Raimondi recalls, "We did many many performances of the piece. We had pretty far flung tours [in the 1970s], we played it everywhere. We played it in China and in some countries in Africa. They would request American works, and we wanted to play interesting examples of what the creative minds were doing in this country."³³

The 1970s as a Watershed Decade

The new recording of Crawford's String Quartet came just at the right cultural moment. Two dynamic intellectual trends of the 1970s—the flowering of American music scholarship and the emergence of a new discipline of women's history—were challenging the complacency of conventional music history. The Nonesuch label rode to success on a wave of cultural nationalism, that is to say, the burgeoning activity associated with the Bicentennial during the 1970s. And so, to a lesser extent to be sure, did Ruth Crawford. Matilda Gaume chose Crawford as the subject for her doctoral dissertation—the first full-length study of Crawford's work—because her "life and works constitute an excellent focal point for a detailed study in American music, inasmuch as she was typically and thoroughly American in background and training."³⁴ Furthermore, renewed attention paid to Charles Ives in this decade spilled over onto subsequent generations of "experimental" composers, including Crawford. H. Wiley Hitchcock, for example, included Crawford in his sympathetic discussion of the 1920s avant-garde in his introductory survey text of American music.³⁵ Under his guidance, music historian Rita Mead began her research on Henry Cowell. Because Cowell advocated for and published Crawford's music during her lifetime, Mead provided more details about Crawford's career.³⁶ The first retrospective concert entirely devoted to Crawford's work was mounted by Joel Sachs and Cheryl Seltzer, with the Performers' Committee for Twentieth-Century Music, in 1975. It elicited this reviewer's comment: "Here is a composer we will be hearing much of during the bicentenary celebrations, but who should survive in the repertory long after that."³⁷

Crawford was also a "woman composer," for better and worse. Those of us who write about women's history in Western classical music use and at the same time are sometimes discomfited by that term, which inscribes marginality into their music and our scholarship. It invites resistance. Just as Western classical music rests on the social structures of patriarchy, so does the premise of the "woman composer" as a category unto itself. The category has served a dual purpose: denigrating women as well as valuing them and highlighting their accomplishments. The benefit of focusing on gender as the primary historical variable is to produce a history where little existed

before. The danger is that women's achievements will be compared primarily to those of other women and unduly segregated from mainstream narratives.

Crawford's reception history is charged with these issues. On the one hand, Teresa Sterne resisted what she called the "ghetto-izing of all women." On the other hand, when she brought out the *String Quartet 1931* on the Nonesuch label, it was

the beginning of my immersion [in Crawford's music]. She and her story and her music became a fixed star in my mind. If she hadn't been a woman, that genius and that spark would have been not only encouraged, but would have been welcomed and would have been promoted.³⁸

Crawford's stature and symbolic resonance as an exemplary, indeed exceptional modernist "woman composer" intensified from the 1970s onward. In 1975 a performance of the orchestral arrangement of the Andante movement from the quartet occurred at a highly publicized concert by the New York Philharmonic. The concert was sponsored by a feminist publishing collective for *Ms.* magazine, and the orchestra was conducted by Sarah Caldwell. New recordings of Crawford's music from independent production companies appeared along with articles in new magazines related to cultural feminism. Barbara Jepson's fine article in the short-lived *Feminist Art Journal* deserves special mention.³⁹ Even scholars who did not identify themselves as consciously feminist could not resist the questions engendered by Crawford's career patterns and her seeming abandonment of composition. To Mead we owe the first recounting of Charles Ives's resistance to Cowell's proposal that he underwrite the recording of the slow movement from Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* because it had been written by a woman.⁴⁰ In her invaluable interviews from the late 1960s, Matilda Gaume asked Crawford's family and friends about Crawford's life as a woman as well as an artist.⁴¹ Little of this material appeared in her conventional dissertation; more surfaced in Gaume's biography and in subsequent articles.⁴²

Thus Crawford's legacy benefited from the ferment of the 1970s and the initial success of the two intellectual revolutions of women's history and American music scholarship in challenging the dominant narratives of Western music history. Textbook publishers responded to the notion of a stagnant canon if not because of political priorities or theoretical issues, then because of their practical awareness of a restless market. In 1977 Joseph Machlis added a substantial discussion of Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* to the seventh edition of his widely used textbook, *Introduction to Music*, in the section on modern music and the "American scene." This reflected the intervention of W. W. Norton's chief music editor at the time, Claire

Brook. In a recent interview Brook explained the change primarily as a market decision. "It is the job of every editor to get maximum adoption" of textbooks, she stated recently. "I said to Joe, we have to get some women in there," and "Machlis was always very, very amenable to market suggestions."⁴³ She suggested it, and it was done. But why Ruth Crawford? Brook continued:

She was an absolute obvious choice because the music that she wrote—it had a kind of respectability. It was acceptable but exceptional, which are the two things that teachers were always looking for. . . . I know I suggested it to Joe and I know he accepted the suggestion.

Like Sterne, Brook had no ideological commitment to women's history per se, and did not believe in publishing separate books devoted to "women composers." Yet she had some life experience that "raised her consciousness," to use a phrase from that era. In her youth, Brook had been a composer, with a stint as one of Nadia Boulanger's students. She recalls:

I had the full measure of the indifference to women composers. Even with Boulanger, she had her favorites among her women students, but she basically believed women should stay home and have babies. Only if your talent was overwhelming, did you make accommodations for it.

And so accommodations were made for Crawford.

By the end of the decade Crawford had become a symbolic figure. When the indefatigable feminist activist musician Jeannie Pool organized a one-day Conference/Workshop on Twentieth Century String Quartets by Women Composers, she dedicated it to Crawford's memory, and her picture appeared on conference material. Pool would soon organize the First National Congress on Women and Music the following year, in 1981. At the time Crawford served as a focal point. Pool remembers:

I decided the best thing to do was anchor the whole conference around Ruth Crawford Seeger. She was a major composer, and her *String Quartet 1931* was a pivotal work done by a woman. If we anchored the conference there, then I would have the ability to present the new works, the new string quartets on her shoulders.⁴⁴

Crawford's achievements inspired other female composers as well. Here was "a credit to the sex" in a stylistic period when modernist values still reigned supreme, someone who was not tarred with the feathers of sentimentality. (Many of us may well remember the casual scorn attached to Amy Beach at that time, then known primarily as "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach.") Crawford's modernist credentials assuaged their "anxiety of authorship" over the absence of female composers from conventional music history.⁴⁵

Crawford's pupil, the composer Vivian Fine, stated in several interviews that "it was of incalculable importance that I had Ruth Crawford as a teacher and as a model in my life."⁴⁶ Fine carried this message to others, among them the noted composer Pauline Oliveros. In her "Sound Journal," Oliveros wrote about the impact of Fine's testimony on her own sense of musical identity:

February 9 [1973]: "Vivian Fine appeared and was truly fine. She teaches at Bennington College, Vermont. Besides composing, she is a terrific pianist. Her own music rings with authenticity. . . . She was a pupil of Ruth Crawford Seeger (a remarkable composer who died too young), thus unlike most of us females, had a model and never considered herself unnatural, consciously or unconsciously, for writing music. . . . She related her experience of the '30's and reminded us that there were not many composers around in those days. Then, they all knew each other. She mentioned "Boulangerie" and how Ruth Crawford was a member of the early Avant Garde. Significant that there was at least one woman in that early group and that Nadia Boulanger, a woman, influenced so many of the American composers."⁴⁷

In 1982 Vivian Fine contributed more directly to the Crawford revival. She found (not in the proverbial attic, but in the basement of her home) the only surviving copy of Crawford's Sonata for Violin and Piano. She and violinist Ida Kavafian performed the work for the first time since 1927 at a Library of Congress concert. The first publication of the score and a recording followed soon after. My own research on Crawford gained an expanded focus at this time partly because of this concert. The question of how she became a composer began to displace the question of why she stopped. The annotations of "mystic" that appeared in the manuscript score of the Violin Sonata intrigued me. My discovery that Crawford herself had burned the score to the Violin Sonata in 1933 stunned me. The curiosity, indeed the need, to explain this act galvanized my energy to write Crawford's biography.

Within the next ten years, most of Crawford's remaining scores were published for the first time and the literature about them grew. Performer-advocates proved crucial as links in the chain. After the first publication of *Five Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg* in 1991,⁴⁸ two very important singers recorded selections, with Jan De Gaetani's CD followed by Dawn Upshaw, who named her CD *White Moon* after Crawford's song. *Music for Small Orchestra*, in particular, helped broaden the audience for Crawford's music beyond the *String Quartet 1931*. Known only through a recording made in 1977 by Henry Cowell's pupil, the conductor Richard Pittman, and his group, Boston Musica Viva, the score was published for the first time in 1993 as Volume 1 in the prestigious series *Music in the United States of America*, a "'coming-of-age' [project] of American studies within the field of musicology."⁴⁹ Four years after that publication, *Music for Small Orchestra* was recorded as the lead work in a high-profile CD devoted exclusively to Crawford's music, conducted by the British musician Oliver Knussen. Also

on that recording were works conducted by the Dutch musician Reinbert de Leeuw, an enthusiastic supporter of Crawford's music.

The Expanding Analytical Literature and Its Issues

As Crawford's visibility in repertory and music literature expanded, a small but important analytic literature about the experimental tradition in general and her work in particular emerged as well. New approaches beyond set theory evolved from the work of the theorist/composers Pozzi Escot and Robert Cogan, who drew attention to the proportional symmetries in Crawford's music.

Crawford's music found an international audience in England, Amsterdam, and Germany. The contributions of David Nicholls, the English theorist/composer and specialist in American music, began in the early 1980s. In his dissertation, he surveyed Crawford's earlier music in particular;⁵⁰ soon afterwards, he published an article about her early composition, especially noting the stylistic watershed represented by Crawford's *Music for Small Orchestra*.⁵¹ Among German-speaking scholars, Felix Meyer's work deserves special mention.⁵²

One somewhat tendentious issue in the 1980s concerned Charles Seeger's contributions to Crawford's development. With respect to modernist theory, Seeger had been known primarily for his classic article on "dissonant counterpoint."⁵³ While it had been understood that he had been Crawford's teacher, no connections had been drawn between this article and her musical development. This changed in the mid-1980s. In 1986, Mark Nelson used Seeger's article as his starting point, as did David Nicholls, who highlighted Seeger's centrality in the first full-scale study of the American experimental tradition.⁵⁴ Several years later scholars rediscovered Seeger's unpublished theoretical treatise, *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*, an extensive document containing two sections, "Treatise on Musical Composition" and "Manual of Dissonant Counterpoint." This was published in a scrupulously edited version by Charles Seeger's biographer, Ann M. Pescatello, in 1994.⁵⁵

The following year, Joseph Straus published his landmark study, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*. Responding in part to the new literature in his field, he confronted the potential pitfalls from focusing on Seeger's involvement with Crawford's composition.

The danger of this approach is in incorrectly suggesting that Seeger was Pygmalion to Crawford's Galatea, that the ideas were his and their embodiment in notes was hers, that she simply did what he told her to do. Nothing could be further from the truth. By the time she met Seeger, Crawford was already a mature composer, reasonably well-known

in ultra-modern circles, with her works receiving regular performances. Her studies with Seeger shaped her music in far-reaching ways, but that should not be seen to detract from her compositional autonomy and originality, any more than Copland's studies with Boulanger, or Beethoven's with Albrechtsberger. Seeger provided her with a framework for her own musical pursuits, a scaffolding within which she constructed her most distinctive, personal, and original works.⁵⁶

In fact, Crawford considered her work on Seeger's treatise so important that a co-authorship did not seem implausible to her.⁵⁷ Seeger's own dedicatory reference to Crawford's collaboration corroborates this detail.

In many respects Charles Seeger reversed the classic relationship between male and female musician, for if anything, he was Crawford's muse as well as teacher. Nevertheless, the extent of Seeger's influence upon Crawford remains an unstable issue, and the temptation to overstate the case is great. An essay by Taylor Greer, for example, tends to divide theory (Seeger) from realizing ideas in practice (Crawford) more starkly than Nancy Rao, who describes Crawford's "crucial role in the creation of Seeger's treatise, quite opposite to the common portrayal of her merely as the typist, sounding board, or muse, of the treatise."⁵⁸

This issue reflects on Crawford's agency and autonomy. As an aside, we should note similar tensions in descriptions of Crawford's participation in the American folk music revival. While there is no doubt that Seeger's enthusiasm and career path affected Crawford's sense of priorities from the 1930s onward, often the case has been overstated in favor of Seeger's influence on her, rather than the other way around as well. The recent publication of Crawford's unknown treatise, *The Music of American Folk Song*, challenges this. Here Crawford analyzes transcription as craft and theory with clarity and sophistication in language that Seeger later employed in his own folk music scholarship.⁵⁹

The question of influence and precedence with respect to Crawford's place in American modernism has also surfaced in the analytic literature of the past twenty-five years or so. Some theorists are exploring the influence of Crawford and her generation on later experimental figures such as Elliott Carter and John Cage. In a widely acclaimed study of Carter's music, David Schiff cited Crawford as one of a number of composers whose music "reflected and refracted his [Carter's] thinking" ca. 1948–50.⁶⁰ Anne Shreffler makes more explicit connections by linking the ultramodern idiom in general and Crawford in particular to the development of Elliott Carter's style. She makes the case that

the fruitful milieu of Varèse, Crawford, and Cowell was just as essential to Carter's elaborate structures as it was to Cage's anarchies. . . . Cowell's rhythmic experiments, Seeger's notion of counterpoint as "sounding apart" and Crawford's "form as process" anticipate some of Carter's own musical practices. Many specific features of the

Crawford String Quartet (1931) in particular—the differentiation of voices, the exploration of clusters as timbre, and the generation of rhythmic processes—resemble many of the most distinctive features of Carter's music.⁶¹

Straus elaborates on the connection between Crawford and Carter:

At the same time, it is in the heterophony of her music that she, like her fellow ultra-moderns, offers her most profound challenge to the Western tradition. . . . This is also the aspect of Crawford's music that proved most decisively influential for later generations of American composers. In its moderate form, the heterophony of ultra-modern music led directly to the music of Elliott Carter, particularly the string quartets, so often characterized by vigorous independence of the parts, both melodically and rhythmically. In its more extreme form, the heterogeneity of much ultra-modern music points ahead to the music of Cage and other composers who celebrate the independence of musical events from any subsuming context.⁶²

Following this line of reasoning, Teresa Davidian explored affinities and influences between Crawford and Cage. Even if she overstates the case, Davidian has a point when she writes, "For all the attention and tribute paid to Crawford over the years, scholars have stopped short of investigating her influence on other composers."⁶³

Such questions of influence are sensitive areas of historical vulnerability for marginalized groups such as female composers as their creative contributions are assessed. As Marcia Citron has written:

Often unarticulated, the concept of influence structures a great deal of who and what are emphasized. Influence generally takes the form of stylistic influence: similarities traced from a forerunner or a contemporary. It usually involves someone considered groundbreaking, whose innovative traits generate ripples throughout the musical community. We tend to concentrate on such an "influential" figure and his style, especially if canonic value has been placed in this kind of music.⁶⁴

Crawford's placement within the analytic and historical literature about serial practice is a case in point. In general, an evolving consensus links earlier and more recent assessments about Crawford's music to serial practices. The noted music historian Carol J. Oja describes the quartet as "prefiguring subsequent total serialism in the USA,"⁶⁵ and the theorist David Cope writes: "Ruth Crawford's innovative *String Quartet 1931* employs procedures of total organization. The third movement of this work includes an obvious systematic procedure of control in which the compositional elements (pitch, duration, dynamics, and rhythm) are related and serialized."⁶⁶

This aspect of Crawford's idiom has been most convincingly investigated by Joseph Straus. Exploring the concept of serial rhythm and its relationship to pitch, he writes:

This isomorphism of durational and pitch-class space, and of metrical position and pitch class, is generally attributed to Milton Babbitt and his system of “time points.” In that system Babbitt analogizes the position of attacks within the measure to the position of notes within the twelve-pitch-class octave. . . . It now appears that Crawford was an important predecessor in this endeavor. . . . In taking steps to ensure that the rhythmic/metric organization and the pitch-class organization of her music were shaped by similar musical concerns, Crawford may be seen as a pioneer in the serialization of musical rhythm.⁶⁷

In an unpublished paper given in 1992, Straus explicitly linked Crawford’s work to a renewed appreciation of the ultramodern circle in general with respect to integral serialism:

When critics discuss the music of Babbitt and other American integral serialists, they generally do so in relationship to Schoenberg, Webern, and other European serialists. It now appears, however, that the impulse toward precompositional planning in which all musical parameters are integrated also had indigenous roots, in the music and writing of Cowell, Seeger, Crawford, and others.⁶⁸

Further elaborating upon this point, Straus explained the historical import of Crawford’s “astonishingly radical” rhythmic and melodic organization:

Crawford has obviously understood the potential isomorphism of pitch and rhythm and, in that profound sense, has “serialized the rhythm” of the piece. I don’t want to exaggerate Crawford’s achievement—the rhythms are not serialized in any consistent or systematic way. Nonetheless, these things happen often enough in her music to suggest clearly that she is aware of a profound analogy of rhythm and pitch, and of the possibility of projecting the same musical motives in both dimensions. The next time a history of rhythmic practice, or of serialism is written, I think Crawford will have to occupy a prominent place—she currently appears hardly at all.⁶⁹

Yet Straus’s work, and indeed this widening of the historical frame for Crawford’s music, has yet to be integrated into most historical narratives of twentieth-century music in a cogent manner. The coverage of Crawford in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, illustrates the problem. One author, William Brooks, describes the “theoretical transparency” of her compositional methods as potentially applicable by “any high-school student” and “deployed in support of a relatively conventional, somewhat elitist aesthetic.”⁷⁰ While Nicholls contradicts this polemical dismissal in his chapter on the American experimental tradition, where he praises Crawford’s “brilliant essays at the farthest reaches of dissonant counterpoint,”⁷¹ the term “dissonant counterpoint” still has little historical reach. Furthermore, Crawford is not included in Stephen Peles’s chapter on “serialism and complexity,” where Cage, Harrison, Adolph Weiss, and Wallingford Riegger, Babbitt, and Carter are given their due.⁷² Despite Straus’s work on

Crawford's serial approach to rhythm as a precedent for Babbitt's time-points, despite a long literature linking Crawford to Carter, and despite the "proto-serial" label so often found in relation to the *String Quartet 1931*, Crawford has been omitted from this historical context. Even here, in a work edited by a long-standing champion of American experimental music, Crawford's contribution and her potential for historically important validation through the issues of affinity, precedence, and influence has been muted. Peles commented on this issue recently with the caution of a lawyer in the courtroom of historiography:

I could well imagine material on Carter being placed with equal plausibility in the chapter dealing with the American experimentalist school rather than in the chapter on serialism. The question of Crawford's influence on Carter could perhaps have been more plausibly raised in that context.⁷³

This aspect of Crawford's reception history raises the more general question of the usefulness of the framing divisions themselves. If both Crawford and Carter destabilize conventional stylistic categories, then perhaps the categories need to be rethought and to enable broader perspectives on modernism.

Carter's own words on Crawford and the *String Quartet 1931* are worth mulling over in this context:

I did not know her. I was not so pleased with her piano pieces in *New Music* [Quarterly]. I knew of the string quartet from the time it was published by *New Music* [1941]. I've known it for years. . . . I thought that her string quartet was extraordinary. Each movement had something unusual and interesting at that time. . . . It is all playable and effective within itself. I've always admired it ever since I have known it. . . . All through my career I've tried to get that piece played. The string quartet made a great impression on me, more than actually some of the other modern works I was following at that time.⁷⁴

A Few Final Observations

How secure is Crawford's place in music history as it now stands? It depends on the critical angle of vision one chooses to apply to these questions. In general, the nexus of activity among performers, including the making of CDs, continues to provide the necessary foundation to sustain her legacy. The publication of her scores is almost complete. As of 2005, early piano pieces and even juvenilia have been published; only two works remain in manuscript—the orchestral fantasia, *Rissolty, Rossolty* (1939) and the *Suite No. 1 for Five Winds and Piano* (1929).⁷⁵ The discography in this volume lists several new recordings, including a performance of the *String Quartet 1931*

by the Arditti String Quartet. For their fortieth anniversary concert at the Library of Congress, the Juilliard String Quartet programmed Crawford's quartet in 2003.

Although textbook coverage varies with publisher and author, the general impression given through an admittedly limited survey of recent texts, is that Ruth Crawford Seeger is more likely to appear in relevant texts than not. W. W. Norton's textbooks continue the pattern set in the 1970s. Various iterations of Machlis's *Introduction to Music*, with new editions written by Kristine Forney, use Crawford's work, notwithstanding a brief hiatus here and there.⁷⁶ Most important, Crawford's inclusion in revised editions of Grout's *History of Western Music* began in 1997. (Here again Claire Brook suggested to the editor, Claude Palisca, that not only did the market demand more attention be paid to female composers, but that Crawford was now "in the canon."⁷⁷) The most recent iteration of Grout's classic by J. Peter Burkholder continues the Norton tradition. Other compositions by Crawford are discussed in general surveys of twentieth-century music, occasionally even with works other than the *String Quartet 1931* discussed in some detail.⁷⁸ Even so, some newer textbooks on American music virtually ignore her contribution, more broadly, partly because of their decreased coverage of American classical music in general.⁷⁹

New perspectives have come into play as well. Carol Oja's study of new music in New York in the 1920s includes a chapter on Crawford, this time exploring her late music with an earlier aesthetic of "spiritual dissonance" that links her to Rudhyar and through him to Scriabin.⁸⁰ With respect to questions of influence, the ties between Carter and Crawford are virtually standard in the literature at this point. In a recent book on Elliott Carter by the French composer-theorist Max Noubel, the impact of Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* is given its due.⁸¹ And here one finds an interview between Noubel and Pierre Boulez, in which unbidden, Boulez mentions Crawford Seeger within the context of the 1920s and "une grande activite avant-gardiste. . . . Il existait des compositeurs tres interessants, comme Crawford-Seeger par exemple."⁸² Such acceptance indicates the extent to which her music has entered into the mainstream of historical discourse about American modernism.

The impact of the women's studies movement is undeniable and persistent, even if the initial sense of discovery and mission has been dulled by the paradox of simultaneous success and backlash. Feminist criticism and theory have emerged in the past decade or so at the center of innovative work. The application of feminist critical theory to Crawford's music is one case in point, and here Ellie Hisama has led the way.⁸³ Some interest in the relationship between music, politics, and identity has brought new attention to Crawford in Germany, where the composer Kirsten Reese has produced a "Ruth Crawford Project" in Berlin and has written about the relationship between politics, identity, and modernism.⁸⁴

As the history of American modernism develops its own more substantive literature and begins to be more integrated into reconfigurations of twentieth-century music history, Crawford's music seems poised to sustain the stable recognition now accorded it. The more lively the questions asked about Crawford's work in particular, within a variety of contexts—modernism, American modernism, women's history, and feminist criticism—the more her legacy contributes to the intellectual discourse that make such future reconfigurations possible. At the least, the democratization of the writing of music history, which has occurred most profoundly in the past twenty-five years or so, has made space for the viability of her legacy, as questions about affinity, style, precedence, influence, and social construction are asked in the broadest of contexts. Where further explorations of “dissonant counterpoint” and American modernism may lead remains an open question, as this recollection by the first violinist of the Composers Quartet, Matthew Raimondi, suggests:

What I remember was that the slow movement was the most attractive to the first-time listener, and the last movement made a hit because it was very boppish . . . like Dizzy Gillespie, or like a saxophone taking off, like Charlie Parker. It was like that. And every time I played the thing, I felt I was performing a sax piece. Probably nobody else would agree with me. But that's just my interpretation. . . . You might see these spurts of activity. . . . It had some of the abstract characteristics of bop.⁸⁵

Who knows? Through sampling and turntabling, a postmodern generation might find new applications for the music that Raimondi experienced as a kind of “bop.” In the meantime, the music itself endures, still modern after all these years. The encompassing nature of Ruth Crawford Seeger's musical empiricism continues to challenge the very definitions of the categories through which modern music history has been constructed and reminds us of the power of listening to “different tunes.”

Notes

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This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Teresa Sterne. I also want to thank Kristine Forney for her help.

1. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to Crawford Seeger simply as Crawford in this essay.
2. Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music* (New York: Knopf, [1964] 1987), xiv.

3. My discussion of biographical details is based on Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
4. Charles Seeger, "Ruth Crawford," in *American Composers on American Music*, ed. Henry Cowell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1933), 118.
5. Marion Bauer, *Twentieth Century Music: How It Developed, How to Listen to It* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933), 287.
6. Ruth Crawford, letter to Vivian Fine, cited in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 222.
7. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 253.
8. Aaron Copland, *Our New Music: Leading Composers in Europe and America* (New York: Whittlesley House, 1941), 143. The list included Antheil, Bennett, Berezowsky, Blitzstein, Copland, Cowell, Hanson, Harris, McPhee, Moore, Piston, Porter, Rogers, Sessions, Sowerby, Still, Randall Thompson, Virgil Thomson, and Wagenaar. In addition to programming Crawford's piano music on one of his concerts in the Copland-Sessions series, he also knew the Seegers from his activity in the Marxist music movement in New York in the early 1930s. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 197. She was later excluded from Copland's *The New Music, 1900–1960* (New York: Norton, 1968).
9. John Tasker Howard, *This Modern Music: A Guide for the Bewildered Listener* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1942), and Howard, *Our Contemporary Composers: American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1943), 240.
10. Rita H. Mead, *Henry Cowell's New Music 1925–1936: The Society, the Music Editions and the Recordings* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Editions, 1981), 366–67.
11. Virgil Thomson, review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, March 16, 1949.
12. Obituary, "Mrs. Charles Seeger," *New York Times*, November 20, 1953, 23.
13. Ross Lee Finney, *Profile of a Lifetime: A Musical Autobiography* (New York: C. F. Peters, 1992), 157. Finney's Piano Quintet was recorded on the same LP as Crawford's String Quartet in the Columbia Modern American Music series.
14. Gilbert Chase, *America's Music* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955), 582.
15. Martin Brody, "Music for the Masses: Milton Babbitt's Cold War Music Theory," *Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 161–92.
16. George Perle, "Atonality and the Twelve-Tone System in the United States," *Score* (July 1960), 58–59.
17. Perle, "Atonality," 59. Perle's article influenced the description of Crawford in Gilbert Chase's second edition of *America's Music* (1966) in which he quoted Perle at length.
18. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 312, incorrectly lists the concert George Perle attended as the performance in 1950.
19. Interview with George Perle by the author, February 16, 1987.
20. Letter from George Perle to Charles Seeger, October 20, 1959, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.
21. For this brief description of the series, see www.masterworksheritage.com/history.html (accessed February 14, 2005). For a review of twelve LPs in the series see Vincent Persichetti, "Modern American Music Series, Columbia Masterworks," *Musical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (July 1954): 471–76.
22. As listed on the liner notes for the Columbia LP.
23. Unsigned column, "Music," *Time*, July 11, 1960, 82. In 1960 the members of the Amati String Quartet were Jeanette Violin and Mary LaPorte, violinists; Maxine Johnson, violist; Gloria Strassner, cellist.
24. Eric Salzman, "Distaff Disk. Ruth Seeger's Work Ahead of Its Era," *New York Times*, April 16, 1961.

25. Raymond Ericson, "Music. Quartet's Debut. Champions of Modern Music Unite to Assure Contemporaries of a Hearing," *New York Times*, May 4, 1965, 51. Ericson referred to the slow movement as "famous" and described the whole piece as "bold and almost as up-to-date as the company it kept on this occasion." That "company" included Babbitt's String Quartet no. 2 and premieres of quartets by Henry Weinberg and Stephen Fisher.
26. The members of the Composers Quartet, each already famous for activity in new music, were: Matthew Raimondi, first violin, Anahid Ajemian, second violin, Bernard Zaslav, viola, and Seymour Barab, cello.
27. Letter from Barab to Crawford, February 14, 1950 and a reply from Crawford to Barab, February 28, 1950, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress. Barab queries her about discrepancies between the manuscript and the published score in the last movement. Crawford assures him that the published score is correct. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger* discusses this performance (313–14).
28. Telephone interview with Teresa Sterne by the author, December 12, 1999.
29. Andrew Porter, "Modern Pleasures," *New Yorker*, February 10, 1973.
30. John Rockwell, review of recording by the Composers Quartet, Nonesuch H71280 in *High Fidelity Magazine*, July 1973, unpaginated clipping, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.
31. Rao's chapter in this volume provides further discussion of Crawford's influence on Carter.
32. Two reviews in British magazines deserve mention: Paul Griffiths, reviewing the Nonesuch recording, *Musical Times* 115, no. 1573 (March 1974), calls the quartet a "legendary American pioneer work. . . . It is a piece remarkable for its time, but it is also a remarkable piece, associating European sophistication with American experiment" (222). See also Arnold Whittall, "Recordings," *Tempo* 109 (June 1974): 45.
33. Telephone interview with Matthew Raimondi by the author, March 1, 2005.
34. Matilda Gaume, "Ruth Crawford Seeger: Her Life and Works" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1973), iii.
35. H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States. A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1969), with subsequent editions in 1974 and 1988.
36. Mead, *Henry Cowell's New Music, 1925–1936*.
37. John Rockwell, writing in the *New York Times*, February 21, 1975, as cited in Jane Weiner LePage, *Women Composers, Conductors and Musicians of the Twentieth Century: Selected Biographies* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 49.
38. Telephone interview with Teresa Sterne by the author, December 12, 1999.
39. Barbara Jepson, "Ruth Crawford Seeger. A Study in Mixed Accents," *Feminist Art Journal* (Spring 1977): 13–17.
40. Mead, *Henry Cowell's New Music*, 257.
41. Telephone interview with Matilda Gaume by the author, November 30, 1999.
42. Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger* and Gaume, "Ruth Crawford Seeger," in *Women Making Music*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 370–88.
43. Telephone interview with Claire Brook by the author, March 7, 2005.
44. Telephone interview with Jeannie Pool by the author, November 30, 1999.
45. The "anxiety of authorship" is a phrase coined by the literary critics Sandra Gilbert and Sandra Gubar to refer to the discouraging effects of the absence of female models as artists. For a definition, see *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern*

- Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Joseph Childers and Gart Hentzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 13–14.
46. Heidi Von Gunden, *The Music of Vivian Fine* (Latham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 71.
47. Pauline Oliveros, “Many Strands,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings, 1963–1980* (Baltimore, Md.: Smith 1984), 89–90.
48. Ruth Crawford, *Five Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg*, ed. Judith Tick (New York: C. F. Peters, 1991).
49. Ruth Crawford, *Music For Small Orchestra* (1926) and *Suite No. 2 For Four Strings and Piano* (1929), ed. Judith Tick and Wayne Schneider, Music of the United States of America (MUSA) series, vol. 1 (Madison, Wisc.: A-R Editions, 1993), 2d ed., 1996. Quotation from an August 1996 unpublished grant proposal by the Committee on the Publication of American Music (COPAM) of the American Musicological Society, in Richard Crawford, “MUSA’s Early Years. The Life and Times of a National Editing Project,” *American Music* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 1.
50. David Nicholls, “The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger—A Study in Advanced Compositional Techniques” (Ph.D. diss., St. John’s College, 1981).
51. David Nicholls, “Ruth Crawford Seeger: An Introduction,” *Musical Times* 124 (1983): 421–25.
52. Felix Meyer, “‘Thoughtful Bricklaying’: Zu einigen Werker der amerikanischen Ultramodernisten, Ruth Crawford,” in *Festschrift für Ernst Lichtenhahn*, ed. Christoph Ballmer and Thomas Gastmann (Winterthur: Amadeus, 1993), 167–92.
53. Charles Seeger, “On Dissonant Counterpoint,” *Modern Music* 7 (June–July 1930): 25–31.
54. Mark Nelson, “In Pursuit of Charles Seeger’s Heterophonic Ideal: Three Palindromic Works by Ruth Crawford,” *Musical Quarterly* 72 (1986): 458–75; David Nicholls, *American Experimental Music, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
55. Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929–1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 17–274.
56. Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3–4.
57. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 131–32.
58. Taylor A. Greer, “The Dynamics of Dissonance in Seeger’s Treatise and Crawford’s Quartet,” in *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology*, ed. Bell Yung and Helen Rees (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1999: 13–28. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, “Partnership in Modern Music: Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford, 1929–31,” *American Music* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1997), 374. For further discussion of Crawford and Seeger’s working relationship, see Greer’s chapter in this volume.
59. Ruth Crawford Seeger, “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music*, ed. Larry Polansky (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2001). See also Tick, “Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger, and ‘The Music of American Folk Songs,’” in *Understanding Charles Seeger*, 109–29.
60. David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (London: Da Capo, 1983), 69. Schiff’s more recent revised edition of this book continues to acknowledge her as well.
61. Anne Shreffler, “Elliott Carter and his America,” *Sonus* 14, no. 2 (1994): 39, 49.
62. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 218–19.

63. Teresa Davidian, "From Crawford to Cage: Parallels and Transformations," *Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2000): 664–95.
64. Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 207.
65. Carol J. Oja, "The USA, 1918–45," in *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), 213.
66. David Cope, *New Directions in Music*, 5th ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: W. C. Brown, 1989), 44.
67. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 178.
68. Joseph N. Straus, "Ruth Crawford's Serialism," paper presented at Cornell University, October 26, 1992.
69. Straus, "Ruth Crawford's Serialism."
70. William Brooks, "Music in America: An Overview (part 2)," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 273.
71. David Nicholls, "Avant-garde and Experimental Music," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, 521.
72. Peles, "Serialism and Complexity," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, 505–6.
73. Telephone interview with Stephen Peles by the author, December 9, 1999.
74. Telephone interview with Elliott Carter by the author, February 1, 2005.
75. Crawford's *Rissolty*, *Rossolty* was recorded for the first time on the CD *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Portrait*, Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.
76. I thank Kristine Forney for information about older editions of Joseph Machlis's *The Enjoyment of Music*, which she has revised and edited for many years. Forney writes: "Ruth Crawford first appears in *The Enjoyment of Music*, 4th ed. (1977) and *The Norton Scores*, 3rd ed. (1977)—the numbering of the scores was off from the editions for a while. I believe I was responsible for taking her out in the 6th ed. of the book and the 5th ed. of the scores—I did this because Claude [Palisca] was planning to add her to Grout and we have tried not to have the same repertory for a variety of reasons. I felt the work is so innovative that music students really need to recognize her contribution. I think I turned to Amy Beach. If I am correct, Claude did not include the work until 1990, and he used the 2nd movement [of the Violin Sonata]. Claire Brook is an important factor in the choice of repertory for both these books, and I am sure she urged Claude to include her. I wanted Crawford back in the book and scores [of *The Introduction to Music*] so added 'Rat Riddles' to the Norton Scores and Enjoyment in the 7th ed. (the numbers are now in sync), thinking it was more accessible to music appreciation students" (e-mail communication to the author, March 3, 2005).
77. Forney notes: "You know that Joe Machlis added her to his *Intro[duction] to Contemporary Music* in 1979 (I don't have the earlier ed.). But as I look at the NAWM scores, I think it took Claude [Palisca] some time to get her in, so it was not a direct exchange. I remember discussing this with Claire, thinking that the last movement of the String Quartet in particular is a little dense for nonmusicians" (e-mail communication to the author, March 3, 2005).
78. See Elliott Antokoletz, *Twentieth-Century Music* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1992), 201, for commentary on the *Preludes for Piano*; and Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 42, for a discussion of *Music for Small Orchestra*. Also, Michael Hall lavishes praise on Crawford in *Leaving Home: A Conducted Tour of Twentieth-Century Music with Simon Rattle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), x.

79. See for example, Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: Norton, 2001), 615, which sounds like the *New York Times* obituary from 1953.

80. Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144–54.

81. Max Noubel, *Elliott Carter ou le Temps fertile* (Geneva: Editions Contrechamps, 2000), 13. Noubel's interview with Boulez appears as the chapter "Un Compositeur qui m'oblige à avancer . . ." "Un entretien avec Pierre Boulez." The section of the paragraph by Boulez reads: "Il existe aussi des raisons historiques à cette maturation [of American modernist music in Carter's work.] Lorsque j'ai organisée à New York un minifestival sur Ives, pour le centenaire de sa naissance, j'ai regardé d'un peu plus près la vie musicale aux Etats-Unis pendant les années vingt, et je me suis rendu compte qu'il existait alors une grande activité avant-gardiste. Varèse en était une des figures dominantes. Il existait des compositeurs très intéressants, comme Crawford-Seeger par exemple."

82. Noubel, *Elliott Carter*, 38.

83. Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

84. Kirsten Reese, "'dissonant music': Ruth Crawford-Seeger, Pionierin der amerikanischen Moderne," in *Die Macht der Töne: Musik als Mittel politischer Identitätsstiftung im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Tillmann Bendikowski et al. (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2003); available at www.klassik.com/magazin/ (accessed January 30, 2005).

85. Telephone interview with Matthew Raimondi by the author, March 1, 2005.

Chapter Two

Ruth Crawford's Precompositional Strategies

Joseph N. Straus

Ruth Crawford's "ultramodern" music anticipated and enabled the achievements of subsequent generations of American composers. Rejecting the forms and sonorities of traditional European art music, including its triadic basis, she created a new musical language that favored dissonant intervals, promoted the radical independence of the parts in a polyphonic texture, explored new sound combinations, and sought innovative ways of structuring rhythm and timbre.¹ This chapter addresses one particular feature of her compositional style, namely, her precompositional strategies, or schemes. In many of her works, she decided in advance to build the piece around a specific musical idea and its repetitions. These repetitions may be either exact, or inverted, or retrograded. Because she decided on such a design in advance, they can be regarded as precompositional, and because entire movements are built around a single idea and its repetitions, they can be regarded as schemes.

Table 2.1 is a chart that lists all of Crawford's original musical compositions, from the first of the Preludes for Piano in 1924 to the Suite for Wind Quintet in 1952. The chart shows four different kinds of precompositional schemes and indicates which pieces use them. The first type of scheme is a simple ostinato, that is, a repeated statement of a musical figure. Most of Crawford's early works have at least one movement that uses an ostinato. She stopped using ostinati in 1929 (apart from a brief revival in 1952 in the Suite for Wind Quintet) and turned to other kinds of schemes. The second type of scheme involves retrograde. In pieces of this type, the first half of the piece is heard backward in the second half. She composed three movements of this kind, although small-scale instances of retrograde symmetry occur in many of her pieces. The third type of scheme involves the systematic rotation of a short musical figure—this type of scheme is used in movements from Crawford's best works, including the *Three Sandburg Songs* of 1930–32

Table 2.1. Crawford's compositions

Work	Ostinato	Retrograde	Rotations	Other
Five Preludes for Piano, Nos. 1–5 (1924–25)				
Sonata for Violin and Piano (1925–26)	x			
second movement				
Music for Small Orchestra (1926)				
first movement	x			
second movement	x			
Suite No. 1 for Five Winds and Piano (1927–29)				
second movement	x			
Four Preludes for Piano, Nos. 6–9 (1927–28)				
<i>Five Sandburg Songs</i> (1929)				
Suite No. 2 for Four Strings and Piano (1929)				
second movement	x			
Diaphonic Suite No. 1 for Solo Oboe or Flute (1930)				
third movement			x	
Diaphonic Suite No. 2 (bassoon and cello) (1930)				
Diaphonic Suite No. 3 (two B \flat clarinets) (1930)				
first movement				x
third movement				x
Diaphonic Suite No. 4 Oboe (or viola) and Cello (1930)				
first movement		x		x
third movement				x
<i>Piano Study in Mixed Accents</i> (1930)		x		
Three Chants (1930)				
<i>Three Sandburg Songs</i> (1930–32)				
“Prayers of Steel”			x	
“In Tall Grass”				x
<i>String Quartet 1931</i> (1931)				
first movement				x
fourth movement	x		x	

Table 2.1. (continued)

Work	Ostinato	Retrograde	Rotations	Other
<i>Two Ricercari</i> (1932)				
"Chinaman, Laundryman"			x	
"Sacco, Vanzetti"				x
<i>Rissolty, Rossolty</i> (1939)				
Suite for Wind Quintet (1952)				
first movement	x			
third movement			x	

and the *String Quartet 1931*. The fourth type of scheme includes more ad hoc kinds of arrangements, often involving partial serialization of pitch and/or rhythm. As the chart shows, virtually every piece Crawford wrote includes at least one movement based on one of these precompositional schemes.

Ostinato

Example 2.1 contains two instances of an ostinato. Example 2.1a shows the opening of the Sonata for Violin and Piano. A distinctive musical figure is heard in the first measure. It is rhythmically unbalanced and syncopated—rhythmic qualities Crawford favored. Intervallically, it begins with a leap of eleven semitones, from G to G \flat , then wedges inward toward its midpoint, presenting a type of melodic design she favored. Whatever its internal qualities, however, once the figure is stated in the first measure, it is simply repeated again and again in the measures that follow. It thus conveys a sense of strictly enforced musical limits, of an almost mechanistic repetitiveness. Against this ostinato in the piano, the violin plays a playful, free, florid tune. Many of Crawford's pieces that use a precompositional scheme use it in just this way: one melody is strict and mechanical; another is playful and free.

Example 2.1b shows the beginning of the first movement of the Suite for Wind Quintet, Crawford's last composition. The bassoon states an ostinato that is remarkably similar to that of the Sonata for Violin and Piano, including the initial leap of eleven semitones and the sense of convergence toward a midpoint.² The other instrumental lines are derived from the ostinato in a striking and original way—as shown in the relationship of the oboe melody to the bassoon ostinato, the situation is very different from that of the Sonata for Violin and Piano. In m. 3, the bassoon states its seven-note

Buoyant
(5+4 in Piano)

(5+4)
sempre p

p

5 *fz*

p *mf*

Example 2.1a. Sonata for Violin and Piano, mvt. 2, mm. 1–8. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

ostinato, as it does in every measure. When the bassoon reaches its second note, F#, the oboe joins it on the same note. The oboe sustains that F# until the bassoon reaches its fourth note, Fb, which the oboe states as well. The oboe holds that F until the bassoon reaches its sixth note, D, which the oboe

Allegretto (♩ = 80; ♩ = 120)
10 ♩ (2 ♩ + 2 ♩)

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B \flat

Horn in F

Bassoon

2 4 6

2

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 etc.

2 4 6

1 2 3 5 6

1 2 3 5 7

2

1

2 4 6

[mp] cantando

7

4 6 2

5^p 6 7

2

3 5 7

5

2

con sord.

2 4 6 7

2

pp cantando

pp cantando

poco

Example 2.1b. Suite for Wind Quintet, mvt. 1, mm. 1–9. Reprinted by permission of Tetra/Continuo Music Group.

then joins. Thus the oboe melody in m. 3 consists of the second, fourth, and sixth notes of the ostinato. All of the melodic lines are generated in the same way. When an instrument attacks a note, it does so in unison with the ostinato. Then it sustains that note until its next attack, which will again be in unison with the ostinato. In this way, the melodic parts, which give the impression of melodic freedom, are in fact merely the outgrowth, the offspring of the ostinato itself.

In both of these pieces, then, the ostinato serves to partition the musical texture into two layers. One layer consists of the ostinato itself, and sounds relatively mechanistic and constrained. The other layer consists of contrasting additional melodies, although as shown in the *Suite for Wind Quintet*, the contrast is only apparent, as the seemingly free melodies are strictly derived from the ostinato, as its projections or emanations.

Retrograde

The second kind of precompositional scheme I will examine involves retrograde symmetry—that is, musical material that is heard forward in the first half of the piece and backward in the second. Such movements are musical palindromes—the same from end to beginning as they are from beginning to end. Charles Seeger recommended the writing of musical palindromes to Crawford, and all of her musical palindromes had their origins in composition assignments he gave her. In Seeger's words: "The more rigorously the dissonant fabric is sustained, the better it will be in retrograde motion. Whole sections and whole compositions can be performed backward with either exact or modified relation."³

Example 2.2 contains the beginning and conclusion of Crawford's *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (1930). The piece consists of a single melodic line, played in octaves, which gradually works its way from the lowest register of the piano to the highest, then retraces its steps in reverse, ending where it began. At the top of the arch, Crawford chooses to enliven the scheme. The first half of the piece presents not only a precise succession of pitches but also a rhythmic pattern that articulates the steady flow of sixteenth notes into groups of varying size, with an accent at the beginning of each group. At the midpoint of the piece, she adds eighteen free notes, which do not participate in the palindrome. These free notes bring about a realignment of pitch and rhythm in the example. In the second half of the piece, both the pitches and the rhythmic groups are heard in retrograde, but in a different alignment. For example, notes that were grouped together in the first half might be split among different rhythmic groups in the second half. This slight independence of pitch and rhythm charges the palindrome with an unexpected dynamism.

♩ = 400-500 (♩ = 100-125)
ff sempre al fine

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

martellato

8va

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47

simile

8.

48 49 50 51 52 53 54

8.

51 50 49 48 47 46 45 44 43 42 41 40 39 38 37 36 35 34 33 32 31 30 29 28

8.

27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

8.

Example 2.2. *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*, beginning and conclusion. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

Crawford was by no means the only twentieth-century composer to use retrograde symmetry, although there are not many movements structured in their entirety as palindromes, as this one is. Retrograde symmetry was useful, to Crawford and other composers, as a solution to two pressing compositional problems: the problem of form and the problem of cadence. The problem of form involves the arrangement of sections of a musical composition into a satisfactory order in the absence of the traditional forms such as sonata, binary, rondo, and other tonal forms. Retrograde symmetry, by its very nature, makes possible an arch form, with a climax right in the middle. The problem of cadence involves the way in which a phrase, section, or entire movement is brought to a satisfactory conclusion in the absence of traditional harmonic patterns, such as the resolution of dominant to tonic. Retrograde symmetry neatly solves that problem by enabling a piece to retrace its steps right back to the beginning. When the first note is reattained, the piece is over.

Rotation

The third type of precompositional scheme I will consider, rotation, occurs frequently in Crawford's music. Five of Crawford's movements employ rigid, mechanistic, serial schemes of rotation and transposition. Example 2.3a shows the first eight measures of the third movement of Diaphonic Suite No. 1 for Solo Oboe or Flute (1930).

Measure 1 presents the seven-note series: G–A–G \sharp –B–C–F–C \sharp . In the seven measures that follow, the series is systematically rotated so that the second measure begins on the second note of the series (A), the third measure on the third note (G \sharp), and so on, until the original ordering is restored in m. 8. As a result of the rotations, the series is heard not only within each measure, but also from downbeat to downbeat, an effect that is enhanced by *sforzando* accents. The notes on the downbeats of each measure, G–A–G \sharp –B, and so on, are the same notes in the same order as in m. 1. We thus hear the series at two levels of structure, within each measure, and from downbeat to downbeat.

When that first set of rotations is complete, at the end of m. 8, the series as a whole is transposed up two semitones and then rotated in the same manner. That new series form begins on A, the second note of the original series and, indeed, throughout the piece, the series forms are chosen precisely to project, on the highest structural level, the pitch-class succession of the series itself (see example 2.3b).⁴ In m. 9, P₂ begins on A, the second note of the series; in m. 18, R₇ begins with the third note of the series; and so on. Each of these series forms is systematically rotated, just as in the first eight measures. The series is thus heard at three different structural levels: in

A) **Allegro** ($\text{♩} = 60-72$)

flute or oboe

mp sempre legato

mf

B)

1 9 18 25 32 39 46 53 60

G — A — A \flat — B — C — F — C \sharp — (G — A)

P₀ P₂ R₇ R₁₀ I₅ I₁₀ RI₀ RI₆ P₀

2nd rotation only

Example 2.3. Diaphonic Suite No. 1, mvt. 3. a) mm. 1–8. Reprinted by permission of Tetra/Continuo Music Group. b) series projected at the highest level.

eighth notes within each measure; from downbeat to downbeat; and from section to section.

Metaphorically, this kind of serial design functions as an emblem of all that is rigid, mechanical, constrained, enslaved. Melodies of this kind, based on strict precompositional schemes, are like machines, their movements rigidly predetermined. Crawford usually combines rotational melodies like this with contrasting free melodies. The song “Prayers of Steel” from *Three Sandburg Songs* (1930–32) and the fourth movement of the *String Quartet 1931* involve juxtapositions of this kind. The conflict that results—between one melody that is strictly controlled by a precompositional scheme and another that is free—is one that Crawford is deeply interested in exploring. In this way, the rotational serialism is like the ostinati discussed previously—it is a way of stratifying the texture into two contrasting layers, one strict and the other free. The rotational serialism also bears similarities to the idea of retrograde symmetry in offering a ready solution to the problems of form and cadence. Sections of the piece are created by the systematic rotations, and when the last rotation is completed, the piece is over.

Other Types of Schemes

The fourth category includes a variety of precompositional schemes, inventively designed by Crawford. One particular kind of design is evident in *Diaphonic Suite No. 4* for Oboe (or viola) and Cello (1930). Example 2.4 shows the opening of the first movement, which combines retrograde symmetry with a precompositional plan that operates on the smaller segments of the melody.

Crawford herself described the movement as “in the form of a much-disguised canon.”⁵ The two instruments play the same notes in the same order, and are thus in canon at the unison. But the rhythms of the two lines are entirely different, making the canon difficult to hear. Furthermore, the shared melodic line is retrograde-symmetrical. That is, around the middle of the movement (and in a different place for each of the instruments), the notes simply run backward, ending where they began.

The shared melody has a remarkable internal structure. It consists of a seven-note segment that is progressively altered in each appearance. In its first appearance, labeled as 1 in example 2.4, the seven-note segment is F \sharp -G-E \flat -A-A \flat -F-E. In its second appearance, labeled as 2, Crawford retains the first note, transposes the second and seventh notes down two semitones, and transposes the remaining four notes up a semitone. In each segment, the first note is always the same (F \sharp), the second and seventh notes are two semitones lower than in the previous segment, and the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth notes are one semitone higher than in the previous segment. Each of the twelve segments is thus different from the others. If there were a thirteenth segment, it would be the same as the first, and the process could start over again. But Crawford avoids such predictability—when she reaches the end of the complete set of twelve statements, she begins the retrograde, and the music works its way back to its starting point.

In the passage in example 2.4, the cello begins as the leading voice of the canon, and moves rapidly through segments 1, 2, 3, and so on. The oboe enters in m. 3, and states the same notes in the same order, but more slowly. Because of the rhythmic difference between the parts, the canon is indeed “much disguised,” as Crawford notes.

Summary of Crawford’s Use of Precompositional Schemes

Many of Crawford’s works involve precompositional schemes, either *ostinati*, retrograde-symmetry, rotational plans, other kinds of designs, or combinations of these for the following three reasons. First, like many of her contemporaries, in America and in Europe, Crawford was searching for ways to organize music in the absence of traditional tonality. Schemes of the type

The image shows a musical score for Oboe and Cello. The tempo is Moderato (♩ = ca. 72). The score is divided into four systems, each with a measure number (5, 10, 15, 20) at the beginning. The Oboe part is in the upper staff, and the Cello part is in the lower staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes several numbered phrases (1-8) and dynamic markings such as *mf* and *cantando*. The Cello part features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes.

Example 2.4. Diaphonic Suite No. 4, mvt. 1, mm. 1–22. Reprinted by permission of Tetra/Continuo Music Group.

described here offer a way of organizing the musical flow, of imposing a welcome compositional order on what might otherwise degenerate into a chaos of tones. Like Schoenberg, with his “twelve tones related only to each other,” Crawford sought a consistent organizing principle. Indeed, some of her compositional ideas, including particularly the rotational plans, can be understood as her response to, or her creative misunderstanding of, what Schoenberg had done. And as for Schoenberg and so many other modernist

composers, Crawford's schemes offered her ready solutions to the problems of musical form and musical cadence.

A second reason involves Crawford's spirit of playfulness. For some composers, writing music is a kind of game based on a set of interesting or stimulating rules. Stravinsky's comment on this matter seems particularly appropriate: "The more art is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free. . . . My freedom consists in my moving about within the narrow frame that I have assigned myself for each one of my undertakings. I will go even further: my freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles."⁶ I am not aware of Crawford having made similar comments, but her music itself suggests an attitude similar to Stravinsky's. She apparently takes pleasure in imposing on herself the kinds of limitations that her precompositional schemes entail, and then playing compositionally within those limits.

A third reason entails the expressive ends toward which the precompositional schemes are used. The melodies governed by these schemes sometimes occur alone, but often occur in counterpoint with other, freer kinds of melodies. If the planned melodies embody a sense of mechanism and constraint, the contrasting melodies embody a sense of freedom. The precompositional schemes thus play a crucial role in a larger dichotomy that underpins much of Crawford's music. The melodies based on a scheme are emblematic of all that is rigid, mechanical, constrained, enslaved—they are like machines, their movements rigidly predetermined. But these rigid melodies are often combined with contrasting melodies that are like living organisms—constantly evolving and growing. Crawford's most interesting works are those in which these two kinds of melodies interact, in which the principles they embody, of freedom and constraint, of human and machine, are brought into direct contact and conflict, as a thesis and an antithesis.

Analysis of *String Quartet 1931*, Fourth Movement

A striking example in which these oppositional principles operate is Crawford's celebrated *String Quartet 1931*. It is her greatest and most important work, and is frequently performed, recorded, anthologized, and analyzed. Each of the movements is distinctively and compellingly constructed. The fourth and final movement demonstrates Crawford's use of two types of precompositional schemes, retrograde and rotation.

This movement pits two contrasting musical lines (one in the first violin, the other played in octaves by the other three instruments) against each other. The relationship between them is not the traditional hierarchical one

The image displays a musical score for the opening of the fourth movement of Ruth Crawford's String Quartet 1931. The score is organized into three systems. The first system features two staves: Voice 1 (Violin I) and Voice 2 (Violin II, Viola, and Cello). Voice 1 begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line. Voice 2 provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The tempo is marked 'Allegro possibile' and the dynamics include 'ff' and 'ppp sempre con sordino'. The second system continues the melodic line in Voice 1 and the eighth-note accompaniment in Voice 2. The third system shows the continuation of both parts, with Voice 1's melodic line becoming more complex. The score is marked with measure numbers 5 and 10.

Example 2.5. *String Quartet 1931*, mvt. 4, mm. 1–14. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

of melody and accompaniment. They are not even coordinated with each other, as they might be in a traditional polyphonic setting. Instead, the two lines are designed to contrast maximally with each other, each responding to its own musical and dramatic imperatives. The result is like a vigorous dialogue in which the participants are somewhat better at expressing their own views than at listening to each other.

Example 2.5 shows the opening of the movement.⁷ Both lines consist of distinct musical statements separated by rests. Voice 2 (second violin, viola, and cello) moves in steady streams of eighth notes, and its first statement contains twenty pitch attacks.⁸ Its second statement is one pitch attack shorter, as is each successive statement until its twentieth, which consists of a single pitch attack. At that point, which Crawford calls “the turning point,”⁹ the process reverses, adding a note with each statement until the original twenty are reattained. Indeed, the second half of the piece, in both voices and in virtually every musical dimension, is the precise retrograde of

the first, further evidence of Crawford's longstanding interest in large-scale retrograde symmetry.

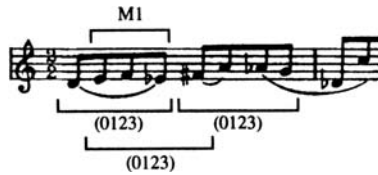
In pitch attacks per statement, Voice 1 (first violin) is the exact complement of Voice 2. The first statement in Voice 1 contains a single pitch attack, and (with a single slight anomaly) each successive statement contains one more than the previous, expanding to twenty-one notes in its twenty-first statement. At that turning point, the same place in both voices, the process reverses—each statement is one note shorter than the previous until the movement ends, as it began, with a single note.

The movement begins with two statements in Voice 1, and then the two voices alternate. As the statements in Voice 1 get longer, those in Voice 2 get shorter; one line waxes as the other wanes. This durational plan is reinforced by dynamics—as the statements in each voice get longer, they get softer, and as they get shorter, they get louder. Thus Voice 1 begins loud, gets progressively softer approaching the midpoint of the piece, then progressively louder during the second half, while Voice 2 does just the opposite. In Crawford's words:

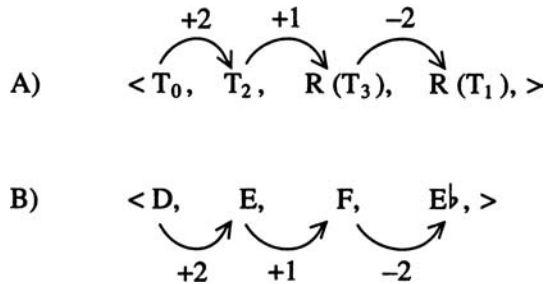
The two voices are written to be independent of each other dynamically. Voice 1 begins with its single tone fortissimo and, with the increase in number of tones in each entry, it decreases in dynamics to pianissimo at measure 55. Oppositely, Voice 2 begins its greatest number of tones at measure 3 with pianissimo, and increases in tone to fortissimo as the number of tones in each entry decrease. There is therefore a sort of dissonance within each voice between volume in dynamics and number of tones, and also a sort of dissonance between the two voices, in volume and number.¹⁰

This basic complementarity of duration and dynamics in Voices 1 and 2 is reinforced by the rhythmic distinctions between them. Where Voice 2 moves exclusively in regular streams of eighth notes (although grouped irregularly by slurs), Voice 1 uses eighth- and quarter-note triplets, quintuplets, sextuplets, dots, and ties, to produce an enormous range of rhythmic values and a resulting sense of "rhythmic fluidity."¹¹ Where Voice 2 is regimented and restricted, Voice 1 is florid and free. As we will see, this basic distinction in character applies in many musical domains.

The pitch classes of Voice 2 are derived from a single ten-note series, shown in example 2.6.¹² The series is a typical, if brief, Crawford melody. It turns in and jumps out, winding around and pivoting on itself as it creates and fills gaps. By the end, it creates a chromatic decachord—only B_♭ and B are excluded. It is intervallically less varied than many of her melodies: it excludes interval classes 4 and 5, and contains only a single instance of interval class 6.¹³ It embeds one occurrence of a three-note motive prevalent in Crawford's melodic lines consisting of a semitone and whole tone in opposite directions, which I will call Motive M1 and which is shown in example 2.6, as well as the three occurrences of chromatic tetrachord (0123).¹⁴



Example 2.6. Ten-note series in Voice 2, mm. 3-4.



Example 2.7. Identity of intervallic structure in a) large-scale transformations of the series and b) the first four notes of the series in *String Quartet 1931*, mvt. 4.

After its initial statement, the series is systematically rotated in Crawford's customary fashion. The second statement begins with the second note and ends with the first; the third statement begins with the third note and ends with the second; and so on. When the entire set of ten rotations is completed, the series is transposed up two semitones (starting on the second beat of m. 21), and a new set of rotations begins. When that new set of rotations is completed, the original untransposed series is stated once (beginning in m. 47). The sustained E^{\sharp} that is attacked in m. 57 is the second note of the series and thus initially suggests that a new set of rotations has begun. Instead, it simply marks the turning point of the movement.

In the second half of the piece, the music of the first half is repeated, but in retrograde and transposed up one semitone, creating the overall plan shown in example 2.7a.¹⁵ As in all of Crawford's serial works, the transformations applied to the series reflect its internal structure. The big transpositional move in the first half is an ascending whole tone (from T_0 to T_2). That is answered in the second half, one semitone higher, by a descending whole tone: from $R(T_3)$ to $R(T_1)$. That overall transpositional progression,

20

C F F# G E A♭ B D G B♭ E♭

RI RI

Example 2.8. Motivic organization of the melody formed by the first note in each slurred group, mm. 20–24. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

0–2–3–1, recapitulates the first four notes of the series, D–E–F–E♭, shown in example 2.7b. The large-scale transpositional plan thus reflects the initial intervallic ordering of the series. Furthermore, the set of transpositional levels—0, 1, 2, and 3—creates the chromatic tetrachord type found three times in the series (refer back to example 2.6).

There are three levels of rhythmic patterning at work in Voice 2: the series statements (always ten notes in length); the phrases separated by rests (ranging in length from twenty eighth notes down to a single eighth note and back again); and the irregular slurs (articulating the constant eighth notes into groups of one, two, three, or four notes). Both the durational and rotational plans are quite regular, but they intersect with each other, and with the irregular slurs, in constantly shifting patterns. The periodicities are occasionally aligned, but more commonly cut against each other. There is thus a kind of rhythmic heterophony within Voice 2.

That rhythmic heterophony creates additional pitch-class voices. Consider, for example, the melody that consists of the first note in each slurred group shown in example 2.8. It has the characteristics of a typical Crawford melody, including a retrograde-inversion chain, or RI-chain, with three members.¹⁶ Furthermore, it embeds two segments, identified by the first two brackets, that are related by transposition to segments of the series.

A) pitch class: C E F# G F A♭ B B♭ A E♭
 beat: 1 3 4 3 5 4 2 7 1 2
 durational interval: $\underbrace{+2 \quad +1}_{-1} \quad \underbrace{+2 \quad -1 \quad -2}_{-3} \quad \underbrace{+2 \quad +1}_{+1}$

B) series (T₀) $\overbrace{D \quad E \quad F}^{<+2, +1>} E♭ \quad F# \quad A \quad A♭ \quad G \quad \overbrace{D♭ \quad C \quad (D)}^{<-1, +2>}$
 series R(T₀) C D♭ G A♭ A $\overbrace{F# \quad E♭ \quad F}^{<-3, +2>} \quad \underbrace{E \quad D}_{<+2, -1, -2>}$

Example 2.9A. Metrical organization of melody formed by the first note in each series rotation, mm. 20-41.

Example 2.9B. Pitch-class intervals of series reflecting durational intervals.

The first of these is the familiar chromatic tetrachord. It thus reveals a high degree of internal structure.

A second additional pitch-class voice is created by the first note of each series rotation. This melody is extracted in example 2.9a, and some information about its metrical organization is also provided.

After the initial C, the first note of the tenth rotation of the series at T₀, the pitch classes simply describe the series at T₂. This is an inevitable result of Crawford's rotational plan: the first notes of each successive rotation will spell out, over a large span, the series being rotated. What is not inevitable is the metrical placement of each of the pitch classes, or the remarkable metrical organization that results.

Each note of the line occurs on one of the eight beats of the measure. The C occurs on the first beat, the E on the third beat, the F# on the fourth beat, and so on. One can calculate the intervals between two beats, counted in eighth notes, just as one might calculate the interval between two notes, counted in semitones. From C to E we advance two eighth notes, from beat one to beat three, and from E to F# we advance one eighth note, from beat three to beat four. All of the durational intervals are calculated in this way.

The durational intervals reflect the pitch-class intervals of the series, shown in example 2.9b. The initial succession of durational intervals, $<+2, +1>$, is also the initial succession of the pitch-class intervals of the series. Indeed, all of the durational intervals in this pitch-class line are derived from inter-vallic successions within the series, as the example shows. The seemingly

simply rotational plan of Voice 2 thus brings in its train a stunningly sophisticated contrapuntal and rhythmic organization.

This isomorphism of durational and pitch-class space, and of metrical position and pitch class, is generally attributed to Milton Babbitt and his system of “time-points.” In that system, Babbitt analogizes the position of attacks within the measure to the position of notes within the twelve pitch-class octave, and simultaneously projects series in both dimensions.¹⁷ It now appears that Crawford was an important predecessor in this endeavor, anticipating some of Babbitt’s concerns at a time when Babbitt had not yet embarked on his compositional career. In taking steps to ensure that the rhythmic/metric organization and the pitch-class organization of her music were shaped by similar musical concepts, Crawford may be seen as a pioneer in the serialization of musical rhythm.

The pitch organization of Voice 1 stands in radical contrast to that of Voice 2. Where Voice 2, with its strict serial rotations, is mechanical and regimented, Voice 1 is rhapsodic and free. Voice 1 has many of the qualities we have seen in other of Crawford’s free melodies. It has a relatively equal distribution of pitch classes (although with the usual preference for the semitone and its inversion and compounds). It twists its way forward with the inversive leap-frogging we have seen in other melodies and frequently employs RI-chains.

The overall shape of Voice 1 involves two large ascending waves, leading to a high point in the middle of the movement, and generally moving through larger and larger registral spaces as it rises. In the second half of the movement, the melody is heard in retrograde, transposed a semitone higher, and thus descends in two large waves, until it reattains its starting point.

While Voices 1 and 2 have distinct and, in some respects, complementary characters, they do share common intervallic concerns. Although Voice 1 contains many intervals not found in the series of Voice 2, particularly members of interval classes 4 and 5, there are long stretches of Voice 1 that can be understood in terms of segmental subsets of the series or its transformations. In the passage in example 2.10, for instance, all of the bracketed segments, comprising virtually every note in Voice 1, represent a segment of the series, allowing for transposition, inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion. Needless to say, the same segments are heard again and again as the series is rotated in Voice 2 and they thus comprise a significant affinity between the voices.

Aspects of the large-scale design of Voice 1 also show an affinity with the series. Example 2.11a shows its first six notes, its turning point, and its last six notes. The first three notes describe Crawford’s ubiquitous Motive M₁, which also occurs as a segmental subset of the series. The next three notes transpose the first three at T₂. At the end of the movement, these T₂-related M₁s are heard in retrograde a semitone higher. The transpositional plan for

Example 2.10. Segmental subsets of the series from Voice 2 embedded in Voice 1, mm. 32–40. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

the motive— T_0 – T_2 – $R(T_3)$ – $R(T_1)$ —is thus identical to the transpositional plan of the series (see example 2.7 above). A related design is formed by the first note, the turning point, and the last note. These three notes, A_b – G – A , recapitulate over a very large span the first three notes of the movement. The large progression in Voice 2 is virtually identical—its first note, turning point, and last note also compose-out Motive M1, creating a deep bond between the voices (see example 2.11 b).

This same structural unit—first note, turning point, last note—also helps to shape some of the phrases and subphrases of Voice 1. Example 2.12 shows the sixth, ninth, and the beginning of the tenth phrases.

In four cases, an initial tone, a contour turning point, and a terminal tone (also a contour turning point) are identified, and in all four cases a form of Motive M1 is spelled out. The first of these involves the same pitch classes as the large-scale statement discussed above (refer back to example 2.11 a) and the last three form an RI-chain. Motive M1, and others that occur frequently on the surface of both Voices 1 and 2, thus shape Voice 1 at the deeper levels as well.

A)

B)

Example 2.11. Large-scale organization in a) Voice 1; b) Voice 2.

Example 2.12. Projections of Motive M1 in Voice 1, mm. 15–17 and mm. 24–27. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

Because of the high degree of melodic integrity of both Voices 1 and 2, typical of Crawford’s heterophony, the contrapuntal relationship between the two voices is difficult to specify. Two general principles can be adduced, although neither is pursued systematically or consistently. First, when the two voices are sounding together, they tend to form harmony types that occur also as segmental subsets of the series in Voice 2. In mm. 19–21, for example, where the voices begin for the first time to overlap by more than a single tone, the harmonies created, (012), (013), and (0135), are all found as segmental subsets of the series (see example 2.13).

A)

B)

	(012)				(012)			(012)					
	D	E	F	E _b	F _#	A	A _b	G	D _b	C	(D)	(E)	(F)
	(013)			(013)					(0135)				
					(013)								

Example 2.13. Similarity of harmonies formed between the voices and those found in the series: a) mm. 19–22; b) segmental subsets of the series. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

A second type of relationship between the two voices involves a sustained note in one voice acting as an inversive fulcrum for the notes in the other. This principle operates at the turning point, where the last two notes in Voice 1, C_# and G, are symmetrical around the sustained E in Voice 2, but only sporadically elsewhere in the movement.

Despite the inconsistent nature of the intervals formed harmonically between the voices, the two voices share enough common motivic content to cause us to reevaluate our original impression of the movement as a dialogue between mutually indifferent and irreconcilable musical characters. Like the partners in many relationships, these melodies conflict with each other, but nonetheless belong together. In this sense, the duality of the opposing melodies is created only to be subverted. The movement thus suggests, to an attentive listener, that even the most apparently irreconcilable conflict can in fact be mediated, indeed, can be heard to dissolve amid the subtle connections between the parties.

The precompositional schemes described in the first half of this chapter are interesting in their own right, but achieve their fullest meaning when heard in simultaneous opposition to music of a very different character. The central characteristic of Crawford's music, both structurally and dramatically, is a tension between the highly structured and the rhapsodically free. In that

way, Crawford recreates musically one of the familiar binary oppositions of Western thought. The immediate effect of the last movement of the *String Quartet 1931*, and other pieces that juxtapose a melody based on a precompositional scheme with a free melody, is a sense of utter and irreconcilable conflict, a mere inscription of duality. With close attention, however, we become aware of the subtle ties that bind the disparate parts, their underlying affinities, their shared concerns. Each kind of melody, without compromising its own integrity and individual character, gives signs of having listened to, and heard, the other.

Notes

Portions of this chapter were published in different form in Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). My thanks to Mario Mazzoli for expertly preparing the music examples.

1. Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) examines the modernist compositions in detail.
2. Judith Tick provides an interesting biographical interpretation of this striking resemblance between the Sonata for Violin and Piano and Suite for Wind Quintet in *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 316.
3. Charles Seeger, "Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music," in *Studies in Musicology II, 1929-1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 196.
4. If $G-A-G\sharp-B-C-F-C\sharp$ is P_0 , the prime ordering of the series that begins on G, which is designated 0, then $A-B-A\sharp-C\sharp-D-G-E\flat$ is P_2 , the prime ordering transposed up two semitones. $G-F-F\sharp-E\flat-D-A-C\sharp$ is I_0 , the inverted ordering that begins on G. It maintains the intervallic ordering of P_0 , but replaces each interval with its complement. R_0 refers to the retrograde of P_0 , thus $C\sharp-F-C-B-G\sharp-A-G$, and RI_0 refers to the retrograde of I_0 , thus $C\sharp-A-D-E\flat-F\sharp-F-G$. Notice that R and RI forms end on the pitch class defined by their subscript number, while P and I forms begin there. Notice also that, in this discussion, $G = 0$, $G\sharp = 1$, $A = 2$, and so on.
5. Ruth Crawford, letter to Charles Seeger, April 4, 1931; cited in Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memoirs, Memories, Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986), 155.
6. Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Dialogues*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 63, 65. Like all of the writings that bear Stravinsky's name as author, the authenticity of *Poetics* is questionable. Robert Craft has noted that "not a single sentence by [Stravinsky] actually appears in the book of which he is the nominal author," and attributes the authorship to Roland-Manuel ("Roland-Manuel and La Poétique Musicale," in *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Robert Craft, vol. II (New York: Knopf, 1982-85), 503. The sentiments can, however, reasonably be attributed to Stravinsky.
7. In the Quartet, accidentals affect only those notes they immediately precede.

8. Crawford designates the opposing parts as Voices 1 and 2 in her analysis of the movement supplied to Edgard Varèse. This analysis is published in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 357–60.

9. *Ibid.*, 358.

10. *Ibid.*, 359–60.

11. *Ibid.*, 360.

12. A *pitch class* is the class of all pitches that are one or more octaves apart—for example, all the Ds in the world. Every pitch is a member of one of only twelve pitch classes.

13. An *interval class* is an unordered pitch-class interval, of which there are six in all. Interval class 1, for example, contains pitch interval 1 (for example, the interval from C to C# one semitone higher, pitch interval 11 (for example, the interval from C# to C, eleven semitones higher), and their octave-related compounds (for example, the interval from C to C#, thirteen semitones higher).

14. Motive M1 is explored in greater detail in Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 26–32. A tetrachord is an unordered collection of four pitch classes. The tetrachords can be grouped into twenty-nine distinct equivalence classes, also known as set classes or set types. Within each set class, each set will be related by transposition or inversion to all of the others. I will identify set classes by their prime form, the most compressed possible representation, which I will present in parentheses. For example, D–E_b–E–F is a member of set class (0123), as is any group of four consecutive chromatic pitch classes. For further discussion of pitch-class collections, see Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973); John Rahn, *Basic Atonal Theory* (New York: Longman, 1980) and Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 3d ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2005).

15. There is a single note in the first half of the piece (m. 24), and another in the analogous spot in the second (m. 93), that are missing from the rotational plan. In her analysis of the movement, Crawford refers to these glitches as “a loose thread in the Persian rug” (Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 359).

16. An RI-chain, or RICH, results when the last two notes of a motive become the first two notes of its retrograde inversion. Inverting a melodic fragment such as a motive replaces each interval, in order, by the same interval in the opposite direction. For example, if we take D–E–E_b (an example of Motive M1) with intervals $\langle +2, -1 \rangle$ as the prime ordering, inverting the notes results in $\langle -2, +1 \rangle$, or D–C–C#. Retrograding the notes reverses the order of the intervals and replaces each with its opposite—thus, retrograding D–E–E_b results in $\langle +1, -2 \rangle$, or D–E_b–C#. Retrograde inverting the notes keeps the intervals the same, but presents them in reverse order—thus, retrograde inverting D–E–E_b results in $\langle -1, +2 \rangle$, or D–C#–E_b. RI-chains involving Motive M1 are particularly prevalent in Crawford's music. Further discussion of RICH appears in Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 42–44. David Lewin provides a general model for discussing RI-pairs and longer RI-chains in *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 180–89.

17. “Since duration is a measure of distance between time points, as interval is a measure of distance between pitch points, we begin by interpreting interval as duration. Then, pitch number is interpretable as the point of initiation of a temporary event, that is, as a time-point number. If this number is to be further interpretable as a representative of an equivalence class of time points and the durational interval

with regard to the first such element, it is necessary merely to imbed it in a metrical unit, a measure in the usual musical metrical sense, so that a recurrence of succession of time points is achieved, while the notion of meter is made an essential part of the systematic structure. The equivalence relation is statable as 'occurring at the same time point with relation to the measure.' The 'ascending' ordered 'chromatic scale' of twelve time points, then, is a measure divided into twelve equally spaced time points, with the metrical signature probably determined by the internal structure of the time-point set, and with the measure now corresponding in function to the octave in the pitch-class system. A time-point set, then, is a serial ordering of time points." Milton Babbitt, "Twelve-Tone Rhythmic Structure and the Electronic Medium," *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (1962): 49-79; reprinted in *Perspectives on Contemporary Music Theory*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1972), 162.

Chapter Three

Linear Aggregates and Proportional Design in Ruth Crawford's Piano Study in Mixed Accents

Lyn Ellen Burkett

Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music (TENM), Charles Seeger's treatise on dissonant counterpoint, is the product of an intense period of collaboration between Seeger and Crawford from the summer of 1930 through September of 1931. The treatise is best understood not as a finished document, but as a glimpse into Seeger and Crawford's thoughts on experimental music at the time it was written.¹ Nancy Yunhwa Rao traces the development of Seeger's ideas with a focus on his conception of the neume—Seeger's term for a specific type of musical motive—and its relationship to phrase, form, modes, and scales in various drafts of the treatise; she proposes understanding TENM “not as a self-contained compositional theory but rather as a thinking and working process in which the focus was significantly modified over the period encompassing Crawford's involvement.”² This chapter draws on an understanding of TENM in this manner, with a focus on processes of dissonation as Crawford applied them to the materials of traditional tonal and pretonal practice in her *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (PSMA) of 1930.

Recognizing Crawford's involvement in TENM is important for a number of reasons. In his book *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, Joseph N. Straus remarks:

Crawford actively assisted in preparing the treatise for eventual publication, although that did not take place in her, or [Seeger's], lifetime. She acted as a sounding board for Seeger's voice, and as such shaped the treatise, amplifying some aspects and muting others. Indeed, Crawford was so immersed in the preparation of the treatise that Seeger offered to name her as its coauthor, an honor she declined. Instead, Seeger dedicated the treatise “to Ruth Crawford, of whose studies these pages are a record and

without whose collaboration and inspiration they would not have been written.” . . . [I]t should be clearly understood from the outset that [TENM] embodies Crawford’s ideas as well [as Seeger’s], and that it would not have taken its present form and, indeed might not have been written at all, without her.³

Crawford’s dual contributions to TENM—“collaboration and inspiration”—need to be evaluated in the context of traditional views of women and creative endeavors. In relation to Straus’s view, Rao’s understanding of Crawford’s influence on the treatise interrogates the traditionally feminine roles of helpmate and inspirational muse and places even more significance on the impact she had on Seeger’s ideas:

Certainly it becomes clear that Crawford played a crucial role in the creation of Seeger’s treatise, quite opposite to the common portrayal of her merely as the typist, sounding board, or muse of the treatise. The image of the tender muse who inspires the man of genius often veils the complexity of authorship. By designating a woman to the role of assisting in the creation of a work, this convention furthers the solitude and supremacy of male authorship and ownership of ideas—it implies that the woman has none.⁴

Aside from her involvement in the writing of TENM, Crawford’s compositions provide vital, engaging realizations of principles set forth in the treatise. Indeed, the compelling nature of Crawford’s own angular brand of modernism in her dissonant-counterpoint-influenced compositions has been a catalyst for generating interest in Seeger’s theoretical ideas. If Seeger’s ideas on dissonant counterpoint provided a young Crawford with the mechanisms to wind together the still raveled fibers of her own compositional aesthetic, then certainly it must be said that Crawford’s mature compositions weave Seeger’s ideas into tapestries more spectacular than anything he could have envisioned emerging from his nascent theories.

Dissonant counterpoint as presented in TENM may be best understood as a direct affront, not only an alternative, to traditional tonal practice, an attempt to confound, confuse, deny, and disturb every aspect of traditional tonality that a listener might cling to for aural guidance and clarity.⁵ Any musical material, procedure, or concept associated with traditional tonal practice—for example, canon, meter, melody, or any formal procedure—may be dissonated. The process of dissonation—Seeger’s own term for his approach to post-tonal composition—is at once both orthodox, adhering to Seeger’s philosophies as they manifest themselves in his counterpoint manual, and subversive, with an explicit desire to undermine musical conventions. In many respects, dissonant counterpoint represents post-tonal compositional theory and practice in its adolescence, full of anger, energy, and an urgency to move forward, imbued with limitless faith in its own power.

Avoidance of pitch repetition is an important aspect of Crawford's dissonant contrapuntal music; this aspect shares something very general in common with twelve-tone composition. While it is rare to encounter twelve consecutive notes in a melodic line with no pitch-class repetition in her music, Crawford did occasionally use twelve-note aggregates in linear contexts. In some of her dissonant-contrapuntal compositions, such aggregates are carefully placed in a manner that highlights proportional divisions. In *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (PSMA) and in several movements of her *Diaphonic Suites*, Crawford used this type of aggregate at points that mark complex proportional divisions in sections, movements, and an entire work. For the purposes of the current discussion, I will refer to occurrences of twelve consecutive notes in a melodic line with no pitch-class repetition as *linear aggregates*, to differentiate them from aggregates that occur in harmonic or polyphonic contexts. My discussion will focus on Crawford's use of linear aggregates to dissonate two musical palindromes in PSMA. In addition to their appeal as hidden treasures—they are virtually impossible to hear in the context of the compositions, and would only be discovered by an analyst or very alert performer—these linear aggregates both accentuate and dissonate the palindromic structure of PSMA, giving insight into the nature and function of dissonance in Crawford's work.

Upon first hearing, PSMA sounds like a Hanon etude on steroids: muscular, athletic, impatient, with a machine-like lack of desire to catch its breath or linger in any one register.⁶ With its arched contour, the piece traces a gnarled, elusive path to the top of the keyboard and back down, stopping for only four frustrated pauses that hardly allow time for a breath between the first and last notes. With irregular accents jutting out from the jagged monophonic line, Crawford creates an effect of formidable pianistic virtuosity.

Written in 1930, approximately a year after Crawford had begun studying with Seeger, this work is organized according to a pitch palindrome and a beam-group palindrome that progress simultaneously, although they do not coincide exactly.⁷ There are 526 sixteenth-note pulses in the piece, including all notes and rests; for the purposes of this discussion, I will refer to these pulses as 1 through 526. The first line of PSMA, indicated in example 3.1, has five groups of sixteenth notes beamed in groups of six, five, five, five, and three. I will refer to these groups as *beam-groups*, a term that reflects their appearance on the page more than their aural effect. I will differentiate them from one another in this discussion by labeling them according to the pulse number of the first note in each beam-group.⁸ The first line of music includes beam-groups 1, 7, 12, 17, and 22; the final beam-group in the piece is beam-group 518.

Figure 3.1 shows a diagram of the entire piece. The upper portion of the diagram illustrates a pitch palindrome, a pitch interpolation, and five

Piano Study in Mixed Accents

Accidentals affect only the immediate note.
The first note of each group of sixteenthths must be strongly accented. It should be played in a tempo that allows the accents to be clearly brought out.
One of the three dynamic possibilities (*ff sempre al fine*, *ossia I*, *ossia II*) should be adhered to throughout a performance.

RUTH CRAWFORD

$\text{♩} = 400-500$ ($\text{♩} = 100-125$) — pitch palindrome

ff sempre al fine
ossia I: *pp*
ossia II: *ff*

beam-group palindrome

7 12 17 22

1 4 5 2 1 2 5 3 5 3 1 2 5 3

1 5 4 5 1 3 3

martellato

endpoint aggregate

ossia I: *cresc. un poco*
ossia II: *dim. un poco*

simile 5 3

simile 1 2 2 3 1 5 5 4 1 3 2

ossia I: *mf*
ossia II: *mp*

ossia I: *p*
ossia II: *f*

5 3 3 1 3 1 4 5 1 2 4 5 1 2 1

5 5 4 1

1 3 4 2

1 2 3 3

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Example 3.1. Annotated score of Crawford, *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

ossia I: *cresc.*
 ossia II: *dim.*

ossia I: _____ *mf*
 ossia II: _____ *mp*

loco

ossia I: *mp*
 ossia II: *f*

132 138 143 148 153

quarter-point aggregate

ossia I: *cresc. poco a poco*
 ossia II: *dim. poco a poco*

156 162 166 171 175 178

Sforz

ossia I: *f*
 ossia II: *F*

110-40636

Example 3.1. (continued)

4

ossia I: *ff*
ossia II: *pp*

beam-group interpolation

pitch interpolation

midpoint aggregate

241 246 250 255 263 266

275 279 284 289 293 296

270 *loco*

ossia I: *dim. poco a poco*
ossia II: *cresc. poco a poco*

loco

354 359 363 369 372 377

quarter-point aggregate

110-40636

The image displays a musical score for Example 3.1 (continued), consisting of piano and violin parts. The piano part is written in treble clef, and the violin part is in treble clef. The score is divided into several systems. The first system (measures 241-266) features a piano part with a 'beam-group interpolation' and a 'pitch interpolation' box, and a violin part with a 'midpoint aggregate' box. The second system (measures 270-296) includes a 'loco' marking. The third system (measures 354-377) features a 'quarter-point aggregate' box. Performance instructions include dynamics like *ff*, *pp*, *dim. poco a poco*, and *cresc. poco a poco*, and articulation like *loco*. Measure numbers 241, 246, 250, 255, 263, 266, 270, 275, 279, 284, 289, 293, 296, 354, 359, 363, 369, 372, and 377 are indicated. The page number 4 is in the top left, and the score number 110-40636 is at the bottom left.

Example 3.1. (continued)

ossia I: *mp* ossia II: *mf* ossia I: *f* ossia II: *f*

ossia I: *dim.* ossia II: *cresc.*

ossia I: *p* ossia II: *f*

ossia I: *mf* ossia II: *mp* ossia I: *dim.* ossia II: *cresc.*

pitch palindrome
beam-group palindrome

494 500 503 508 513 518

endpoint aggregate

Example 3.1. (continued)

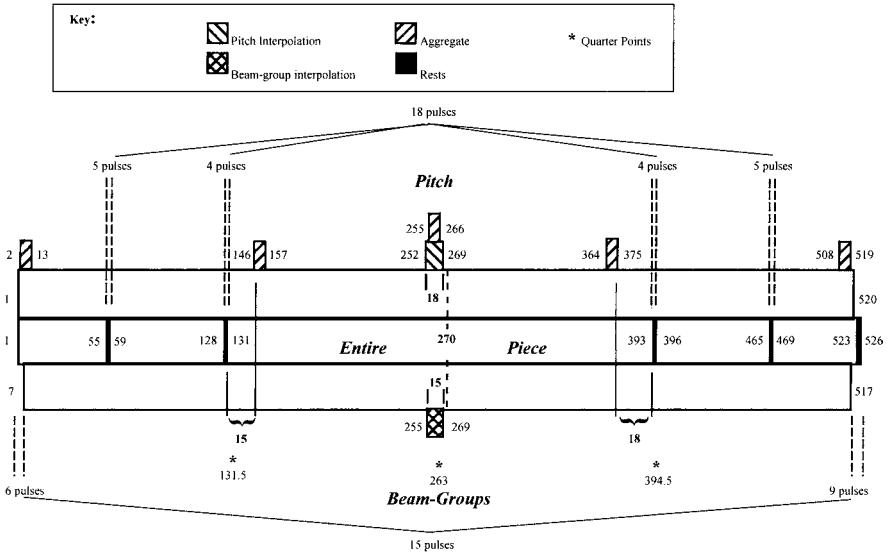


Figure 3.1. Diagram of Crawford, *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*.

aggregates. The center portion of the diagram illustrates the complete piece, with rests indicated by vertical lines. The lower part of the diagram illustrates a beam-group palindrome and a beam-group interpolation. Of the 526 pulses in the piece, 22 are rests—indicated by the thick vertical lines in the diagram—and 504 are notes. Of the 504 notes, 483 belong to a pitch palindrome, and 478 belong to a beam-group palindrome. In the middle of the piece, both palindromes break open and are interrupted by a series of several pitches before they resume. After pulse 251, the pitch palindrome is interrupted by 18 intervening pitches; after pulse 254, the beam-group palindrome is interrupted by 3 intervening beam-groups of 8, 3, and 4—a total of 15 pulses. These notes in the center of the piece, at its registral apex, constitute an interpolation added to the palindrome.

Throughout the piece, the sixteenth note remains at a constant tempo, with a metronome marking of 400–500 sixteenth notes per minute. There is no meter signature in the piece; beam-groups consist of 2 to 8 sixteenth notes, with an accent on the first note of each beam-group. Four bar lines (immediately preceding pulses 60, 132, 393, and 465) indicating phrase divisions, follow or precede rests; because of the rests, phrase divisions indicated by these bar lines would be clearly audible even without the bar lines. The five rests in the piece help to reveal the piece's symmetrical structure to the listener.

My discussion will focus on several compositional elements of PSMA that are intertwined with one another: a beam-group palindrome, a pitch palindrome, interpolations placed in the center of the palindromes, and five linear aggregates. Figure 3.1 illustrates where each of these elements are found in the piece, using sixteenth-note pulses as the unit of measurement. Because of the piece's complexity, I will address each of these aspects individually before discussing what this rather unusual work may tell us about Crawford's compositional work procedure.

First, the palindromes. Mark D. Nelson explains the palindromic structure of PSMA as follows:

The underlying structure of this arching melody is a palindrome spiced with several quirks and one prominent anomaly: its axis of symmetry is an odd segment of eighteen notes which is not symmetrical and is presented in a manner which fundamentally alters the relation of pitch class to accent in the second half of the work.⁹

The pitch palindrome that Nelson identifies begins at pulse 1 and ends at pulse 520. Example 3.1 shows the first five beam-groups at the beginning of the piece, and the last six beam-groups, followed by a quarter rest, at the end; the beginning and ending of the pitch palindrome are designated in the example. At the end of the pitch palindrome, there are two "extra" pitches, C#2 and A#1 (pulses 521 and 522).¹⁰ The beam-group palindrome that Nelson identifies, also indicated in example 3.1, begins at pulse 7, with three beam-groups of five sixteenth notes followed by one beam-group of three sixteenth notes, and ends at 517. Preceding the beam-group palindrome, at the beginning of the piece, there is an "extra" beam-group of six sixteenth notes, and following the beam-group palindrome, at the end of the piece, there is an "extra" beam-group of five sixteenth notes, followed by a quarter rest.¹¹

Next, the interpolations. A pitch interpolation, consisting of eighteen notes, interrupts the pitch palindrome beginning at pulse 252, as indicated in example 3.1; the pitch palindrome resumes at pulse 270. The note immediately preceding the pitch interpolation is G \flat 7, on pulse 251, and the note immediately following it is F#7 (the same pitch, respelled enharmonically), on pulse 270. Beam-groups 255, 263, and 266 form a beam-group interpolation, also indicated in example 3.1, that interrupts the beam-group palindrome. The three beam-groups immediately preceding pulse 255—beam-groups 241, 246, and 250—consist of five, four, and five sixteenth notes, respectively; the three beam-groups immediately following the last note of the beam-group interpolation—beam-groups 270, 275, and 279—also consist of five, four, and five sixteenth notes, and begin a retrograde presentation of the first half of the beam-group palindrome.

The numbers fifteen and eighteen figure prominently into the interpolations and into the piece in its entirety, as is illustrated in figure 3.1. The

number of pulses in the beam-group interpolation—fifteen—is the same as the total number of pulses preceding and following the beam-group palindrome at the beginning and end of the piece. The number of notes in the pitch interpolation—eighteen—is the same as the number of pulses of rest included between the first and last notes of the piece. Furthermore, eighteen multiplied by fifteen equals 270, and pulse 270 is the point where both the pitch palindrome and the beam-group palindrome resume after the interpolations. The numbers fifteen and eighteen are also significant in regard to the placement of the second and fourth aggregate, as I will address below.¹²

Now, the aggregates. The eighteen-note pitch interpolation, indicated in example 3.1, that interrupts the palindromes beginning at pulse 252 and ending at 269, consists of a twelve-note linear aggregate preceded and followed by three sixteenth notes; in this “odd segment of eighteen notes” to which Nelson refers, the twelve notes in the middle of the segment involve no pitch-class repetition, and include all of the notes in the piano’s two uppermost octaves.¹³ I will refer to this linear aggregate as the *midpoint aggregate*. Both the first and last notes of this aggregate, pulses 255 and 266, are the first notes of beam-groups, and as such are to be accented in a performance.

Four other linear aggregates are placed to mark specific proportional divisions in the piece. These aggregates, two occurring before the midpoint aggregate and two occurring after it, are placed near the beginning and the end, and near the one-quarter and three-quarter points of the piece, following the second rest and preceding the third rest. The aggregates at the beginning and end of the piece—which I will refer to as the *endpoint aggregates*—mark the work’s outer boundaries. The first endpoint aggregate, indicated in example 3.1, includes pulses 2 through 13; the second endpoint aggregate, also indicated in example 3.1, includes pulses 508 through 519. Two more aggregates fall approximately halfway between the beginning and end of the piece and the middle of the piece, where the palindrome breaks; I will refer to these aggregates as the *quarter-point aggregates*. The first quarter-point aggregate, indicated in example 3.1, includes pulses 146 through 157, and begins fifteen sixteenth-note pulses—the same number of pulses included in the beam-group interpolation—after the second rest. The second quarter-point aggregate, indicated in example 3.1, includes pulses 364 through 375, and ends eighteen sixteenth-note pulses—the same number of pulses included in the pitch interpolation—before the third rest. Since the piece is palindromic, the endpoint aggregates are retrogrades of one another, as are the quarter-point aggregates. None of them, however, have any readily apparent relationship with the midpoint aggregate.

The five linear aggregates seem to have been placed with great care to mark specific proportional divisions in this composition.¹⁴ These aggregates reveal an aspect of Crawford’s compositional strategy that favors an

interpretation of the piece's temporal center and registral apex as a carefully planned interpolation, ceremoniously placed between the midpoint notes of the ruptured palindrome, rather than a momentary absence of the two palindromes. As if to assure us that the midpoint aggregate is, indeed, placed intentionally, Crawford arranges these pitches so that accents fall on the first and last notes of the aggregate, and takes an aggressive swipe at the piano's highest note, C8, on the third note of the aggregate, before completing the interpolation and continuing with the palindrome.¹⁵ An additional accented pitch (the first note of each beam-group is accented), an E7 on pulse 263, falls between the first and last notes of the midpoint aggregate. This note is the temporal center of the piece.

The interpolation is a key element in dissonating the palindrome in this composition. Pitch repetition *can* be an aspect of a palindrome that allows a listener to grasp the musical process; by placing an interpolation in the center of the form, Crawford eliminates the immediate pitch repetition that would occur when the retrograde begins. The palindrome is further dissonated by a registral discrepancy closely preceding and following the interpolation: pulses 276–78 in the second half of the palindrome are an octave higher than 243–45, the corresponding notes in the first half. Seeger calls for these types of dissonating strategies in any formal procedure that involves repetition.

In TENM, Seeger writes, "Perhaps it is necessary to recall once more that the ultimate aim of the dissonant mood as here understood is to lead to a style in which the old and the new are given equal advantage."¹⁶ With PSMA, Crawford succeeds in achieving this ultimate aim, combining older compositional techniques such as palindrome and isorhythm with Seeger's and her own techniques of metric and melodic dissonance. Tick remarks:

[Crawford's] appropriation of such terminology as *ostinato*, *ricercar*, *passacaglia*, and *monody*, as well as her adaptation of isorhythmic techniques to her own ends, reflects the historical sympathies between early modernism and "archaic" music, which she shared with many modernists (both European and American) in the period.¹⁷

The linear aggregates in PSMA exemplify a maximum melodic dissonance that both ornaments the palindrome and holds it together. Crawford reserves linear aggregates for specific points in her compositions, carefully placing them like rare gems into beautifully crafted settings; unlike twelve-tone composers, she chooses not to employ aggregates consistently throughout her works.

Crawford's own unmistakable compositional voice sings out of every aspect of *Piano Study*, from the care with which she superimposed the two palindromes to the delight she surely must have taken in covering nearly the entire range of the piano in just over one minute.¹⁸ Her meticulous placement of the linear aggregates in relation to the palindromes, and the

mathematical elegance with which she situated the retrograde presentation of both palindromes reveal an ambitious, edgy braininess that is pure Ruth Crawford.

In regard to the pitch function, linear aggregates are similar to tritones or augmented-sixth chords in traditionally tonal harmonic contexts, representing a maximum level of dissonance that is to be used sparingly. There is an important difference, though, between Crawford's dissonant linear aggregates and the dissonant sonorities of traditional tonality: Crawford's linear aggregates are nearly impossible to hear in context. By robbing dissonance of its aesthetic affect in this manner, Crawford satisfies one of the most important aims of dissonant counterpoint: to create a dissonant texture in which dissonance is neutralized to the point that it becomes unremarkable.

Perhaps the most remarkable insight Crawford's linear aggregates can offer in regard to dissonant counterpoint is the importance she placed on avoiding twelve-tone aggregates in a melodic line. We have already observed the care that Crawford took to place linear aggregates at specific points in *PSMA*. The care that she took to *avoid* linear aggregates throughout most of this work—while simultaneously adhering to the dissonant-contrapuntal principle of equal distribution of pitches—certainly required just as much planning and attention to detail. Crawford's dissonant melodies tend to circle and float around the possibility of chromatic completion, but most often dissolve into a previously articulated pitch class before consummating the aggregate. This skillful manipulation of pitch materials to exploit both the presence and absence of chromatic aggregates sets Crawford apart from Schoenberg, Webern, Krenek, and other composers employing twelve-tone technique in their compositions in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Crawford's relationship to the European avant-garde presents a number of complexities and contradictions. Griselda Pollock proposes three terms—reference, deference, and difference—to relate the manner in which postimpressionist artists in late nineteenth-century Paris went about establishing themselves in relation to the avant-garde:

This trilogy proposes a specific way of understanding avant-gardism as a kind of gameplay. In contrast to conventional histories of modern art, which tell its story through heroic individuals, each "inventing" his (usually) novel style as an expression of individual genius, I propose my three terms. To make your way in the avant-garde community, you had to relate your work to what was going on: *reference*. Then you had to defer to the existing leader, to the work or project which represented the latest move, the last word, or what was considered the definitive statement of shared concerns: *deference*. Finally, your own move involved establishing a *difference* which had to be both legible in terms of current aesthetics and criticism, and also a definitive advance on that current position. Reference ensured recognition that what you were doing was part of the avant-garde project. Deference and difference had to be finely calibrated

so that the ambition and claim of your work was measured by its difference from the artist or artistic statement whose status you both acknowledged (deference) *and* displaced.¹⁹

Although Pollock, in this passage, is discussing Gauguin, not ultramodern twentieth-century music, we can interpret Crawford's linear aggregates in terms of reference, deference, and difference. According to such an interpretation, linear aggregates might constitute both reference and deference to Schoenberg, twelve-tone composition, or European music in general, and their limited and idiosyncratic use might constitute difference. While such a scenario may help us understand Crawford's approach to establishing herself within the context of avant-garde or ultramodern movements in the United States and Europe, it remains problematic since Crawford was probably the only person aware of the linear aggregates and any significance they may have held. Because they are hidden within her compositions, Crawford's linear aggregates are difficult to interpret as public statements regarding her compositional aesthetic. Still, the fact that Crawford seems to highlight difference, while veiling reference and deference (symbolized in her music by linear aggregates), seems entirely consistent with everything that we know about the composer and her music. Crawford was much more interested in voicing her own stylistic differences than she was in referring or deferring to anyone, especially any German composer.

During 1930–31, most of which she spent in Berlin supported by a Guggenheim fellowship, Crawford made no attempt to contact Schoenberg until the end of March, and subsequently never had an opportunity to meet with him to discuss her music.²⁰ Tick explores Crawford's somewhat defensive attitudes regarding European music, especially German music. In a letter to Seeger dated April 24, 1931, Crawford boasted that she "had gone through the months here, looking Germany straight in the face and not giving a damn what she [Germany] said or thought—or only a very small damn . . ."; and in another letter written less than a month later, Crawford wrote, "I've discovered in myself a delight in showing the German people that I can get on without them."²¹ Toward the end of her time in Europe, Crawford did eventually meet with Rufer, Hindemith, Berg, Wellesz, Hauer, and Bartók, although her fiercely protected identity as an American composer and as a student of Seeger—with whom she was, at this point, romantically involved—seems to have prevented her from thoroughly absorbing any ideas too removed from the realm of dissonant counterpoint.²²

It is easy to interpret Crawford's use of linear aggregates as a feature of her music that refers and defers specifically to Schoenberg and his own—albeit very different—work with twelve-tone aggregates. However, to understand Crawford as a "progressive" composer because her music is in some ways similar to Schoenberg's, or to understand her linear aggregates only as

a sort of veiled reference to Schoenberg, is to overestimate and misunderstand the elder composer's twelve-tone technique. The incorporation of linear aggregates in her compositions allowed Crawford to establish a difference, to clear an open space in which to assert her own compositional voice. Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique, like Seeger's dissonant counterpoint, is best understood not as a stylistic paradigm to which Crawford aspired but as just one of the many sparks that helped to kindle the brilliant flame of her mature compositional style.

Notes

1. Throughout the current discussion, I will refer to the edition of TENM included in Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929–1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 17–267; this version is based on one of five existing drafts of the treatise. Three of these drafts—two of them reasonably complete, one partial—reside in the Seeger Collection at the Library of Congress. Two additional drafts are in the Seeger Collection at the University of California, Berkeley, Music Library. Pescatello designates these drafts as LC-A, LC-Aa, LC-B, UCB-A, and UCB-B. The version included in Pescatello's book is based primarily on the UCB-A draft—see Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II*, 21. While I have consulted all of these versions of the treatise, a thorough examination of differences between the various drafts is beyond the scope of the current study.
2. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, "Partnership in Modern Music: Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford, 1929–31," *American Music* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 352. Rao traces the development of ideas of neumes and scales through various drafts of the treatise.
3. Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.
4. Rao, "Partnership in Modern Music," 374.
5. Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II*.
6. The notion of PSMA being "on steroids" is especially apt in light of gendered connotations surrounding both musical modernism and piano playing in the early twentieth century. See Judith Tick, *American Women Composers Before 1870* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, [1979] 1995); Catherine Parsons Smith, "'A Distinguishing Virility': Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music," in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 90–106; and Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46–47. Tick discusses young women's training in composing homophonic music, which was considered feminine, while the learned discipline of counterpoint was reserved almost exclusively for male students. Smith explores problematic interactions between feminism and modernism in early twentieth-century American art music. Hisama discusses issues regarding gender and the composer's identity in the fourth movement of Crawford's string quartet.
7. Cynthia Pace explains this work in terms of "a coexisting three-part form, five-part form, and a palindromic pitch, rhythm, and dynamic series" in her "Accent on

Form-Against-Form: Ruth Crawford's *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*," *Theory and Practice* 20 (1995): 125.

8. There are a total of 111 beam-groups in the piece.

9. Mark D. Nelson, "In Pursuit of Charles Seeger's Heterophonic Ideal: Three Palindromic Works by Ruth Crawford," *Musical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (1986): 462.

10. Since the entire piece is written in parallel octaves, I will refer to the octave designation of the upper note on any given sixteenth-note pulse, designating pitch according to the guidelines of the Acoustical Society of America, in which middle C is C₄ and the lowest note on a conventional keyboard is A₀.

11. This quarter rest is the fifth rest in the piece.

12. Judith Tick comments on "number centrality" in several of Crawford's works. The number seven in the third movement of Diaphonic Suite No. 1, the number ten in the last movement of the *String Quartet 1931*, and the number nine in "Chinaman, Laundryman" are all significant in different ways. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 206–12.

13. Nelson, "In Pursuit of Charles Seeger's Heterophonic Ideal," 462.

14. A sixth aggregate in this piece, probably the result of an error in the published score, extends from the D₅ on pulse 366 to the D_{#4} on pulse 377. A discrepancy in the palindrome begins at pulse 377; if not for this discrepancy, this "extra" aggregate would not exist.

In the context of the palindrome, the G_{#4} on pulse 147 corresponds to the G_{#4} on pulse 374. At pulse 377 in the published score, two consecutive pairs of notes—D_{#4} and A₃, and G₄ and F_{#4}—are switched in regard to what the palindrome would dictate. This discrepancy results in an additional aggregate (2659T74E8013) extending from pulse 366 to pulse 377.

If the discrepancy is corrected—that is, if these twelve notes appear in retrograde of their order in the first half of the palindrome—there is no aggregate at this point: the A₃ (pc9) that should appear on pulse 377 constitutes a pc repetition of the A₄ on pulse 369, and pc3, which is accounted for by the D_{#4} (mistakenly placed on pulse 377 of the published score), is absent, and the pitch classes from pulse 366 to pulse 377 are (2659T74E8019).

A handful of other discrepancies appear in the published score; among these are registral discrepancies and several groups of two and three notes that are not retrograded in the second half of the palindrome. At least one discrepancy in the published score is certainly an error: at pulse 374, the left-hand pitch is an F_{#3} and the right-hand pitch is a G_{#4}. The corresponding point in the first half of the palindrome indicates G_{#3} and G_{#4} in the left and right hands, respectively. The Ruth Crawford Seeger Holograph Music Manuscripts and Folk Materials collection at the Library of Congress does not include any sketches or manuscripts of PSMA, so it is impossible to know whether some of the discrepancies are intentional or accidental. A complete list of discrepancies in the published score is included in Lyn Ellen Thornblad Burkett, "Tensile Involvement: Counterpoint and Compositional Pedagogy in the Work of Seeger, Hindemith, and Krenek" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2001), 242–44.

15. The lowest note of the piece is D₁, five half-steps above the lowest key on a conventional piano. D₁ is played on pulses 1, 30, 491, and 520.

16. Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II*, 194.

17. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 211.

18. At Crawford's suggested metronome markings (400–500 sixteenth notes per minute), timing for the piece ranges between 1'04" and 1'19". Commercial recordings of PSMA include a spectrum of performance times slightly exceeding this range. Timings for recordings available to date are as follows, from shortest to longest in duration: Jenny Lin's three performances recorded on BIS 1310—each adhering to one of the three possible sets of dynamic markings indicated in the score—clock in at 58", 58", and 1'; Joseph Bloch's performance on Composers Recordings Inc., CRI 658, is 1'07"; Sarah Cahill's performance on New Albion, NA 114, is 1'17"; and Reinbert de Leeuw's performance on Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2 is 1'23".
19. Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits, 1888–1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 14.
20. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 161–62.
21. *Ibid.*, 161, quoting a letter from Crawford to Charles Seeger, April 24, 1931, and a letter from Crawford to Henry Allen Moe, May 15, 1931.
22. *Ibid.*, 141–64.

Chapter Four

In Pursuit of a Proletarian Music

Ruth Crawford's "Sacco, Vanzetti"

Ellie M. Hisama

Music is propaganda—always propaganda—and of the most powerful sort.
—Charles Seeger

Ruth Crawford's 1932 song "Sacco, Vanzetti" commemorates the notorious trial and execution of the Italian immigrant anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti during the previous decade. On April 15, 1920, a paymaster and a guard for the Slater and Morrill Shoe Company were robbed and fatally shot in South Braintree, Massachusetts, by four to five men.¹ On May 5, 1920, the police arrested two Italian immigrants—Sacco, a shoemaker, and Vanzetti, a fish peddler—as suspects in the crime. The newly appointed director of General Intelligence in the Department of Justice, J. Edgar Hoover, oversaw the proceedings, and prosecutors for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts emphasized the defendants' status as Italian immigrants and their anarchist politics, while failing to present a convincing case against them. The prosecution of Sacco and Vanzetti received worldwide publicity, and became a powerful symbol of an unjust American legal system. After a six-week trial, during which the men's politics and patriotism were on trial as well, they were convicted in July 1921 of armed robbery and murder, and in April 1927 were sentenced to death. Thousands of people protested the verdict, and subsequently, during the appeals process, Massachusetts Governor Alvan Fuller appointed three prominent men to a blue ribbon committee: Samuel Stratton, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; A. Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard University; and retired Judge Robert Grant. Upon the committee's recommendation, Governor Fuller sustained the death sentences, and Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in August 1927.

Recognizing that the trial and verdict were tainted by prejudice against immigrants and those who held anarchist views, Governor Michael S. Dukakis issued a proclamation on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of their execution, that August 23, 1977, would be “Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti Memorial Day” in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and that “any stigma and disgrace should be forever removed from [their] names . . . from the names of their families and descendants, and so, from the name of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”²

The case was recorded in many literary and artistic works, including Edna St. Vincent Millay’s poem “Justice Denied in Massachusetts” (1927), Upton Sinclair’s documentary novel, *Boston* (1928), John Dos Passos’s trilogy *U.S.A.* (1920–36), and Ben Shahn’s Sacco-Vanzetti series of paintings (1931–32).³ Moving musical markers of this tragic chapter in U.S. history include Woody Guthrie’s *Ballads of Sacco & Vanzetti* (1946–47), Pete Seeger’s setting of Sacco’s letter to his son (1951), and Marc Blitzstein’s uncompleted opera from the 1950s, *Sacco, Vanzetti*, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera.⁴

Crawford’s song “Sacco, Vanzetti” stands as a rare sonic experiment in which she attempted to compose what Charles Seeger called “proletarian music.”⁵ Believing music to be a cultural medium through which a dehumanized society might become more compassionate, Seeger argued that music composed especially for the proletariat would make such humanizing possible. Seeger developed his ideas about what would constitute proletarian music at the Composers’ Collective based in New York, in the columns he penned for the *Daily Worker* during the 1930s, and in his 1934 article “On Proletarian Music,” published in *Modern Music*. Proposing that “[t]he question of proletarian music is an integral part of the question of social evolution as a whole,” Seeger suggested that music composed specifically for the proletariat would lead to a more compassionate society: “Music is one of the cultural forms through which the work of humanizing . . . operates. Thus it becomes ‘a weapon in the class struggle.’”⁶ He suggested that the evolution of a proletarian music will occur in three stages: in the first stage, music would draw upon a “bourgeois” musical style; in the second stage, music would have both proletarian content and employ the “forward looking technique of contemporary art music”;⁷ and in the third and final stage, a new category of music would be produced.⁸ His essay only speculates as to what sort of music this third category would actually comprise, but Seeger’s recollections of the Composers’ Collective’s musical attempts suggest one approach to creating such a proletarian music:

[O]ne of the things we tried to do . . . [was] to use ordinary fragments of technique in an unusual way, because we thought *that* was revolutionary and therefore suitable for workers to use. We didn’t give them those same patterns in the usual way, which was what Broadway did. . . . We took those same formulas, simply used them differently,

and hoped that we were doing something revolutionary. [Compositions in that type] had unusual harmonic progressions in them, but usual chords. Or if there were some unusual chords, they put them in conventional patterns.⁹

This chapter proposes that “Sacco, Vanzetti” illustrates Seeger’s notion that music may express revolutionary content through experimental modernist compositional techniques. It thus provides an example of what he identifies as stage two in the evolution of a proletarian music, although to my knowledge neither Seeger nor Crawford explicitly linked this particular song to his theory of proletarian music. In composing “Sacco, Vanzetti” and “Chinaman, Laundryman,” Crawford aspired to reconcile the modernist musical idiom in which she was rigorously trained with her growing leftist political consciousness, a task she would undertake through the medium of traditional music after the Seeger family’s departure from New York for Washington, D.C. in 1935.

* * *

According to Seeger, “Sacco, Vanzetti” and its companion piece “Chinaman, Laundryman,” which comprise Crawford’s *Two Ricercari*, “reflected [Ruth’s] shock at the depression in 1932 and ’33.”¹⁰ He identified these songs as “two declamations of tremendous dramatic power,” and held them in even higher regard than her *String Quartet 1931*.¹¹ Their texts, by Chinese dissident and Columbia University student H. T. Tsiang, decry the unfair treatment of immigrants to the United States. Composed for a commission from the Society of Contemporary Music in Philadelphia, these songs tackle controversial political issues while remaining squarely within the atonal art music idiom in which Crawford composed her other works including her *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (1930), *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg*, commonly known as “Rat Riddles” (1932), and her four Diaphonic Suites (1930).

“Sacco, Vanzetti” and “Chinaman, Laundryman” were premiered for a new music audience on March 6, 1933 at a concert of the Pan American Composers at New York’s Carnegie Chapter Hall, a historic concert at which Varèse’s *Ionisation* was also premiered.¹² They were performed again two months later at the First American Workers Music Olympiad, an event sponsored by the Workers Music League that was held at City College, then located at 23rd Street and Lexington Avenue in New York. The cover of the program for the Olympiad displays the Workers Music League’s logo of a hammer and sickle upon a musical staff.¹³

Like other of Crawford’s works composed during her years in New York and Berlin from 1929 to 1932, “Sacco, Vanzetti” employs compositional methods within the so-called ultramodernist musical idiom. Example 4.1 gives the first fifty-one measures of the holograph score.¹⁴

Sacco, Vanzetti

words - H-T Tsang

music - Ruth Crawford

Tempo Giusto (♩ = 60)

*NB **

Fast! Fast! One year has passed! Dead! Dead! You will never be re-born!

f
sempre marcato

(non arpeggiando)

15

Who said There will be a resur-rection? Why did n't we see a ny of those *gentlemen Who were willing to take your

sempre simile

24

*places? The real mean-ing of Death - You knew it Still you paid with your

*NB ** It is essential that the audience understand the words. If the effort to secure the pitches as written should interfere with the clear rendition of the words, these pitches should then be regarded as general rather than as specific indications.

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Example 4.1. Crawford, "Sacco, Vanzetti," mm. 1-51. Reprinted by permission of the family of Ruth Crawford Seeger.

38

life for your class. Sac-ri-fice! That was real sacrifice! Look

mf

Example 4.1. (continued)

The song opens starkly. In m. 1, the piano presents the hexachord $B_b-E_b-B-C\#-G-D$, played *forte* and *non arpeggiando* and comprising two tri-chords, B_b-E_b-B in the left hand and $C\#-G-D$ in the right hand. The piano's steady diet of half notes, one per bar, contrasts the voice's entrance off the beat in m. 1 and its triplet rhythm in m. 3. The song's opening gives us the first of a generous dose of tritones: not only does the hexachord present a tritone between $C\#$ and G , but the hexachord moves several times to a pitch class played in two octaves that spell out the tritone melodically: E_b in m. 1 to A in m. 2; $C\#$ in m. 6 to G in m. 7; B_b in m. 8 to F in m. 9. The voice's similar predilection for tritones is evident in m. 17, in which the F moves several times to B on the word "resurrection," in mm. 18–19, from B back to F on the words "Why didn't,"¹⁵ and in many other passages in the song.

Along with its sympathetic concern for the ethnic immigrant's plight in twentieth-century America, "Sacco, Vanzetti" shares with its companion song "Chinaman, Laundryman" a tightly knit piano part and a freely structured vocal line in a declamatory style made up of three prominent elements.¹⁶ First, Crawford employs an overwhelmingly syllabic setting—she tends to allot one syllable per pitch throughout the song, as shown in mm. 1–48; second, she writes repeated pitches for the voice—for example, in mm. 15–17, all but one of the syllables in the question "Who said there will be a resurrection?" are sung to F_b ; and third, she uses the technique of *Sprechstimme*, in for example, mm. 4–5, on the words "has passed." Crawford indicates *Sprechstimme* by using downward pointing arrows rather than more traditional notation. The necessity that audience members comprehend the text so that they would then be moved to action is underscored in Crawford's explanatory note to the singer given on the first page of the score: "It is essential that the audience understand the words. If the effort to secure the pitches as written should interfere with the clear rendition of the words, those pitches should then be regarded as general rather than as specific indications."

The author of the texts of “Sacco, Vanzetti” and “Chinaman, Laundryman,” H. T. Tsiang, was an active Communist who worked as Sun Yat-sen’s secretary.¹⁷ In 1929 Tsiang moved from China to New York City and enrolled at Columbia University, where he was encouraged to write by some of his professors; those who read and offered criticisms on his writing included Mark Van Doren, Ashley Horace Thorndike, and John Dewey.¹⁸

Tsiang wrote politically radical poetry, novels, and plays. Upton Sinclair’s preface to Tsiang’s 1929 self-published collection of nine poems titled *Poems of the Chinese Revolution* declared: “This is a voice to which the white world, the so-called civilized world, will have to listen more and more as time passes. . . . The exploited races of the world are awakening and demanding the rights of human beings. Here is a young Chinese student whom the American authorities sought to deport and deliver to the executioner’s axe at home. What he has written is not perfect poetry, but it is the perfect voice of Young China, protesting against the lot of the under-dog.”¹⁹

Tsiang’s poem in memory of Sacco and Vanzetti, “One Year Has Passed,” was published in August 1928 in the Communist paper the *Daily Worker*.²⁰ Crawford may have first read Tsiang’s poem in the *Daily Worker*, in which Seeger published during the 1930s. Using the pseudonym Carl Sands or the initials C. S., Seeger penned music columns for the *Daily Worker* from 1934 to 1935, and was interested in Tsiang’s writing: he incorporated some text from Tsiang’s novel *China Red* in his song “Pioneer Song: Who’s That Guy?” for *Workers Song Book*, vol. 1, published by the Composers Collective in 1935.²¹ A revised version of “One Year Has Passed,” retitled “Sacco, Vanzetti,” appeared in *Poems of the Chinese Revolution*.²² His poem “Chinaman, Laundryman,” also published in the volume, passionately protests the exploitation of an ethnic immigrant laborer, and Crawford’s nine-tone setting of this work employs her signature serial style of composition in the piano part.

Tsiang’s poem “Sacco, Vanzetti” is reproduced below, annotated with the stanzas numbered 1 to 10. The poem’s ten stanzas are divided into five sections in the song, indicated by Roman numerals.²³

Sacco, Vanzetti

(In memory of the first anniversary of the martyrs’ death.)

- I 1. Fast! Fast!
 One year has passed!
 Dead! Dead!
 You will never be reborn!
 Who said
 There will be a resurrection?
 Why didn’t we see any of those gentlemen

Who were willing to take your places?
 The real meaning of “death”—
 You knew it.
 Still you paid with your life for your class!
 Sacrifice!
 That was real sacrifice!

II 2. Look at your enemies,
 They are fishing,
 Smiling,
 Murdering,
 As ever.
 Shameful!
 It is an eternal disgrace to us all.
 Before your death,
 Did not millions promise
 To do “this” or “that”,
 If you should die?
 Now
 One year has passed.
 What about “this” and what about “that”?

III 3. Petitions?
 Protests?
 Telegrams?
 Demonstrations?
 Strikes?
 Oh! They may refire the cold ashes of our two
 martyrs.
 But they can never soften the murderer’s heart!
 Tears?
 Sighs?
 Complaints?
 And the like?
 Oh! They may expect the embraces
 of your dear mothers,
 They can never get pardons from the
 bloodthirsty masters!

4. Have you ever seen sheep and pigs
 Being dragged to the slaughter?
 How pitifully they shriek!

How terribly they tremble!
 Yet men enjoy their delicious flesh
 Just the same! Sheep! Pigs! Foreigners! Workers!
 Your sweat is fertile,
 Your blood is sweet,
 Your meat is fresh!

IV 5. Oh, Vanzetti!
 You did say:
 "I wish to forgive some people for what they
 are now doing to me"?
 Certainly, you can forgive them as you like,
 But you are the Wop, the fish peddler, the
 worker,
 And haven't anything in the bank.
 Isn't it a great insult
 To say "forgive" to your honorable master?

6. Oh, Sacco!
 You did say:
 "Long live Anarchy",
 But you should not forget,
 That when you climb up to heaven
 You must use the ladder!

V 7. Oh Martyrs!
 Dead! Dead!
 You are dead,
 Never, never
 To live again.
 Fast! Fast!
 One year has passed.
 But years and years,
 Years are piling up immortal bricks
 Of your lofty monument.

8. Oh martyrs!
 Look at the autumn flowers:
 They are dying!
 Dying! Dying!
 But
 The trees, the roots from which

The flowers are coming,
 Never, never die!
 When the spring comes
 We shall again see the pretty flowers
 Blooming,
 Perfuming,
 Saluting the warm sun,
 Wrestling with the mild wind
 And kissing the charming butterflies.

9. Oh maytyrs! [*sic*]
 Dead, dead.
 You are dead!
 But
 Your human tree and your human root
 Are budding,
 Blooming,
 Growing!
10. Listen to the war cries of your living brothers!
 This is the incense
 We are burning
 To you.

The poem angrily mourns the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti. Addressing both men in the second person, it bitterly lambastes Sacco and Vanzetti's enemies ("Look at your enemies, / They are fishing, / Smiling, / Murdering, / As ever. / Shameful!"), compares the treatment of foreigners and workers to that of sheep and pigs "dragged to the slaughter," and laments the futility of the efforts made by Sacco and Vanzetti's supporters, who "may expect the embraces / of your dear mothers, / They can never get pardons from the / bloodthirsty masters!" As Judith Tick notes, the poem illustrates a genre that Mike Gold, editor of the Communist periodical *New Masses*, identified as a literary "worker's recitation"—the poem employs various rhetorical devices including exclamatory commands and direct addresses.²⁴ Starting in stanza 7, which begins "Oh Martyrs!" the poem turns from its anguished mourning of Sacco and Vanzetti's death to focus on the meaning of their lives for future generations ("Years are piling up immortal bricks / Of your lofty monument"). The final three stanzas continue to emphasize the men's contributions to society, presenting the image of trees and roots that "never, never die!" and generate new growth of spring flowers. Tsiang's "Sacco, Vanzetti" thus depicts the process of transformation, in a manner similar to his poem "Chinaman,

Table 4.1. Hexachords in each section

Section	Hexachord	Normal Form	Prime Form
I (mm. 1–50)	1	G–B _b –B–C#–D–E _b	6–15 [012458]
II (mm. 51–80)	2	G–A–B _b –C#–D–E _b	6–Z43 [012568]
III (81–140)	3	G–A–C–C#–D–E _b	6–Z41 [012368]
IV (mm. 141–84)	4	A–C–C#–D–E _b –E	6–Z36 [012347]
V (mm. 185–295)	5*	A–C–C#–E _b –E–F	6–15 [012458]

*Equivalent of T₂ of Hexachord 1.

Laundryman,” in which the exploited Chinese launderer becomes a self-affirming and independent individual who energizes his fellow workers by his example.²⁵

Table 4.1 shows how the song’s five sections are governed by the presence of a distinct hexachord.²⁶ The hexachord that dominates Section I, B_b–E_b–B–C#–G–D, constitutes Hexachord 1. As Example 4.1 shows, Crawford’s organization of the piano’s music by means of a repeated pattern is marked in the holograph score each time with a double bar line—for example, between mm. 10 and 11, 20 and 21, and so forth.²⁷ On the first page of the published score, Crawford identifies these ten-measure subsections as “ostinato sections”;²⁸ I refer to such a subsection as a “pitch ostinato” in order to distinguish it from the rhythmic ostinato that occurs later in the song. Hexachord 1 is altered in Section II, which begins in m. 51, with the B moving to A while the other five pitch classes are retained, resulting in the hexachord B_b–E_b–A–C#–G–D. In Section III, which begins at m. 81, the B_b changes to C, resulting in C–E_b–A–C#–G–D. In this substantial central section, mm. 81–140, the texture of the piano harmony changes from the pervasive hexachord that has sounded through m. 86, thinning to a pentachordal texture in mm. 86–95, a tetrachordal texture in mm. 96–105, a trichordal texture in mm. 106–15, and then thickening back to tetrachordal texture in mm. 116–30, the pentachordal texture in mm. 131–40, and returning to the hexachordal texture in m. 141, the start of Section IV. In Section IV, the G from the hexachord in Section III changes to E, resulting in C–E_b–A–C#–E–D; and finally in Section V, the D changes to an F, resulting in C–E_b–A–C#–E–F, or T₂ of Hexachord 1.

The general pattern of the pitch ostinato works as follows: a single hexachord is revoiced and alternates with octaves in a distinct pattern.²⁹ For example, m. 11 begins with the hexachord B_b–E_b–B–C#–G–D, then moves to three G#s in m. 12, then returns to the same hexachord in m. 13, now revoiced as B–E_b–B_b–D–G–C#, moves to octaves again (now As) in m. 14,

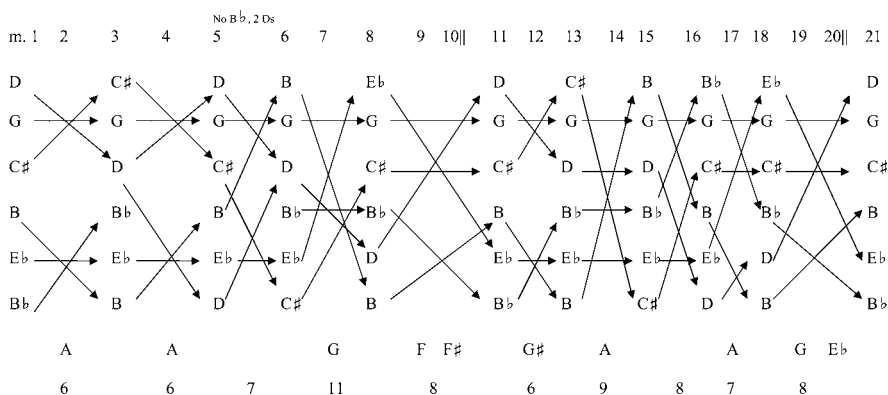


Figure 4.1. Voice leading in “Sacco, Vanzetti,” mm. 1–21.

then continues with two more statements of the revoiced hexachord, followed by another statement of octaves, another revoiced hexachord, and concludes with two more octaves. The pattern of the pitch ostinato is thus chord–octaves–chord–octaves–chord–chord–octaves–chord–octaves–octave s over a span of ten measures.³⁰

Crawford composes the song in what Seeger labeled “verse-form” in his treatise *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*: “With [verse-form], many devices of musical assonance and rhythm can be combined. For instance, a repeated tone, a characteristic interval, some particular neume or rhythmical figure, a distinctive slurring or dotting, can recur at symmetrical intervals at the beginning, middle, or ending of each phrase.”³¹ The end of each “verse” is marked by the double bar line. Because of the structure of the pitch ostinato, each phrase thus ends with two sets of octaves, usually a semitone apart, sometimes a whole tone apart, and occasionally with a larger interval punctuating each phrase. Tick suggests that Crawford classified her two songs as *ricercari* not from any relation they might have to the sixteenth-century form of instrumental composition, but from their concern with such precompositional methods.³² Seeger described the piano accompaniment itself as “ricercar” as opposed to the “sprechstimme contralto.”³³

Crawford’s use of voice leading between the piano’s hexachords is striking.³⁴ Figure 4.1 shows the hexachords and their voice leading in mm. 1–20: By counting the numbers of “twists” between registral voices, shown by the number of intersections of the six voices that join adjacent hexachords, one can calculate the degree of twist created through voice leading between hexachords. For example, moving from m. 1 to m. 3 and counting the

voices from low to high, the lowest voice is 1, the second-to-lowest-voice is 2, and so forth, up to the highest voice as voice 5: voice 5, G, stays in the same relative register, but voice 1, B₂, moves up to voice 3, while voice 3 moves down to voice 1. These moves create three twists. In the upper trichord, voices 4 and 6 similarly swap places while voice 5 remains fixed. As shown by the arrow crossings in mm. 1–3, six twists in all occur over these two bars. Unlike my analysis of the third movement of Crawford’s *String Quartet 1931*, this notion of “twisting” does not follow individual voices of different instruments but rather records the spatial reconfiguration of six notes played by six fingers—three to a hand—and thus the change the pianist would feel in each revoicing of the hexachord.³⁵

Rather than retaining all or most of the pitches in the same register, Crawford shifts them so that a relatively high degree of voice-leading twist is reached. Of the fifteen maximum crossings or twists that can occur between two six-note chords, the number tends to reach at least six. There is a low of three in mm. 75–76 and a high of fourteen in mm. 63–65 and mm. 156–57. Charting the entire song as measured through its degree of twist reveals that a relatively high degree of twist is used throughout the song. Through voice leading and registral exchange, the sound of the hexachord pervading each section is refreshed as it is restated in its variant forms throughout the song, and the music moves insistently onward. The hexachord is never simply reiterated with each voice remaining in the same space relative to the other voices, and thus the twist level never reaches zero in the song.³⁶ The pianist’s physical struggle to attain each newly twisted hexachord at the brisk tempo of half note equals 60 fittingly accompanies the unidentified narrator’s bitter memorial song to the two dead men.³⁷

The piano employs two primary rhythmic devices: a rhythmic mode and an ostinato based upon the use of polyrhythms. As Tick observes, each of the song’s five sections is dominated by a different rhythmic mode³⁸—for example, the rhythmic duration of the piano’s music that sets the poem’s first and second stanzas (mm. 1–80) is primarily half notes; the duration for the third and fourth stanzas (mm. 81–140) is primarily half note–quarter note–quarter note–half note. Such an organizing principle gives the song a long-range formal structure that helps to make the sections distinct.³⁹

Crawford employs polyrhythms in two ways. The first category of polyrhythm is of the garden variety in which subdivisions of the beat contrast between two or more voices. For example, in m. 157 (shown in Example 4.4), the piano plays two quarter notes against the voice, which sings five eighth-note attacks. Such a rhythmic structure strengthens the stark contrast between the piano and the voice. “Sacco, Vanzetti” is one example of Crawford’s compositions that, as Straus has observed, pit two contrasting voices against each other. Its companion song, “Chinaman, Laundryman,” is another such example: the voice’s pitches are free while the piano’s pitches are strictly

87

mf *titions? Pro- tests? Telegrams! Demonstrations! Strikes? Oh! They may re- fire the cold ashes of our two martyrs,* f

The image shows a musical score for Example 4.2. It consists of two staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, starting at measure 87. It begins with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and includes lyrics: "titions? Pro- tests? Telegrams! Demonstrations! Strikes? Oh! They may re- fire the cold ashes of our two martyrs,". The score features various rhythmic patterns, including triplets and quintuplets, and dynamic markings such as mezzo-forte (mf) and forte (f). The bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, which provides harmonic support to the vocal line.

Example 4.2. Crawford, "Sacco, Vanzetti," mm. 87–95. Reprinted by permission of the family of Ruth Crawford Seeger.

The image shows a musical score for Example 4.3, illustrating the component parts of a 3:2 polyrhythm. It consists of two staves. The top staff shows a sequence of notes with brackets indicating groups of three notes (triplets). The bottom staff shows a sequence of notes with brackets indicating groups of two notes (pairs). The two staves are aligned to show how the 3:2 polyrhythm is constructed from these two basic rhythmic units.

Example 4.3. Component parts of 3:2 polyrhythm.

organized via a nine-tone row.⁴⁰ Concerning the performance of *Two Ricercari*, Seeger noted that "the singer doesn't even have to be very much with the piano except just to end together."⁴¹ The use of such rhythms in two voices ensures that piano and voice tug against each other, adding to the tension already established by the piano's voice-leading twists.

The second category of polyrhythm occurs when the composite attacks of a passage comprise a polyrhythmic pattern.⁴² Crawford uses two types of such composite polyrhythms in the song. The first type organizes the piano's music in mm. 81–140, and is made up of composite attacks of a 3:2 polyrhythm.⁴³ Example 4.2 shows mm. 87–95.

Example 4.3 breaks down this rhythmic pattern into its component parts in order to show the two-voiced origins of the piano's polyrhythm, which occurs every two bars.

149

wish to for give some people for what they are, now doing to me. Certainly, you can, them as you like, forgive them as you like,

mf *in poco* *mf*

158

But you are the Ubp, the fish peddler, the worker, and haven't anything in the bank.

f

Example 4.4. Crawford, “Sacco, Vanzetti,” mm. 149–64. Reprinted by permission of the family of Ruth Crawford Seeger.

Example 4.5. Component parts of 4:3 polyrhythm.

A second type of composite polyrhythm organizes the piano’s music in mm. 141–85—dotted quarter–eighth–quarter–quarter–eighth–dotted quarter. Example 4.4 shows mm. 149–64. In this excerpt, the pattern begins in m. 150.

Example 4.5 breaks down this second rhythmic pattern into its component parts in order to show the two-voiced, 4:3 origins of the piano’s polyrhythm, which now occurs every three bars.

Crawford uses these two types of composite polyrhythms to organize the rhythmic structure of the piano in mm. 81–185, or 105 measures—over a third of the song’s 295 measures. As Examples 4.2 and 4.4 show, the two types of ostinati, the pitch ostinato and the rhythmic ostinato, do not correspond except at infrequent junctures. The points at which their beginnings and endings do converge mark significant portions of the text. For example, m. 140 marks the end of the speaker’s passionately drawn parallel between sheep and pigs, and foreigners and workers in stanza 4: “Your sweat is fertile, / Your blood is sweet, / Your meat is fresh!” This dramatic exclamatory statement ends with an ascending major seventh, from G to F# sung on the words “is fresh!” followed by a quarter-note rest, which, combined with the tripled Cs, stands for the half note that ends the last statement of the 3:2 polyrhythm. Both the striking upward leap and the brief respite in the piano from the continual unrelenting pitch ostinato it intones suggest the overwhelming significance of this portion of the text. The introduction of the 4:3 rhythmic ostinato in m. 141 and the beginning of a new statement of the pitch ostinato in the same measure reinforce the importance of these lines of the poem.

The piano’s relentless chord-and-octave texture, presence of the ostinato, and use of polyrhythms give the song its “determined continuity” and “emotional drive,” traits that Seeger deemed essential in revolutionary music.⁴⁴ Seeger described the role of the piano ostinati in “Sacco, Vanzetti” as “pay[ing] no attention whatsoever to the song; they go right ahead on their remorseless course.”⁴⁵ The vocal line’s free pitch organization and its use of indeterminate pitches starkly contrast the repetition in the piano. The effect of the rigidly organized piano part and the free, declamatory vocal part over 295 measures is that of an inexorable death march;⁴⁶ there seems to be no escape from the song’s grim conclusion. The simultaneous presence of a traditional repeated accompanimental pattern and the presence of modernist techniques such as the embracing of traditionally dissonant intervals such as the tritone in the voice, the uncompromising hexachords that govern the piano part, and the use of *Sprechstimme* illustrate Seeger’s suggestion that in proletarian music, “we shall keep as much as we like of the old, but build better upon it. . . . The new grows out of the old, retaining what is strong and discarding what is weak.”⁴⁷

* * *

Crawford’s “Sacco, Vanzetti” marks a critical point in American history with a modernist musical signpost, and demonstrates one way in which music could serve as a weapon in the class struggle. To my knowledge, neither Seeger nor Crawford themselves specifically identified “Sacco, Vanzetti” or

“Chinaman, Laundryman” as an example of the proletarian music that Seeger theorized. But because the song sets a proletarian text and employs the revolutionary compositional techniques of modernist experimental art music, it illustrates the stage in the evolution of proletarian music proposed by Seeger that would join revolutionary content with modernist experimental composition.

The Collective’s members rejected traditional American music as an effective form of proletarian music and vehicle for social change. Seeger recalls that “[t]he Collective members wouldn’t listen to folk music: they were professional musicians, unconcerned with that low-grade stuff.”⁴⁸ According to Seeger, when the Kentucky balladeer and union organizer Aunt Molly Jackson attended the Collective’s meetings in 1933 and sang some of her own songs in rural Appalachian dialect, the Collective’s members were bewildered rather than inspired by her performance; Jackson in turn was not impressed by songs composed by members of the Collective.⁴⁹ Seeger’s former composition student and fellow Collective founder Henry Cowell did not find traditional workers’ choruses sufficiently revolutionary because the smoldering lyrics were doused by regressive, tonal music. Rather than accept the notion that proletarian music should be composed in a simple style readily accessible by people untrained in music, Cowell suggested that “technical innovations must be steadily and slowly introduced into workers’ music, and that workers [will] appreciate it.”⁵⁰

During his years in the Collective, Seeger likewise believed that neither bourgeois music nor what he regarded as “conventional, easy going, subservient folk song”⁵¹ would properly serve the proletariat, and admitted being biased toward music as “fine art.”⁵² Even while publishing columns in the Communist newspaper the *Daily Worker*, he firmly believed popular music to be a “low” form of music. Describing the period during which he taught folk songs at the New School for Social Research in the 1920s and early 1930s, he mused:

I was just a split personality. It took me an even longer time to admit that I liked popular music. Jazz was of the gutter, evil to all good musicians of the old school. And I took a long time to slough that off. I wrote some of the columns for the [Daily] Worker as if I knew everything whereas I really was in a state of just barely beginning to learn.⁵³

Seeger began exploring folk music only when he realized that the Collective was failing to achieve its goal of creating socially relevant music. By the late 1930s, Seeger came to champion the traditional music of the working class: “Plainly, if we are to compose for more than an infinitesimal fraction of the American people, we must write in an idiom not too remote from the one most of them possess—their own musical vernacular.”⁵⁴ Seeger would become a significant force behind the folk revival in the 1940s and 1950s, as the head of the Pan-American Union’s Inter-American Music Center and

chief of its Music and Visual Arts Division, which promoted the exchange of music, both oral and notated, among the Americas, and as father of three children—Pete, Mike, and Peggy Seeger—who would become internationally renowned performers of traditional music.⁵⁵ He eventually rejected the aims of the Collective and the possibility of creating the proletarian music he imagined, stating in a 1980 interview that “there’s no such thing as revolutionary music. To change musical technique is not revolutionary, outside of music. I considered myself a musical revolutionist simply by reversing old technical devices, such as the preparation of consonance. Well that was musically revolutionary, but it had no significance socially.”⁵⁶

In “Sacco, Vanzetti,” Crawford succeeded in composing an example of the proletarian music Seeger envisioned, by bringing innovative compositional methods to Tsiang’s radical text. Whether it reached the “proletarian audience” she and Seeger sought is less certain: the song was performed only a few times during Crawford’s lifetime, and is infrequently performed today.

This type of composition, a brand of politically radical ultramodernism, would prove, at any rate, to be a short-lived experiment for Crawford; in the 1930s, she decided to take up the work of transcribing folk music and of writing original piano accompaniments to traditional tunes. These projects resulted in the publication from 1948 to 1953 of three volumes of folk songs and in her children’s lifelong engagement with and dedication to traditional music.⁵⁷ Yet the immense power of Crawford’s extraordinary song “Sacco, Vanzetti” reveals her singular gift to position revolutionary politics upon an avant-garde musical scaffolding in her pursuit of a proletarian music.

Notes

Versions of this chapter were presented at the Modernist Studies Association, Pennsylvania State University; the Boston Area Gender and Music Seminar, Tufts University; and the Department of Music, Columbia University. I am grateful to audience members at these events for their helpful comments, and to Ben Piekut for his assistance. Thanks as always to Anton Vishio for his advice and suggestions.

1. The Sacco and Vanzetti case is recorded in trial transcripts, published as *The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: Transcript of the Record of the Trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in the Courts of Massachusetts and Subsequent Proceedings, 1920–7*, vols. 1–6 (New York: Henry Holt, 1928–29). The voluminous literature about the case includes Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Michael M. Topp, *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford, 2004).
2. The text of the proclamation is available at www.saccovanzettiproject.org/pages/context/dukakis.htm (accessed February 12, 2003).
3. Upton Sinclair, *Boston: A Documentary Novel of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case* (Cambridge, Mass.: Robert Bentley, [1928] 1989); Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Justice Denied in

Massachusetts,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1927; reprinted in her *Selected Poems* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 76–77. Twenty-three paintings by Shahn about the Sacco-Vanzetti case were exhibited at Edith Halpert’s Downtown Gallery in New York City, April 5–17, 1932. Alejandro Andreus examines Shahn’s representation of these three men in “Ben Shahn and the Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti,” in *Ben Shahn and the Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* (Jersey City, N.J.: Jersey City Museum, 2001), 117–18.

4. Woody Guthrie, *Ballads of Sacco and Vanzetti*, Folkways FH 5485, [1946–47] 1960; Pete Seeger, “Sacco’s Letter to His Son,” Folkways FH 5485, [1951] 1960. Blitzstein began his opera *Sacco and Vanzetti*, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, in the 1950s but did not finish it. Sketches for the opera are housed in the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison. Several songs from this opera are published in *The Marc Blitzstein Songbook*, vols. 1–3, ed. Leonard Lehrman (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1999, 2001, 2003).

5. Charles Seeger, “On Proletarian Music,” *Modern Music* 11, no. 3 (March–April 1934): 121–27. My discussion of “Sacco, Vanzetti” is indebted to Judith Tick’s study “Ruth Crawford’s Proletarian Ricercari,” *Sonus: A Journal of Investigations into Global Music Possibilities* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 54–79.

6. Seeger, “On Proletarian Music,” 121–22.

7. *Ibid.*, 125.

8. *Ibid.*, 125–26.

9. David K. Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands: The Composers’ Collective Years,” *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 2 (May 1980): 164.

10. Ray Wilding-White, “Remembering Ruth Crawford Seeger: An Interview with Charles and Peggy Seeger,” *American Music* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 451. Mike Seeger recalls that the Seeger home in Silver Spring displayed a Works Progress Administration plaster sculpture of a man hanging from a scaffold, lynched, and a judge and jury looking away from him as well as a painting by Ben Shahn, who was a friend of the Seeger family. See Mike Seeger, “Thoughts of Silver Spring, 1938,” in *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Tradition, Modernity, and the Making of American Music*, ed. Ellie M. Hisama and Ray Allen (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, 2001), 12.

11. Wilding-White, “Remembering Ruth Crawford Seeger,” 451.

12. Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Proletarian Ricercari,” 66. Carol J. Oja explores the circumstances of Varèse’s composition of *Ionisation* and the reception at its premiere in her *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43–44.

13. This program cover is reproduced in Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Proletarian Ricercari,” 70.

14. The score of “Sacco, Vanzetti” published by Theodore Presser includes errors. The holograph score is available in *Soundings* 7–8, ed. Peter Garland (July–October 1973): 206–14 and is the version used here. My thanks to Larry Polansky for discussions about these two versions of the score.

15. Other prominent instances of the tritone in the voice occur in m. 52, A–E♭ (“at your enemies”), in mm. 68–72, G–C♯ (“to do ‘this’ or ‘that’ if you should die?”), in m. 101, A♯–E (“Tears?”), and elsewhere.

16. Aspects of structure in “Chinaman, Laundryman” are explored in Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Proletarian Ricercari,” 59–60, 63, and Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8–9, 75–76, 82–83, and 117–18. An analysis of “Chinaman, Laundryman” appears in chapter 4 of Ellie

M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

17. For biographical information on H. T. Tsiang, see Floyd Cheung, "Introduction," in H. T. Tsiang, *And China Has Hands* (Forest Hills, N.Y.: Ironweed Press, [1937] 2003); Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 109; and Alan Wald, "Introduction to H. T. Tsiang," in *Into the Fire: Asian American Prose*, ed. Sylvia Watanabe and Carol Bruchac (Greenfield Center, N.Y.: Greenfield Review, 1996), 341–44. An important study of Tsiang's novel *And China Has Hands* in relation to Chinese American masculinity appears in Floyd Cheung, "Performing Chinese American Masculinity, 1865–1941" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1999), 193–215.
18. H. T. Tsiang, "Foreword," in his *Poems of the Chinese Revolution*, English edition (New York: Liberal Press, 1929), n.p.
19. Upton Sinclair, "Statement," in Tsiang, *Poems of the Chinese Revolution*, 3.
20. H. T. Tsiang [sic], "One Year Has Passed," *Daily Worker*, August 22, 1928, 3. Tsiang also published a poem titled "The Blood of Shanghai" in *Daily Worker*, August 11, 1928, 3.
21. H. T. Tsiang, *China Red* (New York: H. T. Tsiang, 1931). A list of Seeger's columns and reviews published in the *Daily Worker* appears in Pescatello, *Charles Seeger*, 325–26. Seeger's "Pioneer Song: Who's That Guy?" was published under the pseudonym of "Carl Sands" in *Workers Song Book No. 1* (New York: Workers' Music League, 1935). "Pioneer Song" appears in Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1980), 128–29.
22. Tsiang, *Poems of the Chinese Revolution*, 15–16.
23. The text of Crawford's "Sacco, Vanzetti" is nearly identical to the version of the poem published in *Poems of the Chinese Revolution*, reproduced in the text. (The version printed in the *Daily Worker* contains several grammatical and printing errors.) Straus refers to these five sections as "stanzas."
24. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 191.
25. A reading of Tsiang's poem "Chinaman, Laundryman" appears in Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism*, 62, 76, and 91–98.
26. Straus explores the large-scale harmonic progression created by these five hexachords in *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 114–15.
27. In the published version of the song, apostrophes are used instead of double bar lines to separate the statements of the ostinato. Straus discusses Crawford's use of ostinati in other of her compositions in his chapter published in this volume.
28. Ruth Crawford, "Sacco, Vanzetti" for voice and piano (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Theodore Presser, 1973).
29. The hexachord in m. 5 does not fit the pattern that is established throughout the song: it contains two Ds (the lowest and highest notes of the chord), and lacks a B \flat . The missing B \flat is reminiscent of the fourth movement of Crawford's *String Quartet 1931*. In this work, Voice II, comprising Violin II, viola, and cello, is missing an E in m. 24, a note that Crawford identified on her annotated published score as a "loose thread in Persian rug," or a deliberate "error" that breaks the otherwise strict pattern. This annotated score is available in the Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.
30. David Nicholls refers to Crawford's use of alternating chords and octaves in "Sacco, Vanzetti" as "texture-ostinato." See Nicholls, "The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger—A Study in Advanced Compositions Techniques" (Ph.D. diss., St. John's College, 1981); cited in Tick, "Ruth Crawford's Proletarian Ricercari," 64.

31. Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929–1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 196.
32. Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Proletarian Ricercari,” 60. For more on Crawford’s use of precompositional methods, see Straus’s chapter in this volume.
33. Charles Seeger, Letter to Alan Stout, July 21, 1970; quoted in Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Proletarian Ricercari,” 60.
34. “Voice leading” refers to the linear connection between vertical sonorities and traces the path of individual registral voices from one harmony to the next.
35. I explore the “degree of twist” between the instrumental voices in Crawford’s *String Quartet 1931*, third movement in Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism*, 12–34.
36. The maximum number of fifteen, in which the hexachord would do a headstand, is also never reached.
37. The tempo marking in the published score is half note equals 60, while in the holograph score (shown in Example 4.1), it appears to be whole note equals 60. Although the latter marking would result in a remarkable challenge for the pianist, Crawford’s music is generally difficult to perform, and it is not impossible that she wanted the tempo indicated in the holograph.
38. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 64, 74.
39. See Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 118–19.
40. In the fourth movement of Crawford’s *String Quartet 1931*, the first violin, comprising Voice I, and the second violin, viola, and cello, comprising Voice II, are also similarly distinguished by free vs. strict pitch organization. For a discussion of these two voices and the musical narrative they enact, see Straus’s chapter in this volume and chapter 3 in Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism*.
41. Wilding-White, “Remembering Ruth Crawford Seeger,” 451.
42. Straus observes that the ten-measure pitch ostinato and the rhythmic patterns of two- and three-measure duration “move in and out of alignment with each other” and that this phenomenon is similar to the shifting alignment of pitch and rhythm that occurs in Crawford’s “In Tall Grass” from *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg* of 1930–32 (Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 119).
43. My thanks to Anton Vishio for remarking on this use of polyrhythms in “Sacco, Vanzetti.” Vishio explores aspects of polyrhythms in “Sacco, Vanzetti” and other non-tonal compositions in “The Dynamics of Polyrhythms,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory, Seattle, November 2004.
44. Unsigned column by Seeger, “A Program for Proletarian Composers,” *Daily Worker*, January 16, 1934, 5.
45. Wilding-White, “Remembering Ruth Crawford Seeger,” 451.
46. Thanks to Melissa de Graaf and Justin Rust for sharing this characterization of the song.
47. Seeger, “On Proletarian Music,” 122.
48. Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 162.
49. Interview with Charles Seeger by Richard A. Reuss, June 7, 1967; cited in Richard A. Reuss with Joanne C. Reuss, *American Folk Music & Left-Wing Politics, 1927–1957* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 53.
50. A. B., “Symposium and Concert at John Reed Club,” *Daily Worker*, December 20, 1934, 5; quoted in Reuss, *American Folk Music & Left-Wing Politics*, 53.
51. Carl Sands [Charles Seeger], “Thirteen Songs from Eight Countries Included in Book Put Out by Music Bureau Internat’l,” *Daily Worker*, February 1, 1934, 5.

52. Dunaway, "Charles Seeger and Carl Sands," 166.

53. *Ibid.*, 166.

54. Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II*, 387; reprint of Seeger, "Grass Roots for American Composers," *Modern Music* 16 (1939): 143-49.

55. Further information on Seeger's years with the Pan-American Union is given in Pescatello, *Charles Seeger*, 173-206. Ray Allen's and Lydia Hamessley's chapters in this volume explore the careers of Mike Seeger and Peggy Seeger.

56. *Ibid.*, 167.

57. *American Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948); *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1950); and *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953). Roberta Lamb's chapter in this volume explores Crawford Seeger's songbooks for children.

Chapter Five

The Reception of an Ultramodernist

Ruth Crawford in the Composers' Forum

Melissa J. de Graaf

Ruth Crawford's experience in the Composers' Forum in 1938 marked a turning point during a static time in her career, possibly providing just the inspiration the struggling composer needed to reestablish her faltering professional identity.¹ Never a prolific composer, Crawford experienced an unusually unproductive period from 1932 to 1938—her only surviving work the three-part agitprop round “When, Not If” and a group of twenty-two folk song settings. A number of works from the early 1930s were either left unpublished or were lost. She left two orchestral pieces unfinished around 1932, a year that also witnessed the crisis in her psychic equilibrium, marked most dramatically by her burning of the Violin Sonata, which had proved such a success at its premiere in 1926. “When, Not If” (1932–33), the counterpart to her husband Charles Seeger's “Not If, But When,” was published and recorded five years ago.² Another round Crawford wrote at that time was lost. Though she worked on a piece for the *New Masses* competition, along with Seeger, Copland, and a host of other radical modernists, in the end she failed to enter her “Into the Streets May 1st” into the competition, and the composition has never resurfaced. She was slated to contribute a piece to the Eisler Festschrift in 1934, according to the table of contents, but the piece never materialized.

The New York City Composers' Forum, a series of weekly concerts of contemporary music, was established in 1935 under the auspices of the Federal Music Project (FMP) and Works Progress Administration (WPA). One of the New Deal's most successful endeavors, it showcased countless of Crawford's contemporaries, including Aaron Copland, Amy Beach, Henry Cowell, Virgil Thomson, and Roger Sessions.³

The Forum reflected the lively political atmosphere of the period as well. Inspired by a recent tour of the Soviet Union, Ashley Pettis, director of

Social Music Education for the FMP, visualized the Forum as a teaching tool for building a new, educated audience, and presented his idea to FMP director Nikolai Sokoloff in 1935. As a music editor for the Communist weekly *New Masses*, as well as a pianist and composer, Pettis fervently believed in the use of music as a weapon in the class struggle and sought a closer relationship between composer and audience.⁴ At the opening concert of the Forum, Pettis declared the goal of the entire endeavor:

We are hoping that through these evenings in intimate contact with composers, we may do our part in removing the barrier which has always existed between the composer and the people who are or should be the consumers of his goods.⁵

In the first five seasons a total of 244 composers took part in 141 concerts. The first season, the Forum presented one composer each week; following seasons highlighted two, sometimes three, composers. Concerts during the first season were held at the Federal Music Building at 110 West 48th Street, but growing audiences demanded that new quarters be found. On January 27, 1937, the new Theatre of Music opened at 254 West 54th Street, which seated 1,200 people, 800 more than the 48th Street venue.⁶ At the beginning of each concert, Pettis introduced the composer or composers who had been selected by a committee including Copland, Varèse, and Pettis after submitting sample works.⁷ After the concerts, audience members passed forward their questions on slips of paper. Pettis, acting as intermediary, read the questions and comments, to which the composers responded to the best of their ability.⁸ In the most extreme cases, the question-and-answer sessions erupted in arguments, fistfights, and riots.⁹

The New York Composers' Forum, more than other parallel local venues around the country, brought together the most disparate, conflicting set of people imaginable. The audience often included composers and performers, society types, music critics and journalists, artists and dancers, and even people off the streets. The free admission made the Composers' Forum a welcome venue for poor and homeless people.¹⁰ Lehman Engel's concert attracted an impressive roster of luminaries, not only fellow composers and musicians, but also playwrights, poets, dancers, and patrons of music including Martha Graham, e. e. cummings, the actress Mary Morris, and publisher W. W. Norton.¹¹

Crawford made her appearance in the Composers' Forum on April 6, 1938. On the program were her *String Quartet 1931*, the *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (1930), one of the piano preludes (1927), and the *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg* ("Rat Riddles," "Prayers of Steel," and "In High Grass") (1930–32).¹² Performers that evening included the Forum String Quartet (Walter Eisenberg, violin; Milton Lang, violin; Harry Hyams, viola; and Herman Krapkoff, cello); Richard Singer, piano; Dorothy Essig, contralto;

Martha Thompson, piano; Samuel Spumberg, oboe; and Samuel Schwartz, percussion.

As was standard practice, Crawford shared the program with another composer, Hanns Eisler. The program committee's decision undoubtedly reflects her involvement in Marxist musical culture and groups like the Composers' Collective. Eisler had gained renown in Europe and America for his collaboration with Bertolt Brecht on the controversial *Lehrstücke Die Massnahme* and *Die Mutter*. These works, both in Eisler's *Massenlieder* styles, became models for the "mass song" in the United States. Charles Seeger, as well as Henry Cowell, Elie Siegmeister, and a number of other socially conscious composers, adopted the style, forming the Composers' Collective in 1934–35 to promote music for the proletariat that maintained a challenging modern aesthetic. Crawford attended infrequently, and Siegmeister recalls her as being "a little reticent and a little withdrawn" during this period.¹³ Eisler believed that music must support the struggle of the people. He admired the Collective's aims during his first visit to New York in 1934:

I was impressed on finding these ideas so fresh, so strong and courageous among the best composers of America. . . . These composers are struggling against antiquated, sterile music, against the kitschy kind of film and jazz music, and against snobbish, isolated modern concert music. They are struggling for a new modern style based upon the latest achievements of modern music, while using it at the same time in the struggle of the workers and employees against oppression and for bread and freedom.¹⁴

As a heroic model for the American radical left in the 1930s, Eisler attracted sizable audiences to his lectures at the New School for Social Research in 1935 and 1936. During Eisler's first visit, Seeger helped plan a *Festschrift* and reception in Eisler's honor.

Most of the audience at this Forum session would have come to hear Eisler's works rather than Crawford's, given his popularity with the radical New York intelligentsia. His half of the program included four chamber cantatas for voice, two clarinets, viola, and cello (1937), the *Sonata for Piano*, op. 1 (1923), and the *Klavierstücke*, op. 8 (1925).¹⁵ Written in response to the Popular Front strategy of reaching out to a broader audience, Eisler's cantatas, with texts by Italian poet Ignazio Silone, depict antifascism as a class struggle and the violence that results from fascist ideology. The content of the works would undoubtedly have resonated with this particular New York audience.

It is important to position Crawford within the context of female experience in the Forum, in order to fully understand the reception she received in the Forum. Crawford was one of fifteen professional female composers involved in the Composers' Forum.¹⁶ The types of comments and criticisms directed at female modernists were similar to those leveled at their male

modernist colleagues, with one major difference: the men were exempt from sarcastic taunts. One listener suggested that Jessie Baetz's compositions for Violin and Piano "could very well do without the Piano and might do without the Violin as well," and that her "variations on 'doom-de-doom' are really not sufficiently infantile."¹⁷ At the end of Henry Holden Huss's Forum session, one of the regular attendees opined: "I hope that one of the women composers present with us tonight, whose compositions preceded yours and who claims to compose mannish but, to me, not so Spanish, has listened and taken a lesson in composing." The audience member was referring to Johanna Beyer's concert, which had taken place two weeks earlier.¹⁸ At Crawford's concert, one of the less kind attendees commented: "Did you try hard to be original? Did you succeed?" This was followed by yet another sarcastic jibe: "Do you really believe that your music is the future music of America? If so, then I pray for its deliverance."¹⁹

Transcripts of male modernists' Forums also reflect sometimes-hostile attitudes toward modernist music, minus the sarcasm. At Edwin Gerschefski's session, a listener observed, "Occasionally here and there a few bars or so ring out poetically, then you seem to recede into clouds of meaningless dissonances."²⁰ The audience at Otto Luening's concert appears to have been concerned with his modernist, fragmentation technique. One person asked, "In the first movement of the quartet why the numerous rests? Why the sudden breaking off of themes that want to go somewhere and then silence?"²¹ Another listener commented on Norman Cazden's String Quartet: "Painful to listen to—a waste of time. Can't imagine anyone publishing this kind of music, buying it, paying to hear it performed or tuning in on it on the radio. If music isn't to give pleasure, of what use is it?"²² Though these comments reflect the same kind of incomprehension and distaste as those recorded at Crawford's session, none of them exhibit the same level of sarcasm. The comments leveled at Crawford and other female modernists may reflect a hostility prompted by deep-seated anxiety revolving around modernism and gender ideology.

It is clear that the Forum was often an unpleasant, even antagonistic environment for female composers, which may help explain why Crawford only appeared once. Crawford's Forum session took place on April 6, 1938, toward the end of an extremely successful season for women in the Forum. Women's participation gradually increased in the first three seasons but experienced a sharp decline in the fourth season when professional female composers virtually disappeared from the programs. It is not entirely clear *how* pieces and composers were selected. Official documentation and descriptions indicate that any composer could submit works to the Selection Committee, whose members would evaluate the submissions and decide on participants.²³ However, several key pieces of evidence contradict this scenario. At his concert in 1937, Paulo Gallico said in passing that "my friend,

Mr. Pettis, asked me to appear tonight.”²⁴ Henry Brant has recently corroborated this statement, explaining that one was simply invited, if you knew someone. He remembers nothing about a selection committee. If it is true that some composers were simply invited by Pettis or by another member of the committee, then the lack of women in the Forum was certainly not “beyond [their] control” as Pettis claimed at Marion Bauer’s Forum session.²⁵

There are no records indicating how many women submitted works that were *not* selected for performance. Perhaps the social repercussions of the Depression influenced the selection committee to give the few opportunities to men.²⁶ The last few years of the Forum saw a change in administration; the new members on the selection committee may have been less tolerant of “lady composers,” but it is also possible that women composers stopped submitting selections. Possibly the committee felt that they had already done their duty or filled some unspoken quota in the earlier seasons, and that there was nothing unusual in the absence of women in the late 1930s. Perhaps the atmosphere of the Forum, with its frequent attacks and sometimes gendered criticism, discouraged Crawford and other women from taking part. In any event, the administrative arm of the Forum no longer acknowledged the low percentages of women composers, and certainly failed to acknowledge or explain the sharp decline in the 1938 and 1939 seasons.

While some of the criticism Crawford endured seems to have been related to her status as a female composer, the transcripts are remarkably free from overt references to her gender. The only reference to her sex was one she raised herself. Asked whether she had written any music lately, she responded, “I have been composing babies the past five years.”²⁷ Crawford was not exempt from other types of criticism, however. As Tick states, the reactions of the audience “opened old modernist battle scars.”²⁸ Following hisses from the audience, one listener exclaimed, “Please, please, explain the purpose and the content of your music so they won’t hiss any more.” Another member of the audience requested, “Please inform one bewildered auditor the intent and purpose of your writing. Why is it so difficult to grasp at first hearing?” Two comments focused specifically on her *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg*. One listener thought the percussion accompaniment “unsympathetic” to the voice, and another listener inquired, “Precisely what did you have in mind in that last selection? (with voice),” to which Crawford responded, “Doesn’t need to be answered.” The latter was the same response she had given to the question “Did you try to be original?” demonstrating her conviction and determination not to be intimidated.²⁹

Crawford was unhappy with the performances of her works. When asked if her music was exceptionally difficult, she replied, “Of course most composers think their music is difficult, but it is very generally conceded that mine is exceptionally so. The string quartet should have months of

rehearsal, due especially to its rhythmical and dynamic difficulties." The third and fourth movements should have been played "at least a third faster . . . the melodic line is lost when played so slowly." She believed that the audience had not really heard her music that evening and no doubt felt the poor performances influenced the negative audience reaction.³⁰

Crawford used the opportunity of the Forum discussion period as an attempt to elucidate some of her techniques. She described most of her works as "tightly organized," with "a distinct form-plan." She explained that the slow movement of the *Quartet* was built on a "counterpoint of dynamics" in which "the crescendi and diminuendi should be exactly timed, and no instrument should reach the high or low point at the same time as any other." On the melodic line of the slow movement, she clarified, "as in the second movement, it travels from instrument to instrument; there is only one line."³¹

At least one member of the audience was interested in her technique of dissonant counterpoint, which she modeled on her husband's theory. The listener inquired, "Can you explain something of your use of dissonant counterpoint on which your *Quartet* is obviously based?" This person went on to comment on the slow performance of the piece compared to a previous performance, and finally concluded, "The whole is a fascinating study in dynamics." As the questions were submitted anonymously, it is impossible to determine the identity of this well-informed speaker. It is no stretch of the imagination, however, to hear the voice of Charles Seeger himself asking the self-flattering questions.³²

In her response to another question, Crawford articulated that she thought out her music horizontally, making it more difficult than music thought out vertically. Her emphasis on the horizontal plane and her technique of dissonant counterpoint, while not directly referencing it, suggest a neo-Baroque aesthetic that was shared by a number of other modernist composers in the Forum, including Beyer and Roy Harris.³³

The neo-Baroque element and prevalence of contrapuntal textures connected directly to the "form versus content" dichotomy perceived in the music of many modernists. During her Forum session, Crawford admitted to an emphasis on form, but also declared a desire for greater content in her music. Explaining her pursuit of enhanced musical techniques, she described the music on that evening's program as having been written "during a period when I was more concerned with form than with content. I was trying through form, rhythm, dynamics, to work out disciplines which would expand musical technique and give it wider horizons."³⁴ When asked if she believed her music, with its emphasis on form, to be the future of music in America, she had to admit that she did not. She acknowledged, "The music of the future will have more content than this music has." She did not disavow experiment in music, however. On the contrary, she affirmed the importance of contesting conventional musical forms and techniques, declaring:

I do believe that this sort of work has very great value. New techniques must be worked out, experimented with, for a long time before the balance can be reached out of which what can be called a true American music can arise.³⁵

Crawford recognized the need for content to counterbalance the emphasis on form, but rather than reject deliberate exploration of new forms and techniques, she advocated years of continued experimentation before a true synthesis could occur. Crawford's aim for greater content in her music calls to mind Copland's critique of modernism during his Composers' Forum session: "In a sense, strangely enough it is true that 'ultra-modern' music did die in 1930—in this sense only—that a certain period of development in sounds came to an end. . . . Everyone experimented and now it was time to dig in and do something with those experiments."³⁶

Forum questions concerning the compositional process reflected the binary of form versus content but used analogies such as "design versus sound" and "construction versus instinct." One listener was curious about Beyer's working methods, whether she could actually "hear" the music or simply "see it as 'design.'"³⁷ Cazden fielded a similar question: "Do your themes develop spontaneously or do you work to achieve the form you desire?" The composer explained that writing music required a great deal of effort: "I do have to work over the themes considerably. It just doesn't flow out of the pen. (amusement) And I do hope that no present day composer feels that music does flow out of the pen."³⁸ Another audience member asked Edwin Gerschefski whether his developments were "inspired by arithmetical plans or a beauty of spirit?"³⁹ A listener at Crawford's concert inquired about her compositional process: did her music "pour forth or was it constructed?"⁴⁰

The Forum transcripts clearly illustrate Crawford's desire to achieve an ideal aesthetic of balance between content and form, message and means. Crawford declared,

All composers would, I believe, agree that the making of music combines both expression and construction. Any student of music who has looked into the works of any of our great composers will find an astonishing amount of thoughtful bricklaying and intellectual effort.⁴¹

Seeger discussed the idea of intuition and reason as complementary elements in his fourteen principles of music criticism in *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*. He observed, "The two mental faculties involved in music criticism, intuition and reason, not only complement each other, but one may actually influence how the other proceeds."⁴² Seeger held conflicting opinions of Schoenberg and the composer's serial techniques. He felt that Schoenberg's music stimulated the intellect, but that the product of such arithmetical procedures usually failed to touch the emotions.

Seeger devised a three-part assessment of modern music, incorporating his most important students and colleagues—Cowell, Crawford, and Ruggles. He linked Ruggles and Scriabin as “neo-Romantics” who shared a compositional process that searched “for emotional rapture and spiritual fulfillment,” while Cowell and Stravinsky, the neoclassicists, “adopt[ed] a more detached and objective approach.”⁴³

In Seeger’s view, the composers who truly achieved a balance between intellect and emotion were Schoenberg (despite his other comments) and Crawford. They could be grouped in the same aesthetic category “because of their mutual desire to avoid the extremes of pure emotion or reason. Motivated by neither pure emotion nor cold calculation, they stand the greatest chance of realizing Seeger’s lofty aesthetic ideals.”⁴⁴ He went on to assert that Crawford had the greatest potential for expressing this perfect balance, what Taylor Aitken Greer calls an “ideal fusion of intuition and logic that would help usher in the new ‘style’ of balanced composition.”⁴⁵

Toward a New Simplicity: The Future of American Music?

By 1938, however, Crawford was in pursuit of a different kind of balance. Beginning in 1932, Crawford had sought to integrate Marxist-inspired lyrics and modernist music settings, employing her signature dissonant counterpoint, *ostinati*, *Sprechstimme*, and modified serial technique. Her *Two Ricercari*, “Chinaman, Laundryman” and “Sacco, Vanzetti,” and her agitprop round, “When, Not If,” all from 1932, reflect an aesthetic espoused by radical modernists such as Philip Rahv and William Phillips, founding editors of the *Partisan Review*, a Marxist cultural journal.⁴⁶ In an effort to apply Marxist dialectics to critical theory, Rahv asserted that any separation of form and content was simply false. Like Crawford and Seeger, Rahv saw form and content as one dialectical unity.⁴⁷

It is possible that Crawford felt frustrated from the seemingly unsuccessful attempts to integrate form and content in her music of that period. Her burst of activity in 1932 preceded four years of very little compositional output. In 1934 she and Seeger both composed entries for a competition sponsored by the radical magazine *New Masses*, on Alfred Hayes’s text “Into the Streets May 1st.” Seeger sent his entry in, competing against Aaron Copland, Marc Blitzstein, Norman Cazden, and Elie Siegmeister, among others. As previously noted, Crawford never sent in her song, and it has since been lost.

By the time of her Composers’ Forum Concert in 1938, Crawford was in search of a new simplicity, and she was far from alone. Fellow modernist Gershefski mentioned moving toward simplicity in his recent work, and even such “middle of the road” composers as Henry Hadley and Werner

Josten were retracing their steps away from temporary ventures into polytonality and dissonance in favor of simpler techniques and sounds. Cazden, a politically radical modernist like Crawford, described what he saw as a rapprochement between composers and audience—that composers “are coming to the audience and they see the necessity for winning the audiences over to their side.”⁴⁸

Outside the Forum, Seeger had become disillusioned with the mass song as it was being done, protesting that these songs could not be sung by average workers. He complained that Copland’s setting of “Into the Streets May 1st,” which had won the *New Masses* competition, “could not be sung on a picket line or at a protest march.”⁴⁹ Copland, too, was moving toward a less complicated aesthetic. Asked during his 1937 Forum session whether he saw “any discernable and definite trend and aim in today’s music,” he answered, “The trend is to get closer to the audience. To write things simpler so that the audience can build it without pulling it down.” His own goal, he stated, was “to write something that is simple, yet very good. It will take some time to do it. (as an afterthought) I have just written a high school operetta!”⁵⁰

In late 1935 Crawford joined her husband in Washington, D.C., where he had begun his new job in Roosevelt’s Resettlement Administration. Between 1936 and 1938 she worked on the arrangements for *Twenty-two American Folk Tunes*, her only compositional output during these years. She referred to them in her Forum session but failed to identify them as folk songs, mentioning them simply as “a couple of dozen piano pieces.” Not satisfied with mere arrangements as expressions of her desire for simplicity, she disclosed further plans along those lines. In response to a listener who pleaded with her to “write some music that a greater number of people can listen to,” she affirmed, “I will. I have become convinced during the past two years that my next music will be simpler to play and to understand. But at the same time we should not forget that it is also important to write music for the very few.”⁵¹ Far from completely rejecting her modernist ideals, Crawford still believed it was possible to achieve a balance, or fusion, between modernism and simplicity.

Descriptions of Crawford’s unfinished String Quartet No. 2 (1938) illustrate the composer’s attempts at a synthesis between simplicity and dissonance.⁵² She struggled with conflicting ideologies in this piece, wanting “to combine my two desires: to make use of the old technique [dissonant counterpoint], but to make use also of folk material. . . . Just introducing dissonance into the actual folk material seems superficial; using it as it is, is out of the question (why not just play a record?)”⁵³ She planned to incorporate the fiddle tune “Flop-Eared Mule,” hoping that “its eighth note prevalence would less interfere with the runs which are built according to my old ostinato favorite with a cumulative rhythmic hitch.”⁵⁴ Her perception of the work’s difficulties seemed to change literally on a daily basis. In a letter to

Charles on 4 November 1938, she glimpsed something of the fusion between simplicity and her old techniques: "It may be too strenuous, though there is plenty of simplicity in it. In fact, it is a combination of simplicity and complexity. There is even tonic and dominant in it, horrors."⁵⁵ Yet the next day she was again in doubt:

The quartet went well yesterday, one "piece" is almost finished. It is a terribly strenuous piece of music, I think. I'll call them Etudes for String Quartet—then there won't be so much fuss about their being difficult. Maybe the next section will be easier. Will I ever write really simple music?⁵⁶

Perhaps in the end she felt that the two aesthetics were irreconcilable. She never completed the piece, and sketches have not survived. The "larger plans" she had spoken of in the Composers' Forum came to nothing.

In 1939 she was given an unexpected chance to try again to integrate the two aesthetics. Along with Seeger, Copland, Brant, and other composers, she received a commission from CBS for an orchestral arrangement of folk songs, resulting in the elegant and ambitious *Rissolty, Rossolty*. Unable to resist the urge for complexity and innovation, Crawford quickly exceeded the limits of a typical folk setting, producing a vastly different work from that of her husband. While Seeger's "John Hardy" is a fairly simple, direct presentation of the folk tune with few rhythmic, melodic, or orchestral innovations, Crawford's piece is a sophisticated layering of a fiddle tune, "The Last of Callahan," and two folk songs, "Rissolty, Rossolty" and "Phoebe." She fragments and juxtaposes the three melodies with a varied and creative orchestration and wonderful use of wind and brass instruments. The musical textures become increasingly rich and layered, in a polyphony of folk tunes and fragments of tunes. Metric changes from 6/8 to 2/4 to "one beat per measure" add to the challenge of musical material. This is followed by a whimsical ending; at the height of the climax with the three juxtaposed tunes, the music comes to an abrupt halt. The opening motive is heard briefly, then silence.

The riotous bustle of noises and activities during the climax is reminiscent of the layering effects in Ives and Copland's music—Copland's "cubistic" approach to music, the collage effect he heard in the music of Ives.⁵⁷ It is evocative of the noise and merriment of a backcountry square dance or hoe-down, or the cacophony of sounds when the creatures of the woods and mountains wake at dawn. The Ives connection may have been more than mere accident. Ives had sent several scores to Seeger in 1939 for an article in *Magazine of Art*. Crawford typed the article for her husband and in a letter thanked Harmony Ives: "It has been always one of our strong regrets that though having such close bonds to Charles Ives both in music trends and friends, our paths have never crossed."⁵⁸ "Music trends" could have referred

to what Tick calls “their sympathetic response to vernacular sound as heard by modernist ears.”⁵⁹ Crawford’s work should have been considered a complete success in terms of the composer’s desire for a fusion of the simple and complex, content and form.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, “*Rissolty, Rossolty*,” never received the critical acclaim it deserved, and worse, Seeger undermined her accomplishment. Mike Seeger, their son, remembers his father saying, “Well mine came out best.”⁶¹ If outside critics had supported and recognized the significance of this marvelous work within the context of her career, this very possibly would not have been Crawford’s last composed work until 1951. Her ideals concerning form and content, which she discussed in the Forum, would have had the opportunity to develop and come to full fruition.

Conclusion: Impact of the Composers’ Forum

Crawford’s experience in the Forum impacted her music in a several significant ways and reflected the development of her musical ideology during this time of transition in her career. After a number of relatively unproductive years of discouragement and challenge, Crawford’s participation in the Forum may have reestablished in her own mind her identity as a professional composer. It may have provided just the motivation she needed to seriously develop “some larger plans” she mentioned during her Forum. She began work on the second string quartet and *Rissolty, Rossolty* (1939), joined the American Composers Alliance, and revised the slow movement of the *String Quartet 1931*, readying it for performance. Perhaps most significantly, she deposited the score of the String Quartet at the Library of Congress, thereby, as Judith Tick notes, “claiming historical significance for herself and the work” and bolstering her identity as composer.⁶²

The interactions between composers and audiences as experienced in the Forum often had a profound effect on composers, their conceptions of musical culture, and their musical output. Many composers took their interactions with the audience quite seriously. Listeners’ desire for relevant, meaningful music would certainly have affirmed the direction in which Crawford was already heading. Crawford’s Forum comments on the synthesis of form and content, and her search for a new, simpler modernist expression foreshadow her post-Forum music. Though she eventually abandoned the sketches for the second string quartet, she wrote about her attempts at a fusion of “simplicity and complexity.”⁶³ This fusion was perhaps most beautifully realized in her orchestral fantasy *Rissolty, Rossolty*. Abandoning these compositional efforts, however, Crawford sought, and found, her “music of the future” in the folk tradition, spending the next twelve years of her life creating complex and painstakingly detailed transcriptions of field recordings. Perhaps in some way her folk song settings from those intervening

decades reflect an older search for integration of experimental form and socially relevant content.

Notes

1. This chapter will refer to the composer as “Ruth Crawford,” as she was identified at the Composers’ Forum concerts.
2. Ruth Crawford’s “When, Not If,” was published in *MusicWorks: Explorations in Sound* 80 (Summer 2001): 17, with an accompanying CD of the work performed by Jody Diamond, Mary Ann Haagen, and Larry Polansky. Seeger published his round in the *Workers Song Book*. It was performed in the Composers’ Collective and by Lahn Adomian’s Communist chamber choir, the New Singers. See Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 197.
3. The documents and transcripts of the Composers’ Forum form the basis of Melissa J. de Graaf, “Documenting Music in the New Deal: The New York Composers’ Forum Concerts, 1935–1940” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2005).
4. Pettis (1892–ca. 1965?) studied in San Francisco, New York, and Berlin, making his debut as pianist and composer in New York in 1922. See “Ashley Pettis, Pianist, Makes Debut,” *New York Times*, December 12, 1922, 26. From 1925 to 1931, he taught at the Eastman School of Music, and later at Sarah Lawrence College. In 1936 the Knickerbocker Little Symphony, under the auspices of the FMP, premiered his *March Hymn*. He co-authored *The Well-Tempered Accompanist* (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: T. Presser Co., 1949) with Coenraad Valentyn Bos, and wrote *Music: Now and Then* (New York: Coleman-Ross, 1955). In 1951 he entered the priesthood of the Catholic Church, residing in Rome for some years. By 1961 he had become the chaplain at St. Mary Hospital in Nelsonville, Ohio. See Ross Parmenter, “The World of Music,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1961, X9. A few additional biographical facts can be gleaned from his brief mention in Nicolas Slonimsky’s *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 5th ed. (New York: G. Schirmer, 1958), 1237.
5. Composers’ Forum Records, October 30, 1935. The Federal Music Project and Composers’ Forum Records can be found at the National Archives II College Park, Maryland in Record Group (RG) 69.5.3. The Composers’ Forum Transcripts are a subsection within the Records. Transcripts also exist for the Boston Composers’ Forum at the Boston Public Library. Other cities did not maintain detailed records, although some descriptions are available for the Minneapolis/St. Paul Forum.
6. In the 1970s, the 54th Street venue was transformed into the infamous Studio 54, a star-studded nightclub rife with cocaine and corruption. Today the venue is once again a successful venue for stage performances and home of the Roundabout Theatre Company.
7. There are indications that some composers were able to bypass this supposedly blind selection process, as will be discussed later in this chapter.
8. Some transcripts indicate that composers knew from whom the question came; composer Bernard Wagenaar addressed one questioner as “Madame” (Composers’ Forum Transcripts, December 2, 1936).
9. Brief but valuable discussions of the Composers’ Forum can be found in Barbara A. Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press,

1980), and Cornelius B. Canon, *The Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration: Music in a Democracy* (University Microfilms International, University of Minnesota, 1963). Transcripts of these sessions survive nearly complete in the National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, comprising a rich source of information about a time in American musical life that remains underexplored.

10. Ross Lee Finney recalled his first concert with the Forum: "Two-thirds of the people were there to get out of the cold. A lot of them were asleep!" Quoted in Heidi Waleson, "Composers' Forum at 50," *High Fidelity* (Musical America Edition) 36 (April 1986): 14.

11. Composers' Forum Transcript, May 27, 1936.

12. Crawford made several interesting annotations to the program in the Composers' Forum Records in the National Archives II. Her *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* is listed as Piano Etude, to which she added "in Mixed Accents." She crossed out the "Five" in front of the Piano Preludes and replaced it with "(one)," and she wrote in the titles of the *Three Songs*, which had not been included. She also added dates next to each of the pieces, including 1933 for the *Piano Study* and for the *Three Songs*, differing from the accepted dates for those works. Tick lists the date for the *Piano Study* as 1930, and the *Three Songs* as 1930–32. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 363–64.

13. Quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 196.

14. From a report about Eisler's American tour, which he read in the Strasbourg broadcasting station on June 7, 1935. Hanns Eisler, *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs, trans. Marjorie Meyer (London: Kahn and Averill, 1999), 87–88.

15. For a brief, but detailed discussion of Eisler's use of a modified twelve-tone technique and clear, contrapuntal textures in the chamber cantatas and his other important political cantata *Gegen den Krieg* (Against War), op. 51 (1936), see Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler Political Musician*, trans. Bill Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 150–53.

16. Other women in the Forum included well-known composers such as Amy Beach and Marion Bauer, but also lesser known composers such as Johanna Beyer, Jessie Baetz, and Eda Rapoport. The transcripts of their sessions are invaluable, recording eloquent accounts of their music, their philosophies, and the unique challenges presented by their role as women in modern music. For an in-depth discussion of female composers in the Forum, see Melissa J. de Graaf, "'Never Call Us Lady Composers': Women in the New York Composers' Forum, 1935–1940," *Musical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

17. Composers' Forum Transcripts, December 15, 1937.

18. Composers' Forum Transcripts, June 2, 1937. For an account of Beyer's experiences in the Forum, see Melissa J. de Graaf, "Intersections of Gender and Modernism in the Music of Johanna Beyer," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 8–9, 15, available at <http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam/So4Newshtml/Beyer/Beyer.htm> (accessed July 12, 2005); and Larry Polansky and John Kennedy, "'Total Eclipse': The Music of Johanna Magdalena Beyer: An Introduction and Preliminary Annotated Checklist," *Musical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (1996): 719–78. Very little is known about this intriguing figure in American ultramodernism. Beyer (1888–1944) emigrated from Germany in 1923, according to her Forum program, and settled in New York, where she studied at Mannes College and with Crawford, Henry Cowell, and Charles Seeger. She taught music at the Greenwich House Music School and at lower schools in the New York area, and acted as Cowell's press secretary during his years in San Quentin State Prison in California. Her complicated relationship with Cowell remains to be explored.

19. Composers' Forum Transcripts, April 6, 1938.
20. *Ibid.*, April 29, 1936.
21. *Ibid.*, April 20, 1938.
22. *Ibid.*, January 27, 1937.
23. The Selection Committee during the 1937–38 season included Wallingford Riegger, Isadore Freed, Nicolai Berezowsky, Harry Cumpson, Arthur Hartmann, and Forum director Ashley Pettis.
24. Composers' Forum Transcripts, April 28, 1937.
25. *Ibid.*, January 8, 1937.
26. For an in-depth discussion of gender bias in the Depression era, see Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). Work outside the home presumably threatened to defeminize women by making them “‘narrow, hard, [and] efficiency bitten’” and “distracted them from the lesson of True Womanhood: that children ‘are her immortality’” (11). Judith Tick also discusses the effects of Depression-era division of labor by gender on Crawford’s relationship with her husband. She repeatedly referred to his coveted position in the Resettlement Administration as “their” job. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 230.
27. *Ibid.* Michael, was born in 1933; Peggy in 1935, Barbara in 1937, and Penny in 1943.
28. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 252.
29. Composers' Forum Transcripts, April 6, 1938.
30. *Ibid.*
31. For a thorough discussion and analysis of the third and fourth movements of the *String Quartet 1931*, see Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chapters 2 and 3; Joseph N. Straus’s chapter in this volume, and his *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 158–82; and Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 212–22.
32. It is likely that Seeger was *not* in attendance at his wife’s Forum concert, being occupied with fieldwork in the South. Judith Tick suggests that the speaker might very well have been Henry Cowell, who would also have been familiar with the piece (personal communication).
33. It is striking to note the similarities between seemingly disparate composers like Harris and Beyer, who was also deeply influenced by Bach. Her Dissonant Counterpoint No. 1 is replete with the encoded letters B-A-C-H, and at her Forum session, Beyer stated, “I like Bach. I am influenced by Bach. Bach is my morning prayer and Bach is my evening prayer” (Composers’ Forum Transcript, May 20, 1936). Bach’s music and style were perceived as an antidote to fin-de-siècle excesses and mass culture. As early as 1905, composers and musicians already anticipated the modernist vision of Bach and the Baroque, claiming that Bach was a “balm for a culture that is seen as degenerate, perverted, effeminate, and unhealthy.” From a survey conducted by the editors of *Die Musik* in Berlin, as quoted in Walter Frisch, “Bach, Brahms, and the Emergence of Musical Modernism,” *Bach Perspectives* 3 (1998): 129.
34. Composers' Forum Transcripts, April 6, 1938. The only exception to this motivation was the Piano Prelude (1927), written several years earlier than the rest of the pieces on the program.
35. *Ibid.* For a detailed discussion of Copland’s Forum experience, see Melissa J. de Graaf, “Aaron Copland and the Composers’ Forum-Laboratory Transcript: A Post-

- Concert Discussion, February 24, 1937," in *Aaron Copland and His World*, ed. Carol J. Oja and Judith Tick (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 395–412.
36. Composers' Forum Transcripts, February 24, 1937.
37. *Ibid.*, May 19, 1937.
38. *Ibid.*, January 27, 1937. Schoenberg expressed his concept of balance in terms of intuition versus reason, and spontaneous emotion versus cerebral effort, describing his compositional strategies as combinations of intellectual and emotional labor. See Arnold Schoenberg, "Heart and Brain in Music," *Style and Idea*, ed. Dika Newlin (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1950), 179.
39. Composers' Forum Transcripts, April 29, 1936.
40. *Ibid.*, April 6, 1938.
41. *Ibid.* Other modernists sought a slightly different kind of balance: in the program notes for the Excerpts from Piano Suites, Beyer dedicates the first piece to Crawford and describes the work as "two-part dissonant counterpoint; the first voice feminine, arabesque-like; the second voice strong, masculine" (Composers' Forum Programs, May 20, 1936).
42. Charles Seeger, *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*, as quoted in Taylor Aitken Greer, *A Question of Balance: Charles Seeger's Philosophy of Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 80. Greer comments on the close affinity between Seeger and Bertrand Russell, who proposed in his early writings that "neither the mystic's vision nor the scientist's precision is the 'sole arbiter of metaphysical truth'" (Greer, *A Question of Balance*, 84–85).
43. Seeger, *Tradition and Experiment*, quoted in Greer, *A Question of Balance*, 117.
44. Greer, *A Question of Balance*, 118.
45. *Ibid.*, 119.
46. For discussion of Crawford's *Two Ricercari*, see Hisama's chapter in this volume, and Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism*, chapter 4.
47. See Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 75–97.
48. Composers' Forum Transcripts, January 27, 1937. Cazden had been active in the Composers' Collective a few years earlier, and had incorporated mass song style into his more academic compositions.
49. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 229.
50. Copland is referring to *The Second Hurricane*, intended for students of the Henry Street Settlement and premiered in April 1937 at the Grand Street Playhouse in New York, conducted by Lehman Engel and directed by Orson Welles. It has been performed infrequently since then, but in 1960 Leonard Bernstein directed a television production of the opera.
51. Composers' Forum Transcripts, April 6, 1938.
52. Straining to juggle domestic pressures with her need to create, she called the work "Baby number 4, Opus Number?" Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 253.
53. Quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 254.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*
57. For more on Copland's analogies between this type of musical layering and Cubism, see Gail Levin and Judith Tick, *Aaron Copland's America: A Cultural Perspective*

(New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2000); and de Graaf, “Aaron Copland and the Composers’ Forum-Laboratory Transcript.”

58. Quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 261.

59. *Ibid.* The form of the piece also serves to highlight content replete with allusions to the socially relevant issue of male–female relationships: the text of “Rissolty, Rossolty” approaches marital relations from a male perspective, while “Phoebe” takes a contrasting, female view of marriage.

60. Tick observes that “Rissolty, Rossolty” “resists conventional closure” (*ibid.*, 264).

61. *Ibid.*, 260. Pete Seeger, one of Charles’s sons from his first marriage, recalls that his father knew his work did not measure up to his wife’s. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 260.

62. *Ibid.*, 253.

63. *Ibid.*, 254.

Chapter Six

Ruth Crawford's Imprint on Contemporary Composition

Nancy Yunhwa Rao

“The Startling Modernity of Her Style”

“There was a feeling, right or wrong—that isn’t the question, it was a question of taste—that if we begin performing works which presented very definitely you might say—if you want to say it—the end of an era but not the beginning of what we felt was *our* era, there was always a fear of sliding back.”¹ These are the words of Claire Reis reminiscing about the League of Composers and the necessity for modern works to reflect the spirit of the times, a view that was widely shared among her colleagues. Edgard Varèse, for example, saw the challenge for many modernists of the 1920s and 1930s as the pursuit of “new mechanical mediums which will lend themselves to every expression of thought and keep up with thought.”² Thus a work of modern art must in some ways express a contemporary feeling of living in novel times, deriving not from the past but from the present environment.

From the time of her first compositions, Ruth Crawford’s works were placed firmly in the category of “music of *our* era.” She was, as the *Musical Leader* observed in 1929, “widely known for the startling modernity of her style.”³ When the Pan-American Association of Composers was formed in 1928, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the event, noting that “Ruth Crawford is estimated by the modernists of America as the greatest woman composer of the day.”⁴ In 1949 the composer and critic Virgil Thomson wrote of her *String Quartet 1931* that it was “thoroughly absorbing. It is in every way a distinguished, a noble piece of work. It is also a daring one and completely successful.”⁵ More recently, Wilfrid Mellers’s inspired account of the quartet concludes:

The slow movement works by infinitesimally slow exfoliation and contraction from nodal “clusters”, making for a polyphony of dynamics rather than of pitches. Such

sonorities, familiar in the sixties, were totally unknown in 1931; but what matters is not chronological precedence, but the fact that Crawford's sound-adventures are still, in 1997, "news that STAYS news"—to use Ezra Pound's appositively memorable phrase.⁶

The novelty in Crawford's work has helped to establish her place in American modern music and has drawn the most critical attention. Yet it is not the novelty per se that makes her compositions so compelling a voice. Rather, the value of her work lies more poignantly in the way she successfully reoriented her listeners to a sound world that was congenial, involving, and deeply moving. It is in this sense that her works continue to stay new, and remain a startlingly fresh voice for later generations of composers, performers, and listeners. The question of Crawford's influence on later composers has become the subject of several studies in recent decades, and I hope to contribute to this endeavor by making explicit certain aesthetic issues in the two middle movements of her famous *String Quartet 1931*, first studying their theoretical underpinning and then exploring their significance as regards the imprint of Crawford's contributions to American music. I will also reflect upon related issues of genealogy.

Geometrical Schemata, or Scales

In her biography, Judith Tick ponders Crawford's influence on American music and points to the constraining nature of our current stylistic categories:

Crawford defined her second-style period as the expression of "modern American dissonant music"—a phrase that does not fit the theoretical discourse of the last few decades. . . . Although it remains for others to explore the legacy of dissonant counterpoint on which she founded her second style, it already seems clear that its differences from European serialism are as important as its affinities.⁷

Certainly the usefulness of serialism as a reference point—either theoretically or historically—is complicated. There are enough parallels between the compositional procedures in the fourth movement of Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* and those found in certain twelve-tone compositions to lead commentators to adopt the framework of serialism, thereby validating Crawford's achievement by describing her as a predecessor of total serialism later in the century. Yet as Tick points out elsewhere, despite the effort of scholars in this direction, Crawford has not been "given her due as the history of American serial practice unfolds."⁸ In fact, I would argue that the invocation of serialism often makes Crawford seem to be a naive or simplistic serial composer.⁹ The earliest example can be found, ironically, in George Perle's 1960 influential essay that first brought analytical attention

to Crawford's *String Quartet 1931*. While Perle begins with unreserved praise for the quartet as "an original and inventive work whose numerous 'experimental' features in no way distract from its spontaneity, freshness and general musicality," he concludes, after a discussion of serial procedures of the last movement, in a more qualified tone: "Compared with some of the experiments today in 'total organized' music, the fourth movement of Miss Crawford's quartet is admittedly naïve, but it is a remarkable adumbration of a technical approach that has received wide attention only in the last few years."¹⁰ Perle and subsequent scholars who make the case for Crawford as a part of the mainstream historical narrative by comparing her work to later serialism do so at a cost. First, her schematic design is unfairly subjected to the theoretical assumptions and analytical tools derived from serialism. Second, significant characteristics of her music that are less quantifiable in a serial framework are suppressed. These include musical features that were important to her and her contemporaries rather than to the historiographic or analytic categories that would come later. In the early 1930s several concepts were at the forefront of debates in the circle of modernist composers in which Crawford participated. Though some of these concepts have since lost their urgency and prominence, their impact on modern American music is wider and deeper than many realize. It is thus important to place Crawford's legacy in the historical context of this strand of American compositional thought.

To this end, the view of one of Crawford's contemporaries offers a useful starting point. Elliott Carter, writes biographer David Schiff, "[in] his teenage years, discovered the American ultramodernists or experimentalists: Ives, Ruggles, Varèse, Cowell, Rudhyar, Crawford and Nancarrow." Carter allied himself with the group through his financial support for the journal *New Music* and studied Henry Cowell's *New Musical Resources*.¹¹ As an enthusiastic student of ultramodernist music, Carter's account captures some of these composers' urgency and concerns and his own unmistakable admiration. His article "Expressionism and American Music" and several others employ terms such as "geometrical schemata" or "schematic devices," concepts that he attributes to the above-mentioned composers, to Joseph Schillinger, and occasionally to himself as well.¹²

The power of the inner experience to force these composers to find a new means of expression led in two apparently opposite directions, . . . "chaos and geometry. . ."

In the American period under consideration many kinds of "geometrical" schemata were applied to music. . . . Ruth Crawford, in particular, developed all kinds of patterns of this sort. Her *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (1930) uses variable meters and a retrograde pitch plan that reminds one of similar methods of Boris Blacher, while her *String Quartet* (1931), especially the last movement, juggles with quite a number of different "geometric" systems, one governing pitch, another dynamics, and still another the

number of consecutive notes before a rest in any given passage, besides, the whole movement is divided into two parts, the second a retrograde of the first a semitone higher.¹³

Carter goes on to describe how the geometric method can be used in composition:

“[G]eometry” can be a way of building an entirely new world or a way of deforming or dissolving the old. It is possible that an illogical, disorganized geometry or a totally irrelevant one can be just as much of a deforming or even constructive pattern as one more obviously relevant and logical (although the chances are obviously higher that the latter will be more fruitful) in the hands of an imaginative composer.¹⁴

In a later interview he applies the geometric concept to his own works, emphasizing his attraction to the new horizon offered by its structural scenario and subtly intimating a distance from serialism.

I sometimes try quasi-“geometric” things in order to cut myself off from habitual ways of thinking about particular technical problems and to place myself in, so to speak, new terrain. . . . [In] the case of certain type of serialism one is clearly dealing with an essentially visual-mechanical kind of “logic.” . . . On [the] matter of continuity, serialism gives only the simplest kind of schematic information.¹⁵

“Geometry” is a term frequently used in writings about American modern music during this period. Varèse’s work, for example, was described in a 1925 article by his journalist friend Massimo Zanotti-Bianco as “sound geometry.”¹⁶ To be sure, the various uses of the term bespeak a certain intellectual anxiety among the modernists: finding a sense of order. The term’s scientific overtone implies a higher place in the hierarchy of intelligentsia. The task remains of how to maintain a fine balance between intellect and vital expression, a characteristic to which Carter frequently refers when he compliments the work of the ultramoderns. If Carter’s surveys of American musical life of the 1920s to the 1950s in these essays can be read as reflecting the early development of Carter the composer, the influence of the ultramodernists’ music on him is all the more apparent.

Crawford was an integral part of this ultramodernist circle, and her compositions would later become synonymous with ultramodernist musical aesthetics. Her ideas and musical imagination also figure prominently in Charles Seeger’s compositional treatise, *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*, and deal with fundamental aspects of what Carter described as geometrical schemata. To illustrate these points, I will first analyze the schematic design of the Scherzo movement of her quartet. This also allows me to place her among several other contemporaneous composers and

theorists in terms of scale theory. A consideration of the Schillinger-Gershwin connection as a reference point provides a glimpse of the milieu of musical ideas in the 1930s. With this as a background, I will then examine Crawford's influence on Carter through a comparative analysis of the scherzos in Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* and Carter's *String Quartet No. 1*.

Although Crawford is not often regarded as a theorist, she should be. Her contribution to Seeger's compositional treatise was fundamental and significant.¹⁷ It can be best observed in the evolution of the treatise's main topics during its formation, which spanned the course of her compositional study. What started as a three-page instructional note went through several drafts and finally became a two-volume treatise. Crawford's contribution to the treatise is most apparent in the increasingly prominent role of neumes, the addition of dissonant scales, and the treatise's eventual converging of neume, scale, melody, run, and sequence into a unified musical idea. Her thematic use of such a dissonant scale/sequence in the second movement of her *Quartet* is a brilliant example, and in many ways a persuasive musical "explanation" of the overall concept.

One of the movement's two thematic materials—Theme I—is a dissonant scale that sprints forward either in ascending or descending motion. In contrast, Theme II is a wedging melodic phrase whose notes gravitate inward to a center from the outer boundary of a large interval formed by an initial leap. The two themes, although differentiated by the way they move through the pitch space, are closely related through a signature hexachord. This hexachord, comprising two neumes (o13 and o24), forms the basic unit of the forward-thrusting Theme I on the one hand, and it is nested at the center of the wedging Theme II, on the other.¹⁸ Example 6.1 provides an outline of the interaction between these two themes in this movement. The straight arrow indicates Theme I (e.g., m. 2, m. 22), with the arrowheads pointing to the direction of the ascent or descent. Theme II is represented by two beamed notes at the top as well as two at the bottom (e.g., m. 18, m. 43). In each case, it shows that a larger outer interval moves gradually toward a smaller inner interval, hence the wedging motion.

The movement's initial ascent (Theme I) swiftly climbs up more than three octaves from the middle register to land on a high B. The forcefulness of this ascent gesture will require several downward spiralings of Theme I in the remaining movement to unwind. The repeated attempts—descending fragments of dissonant scale/sequence—each take subtly different paths in satisfying the necessary gesture of descent. The design of the swift Theme I combines the ideas of neume, scale, and melody. It comprises three successive appearances of the signature hexachord—each composed of two three-note neumes, spans a tritone, and is connected to the next by a whole tone—resulting in a two-octave sequence/scale whose initial note is duplicated in the third octave. Most of the time, the scale appears in segments of

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, specifically a scherzo. It consists of two staves, a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The music is written in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor). Above the staves, several measures are marked: m. 2, m. 18, m. 22, m. 25, m. 43, m. 71, m. 89, and m. 93. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. The score illustrates the interaction between a scalar sequence and a wedging theme.

Example 6.1. Ruth Crawford, *String Quartet 1931*. Scherzo, interaction between the scalar sequence and wedging theme. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

varied lengths. Twice it appears in full, over two octaves. In both cases, when the sequence reaches into the third octave, Crawford embeds the return of the initial note through dovetailing. The result is that Theme I flows seamlessly into Theme II, delaying or evading complete duplication of the first hexachord. That there are four classes of this two-octave scale has not gone unnoticed by Crawford. At the climax of the movement (starting in m. 71), a long-range descent comprises three segments of this scale interpolated each time with episodes of the wedging theme. These three scalar segments are each derived from a different class. As such, as I have mentioned elsewhere, Theme I “traverses through this long descent passage without actually having to duplicate the same hexachord.”¹⁹

The principles that underlie such a scale/sequence/melody design in the second movement are characteristic of the scale theory articulated by several compositional treatises by contemporaries of Crawford, closely connected through the New York Musicological Society of the 1930s. The published bulletin of the society shows multiple sessions devoted to the topic, and reveals how the members’ simultaneous inquiries into scalar theory occasionally result in similar solutions. The inevitability of similar results underlies both their collaboration and their individual ambitions. In addition to *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* written by the society’s inaugurating lecturer, Joseph Yasser, such studies include Seeger’s *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*, Cowell’s “The Nature of Melody,” Nicolas Slonimsky’s *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*, and Joseph Schillinger’s *The Schillinger System of Musical Composition*.²⁰ The latter two authors list two-octave scales similar to those in Crawford’s quartet. Example 6.2 presents a comparison of the two-octave scales. Two possible versions of Crawford’s scales are listed in examples 6.2a and 6.2b, the structure of which can be summarized by the reduction in example 6.2c. Example 6.2d lists initial notes for each hexachord, showing a pattern of “equal division of two octaves into three parts.”

The image displays seven musical staves, labeled 'a' through 'g', each containing a sequence of notes on a five-line staff. Staff 'a' shows a scale with notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 'b' shows a scale with notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 'c' shows a scale with notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 'd' shows a scale with notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 'e' shows a scale with notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 'f' shows a scale with notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 'g' shows a scale with notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.

Example 6.2. Comparison of scales (arranged from top to bottom a and b: Crawford—two possible scales in *String Quartet 1931*, mvt. 2; c: basic framework of Crawford’s scale; d and e: Slonimsky; f: Schillinger; g: Ruggles).

The same example, together with the above description, launches the chapter “Quadritone Progression” in Slonimsky’s *Thesaurus*. The chapter provides seventy-nine scales/melodic patterns (nos. 658–736) based on this division, of which one (no. 708) is reproduced here in example 6.2e. Example 6.2f reproduces an example (figure 36) from the chapter “Pitch Scales: The Fourth Group Symmetrical Scales of More Than One Octave in Range,” in the first volume of *The Schillinger System of Musical Composition*, showing a rendition of the scale based on the framework of example 6.2d.²¹

In his theory Schillinger incorporates, in the spirit of Yasser’s notion of function, the term “tonic,” referring to the beginning note of each four-note pattern.²² By contrast, Slonimsky uses “principal” or “basic” intervals to characterize the pattern, and refers to them by “Latin and Greek names derived from old scales” in order to “avoid any association with a definite tonality.”²³ On the other hand, in Crawford’s dissonant scales the role of inner division is basically motivic. Regardless of individual variances, the similarity among the scales in example 6.2 points to their mutual influence. Although he was not formally a member of the society, Carl Ruggles, another highly regarded contemporary, was an integral part of this group and shared a similar musical conception.²⁴ Ruggles never penned anything like a treatise, yet his work

demonstrates similar schematic designs. The closest he comes to theorizing is found in his letters. For instance, a 1940 letter by Ruggles to John Kirkpatrick includes a “model” of interval relation, which Ruggles explains he had been working on (see example 6.3).²⁵ The model is shown at the top of the page (F–C–D_b–A_b–A–E). It has as its basis the similar equal division of two octaves into three parts discussed above (see example 6.2g for comparison). “Out of it has come [two] unfolding[s],” Ruggles writes next to two music sketches. In his analysis of this model Steven Slottow points out that there are only four different classes, and that Ruggles in “Unfolding I” switches between the four classes to avoid monotony, a procedure not unlike those found in Crawford’s quartet.²⁶ From this comparison we can conclude that the geometrical schemata do not constitute, for the ultramodernist composers, an individual and ad hoc compositional solution, but are a consequence of the collective pursuit of scale theory among the theorists and composers of this circle.²⁷ Furthermore, this conception of scale theory is inseparable from their earnest pursuit of dissonant aesthetics.

Ultramodernist dissonant aesthetics reached far beyond its immediate circle of composers, mostly in the form of scale theories. For John Coltrane, the scalar concept became a staple of improvisation when he adopted Slonimsky’s *Thesaurus* to play as daily exercises in the late 1950s. It soon became an integral part of his music: in Coltrane’s own words, “I sit there and run over chord progressions and sequences, and eventually, I usually get a song—or songs—out of each little musical problem.”²⁸ Part of Coltrane’s *Giant Steps* was directly derived from Slonimsky’s *Thesaurus*.²⁹ Many scholars view this usage as initiating a new phase for jazz. The *Thesaurus*’s status as a building block for jazz improvisation continues into the 1990s.³⁰

Similar scalar concepts were adopted by musicians such as George Gershwin, Glenn Miller, Vernon Duke, and Benny Goodman. Steven Gilbert suggests that two of Gershwin’s compositions show the greatest evidence of Schillinger’s theory of pitch-scales: piano concerto “*I Got Rhythm*” *Variations* (1934) and *Porgy and Bess* (1935).³¹ Several related music examples give a sense of what is entailed under the rubric of “scale theory.” Example 6.2f is sometimes commented on as an example of a variation on the “I Got Rhythm” motive. Example 6.4 reproduces examples from Schillinger’s “Theory of Pitch Scales.”³² In example 6.4a the motive is shown transposed three times based on the division of an octave into four equal parts. Example 6.4b illustrates, with the second and fourth motives having switched places, resulting in a rotation of notes within each motive, a procedure Schillinger terms “circular permutation.”³³ This procedure characterizes many of Crawford’s compositions, mostly notably the last movement of her *Quartet*. Other “circular permutation” works, which are identified by recent scholars using the term “rotational row,” include *Diaphonic Suite No. 1 for Solo Oboe or Flute*, third movement (seven notes), “Prayers of Steel” from *Three Songs to*

What a marvelous idea that "Fantasia" must be. It shows up Steaks & Ki for what he really is. What do I hear again say?

I've been working on: And out of it has come this ungodling!

Also this: Priz. Lovely, what?

And I think I have a great End for it.

You in the meantime, do let me hear from you. How did the concert go?

Love to Hope,
Carl

Example 6.3. Excerpt from Carl Ruggles's letter to John Kirkpatrick, November 25, 1940. The model on the top indicates F-C-D \flat -A \flat -A-E, whose continuation would be an F two octaves above the initial F. Reprinted by permission of Irving S. Gilmore Library, Yale University.

Four Tonic Setting (without Permutations)*Four Tonic Setting (with Circular Permutations)*

Example 6.4. Application of circular permutation in *The Schillinger System of Musical Composition* (Fig. 41 from Volume 1, Chapter 8 “Pitch Scales: The Fourth Group,” p. 164). Reprinted by permission of Carl Fischer, LLC.

Poems by Carl Sandburg (“Rat Riddles”) (seven notes), the song “Chinaman, Laundryman” (nine notes), and *Suite for Wind Quintet*, third movement (twelve notes).³⁴

At issue here is not so much the naming, but Crawford’s intellectual environment and aesthetic orientation. Using circular permutation to generate “derivative scales of the same family,” Schillinger advises, “one can evolve a melodic continuity.”³⁵ In a similar spirit, Crawford called the third movement of her *Diaphonic Suite for Solo Oboe or Flute* “my new triple *passacaliac perpetuo mobile*,” which, with its focus on melodic organization, signaled a break from her more vertically oriented, Scriabinian Chicago period. Crawford’s exchange with her former mentor Dane Rudhyar about this topic after she plays her “triple *passacaliac perpetuo mobile*” movement [the third movement of the *Diaphonic Suite for Solo Oboe or Flute*] is revealing about the significance of this new aesthetics:

[Rudhyar] was not excited. He turns it off with, “Of course *perpetuo mobile* types are not in my line.” “But Rudhyar, I reply, if you want to be cosmic, isn’t the world and every other planet and everything in the universe doing a *perpetuo mobile*?”

Later he says, “Of course I do not believe much in melodic line, I believe in the single tone.” I remind him of line in other arts, and add, “If again you wish to become cosmic, what of the melodic line created by the various reincarnations of a soul? The undulations, the rising, the falling, the mountainous leaps?”³⁶

This diary entry written in May 1930, seven months after she joined the New York modernist circle, tells of Crawford's vision. Filled with an unmistakable sense of excitement about new musical horizons, this entry reflects the intense nature of Crawford's modernist pursuits as she became part of the modernist intellectual circle.³⁷

It is from this intellectual tradition that Carter has drawn much inspiration since his youth. His *String Quartet no. 1* of 1950–1951 shows many signs of this influence. This quartet marked an important juncture in Carter's compositional career when he turned away from his neoclassical style of the previous decade. In an interview years later he notes, "With my First Quartet I returned to things that I had done earlier, although my teachers Walter Piston and Nadia Boulanger actually didn't like my earlier music. They couldn't teach me what I wanted to learn."³⁸

At a certain point I began to feel that I really would like to write more like the older modernists I admired. But I didn't understand exactly how to go about writing such music after having acquired a traditional background in harmony and counterpoint. So in a sense my development before '44 was a gradual attempt to learn how to write dissonant, "advanced" music, the kind that I first liked and that had first attracted me to music.³⁹

It is unsurprising, then, that Carter's First String Quartet pays homage to the ultramodernists. Already well known are the quoting of the opening theme of Charles Ives's First Violin Sonata in mm. 27–32 of the first movement and the adoption in the variation movement of multiple tempo layers similar to Conlon Nancarrow's *Rhythmic Studies No. 1*. Carter made both influences clear in liner notes, to which he also added, "These two composers, through both their music and their conversation, had been a great help to me in imagining this work and were quoted in homage."⁴⁰ More recently, Crawford has been included on the list of musical influences on this quartet. In a notable addition to the second edition of *The Music of Elliott Carter*, Schiff writes, "[The first Quartet] owes little to the classical tradition, though it is clearly indebted to Berg's *Lyric Suite*, Bartók's Fourth String Quartet and, in particular, Ruth Crawford's String Quartet."⁴¹ In 2001 Carter also wrote to Ellie Hisama, "I have known Ruth Crawford's String Quartet ever since it was published in New Music Editions and have always admired it and other works as they came to my attention."⁴²

Even so, the details remain unspecified. What would the influence be, and what form of impulse does it elicit? Although from his earliest discussions, Carter's description of the first quartet emphasizes its polyrhythm and metrical modulations, the sketches for the piece point to the crafting of "dissonant" music. According to Schiff, "Preliminary sketches for the First String Quartet show none of the rhythmic innovations of the final score, but seem to extend in [a] more chromatic direction."⁴³ A common approach to "learn how to write

♩ = 112

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello

Example 6.5a. Crawford, *String Quartet 1931*, Scherzo, reduction of mm. 1–16. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

♩ = 135

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello

Example 6.5b. Elliott Carter, *String Quartet No. 1*, second *Allegro scorrevole*, mm. 25–40. Copyright © 1956 (Renewed) by Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI); International Copyright Secured. All right reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

dissonant, ‘advanced’ music, the kind that I first liked and that had first attracted me to music,⁴⁴ as Carter eagerly stated, is, obviously, to imitate.

I propose that Crawford’s quartet is a model of Carter’s first quartet as reflected by the parallel in the schematic strategies in their Scherzos. This

model comes close to the surface in the opening of the second scherzo of Carter's first Quartet. Known as the second *Allegro scorrevole* that coincides with the beginning of Part II in the score, the second scherzo is modeled on the opening of the Scherzo movement in Crawford's Quartet, in which the scalar descent, initiated by a three-note neume, is carried by the continuing handing back and forth of the neumes between the first and second violins. This large ascending motion, diverted occasionally by neumes of contrary motion, climbs up from the mid-register until it lands on the high B in m. 16 (see example 6.5a). Carter, in the same time signature 2/4, creates a similar ascent using a four-note neume 0136. The ascent is similarly carried out by the continuing handing back and forth of the neumes between two instruments—first the second violin and cello and then the two violins—until the general ascent reaches a high G_♭ in m. 5. While Crawford's neumes alternate between 024 and two versions of 013 (interval succession 1–2 or 2–1), Carter's neumes alternate between two versions of 0136 (interval succession 1–2–3 or 3–2–1), occasionally leaving the last note of a tetrachord to a different instrument (see example 6.5b). In Crawford's movement, two neumes, typically interlocking, form a signature hexachord whose total interval span is a tritone. Thus the ascent is characterized also by unrelenting presence of the tritone, an interval that is part of the structure of Crawford's scalar sequence of the two-octave scale discussed earlier. Carter's version retains the tritone characteristic but it instead occurs through the outer interval span of each neume. The scalar ascent in his Quartet is thus also characterized by the constant presence of the tritone interval. While Carter's design of the large ascent is similar to Crawford's, by merging the characteristics of the latter's three-note neume and signature hexachord in his four-note neume, he condenses the ascent gesture, making it shorter and more intense.

The end of the first section in Crawford's second movement (mm. 25–42) is elegantly marked by a long-range wedging motion of sustained notes (see reduction in example 6.6a). The first violin and cello, forming the outer interval, are at first five octaves apart; then they gradually gravitate toward the center, by the end switching into an overlapped semitone on second violin and viola. This wedging motion is motivically an augmentation of theme II; it also contrasts with the forceful upward mobility of opening ascent. Although short fragments of scalar descent continue to appear during the process, this large wedging motion, with the sustained strings, seems to distill actions and to provide a balance to the propelling motion of constant sixteenth notes. In a comparable fashion, Carter also, with sustained notes on the outer strings, follows the second *Allegro scorrevole* with a wedging motion of similar character (mm. 31–42). Rather than a perfect symmetry, however, fewer notes form the upper part of the wedge, which, together with double stops on the cello, results in a weighted ascent that forms the lower edge of

Example 6.6a shows a musical score for a string quartet in 2/4 time. The score includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. A bracket above the Violin I staff indicates a section of music from measure 25 to 40. The Violin I part features a prominent wavy, undulating melodic line, while the other instruments provide harmonic support with various rhythmic patterns.

Example 6.6a. Crawford, *String Quartet 1931*, Scherzo, wedging motion, mm. 25–40. Reprinted by permission of Carl Fisher, LLC o/b/o Theodore Presser Company.

Example 6.6b shows a musical score for a string quartet in 2/4 time. The score includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. A bracket above the Violin I staff indicates a section of music from measure 29 to 42. The Violin I part features a prominent wavy, undulating melodic line, while the other instruments provide harmonic support with various rhythmic patterns.

Example 6.6b. Carter, *String Quartet No. 1*, second *Allegro scorrevole*, wedging motion, mm. 29–42. Copyright © 1956 (Renewed) by Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI). International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

the general wedging motion (see reduction in example 6.6b).⁴⁵ The end of this wedging is also marked by the interval of a semitone. Similar to that of Crawford's, this wedging motion is thematic; as Judy Lochhead notes, underlining the first four measures of the opening theme in *Fantasia* is a symmetrical inward motion from outer extremes to a central dyad.⁴⁶

Even Carter's curious formal structure seems to be related to Crawford's work. The formal ambiguity in the First Quartet is well known. While there is no break between the first movement *Fantasia* and the second movement *Allegro scorrevole* (even the measure numbers are continuous), a pause separates the entrance of a second *Allegro scorrevole* (the measure number restarts from 1). In his study of Carter's music, Max Noubel explains the effect in terms of cinematic aesthetics: "the pause acts as a sort of stop in cinema, it serves not only to linger on the content of this sonorous matter, but also to

reveal the direction of his action by the unexpected suspension of all movement in the silence."⁴⁷ I would argue that the ascent of the second *Allegro scorrevole* is preceded by a dramatic and articulated pause that might be heard as a reinterpretation of the pause articulated by a loud chord that precedes the opening ascent in Crawford's second movement. Both "pauses" are preceded by quiet long single notes in *p* or *pp*. Whereas Crawford connects the first and second movements through a "pause" of a loud chord, Carter effects a similar result through a "pause" of silence in connecting the two *Allegro scorrevole* sections; both, to borrow Noubel's description of this passage, "serve to emphasize the essential continuity of the music."

Although it remains for others to explore the compositional process of Carter's First String Quartet, I believe that Carter's formal division, the restart of measure numbers in the second *Allegro scorrevole*, and the way that the 0136 neume appears in the first *Allegro scorrevole*—not in a scalar sequence but in a more general "constantly changing mosaic" with the neumes mostly "inverted, played backwards, transposed, fragmented, [and] permuted"—suggest that the first *Allegro scorrevole* is possibly an elaboration or development of the more condensed second *Allegro scorrevole*, which might have been composed before the first.⁴⁸ To give an example of the developmental characteristics in the first *Allegro scorrevole*: from m. 441 to m. 466, the 0136 neume is constantly handed back and forth between instruments. While the sequence/scalar effect is unmistakably present, it is briefer and its gesture often made less clear by simultaneous scalar motions in opposite directions. This passage is constantly filled with tritones (the outer interval of the motive), sometimes of the same "type," that is, the saturation of the same neume (such as exclusively E_b to A or A to E_b in mm. 445–47, or exclusively D to B_b or B_b to D in mm. 459–60) and sometimes of different types such as the consecutive appearance of all six pairs of tritones in mm. 451–52. The latter more closely resembles the musical surface in Crawford's Quartet movement, which, as a result of the two-octave scalar sequence, often cycles through three tritone types. (See, for instance, the tritone that forms the outer intervals of each hexachord shown in example 6.2a.)

Several scholars have previously acknowledged Crawford's influence on Carter's music in more general terms. Anne Shreffler notes, "Many specific features of the Crawford String Quartet in particular—the differentiation of voices, the exploration of clusters as timbre, and the generation of rhythmic processes—resemble many of the most distinctive features of Carter's music."⁴⁹ Noubel clearly credits Crawford's influence when he writes:

It is highly possible, in the end that this drama benefited from the more direct source of Ruth Crawford, which put into practice the idea of "dissonant counterpoint." The first movement of her Quartet (1931) prefigured the characterization of instruments in the works of Carter which [see the light] after his Second Quartet. In effect, the parts

are differentiated not only in their character, but also in their register, their articulation and their speed. In addition, as with Carter, the music finds its dramatic force in the continuity of rhythmic processes.⁵⁰

Carter's indebtedness to Crawford is certainly not limited to his First Quartet. What identifies Crawford's quartet as an important model—the sense of dissonant melody and the use of schematic design and scalar pattern to achieve the effect—makes it particularly interesting both historically and aesthetically. It underscores Carter's intense engagement with American ultramodernist music; he digs into the not-too-distant modern musical past.⁵¹ Certainly, to students of American modernist music, the manner in which Carter's reinterpretation of Crawford's quartet, in particular the scherzo, is manifested is important not only because it sheds light on Crawford's imprint in modern music but also because it necessarily opens up our listening of Carter's first quartet by considering Crawford's quartet as part of the intertextual network. In his reinterpretation of Crawford's Scherzo, Carter retains its musical gestures and effects; in its general conception he adopts similar schematic procedures.⁵² Crawford's masterful control of the balance and drama between movements must have also been inspiring. Crawford wrote of her composing of the quartet, "one movement finished, another thwarted, and the third waiting for the second to decide what to do."⁵³ The two middle movements are tied skillfully by such interdependence. While the second opens with a quick and forceful ascent, which is then balanced by the repeated occurrences of spiraling down in the remaining movement, the third begins with a poised stillness and a gradual ascent that takes up almost the whole movement, and only after the ultimate arrival of the apex follows a quick spiraling down back to stillness.⁵⁴ Similarly Carter's first quartet is marked by intense concern for balance and drama between movements, especially the *Allegro scorrevole* and *Adagio*.

Finally, insofar as the above analysis demonstrates a lineage between two works composed twenty years apart, both prominent in the twentieth-century string-quartet literature, I hope it also makes the following theoretical point. Although we can, of course, merely *reconstruct* a historical context rather than make claims about *returning* to one, I believe that "geometrical schemata," as a Carterian term that embodies particular historical perspectives, holds much promise for referencing this set of scalar/melodic concepts and musical practices during the era of 1930 to the 1950s. It might not be coincidental that for Crawford in 1930–31, Carter in 1950–51, and Coltrane in the late 1950s, this schematic/melodic strategy and its ensuing aesthetics accompanied the turning points of their creative oeuvre. Rather than replacing it, we may do well to allow the various cultural/musical meanings of this somewhat archaic term speak to us, and to take a central role in our analyses.

Sliding Tones

In his 1958 article “History of Experimental Music in the United States,” John Cage calls attention to the rich history of American musical innovations—those that are independent of “the stream of European music.” The examples include “the clusters of Leo Ornstein,” “the resonances of Dane Rudhyar,” his own prepared piano, and also “the sliding tones of Ruth Crawford.”⁵⁵ This last reference to Crawford is surprising for several reasons.

Cage, a long-time student and friend of Cowell, was unquestionably familiar with the novel ideas about sliding tones in Cowell’s *New Musical Resources*, in which the sliding concept is considered to be “a special branch of investigation” in three dimensions: pitch, dynamic, and tempo.⁵⁶ In a 1937 letter to Cage, Cowell suggests that sliding tone is especially promising for future compositions.⁵⁷ Cage himself used tempo slides in his *Music of Changes*, as well as in several other works written during the same period of 1950–51. Even better known was Cowell’s own use of sliding tones within the dimension of pitch in his string-piano works from the 1920s, such as the now-canonic piano work *The Banshee*, the performance of which Cage himself often assisted by holding down the piano pedal. String slides also play prominent roles in movements of Cowell’s symphonies and chamber works of the 1950s. Yet instead of pointing to the obvious example of Cowell for the innovation of sliding tones, Cage refers to Crawford.

Cage was probably referring to the dynamic slides in the Andante movement of Crawford’s *String Quartet 1931*. This movement had gained critical acclaim for its striking effect since it was first featured in the 1934 inaugural issue of the *New Music Quarterly* recording series. The force of this movement is derived primarily from the carefully arranged and timed crescendo and decrescendo in all four strings. That its instruments all belong to the same family intensifies the drama of “throwing one organ of the same instrument against the other,” to borrow Crawford’s metaphor.⁵⁸ The dynamic slides form the smallest building blocks, creating collectively what Cage once called, a “temporal continuum.” One of Crawford’s strokes of genius is her shaping of the slides in ways that they effect varied senses of balance, surge, and ultimately of proportion of time. Cowell had long advocated the idea of constant gradual change—in pitch, dynamic, or tempo—as an independent concept where the rate of change and the contrapuntal relation with one another can be shaped to achieve a compelling overall effect. Crawford’s Andante movement achieved a groundbreaking solution, which explains in part why her movement was so highly regarded that it was included in the first recording of the New Music Society series, despite Ives’s initial objection. Cowell made the case in a letter to Ives, who provided financial backing for the project: “I think [Crawford’s Andante] is without question the best movement for quartet any American has written, and I would rather hear [Crawford’s Andante] than almost anything that I can think

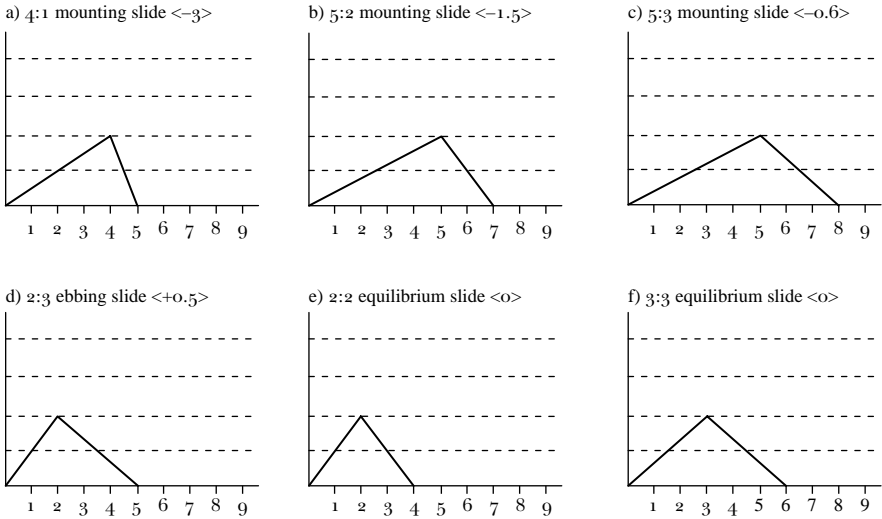


Figure 6.1. Dynamic slides of different shapes: mounting, ebbing, and equilibrium.

of. [It is] a genuine experience, and rises far above Crawford's earlier works. I would like to make the record, if only to have you hear it!"⁵⁹ Tick suggests that this movement "might secure [Crawford's] place in American music history," and that the quartet's premiere was "the high point of Crawford's career."⁶⁰ The dynamic flux in this *Andante* movement is meticulously sculptured; in the words of contemporary music critic and composer Harrison Kerr, it is an "expressive movement written with seeming fluency and with deep emotion."⁶¹

The *Andante* movement—in particular mm. 1–75—is a gradual dynamic ascent from *ppp* to *fff*, spread out in several stages.⁶² On the whole, it can be perceived as the amalgamation of individual units of dynamic slide. Each unit, separated by a break of the solid tie, comprises a crescendo and a decrescendo, forming a peak at which the two meet. Since the range of dynamic change for each unit is fairly consistent—for example, between *ff* and *mf*, or between *ppp* and *p*—it is the relation between the duration of its ascent and descent that determines the shape of a slide. In a separate study I characterize the three basic shapes as an equilibrium slide, a mounting slide, and an ebbing slide.⁶³ When the ascent is longer than the descent, it is a mounting slide, with the peak closer to the end of the unit. The reverse is an ebbing slide. In an equilibrium slide the ascent and descent are of equal length, with the peak at the center.

Figure 6.1 shows the shapes of these three types. The number on the two sides of the ":" indicates the duration of the ascent and descent. Each ratio

(e.g. 1:2 or 4:5) reflects the rhythmic proportion of an individual slide. I also use integers to represent the three different slides in this movement, with 0 indicating equilibrium slides, integers with “+” indicating the ebbing slides, and integers with “-” indicating the mounting slides. The integers approximate the slides’ off-centered feeling. Each integer is the sum of the slide’s longer side divided by its shorter side, and minus one. The smaller the integer, regardless of the sign before it, the closer the slide is to equilibrium slides. While the symmetrical equilibrium slides produces a static effect, the mounting slide, with its shortened descent, creates tension, and the ebbing slide obtains a sense of extension from the elongated descent. The varied effects of these slides, more pronounced when in succession and in multivoices, play an important role in the musical narrative of the movement. Figure 6.2 shows the distribution of the three different slides in this movement.⁶⁴

As the movement begins, each instrument enters in a poised equilibrium slide $\langle 0 \rangle$, which then tilts slightly as it moves into ebbing slides $\langle +1, +0.5 \rangle$. The opening section, with consecutive separate entrances of the instruments in a symmetrical tidal wave, never strays too far from its fairly balanced effect. After all the instruments enter, the movement proceeds with waves of ebbing motions, as though the increased off-centeredness releases motion from the previous stillness. The sense of motion grows while the ebbing slides become more and more asymmetrical $\langle +3 \rangle$, stretching out as each decrescendo breathes out leisurely in an elongated descent. Several sections of long-range crescendo and decrescendo are undergirded by the ebbing slides, punctuated only by brief returns to equilibrium slides at sectional openings. The overall dynamic level gradually rises. As the movement progresses to *mf* in m. 50 a switch into mounting slides signals the movement’s ultimate ascent. Accrued from the shortened, hurried descent in mounting slides, the tension piles up. These mounting slides become more asymmetrical, as they also gradually become longer (5:2, 4:1, 5:3). One after another they are propelled forward until the uppermost point of the dynamic ascent is reached, and the equilibrium slides reign again. The colossal upsurge is accrued from the succession of dynamic slides, and the pulsation of each individual slide is also deepened by the regular pulse underlying them, articulated incessantly by the successive appearance of the slides’ peak points. Notably, the slides’ rhythmic proportions determine the meters in this movement, which change along with the slides’ duration. (The total length of the sliding units determines the meter.)⁶⁵ As a whole the Andante draws its persuasive power from an escalating musical tension, derived in large part from the relentless pulsation of the dynamic slides and their varied shapes. With a kind of “sophisticated spontaneity,” to borrow Crawford’s own phrase, the movement’s subtly nuanced dynamic ascent is carried out by the meticulous and precise rhythmic designs of the slides.

As I discuss elsewhere, Crawford's dynamic slides contribute to a significant direction in twentieth-century music in which steady flux replaces more conventional musical parameters as a primary focus of compositions.⁶⁶ From this perspective Crawford's accomplishment looms large, because the sound world she so convincingly created with dynamic slides achieves its aesthetic potential beautifully. Forty years later, when he returned to conventional notation from his famous graph notation, Morton Feldman was fascinated by dynamic slides in similar ways, though to a quite different end. In 1972 in answer to Paul Griffiths's question about this recent unusual change, he noted: "In *The Viola in My Life* underlying almost every viola sound there is a slight *crescendo*. . . . [The] rhythmic proportions were brought about because of the duration of the various types of *crescendo*. I've become fascinated with precise notation now."⁶⁷ The implication is profound for Feldman, who noted in a lecture the following year that "some factor other than rhythm that determines both how the work moves in time and a proportion of each bar length. In *The Viola in My Life*, it was the precise measuring of the crescendos in the viola which became the 'rhythmic' proportions for each measure."⁶⁸ In addition to *The Viola in My Life* I–IV (1970–71), other famous examples by Feldman include *I Met Heine on the Rue Fürstenberg* (1973) and *Rothko Chapel* (1973). In these works, dynamic slides take on thematic significance, and give rhythmic shapes to sustained long notes. Then in the mid-1970s Feldman developed a use of dynamic slide that echoes still more closely with Crawford's Andante movement: juxtaposition of continuous swelling and ebbing of sustained notes in crescendo and decrescendo of different and irregular durations. These meticulously notated multipart dynamic slides began to figure prominently in Feldman's compositions, so much so that they are considered "a novelty in Feldman's work of the 1970s" in Sebastian Claren's full-scale study of Feldman's work.⁶⁹ Claren uses this feature to link works such as *Oboe and Orchestra* (1976) and *Routine Investigations* (1976) to the composition of Feldman's *Neither*: an opera in one act on a text by Samuel Beckett (1977). The multiple layers of dynamic slides in *Routine Investigations* and *Neither*, especially its prelude, are two poignant examples, of which the latter will be discussed here.

In the opening of the prelude to *Neither*, the sustained notes from the winds, divided into six groups, fluctuate in crescendi and decrescendi of different rhythmic proportions (see example 6.7). Most are in the shape of equilibrium slides, like those analyzed in Crawford's Andante. The duration of the evenly spaced sliding units of flutes, oboes, and clarinets are five, two, and four eighth notes respectively. The durations for the slides of bassoon and trumpet are mostly three eighth notes, but they are extended intermittently, resulting in two strands of unevenly spaced slides that often do not coincide. The horns crescendo from *ppp* to *mp*, over the duration of six quarter notes. These multiple layers of unsynchronized sliding figures, each

neither
to a text by Samuel Beckett

Morton Feldman

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Example 6.7. Morton Feldman, *NEITHER*, Prelude, mm. 1–12, multi-layers of varied dynamic slides. © 1977 by Universal Edition (London) Ltd., London; © renewed. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission of European American Music Distributors LLC, U.S. and Canadian agent for Universal Edition (London) Ltd., London.

pulsating at its own pace, acquire the quality of the subtle and quiet yet complex fluctuation of the opening sustained chords. The effect is the infusion of “richness” in the “touch” of the sonority, to use a famous Feldman metaphor.⁷⁰ Catherine Hirata links the notion of “touch” to what Cage terms the “tenderness” in Feldman’s music, which she further characterizes as “delicacy, softness, sensitivity, gentleness.”⁷¹

The prelude’s sustained chords in multiple layers of dynamic slides constitute an unusually complex dynamic counterpoint.⁷² Later the opening materials, a kind of “linear fluctuation,” would underlie the opera’s ongoing shifts among different degrees of activities and stasis: sometimes in a thickened and dense texture, such as the eight strands (R5–R6) in the prelude, sometimes thinned out, such as the long passage of evenly spaced decrescendo on violas and solo cello (R30–R35) in the first interlude, and even sometimes switches over to *tonal* slides, such as the unsynchronized strata of sliding pitches on horns and trombones (R89).⁷³ Here the slides, either dynamic or tonal, signal “motion” that contrasts with episodes of sustained notes that suggest a complete stasis. Episodes of such stasis appear alternately with sections of “motion” in *Neither*, just as a sense of oscillating between the two underlies Beckett’s verses. In the closing section, the clarinets’ continuous pitch slides at the top register reckon with the dynamic slides of the winds at the opening section (example 6.7), as though reconciling with the fact that the “unspeakable home” is the unending “To and fro in shadow from inner to outer shadow.”

Though they both embody motion, Crawford’s slides are given a different meaning in Feldman’s sound-landscape of the mid-1970s where there is no buildup or sense of climax. Yet Feldman’s work makes explicit certain aspects of Crawford’s aesthetics. The general quietness and the repetition of the subtly different units of Feldman’s slides have the dramatic effect of heightening the sense of musical space: tiny events seem larger, and the sense of musical time becomes elongated.⁷⁴ Exploring the richness of sound color through the building blocks of individual units of dynamic slides, Feldman creates a sound world that hovers rather than progresses. Considering Crawford’s dynamic slides from this Feldmanian perspective, we can hear how her *Andante* stretched the convention of temporal projection and engendered a unique perceptual process that constitutes an important aspect of our listening experience/enjoyment of this movement. In other words, with her *Andante* movement, Crawford suggested a whole new way of listening.

Whether incidental or not, the entrance of this aspect of Crawford’s aesthetics into Feldman’s musical idioms is not so surprising. After all, this was a time when Feldman spoke of “‘unfixing’ the elements traditionally used to construct a piece of music,” so that the sounds could “exist in themselves.”⁷⁵ Besides, as a close associate of Cage’s in the 1950s, Feldman would certainly have been introduced to Crawford’s slide, as he was to Crawford herself. In an interview, Feldman recounted the following anecdote:

I met Ruth Crawford once when I was a kid (John Cage introduced me) in this vast room full of all male composers. And there was Ruth Crawford—she was the only one sitting down. Since then I've developed a kind of "upmanship": when I go into a situation where all my colleagues are, I sit down.—She was my role model! [Laughter] And I spent the whole evening, instead of hobnobbing and making deals, with this woman asking me what kind of music I wrote and everything.⁷⁶

Although this story seems to record not much more than the meeting of two composers, it suggests richly the ambience of the 1950s and the extraordinariness of Crawford's "standing" in an all-male modern music circle. Since this anecdote follows immediately after Feldman's statements about his own liberation from anxieties of the society's reward system and the importance of a composer's inner-directedness, it underscores his admiration for Crawford. At the same time we see from Feldman's eye how Crawford was made "fixed" in her gender. Feldman's jovial claiming of "upmanship" necessarily glosses over the alienation that Crawford met with, which is no less poignantly expressed by the laughter that followed his declaration of Crawford as a role model. The laugh and the intended irony in the interviewer's subsequent rhetorical question, "But tell me what would happen if every composer at a gathering was to sit down and remain seated," is unmistakably triggered by certain tensions over gender and influence.

It might not be coincidental that Feldman's fascination with dynamic slides counterpoint in the mid-1970s coincides with a remarkable time for Crawford's String Quartet. The 1973 Nonesuch recording of her quartet, together with Milton Babbitt's String Quartet No. 2 and George Perle's String Quartet No. 5 played by the Composers Quartet was an important event in the contemporary music scene.⁷⁷ Reviews of the new recording invariably bestowed upon Crawford's quartet unreserved praise: "The real find on this record is Ruth Seeger," wrote a reviewer for the *Washington Post*; "The Seeger is the item of principal interest here, a real landmark of American music," wrote a critic for the *New York Times*.⁷⁸ The acclaimed Composers Quartet featured Crawford regularly on its program from its debut concert in 1965 and throughout the 1970s; a young Michael Tilson Thomas performed the Andante movement for string orchestra with the New York Philharmonic in 1971.⁷⁹ If words by critics ("as bold and up-to-date as the company it kept on this occasion," "revealed cruelly how little the string quartet has developed as a medium for contemporary expression in the last four decades," "every bit as contemporary as that of [Karel Husa and Seymour Shifrin]," or "closer parallels can be found in Ligeti and Lutoslawski compositions of recent years") can be taken as an indication of the contemporary musical thinking, the prominent release of Crawford's quartet made it in every sense an active part of the modern music scene of the 1970s.⁸⁰

Indeed, the Andante movement of Crawford's Quartet came to represent the type of aesthetic, sensibility, and nuances that many composers aspired to, from Cage's Monroe Street group to the various groups of experimentalist composers during the second half of the twentieth century. For many of these composers, Crawford's sound world is iconic,⁸¹ and in this respect, Lou Harrison's remark is exemplary. Responding to a Crawford scholar's inquiry, he notes:

My first hearing of a piece by Ruth Crawford was when I received through the mail my subscription copy of a "New Music" edition recording which held on it the slow movement of the string quartet. I was permanently entranced. That was in the mid to late 1930s. . . . It was Henry [Cowell] who showed me the full score of that work when it was first published. . . . You can understand that her ideas sometimes "memorize" themselves in a composer's mind.⁸²

Music Genealogy

As Crawford gradually secured a significant place in the history of American music and her music was heard more frequently and fully, many composers who came of age during the 1970s not only embraced her aesthetic but also took her legacy as part of their musical genealogy or lineage, sometimes considering her to be a role model. Larry Polansky recalls the impact of Crawford's work on him in the 1970s: "I first encountered RCS's music in her String Quartet. I seem to remember standing in a cafeteria line with James Tenney in Toronto, probably around 1975 or 1976, and Jim telling me that I should check out that piece. Hearing the quartet, I was immediately hooked, and resolved to learn as much about RCS and her work as I could."⁸³ Polansky's composition *The Casten Variation* is computer-composed, an analysis/synthesis based on the model of Crawford's *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*, while his *Lonesome Road (The Crawford Variations)* and *Three Fiddle Tune Transcriptions by Ruth Crawford Seeger* are built from Crawford's work in folk music. As for her general influence, Polansky noted, "Crawford's Andante movement has the reputation for being the first piece that explores timbre, using parameters other than pitch for the organization of a piece. . . . During the 1970s, that was at the edge of people's conscious."⁸⁴ As a young composer in the 1970s, John Luther Adams considers a major influence "the American experimentalist tradition of Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford, Harry Partch, Conlon Nancarrow, John Cage, Lou Harrison, Morton Feldman, Pauline Oliveros, James Tenney and others."⁸⁵ Michael Pisaro, as an undergraduate in composition at DePaul University in the late 1970s, considered himself fortunate to have studied with teachers that,

themselves a part of the loose alternative community, introduced him to “Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Carl Ruggles, and Henry Cowell.”⁸⁶ While writers of the history of American serialism may remain reluctant to include Crawford in their narrative, composers of contemporaneous and later generations have increasingly come to claim her as a significant figure in the genealogy of American modern music that constitutes the heritage for their own music.⁸⁷

Crawford’s “passacalialic *perpetuo mobile*” style remains particularly fascinating to some composers today. Tenney’s attraction to the style is expressed by a group of works written since 1997 that pays obvious tribute to Crawford. Each composition in this group includes a reference to Crawford’s work in its title: *Diaphonic Study* for string quartet and piano (1997), *Diaphonic Toccata* for violin and piano (1997), *Seegersong #1* for solo clarinet or bass clarinet, *Seegersong #2* for flute or alto flute (1999), as well as *Diaphonic Trio* for violin and piano (1997), which is dedicated to Crawford. *Diaphonic Trio* reinterprets *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* by incorporating it with heterophonic characteristics that recall her *Diaphonic Suites*. In this work, a distinctive *perpetuo mobile* melody in constant sixteenth notes begins by inverting Crawford’s *Piano Study*, also in unison and on the piano’s lowest register. Instead of using periodic rests and dynamic changes that break the continuous melody into sections as in Crawford’s work, the piano melody in *Diaphonic Trio* is continuous, moving upward steadily both in register and in dynamic level until it reaches *ff* at the top of page 5. A diminuendo follows but the ascent in register continues until the bottom of the same page. The melody then descends in diminuendo until the end when it simply simmers in *pp*. Against the piano’s forceful *perpetuo mobile* melody and arch-type contour, the violin, in an opposite contour, plays a slow-flowing, rhythmically flexible melody. From the top register it descends gracefully, arriving at the lowest end simultaneously with the piano’s reach of its topmost register, and then gradually ascends back, to where it began, concluding in the same melodic dyad. In *Seegersong #2*, on the other hand, the solo *perpetuo mobile* melody, while retaining Crawford’s periodic rests and dynamic changes, which break the melody into sections, is placed within a long-range arch of acceleration and deceleration. The level of rhythmic activities in the solo *perpetuo mobile* melody change according to the arch structure, steadily nevertheless. It is as if Tenney reinterprets Crawford’s *Piano Study* through a tempo version of his famous single dynamic arch in *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion* (1971).

Pauline Oliveros also noted recently, “The shaping and enveloping is incredible within the strictness of her form in *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*.”⁸⁸ While “really a little resentful that [she] didn’t get to hear music by Ruth Crawford” in her early years, Oliveros told an interviewer who asked about her musical lineage that “I have more allegiance to Ruth Crawford Seeger.”⁸⁹

Vivian Fine deems her experience as Crawford's student in 1920s to be of incalculable importance:

Of course, having her as my role model was a great influence—although in those days we didn't think in those terms. But having as [a] teacher a person who was in the forefront of composing contemporary American music had a great influence on me as a composer. I would give Ruth Crawford principal credit for making me realize I had creative talent. She did not try to influence me to be a composer but she had the ability to impart and encourage my personal growth.⁹⁰

Fine is among the few female composers before the 1970s who could enjoy having such a role model. Johanna Beyer, also a student, would be another exception. Beyer's compositions of 1933–34 bear clear signs of Crawford's influence.⁹¹ One of her *Dissonant Counterpoints* for piano was dedicated to Crawford, her three songs for soprano, percussion, and piano based on poems by Carl Sandburg, *Timbre Moon*, *Star Songs Faces*, and *Summergrass* (1933), take on the playful character of Crawford's three songs. The slides in the Presto movement of Beyer's String Quartet (1933–34) and in the Largo movement of her String Quartet no. 2 (1936) are different reflections on Crawford's famous Andante. Although lacking slides of any kind, John Cage's third movement of his String Quartet in four parts (1949–50), "Nearly Stationary" is clearly indebted to the new sense of temporality in the same movement of Crawford's String Quartet.⁹²

Yet Oliveros's lamenting of the void of knowledge about Crawford during her own formative years also speaks volumes. It exposes a kind of rupture and discontinuity that demands closer consideration. Oliveros's disappointment reminds us that in the mid-twentieth century, Crawford the composer was mostly overlooked except perhaps by those who were directly associated with ultramodern music. Rupture, indeed, constitutes part of Crawford's imprint on contemporary compositions. She might be heard, through her scores, recordings, and sparse performances during this period, but she was not "seen": not in the roomful of male modern composers, as allegorically conveyed in Feldman's anecdote of meeting Crawford in early 1950, and not "seen" in printed history texts, as Tick's survey of mid-century authoritative books on American modern music shows.⁹³ The rupture registers not only the workings of cultural/social practice during this period that rendered her invisible, but also its irreversible effects. Certainly, Harold Bloom's theory of authorial influence reminds us to look beyond the tracing of immediate influence from one composer to the next, and instead to take the immediate predecessor as representing not just the creativity of one person alone but that of the tradition, or all its predecessors.⁹⁴ Crawford's work in the 1930s brought about a distinct kind of release of various dimensions of musical sound. Many contemporary

composers responded in their own work to this new sense of musical continuity, as it irresistibly requires a reaction. Thus in a fundamental way, the renewed recognition of Crawford the composer starting in the 1970s should be considered not so much as a new introduction of her music to the contemporary music scene but as a way of introducing *that which has already left its imprint*. Nevertheless, as one of the rupture's irreversible effects, the by now well-made language of music discourse would inevitably be slow to accommodate the full complexity of Crawford's works of the 1930s. The void that Oliveros laments is truly symbolic of the irreversible effects of the discursive trails.

The past decade sees many composers finding resonance with Crawford, and expressing their allegiance by writing tribute or homage composition for her. The homages written by Polansky and Tenney are extensive. Christian Wolff's first commercial recording, entitled *For Ruth Crawford* (1991), includes a trombone and piano piece *Ruth*; in 2001 pianist Sarah Cahill commissioned seven composers to write homage pieces.⁹⁵ Among them, Oliveros's *Quintuplets Play Pen: Homage to Ruth Crawford* (2001) has since been featured frequently. In some cases the homage is not merely about paying tribute. Tenney, once a student of Ruggles and Varèse, described the spirit of his homage in an interview:

I like to think that I deliberately connected myself to the experimental tradition as much as I could, by getting to know as many of them as possible. But I was too late to meet Ives, and I never got to meet Cowell. I was also too late to meet Ruth Crawford. But I have written pieces that were homages to every one of those composers, and that it is a way of trying to establish a connection and make a public statement; yes, there is a lineage here and I choose to be in that line. That is my position. And whether a hundred years from now I'll be considered part of it is another question, but at least I feel that I'm part of it.⁹⁶

Looking back to Crawford's rise as a promising modernist composer in the 1920s and 1930s, we are reminded how essential being a "modernist" was to her reputation at the time, which likely included the award of a 1931 Guggenheim fellowship in music. Not all of her significant modernist innovations were met enthusiastically in her time, however, which resulted in their nearly complete oblivion. The pioneering choral work *Three Chants* (1930) is full of manipulation of phonemes, as described in her own words: "voice chanting at the pitch most suited to that individual voice," "a 'complex veil of sound,'" "a kind of new composite mass-pitch." Though a commissioned work, it was premiered only partially, reluctantly, and in mediocre fashion by conductor Roger Reynolds, who subsequently appeared reserved in his recommendation for the renewal of her Guggenheim Fellowship, support that at the time would have had the effect of enabling Crawford to

compose for another year.⁹⁷ *Three Chants*, now available in recording but the score of which remains unpublished, is yet another example of her extraordinarily innovative imagination. What she wrestled with is an area of exploration so important that it was later tackled by composers of remarkably different styles: Oliveros's *Sound Patterns* (1961), György Ligeti's *Adventures* (1962), Luciano Berio's *Sequenza III* (1965–66), Iannis Xenakis's *Nuits* (1967–68), Cage's *Sixty-Two Mesostics re Merce Cunningham* (1971), Milton Babbitt's *Phenomena* (1977), and Isang Yun's *Engel in Flammen* (1994), to mention only a selected few.

The significance of Crawford as a modernist lies in the fact that, as Polansky puts succinctly, “her work is *emblematic* of important ideas that become very important later in the century.”⁹⁸ Crawford's musical imagination makes a compelling and congenial sound world, and her geometrical design turns the modern scalar theory into such compelling works that they remain witness to the significance of the theoretical pursuits in American compositional theory. In both sonic expression and the schematic designs, her influence on Elliott Carter is apparent, as the second *Allegro scorrevole* in Carter's First String Quartet demonstrates most directly. The unprecedented radicalness of Crawford's Andante movement in the quartet lies in the rich and subtly nuanced sonority derived from her shaping of time with dynamic slides, and the concept that the rhythmic proportions of crescendo and decrescendo can be deployed to achieve a compelling dramatic process—and ultimately a new way of listening. Instead of an artful play with the novelty of unconventional musical materials, one perceives weight and seriousness; it is viscerally engaging. From this perspective we can most readily see that the subtle sonic effect of dynamic fluctuations that we associate with Feldman's work of the early and mid-1970s originates with Crawford. The fact of Feldman's eventual turn to Crawfordian notation, after two decades of employing primarily graph notation, to communicate the richness of the “touch” of sonority helps to reveal the profundity of Crawford's Andante, as well as her consequential place and influence in musical history. It is almost certain now that the recent retooling of analytical approaches to Feldman aesthetics will shed light on fundamental issues surrounding the sound world of Crawford's Andante. In other words, considering Crawford's work opens up our reading of Carter, Feldman, or Tenney, and works of these composers also help us in listening to Crawford. The relevance of both directions underscores the significance of Crawford's work as an influential text in American modern music.

Finally, perhaps Oliveros's thoughtful reflection best summarizes Crawford's legacy as a composer. In answer to the question “How would twentieth-century American modern music be different without the contribution of Ruth Crawford?” Oliveros responded:

Ruth Crawford is such a creative being. She belonged to a circle of modern composers and she had an influence on modern music through that circle. The modern music movement was much enriched because of her and has had therefore a longer life.⁹⁹

Notes

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1. David Metzger, "The League of Composers: The Initial Years," *American Music* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 56.

2. Quoted in Robert Crunden, *Body and Soul: The Making of American Modernism* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 52. The quote is taken from an interview in the *New York Review*, March 1916.

3. *Musical Leader*, June 6, 1929; quoted in Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62–63.

4. "Pan-American Composers: Association for the Furtherance of New Music Formed of Citizens of Americas to Sponsor Concerts," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1928.

5. Virgil Thomson, review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, March 16, 1949, quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 134.

6. Wilfrid Mellers, "Model of Devotion: Wilfrid Mellers Welcomes an Important New Biography of Ruth Crawford Seeger," *Musical Times* 138, no. 1857 (November 1997): 22.

7. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 201.

8. See Judith Tick's chapter in this volume.

9. By pointing out Crawford's perpetual status as merely a "novelty," Tick seems to be approaching this phenomenon from a different angle.

10. George Perle, "Atonality and the Twelve-note System in the United States," *The Score* 29 (July 1960): 60. Similarly, in discussing Carter's musical influences, Anne Shreffler remarks: "Crawford's relatively simple musical idea creates a highly kinetic and dramatic shape." See her "Carter and his America," *Sonus* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 49–50. It could perhaps be argued that the use of "naïve" or "simple" in these instances is free of any negativity. For example, Elliott Antokoletz suggests that given Perle's later negative opinion about "total organized" music, he was really praising Crawford "for not being like the 'total serialists'" (personal communication).

11. David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 6, 9; Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources*, with notes and an accompanying essay by David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1930] 1996).

12. On "geometrical schemata," see Elliott Carter, "Expressionism and American music," in *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937–1995*, ed. Jonathan Bernard (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 72–85. On "schematic devices" see Elliott Carter, "La Musique sérielle aujourd'hui," in *Elliott Carter: Collected*

Essays and Lectures, 1937–1995, ed. Jonathan Bernard (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 17–18.

13. Carter, “Expressionism and American Music,” 78–79.

14. *Ibid.*, 80.

15. Allen Edwards, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds: A Conversation with Elliott Carter* (New York: Norton, 1972), 81.

16. Massimo Zanotti-Bianco, “Edgard Varèse and the Geometry of Sound,” *Arts* 7 (January 1925): 35–36; quoted in Crunden, *Body and Soul*, 54.

17. Crawford’s influence on the treatise was so strong that at one point, Seeger suggested that Crawford be listed as co-author. See Nancy Yunhwa Rao, “Partnership in Modern Music: Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford, 1929–1931,” *American Music* 15, no. 3 (1997): 352–80. See also Taylor Greer’s chapter in this volume.

18. Here 013 is used to refer to a three-note ascending or descending melodic figure whose outer interval is a minor third, and the intervals between the adjacent notes are either minor second or major second in no particular order; 024 refers to a three-note ascending or descending melodic figure whose outer intervals is a major third, and the intervals between the adjacent notes are major seconds.

19. A fuller analysis of this movement appears in Rao, “Partnership in Modern Music.” The four distinct classes of this two-octave scale and their use in the three scalar segments of the long descent are illustrated in that article’s examples 7a and 7b.

20. Josef Yasser, *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* (New York: American Library of Musicology, 1932); Charles Seeger, “Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music,” in *Studies in Musicology II, 1929–1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 39–273; Nicolas Slonimsky, *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947); Joseph Schillinger, *The Schillinger System of Musical Composition* (New York: C. Fischer, 1946); and Henry Cowell, “The Nature of Melody,” unpublished manuscript, Cowell Collection, New York Public Library. A fuller discussion of the connection among these modernist composers can be found in Nancy Yunhwa Rao, “American Compositional Theory in the 1930s: Scale and Exoticism in ‘The Nature of Melody’ by Henry Cowell,” *Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (2001): 595–640.

21. Schillinger, *The Schillinger System of Musical Composition*. This is chapter 8 of book two’s “theory of pitch-scales” in vol. 1, p. 157. This book shares its basic concept with Slonimsky’s *Thesaurus*. It should be noted that in another book, Schillinger details more directly the idea presented in book 2. See Schillinger, *Kaleidophone: New Resources of Melody and Harmony: Pitch Scales in Relation to Chord Structures* (New York: Charles Colin, 1940).

22. By “tonic,” Schillinger means the “axis-points of the corresponding symmetric systems. These tonics serve as root tones of the structures evolving in simultaneity and continuity” (*The Schillinger System of Musical Composition*, 148). The editor notes: “These symmetric scales and the symmetric harmony derived therefrom are of the utmost importance in modern and future music; they constitute one of the most brilliant theoretical and practical discoveries of the Schillinger System.” See Chapter 7: the third group, Symmetrical Scales. For scales with “three tonics” see figure 40, p. 161 and figure 42, p. 165.

23. Slonimsky, *Thesaurus*, i.

24. As Stephen Slottow notes, “Although individual, iconoclastic, and ornery, he [Ruggles] was not an isolated phenomenon, but an integral part of the ultra-modern movement.” See his “A Vast Simplicity: Pitch Organization in the Works of Carl Ruggles” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001), 8–9.

25. *Ibid.*, 320–23, especially music examples 3–56. Letter from Carl Ruggles to John Kirkpatrick, November 25, 1940. MSS, John Kirkpatrick Papers, Box 30, Folder 334, Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University.

26. *Ibid.*, 140.

27. Not included in the comparison of examples 2 and 3 are music examples of the dissonant scale from Seeger's *Treatise*, despite their relevance. A separate article devoted to Crawford and Seeger's partnership establishes the close connection between those sections in the *Treatise* and Crawford's scalar design. See Rao, "Partnership in Modern Music."

28. As the contemporary keyboardist Joe Zawinul confirms, "A lot of the scalar materials Coltrane was playing was Nicolas Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*." Ashley Kahn, *Kind of Blue: The Making of the Making of the Miles Davis Masterpiece* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 71. Michael Budds calls this "synthetic scale" and notes: "In a lecture at the University of Iowa on April 6, 1976, Nicolas Slonimsky reported that his publisher had informed him that Coltrane had recommended Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* to all his colleagues and pupils. . . . Coltrane's use of Slonimsky's *Thesaurus* as a personal practice tool is confirmed in [J. C.] Thomas's account of a private practice session by Coltrane." See Michael Budds, *Jazz in the Sixties: The Expansion of Musical Resources and Techniques* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1978), 50. See also J. C. Thomas, *Chasin' the Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 102. As his biographer Lewis Porter notes, this period was particularly marked by Coltrane's "innovative spirit." See Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 138–39. With an increased interest in "breaking pattern," as Wayne Shorter puts it, Coltrane was using a variety of exercise books to expand his musical idioms, including those for violin or harp that are full of arpeggio patterns unusual for the saxophone.

29. David Demsey, "Chromatic Third Relations in the Music of John Coltrane," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 5 (1991): 145–80; *John Coltrane Plays Giant Steps*, Transcriptions and analysis by David Demsey (Milwaukee, Wis.: Hal Leonard, 1996). See also Porter, *John Coltrane*, 148–50.

30. Karlton Edward Hester writes, "Coltrane's melodic conception was stimulated by his work with the patterns he discovered in the *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* by Nicolas Slonimsky, a monumental compilation of unusual melodic patterns. His 'modal' phase had refocused the jazz soloist on scales, a tremendous contribution to the emancipation of the jazz improviser from the existing harmonic framework." See Karlton Edward Hester, *The Melodic and Polyrhythmic Development of John Coltrane's Spontaneous Composition in a Racist Society*, Studies in the History and Interpretation of Music, vol. 54 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellon Press, 1997), 55. Porter considers that the long process of creation of *Giant Steps*—from as early as 1957 to spring 1959, with various groups, multiple recording sessions, and numerous takes—indicates the amount of time it took for Coltrane to prepare for this complex and extremely fast work. It seems to me, though, that the merging of scale/sequence and melody, not unlike that discussed with the ultramodernist composers, is also challenging. Coltrane gives a hint of this in his unusual liner note: "I'm worried that sometimes I'm doing sounds just like academic exercises, and I'm trying more and more to make it sound prettier." In an interview the following year, he explains the "prettier" as "trying to work what I have, what I know, *down* into a more lyrical line." Quoted in Porter, *John Coltrane*, 150–58.

Mark Gridley writes, “these patterns [Coltrane introduced] were still considered fundamental building blocks for jazz improvisation.” See Mark Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000), 267. Furthermore, Ingrid Monson notes that these patterns have been “parsed into ‘licks’ that have been widely practised by subsequent jazz musicians. Such ‘licks’ are a crucial musical resource from which build convincing solos and thematic continuity.” See Ingrid Monson, “Jazz Improvisation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123.

31. Steven Gilbert, *The Music of Gershwin* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995). For the influence of “theory of pitch scales” on “I Got Rhythm” Variations, see 173–74; for the notion of “geometrical expansion,” see 174–75. See also Paul Nauert, “Theory and Practice in ‘Porgy and Bess’: The Gershwin-Schillinger Connection,” *Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 9–33.

32. See Schillinger, *The Schillinger System of Musical Composition*, vol. 1, chapter 8 “Pitch Scales: The Fourth Group,” p. 164 and figure 41.

33. The second motive starts with the second note of the original motive, the third motive starts with the third note, and the fourth motive starts with the fourth note. Schillinger’s examples aim to illustrate the use of circular permutation as a valuable variation technique. Noel Brook notes Gershwin’s preference for circular permutation particularly in rhythm in “A Schillingerian and Schenkerian Approach to Gershwin’s ‘I Got Rhythm’ Variations” (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1998), 42. Stephen Gilbert notes the use of this permutation in the tune book for *Porgy and Bess*, while Wayne Shirley reports its use on thematic continuation in the opera’s musical sketch. See Gilbert, *The Music of Gershwin*, 190–91, and Wayne Shirley, “‘Rotating’ Porgy and Bess,” in *The Gershwin Style: New Looks at the Music of George Gershwin*, ed. Wayne Schneider (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21–34. See also William G. Hyland, *George Gershwin: A New Biography* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 167–68.

34. See the discussion in Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Certainly Crawford’s own analysis of the fourth movement of her Quartet using the term “row” shows her inclination to connect this procedure to terminology of the second Viennese School. Nevertheless, she did not use the terms “rotation” or “circular permutation” to describe this procedure.

35. Schillinger, vol. 1, book 2, in particular chapter 3, “Evolution of Pitch-Scale Styles,” *Schillinger System*, 117. Schillinger’s remarks on its usefulness as a variation technique shed some light: “when an extremely large amount of material is used, general permutations become very practical. But in cases where limitations are imposed by a certain type of esthetic necessity, circular permutations may solve the problem better than a vague selection from the entire number of general permutations” (*Schillinger System*, 46–47). It must be noted that the notion of circular permutation can be found in Schillinger’s writing as early as 1931 in his application for a Guggenheim fellowship, thus making it contemporary to Crawford’s compositions. This is included in the paper entitled “Application Form and Report to Guggenheim” in the Schillinger Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Under the section “Formation of Melodic Element,” Schillinger lists “Accumulation and discharge of intervallic energy in the process of formation of melorhythms: repetition, contrary motion, centrifugal and centripetal motion, wave movement and rotary movement.” This proposal comprises the blueprint of his

later work. For discussion of other aspects of this proposal, see Rao, "Partnership in Modern Music."

36. In Crawford's diary entry of May 3, 1930, quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 127.

37. Schillinger was one of the three people whom Seeger, together with Otto Kinkeldey, handpicked to form the New York Musicological Society because, in Seeger's words, he "could talk about music on the level that we wanted to talk about it." Quoted in *Reminiscences of an American Musicologist Oral History Transcript: Charles Seeger*, interviewed by Adelaide G. Tusler and Ann M. Briegleb (Los Angeles: Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles, 1972), 188. Their gatherings, many of which focused on theoretical issues of this type, "attracted more and more people and were more and more worthwhile . . . becoming known around the city" (222).

38. Heinz Holliger, "Conversation with Elliott Carter," *Sonus* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 5–12.

39. Jonathan Bernard, "An Interview with Elliott Carter," *Perspectives of New Music* 28, no. 2 (1990): 192.

40. Carter indicates these musical quotations in his program note, "This quartet, for instance, quotes the opening theme of Ives' First Violin Sonata, first played by the cello in its lowest register after each of the other instruments has come in near the beginning. A rhythmic idea from Conlon Nancarrow's First Rhythmic Study is quoted at the beginning of the Variations." See Elliott Carter, liner notes to String Quartets no. 1 and 2, Composers Quartet (Nonesuch H-71249, 1970); reprinted in *The Writings of Elliott Carter*, ed., Else and Kurt Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 274–70.

41. Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 55.

42. In his letter Carter continued, "Both David Schiff's *The Music of Elliott Carter* and Max Noubel's *Elliott Carter ou le Temps fertile* discuss the influence of her quartet on me." Carter, letter to Ellie Hisama, April 7, 2001, quoted in *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Modernity, Tradition, and the Making of American Music*, ed. Ellie M. Hisama and Ray Allen (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, 2001), 9.

43. Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 21.

44. Bernard, "An Interview with Elliott Carter," 192.

45. While the mood contrast also characterizes the first *Allegro scorrevole*—contrapuntal passages of motives constantly interrupted by sustained passages using held notes—none of the earlier passages resemble the scalar ascent and wedging motion of Crawford's model.

46. See Judy Lochhead, "On the 'Framing' Music of Elliott Carter's First String Quartet," in *Musical Transformation and Musical Intuition: Essays in Honor of David Lewin*, ed. Raphael Atlas and Michael Cherlin (Dedham, Mass.: Ovenbird Press, 1994), 188. Her example 7 shows a C–E \flat dyad that articulates a register center for the preceding music in mm. 1–4. She notes that both the upper and lower lines move toward the center through T $_7$.

47. Max Noubel, *Elliott Carter ou le Temps fertile* (Geneva: Contrechamps, 2000), 89 (my translation).

48. For "constantly changing," see Elliott Carter, "Music and the Time Screen," in *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937–1995*, ed. Jonathan Bernard (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 351; for "inverted, played," see Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 64.

49. Shreffler, "Carter and His America," 49–50.

50. Noubel, *Elliott Carter*, 38 (my translation).

51. Some of the recent scholarship on imitation and intertextuality in modern music is relevant to my discussion. See, for example, Martha Hyde, "Neoclassic and Anachronistic Impulses in Twentieth-century Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 18 (1996): 200–235, which presents a useful notion of dialectical imitation, and Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), especially 4–21.

52. In addition, one can certainly explore what Carter's famous *Harmony Book* shares in common with the theoretical work of scale theory, most notably Slonimsky's *Thesaurus* and Schillinger's *Kaleidophone*. To begin, in a spirit similar to the other two works, the organization of his *Harmony Book* places great emphasis on equal division. Take for example the numbering of pc collections of various sizes. For trichords and hexachords, the numbering system starts with the collections that divide the octave into equal parts. Accordingly, Carter's numbers are 3–1 (048) and 6–1 (02468t). For tetrachords and pentachords, the numbering system starts with the collections that are symmetrical. Accordingly, Carter's numbers are 4–1 (0123) and 5–1 (01234). See Elliott Carter, *Harmony Book*, ed. Nicholas Hopkins and John F. Link (New York: Carl Fischer, 2002).

53. Letter from Crawford to Henry Allen Moe, June 13, 1931; quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 156.

54. Tick notes that the current Andante of String Quartet 1931 was revised in 1938: the climax is enhanced by the additional change of chords and use of double and triple stops. In 1948, Crawford referred to this revision as a major change. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 215–18.

55. Cage, *Silence*, 73.

56. Cowell, *New Musical Resources*, 19–20, 83, 94.

57. "I honestly believe, and formally predict, that the immediate future of music lies in the bringing of percussion on one hand, and sliding tones on the other, to as great a state of perfection in construction of composition and flexibility of handling one instrument as older elements are now." Letter from Cowell to Cage, March 23, 1937, Cowell Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Research Division. The complete letter is now published in Leta Miller, "Henry Cowell and John Cage: Intersection and Influence, 1933–1941," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59, no. 1 (2006): 49–112.

58. This phrase is taken from Crawford's description of Wallingford Riegger's *Study in Sonority* for ten violins (1930) in her diary entry of February 17, 1930. Tick credits this piece as an inspiration for Crawford's Andante movement, and I agree from the perspective of timbre. Riegger's piece, with its innovative approach in timbre clearly made a strong impression on Crawford, still relies primarily on thematic contrast. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 123.

59. Quoted in Rita Mead, "Cowell, Ives, and New Music," *Musical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1980): 552. Cowell's remarks are discussed in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 185–86. Tick also points out that this letter is the refrain of a 1934 article, in which Cowell wrote that this movement was, "perhaps the best thing for quartet ever written in this country. This is my unqualified opinion, and is shared by many of my confreres who are not wildly enthusiastic over Crawford's works as a whole." See *Americana Annual: An Encyclopedia of Current Events*, ed. A. H. McDannald (New York: Americana Corp, 1934), 390–94.

60. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 131.

61. *Trend*, March 1934, [n.p.] quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 186.

62. Two significant analyses approach the Andante movement differently than mine. Ellie Hisama analyzes this movement in "The Question of Climax in Ruth Crawford's String Quartet, Third Movement," which addresses the possibility of a "double-voice discourse" in this movement by analyzing the twining activity among the four instruments. Through a carefully defined tool that measures the degree of twist, Hisama's analysis yields an alternative narrative that proceeds along the more conventional one that drives to climax. On the other hand, Joseph Straus's analysis of this movement focuses on the composite melody, contour, harmony, and motivic designs. See Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*.
63. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, "Cowell's Sliding Tone and the American Ultra-Modernist Tradition," *American Music* 22, no. 3 (2005): 281–323.
64. A different representation of this figure uses diagram. *Ibid.*, 306.
65. This is rather consistent. So slides of 2:2 and 1:3 are written in 4/4 time, while 4:1, 3:2, and 2:3 in 5/4 time. In her own analysis of this movement, Crawford gives an example of sliding units in such irregular meters. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, Appendix I.
66. We find examples of tonal slides in Cowell, Stockhausen, and Xenakis, and of tempo slides in Nancarrow, Carter, and Cage. For fuller discussion, see Rao, "Cowell's Sliding Tone and the American Ultra-Modernist Tradition."
67. "Morton Feldman Talks to Paul Griffiths," *Musical Times* (August 1972): 758–59.
68. Morton Feldman, Slee Lecture, the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, February 2, 1973, transcription by Nicola Walker-Smith, ed. John Bewley, February 2001; available at <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/music/spcoll/feldman/mflectures.html#slr320> (accessed July 29, 2004).
69. Sebastian Claren, *Neither: die Musik Morton Feldmans* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2000), 359 (my translation).
70. According to Feldman's student Gracia Orlando, "touch" is a significant concept in Feldman's aesthetics, the expression of which can be traced throughout all stages of his oeuvre (personal communication). In her study of Feldman's *Last Pieces* for Piano, Catherine Costello Hirata makes the following vivid observation that captures the effect of this famous notion of "touch": "It's one of those music-to-music metaphors, where an effect known in association with one musical situation is attributed to another musical situation. . . . [O]ne is the situation of a performer, of Madame Press infusing a single note with a certain touch, with a certain richness, by way of the 'liveliness' of her finger. The other is the situation of a composer, of Feldman's infusing a single sound with a certain touch, a certain richness, by way of the context in which he embeds that sound, by way of the relations between that sound and the sounds of its context." Catherine Costello Hirata, "Analyzing the Music of Morton Feldman" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2003), 39.
71. *Ibid.*, 63.
72. In this first-time collaboration between himself and Beckett, Feldman started composing the prelude before the text arrived. Thus this section in its own way reflects his contemplative anticipation of the text. Though multiple layers of dynamic slides can be found in works of 1976, they are not as complex as the irregular durations found here. Catherine Laws describes it as "confusing layers of pulse" in her chapter "Morton Feldman's *Neither*: A Musical Translation of Beckett's Text," in *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. Mary Bryden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 57–85, especially 64.

73. Steven Johnson discusses the spectrum from stasis to motion using Jonathan Kramer's terms "vertical time" and "linear time" elaborated in his *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 386–88. Johnson's suggestion of different degrees of activity in between the two extremes of the spectrum in *Rothko Chapel* is quite applicable to the musical situations in *Neither*. See Steven Johnson, "Rothko Chapel and Rothko's Chapel," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (summer 1994), 6–53.
74. Mark K. Janello calls this effect the raising of "perceptual gain" in "The Edge of Intelligibility: Late Works of Morton Feldman" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2001), 54.
75. Hirata, "Analyzing the Music of Morton Feldman," 33.
76. Morton Feldman and Michael Whiticker, "Morton Feldman: Conversation without Cage," www.cnvill.demon.co.uk/mfwhtckr.htm (accessed June 28, 2004). The interview was conducted at the Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music in July 1984, and was originally published in the Australian journal *Ossia: A Journal of Contemporary Music* 1 (Winter 1989): 6–9. Feldman must have met Crawford after 1950, since he supposedly first met Cage at the New York Philharmonic's performance of Anton Webern's *Symphonie* conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos in New York on January 26, 1950. It is possible that the meeting happened during Crawford's trip to New York for the ISCM's performance of her *Quartet* on April 11, 1950.
77. Theorist/composer Andrew Mead, then a freshman in composition at Oberlin College, remembers vividly the impact of the influential recording: "that was all we could talk about." He also recalls the Composers *Quartet* giving two concerts at Oberlin in the 1970s, which included Crawford's quartet, Babbitt's second quartet, and Carter's first and second quartets (personal communication).
78. Joseph McLellan, review of the recording in the *Washington Post*, July 15, 1973, BW11; "A 200-Year Success Story," *New York Times*, June 17, 1973, 28, 30.
79. Raymond Ericson, "Music: *Quartet's* Debut: Champions of Modern Composers Unite to Assure Contemporaries a Hearing," *New York Times*, May 4, 1965, 51.
80. The first quote, Ericson, "Music: *Quartet's* Debut"; the second and third quotes, Allen Hughes, "Fine Arts Group Performs Pieces It Commissioned," *New York Times*, May 15, 1970, 43; Andrew Porter, "Modern Pleasures," *New Yorker*, February 10, 1973, 96.
81. Richard James, describing Crawford's influence on avant-garde composer Gordon Mumma's *Suite for Piano* (1960), points out "The score is meticulously noted, individual dynamic markings accompany almost every note." See his "ONCE: Microcosm of the 1960s Musical and Multimedia Avant-Garde," *American Music* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 372.
82. Lou Harrison, letter to Davidian. Quoted in Teresa Davidian, "From Crawford to Cage: Parallels and Transformations," *Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 691.
83. Larry Polansky "Rewriting Ruth Crawford Seeger," *Musicworks* 81 (Fall 2001): 29.
84. Larry Polansky, interview by the author, January 27, 2005.
85. John Luther Adams, "Simplify, Simplify, Simplify," *NewMusicBox: The Web Magazine from the America Music Center*, www.newmusicbox.org/sp_view_topic.nmbx?id=31spoo, posted December 1, 2001 (accessed July 8, 2004).
86. "American Composer, American Music?" Interview with Michael Pisaro, *Con Brio: DePaul School of Music Newsletter* (Winter 2004): 4.
87. Tick documents this claim insightfully in her chapter in this volume. Of particular interest are William Brooks's unequivocally dismissive remarks about Crawford and Tick's exchange with Stephen Peles.

88. Pauline Oliveros, interview by the author, January 27, 2005.

89. "Creating, Performing and Listening," interview with Pauline Oliveros by Frank J. Oteri, *NewMusicBox*, www.newmusicbox.org/first-person/decoo/home.html, December 2000 (accessed July 8, 2004); "Deep and Wide," interview with Pauline Oliveros by Miya Masaoka, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, May 29, 2002. www.sfbg.com/36/35/art_music_deepandwide.html (accessed January 25, 2006). The actual excerpt is quoted here:

Q: Do you feel part of a continuous lineage, and if so, who came before you? Who comes after you?

PO: I feel a connection with a continuum. Attempting to tune into the universe, music and sound, at any given moment. But I don't want to name names. They would be men, and I don't want to continue that patriarchal influence. No, I have more allegiance to Ruth Crawford Seeger.

90. Jane Weiner LePage, *Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth Century: Selected Biographies*, Vol. 2 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 72–73.

91. See the pioneering study in Larry Polansky and John Kennedy, "'Total Eclipse': The Music of Johanna Magdalena Beyer: An Introduction and Preliminary Annotated Checklist," *Musical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (1996): 719–98. For additional discussion regarding the connection to Crawford, see Melissa J. deGraaf, "Intersection of Gender and Modernism in the Music of Johanna Beyer," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2004), 8–9, 15. Also available at <http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam/So4Newshtml/Beyer/Beyer.htm>. (accessed May 2, 2006).

92. In her analysis of sequence and structure, Teresa Davidian shows also parallels between the last movement of Crawford's *Quartet* and Cage's *Metamorphosis* (1938). See Davidian, "From Crawford to Cage: Parallels and Transformations," *Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2000): 664–95.

93. See Tick's chapter in this volume.

94. For a discussion and criticism of this particular notion in Bloom's theory in relation to music, see William Gregory Hussey, "Compositional Modeling, Quotation, and Multiple Influence Analysis in the Works of Johannes Brahms: An Application of Harold Bloom's Theory of Influence to Music" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1997), 5–7, in particular the section on "Proof of Influence."

95. Other examples include Sorrel Hays's *90s: a Calendar Bracelet* (1990), a cycle of pieces for MIDI grand piano, which is dedicated to both Ethel Smyth and Crawford; Udo Kasemets's *Diaries and Letters of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (2000) is a piece for two speakers plus any numbers of speakers and any number of performers.

96. "James Tenney on his Cultural and Compositional Diversity: In Conversation with Gayle Young," *Musicworks* 77 (Summer 2000): 23.

97. These descriptions are taken from correspondence of Crawford to Gerald Reynolds, November 30, 1930; see Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 143–46, 164.

98. Interview with Larry Polansky by the author, January 27, 2005.

99. Interview with Pauline Oliveros by the author, January 27, 2005.

Chapter Seven

Reminiscences on Our Singing Country

The Crawford Seeger/Lomax Alliance

Bess Lomax Hawes

As the jazz age spiraled into the Depression years and a renewed focus on the situation of the “common man (and woman)” emerged, songbooks like Carl Sandburg’s *The American Songbag* and my father and brother’s *American Ballads and Folk Songs* began to appear alongside the familiar hymnals, opera chorus excerpts, and the popular song collections of Gilbert and Sullivan, Berlin, and Gershwin. The typical songbook of the period included lyrics, an outline of the tune in musical notation together with full piano accompaniment, and occasionally guitar chords. The idea was to gather around the piano and sing the songs *en famille*, and I remember when everybody I knew used to do just that on Sunday afternoons.

The folk music collections contained a potpourri of Appalachian ballads, sea chanteys, African American spirituals, blues, and work songs, and now and then a Spanish dance tune and miscellaneous city song. While transcriptions of basic melody lines and harmonic accompaniments proved invaluable for us Sunday crooners who wished to sing the songs ourselves, the increasing popularization of the recording machine in the 1930s inevitably led to a teasing problem. What bits of the tunes got written down hardly ever really sounded like what you could hear with your own ears when you finally listened to the field recordings as performed by the original singers. And sometimes the written music seemed a pale reflection, or even a totally different version, of what was coming out of that Victrola horn.

Composer Ruth Crawford Seeger was one of the first Americans to grapple with this problem in a serious and systematic fashion. Her marvelously descriptive musical introduction to the 1941 collection *Our Singing Country*

is an early and admirable attempt by a classically trained musician to figure out how to cope with other peoples' musical languages.¹ The book itself was composed of songs gleaned from the original recordings of black and white singers made by my father and brother while they crisscrossed the southern states during the 1930s. For me it has always been my family's purest, most creative work, and they themselves wanted very much to make it available.

Selection of what to include in the final published volume—and what to leave out—was a painful process. Father, Alan, and Ruth formed the basic editorial committee though Charles Seeger was often there too. And I was always among them taking notes as we listened to hour after hour of field recordings in the old Library of Congress attics where the dust and the heat blew in and the painted friezes and gilded decorative panels filtered the roaring ax-chopping songs and the great crashing shaped-note hymns down through the prim and orderly library stacks below us. In the evenings string quartets would play Beethoven and Haydn in the library's concert hall; but in the attics the unsilenced and unquenchable voices of the southern working people sang on.

I used to require students in my folk music classes to read Ruth's musical introduction as it finally appeared in *Our Singing Country*. I had been personally privileged to observe firsthand what a tough job she had taken on and how hard it was to do. I was seventeen that year, and after the weeks of listening at the Library of Congress I worked as a messenger girl between Ruth, living in Maryland, and my father and Alan, living on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Every week I would go back and forth between them on the bus carrying bits of manuscript, alternate music transcriptions, copies of the original discs, critiques and messages, both passionate and hilarious.

Ruth was a marvel. She tackled the presentation on paper of a fiddle tune like "Bonaparte's Retreat" with the same precision, determination, and awe that she would have devoted to a brilliantly realized cadenza from a Mozart violin concerto. Ruth listened, and listened, and then listened some more. She used the recording for what she believed it to be—a true record of the music as played or sung. She took as her basic assumption that the music was sounding the way the player wanted it to sound—not like a failed imitation of something else.

Most people at that time thought of the folk song as "simple," "naive," "natural" and crude—indeed many people still do—but Ruth's splendid classical education and democratic personality left her devoid of that snobbery. She believed her job was simply to move the music as performed into another form of communication—print—thereby allowing it to circulate in a different way. Most people doing that kind of work at that time were content with an approximation of what they thought they heard; Ruth never

was. When she had to approximate, she grieved over it and agonized and changed it back and forth interminably, and finally wrote footnotes saying she was sorry and it was not exactly what she had hoped for.

In the meantime my brother Alan—as passionate and committed as Ruth to social needs, social justice, the importance and artistry of the special messages of ordinary people, but with much more experience in the twisting and cramping effects of translating sound into print—was trying to make up in a different way for the separation of musician, music, and performance that we all observed occurring when songs were put into books. He thought a great deal about how to present the songs in *Our Singing Country* within their special place and time, how to bring their unknown singers into prominence, and how to convey his respect for their poetry, passion, and artistry. He grouped the songs in terms of their use and their place of singing rather than according to literary criteria, struggling in every way he could conceive to rejoin the artist with the art. These were truly radical years in our country and both Ruth Crawford Seeger and Alan Lomax were themselves conjoined in an attempt to change the basic assumptions that had underlain both the academic and popular attempts to understand American music. And if you are going to support the changing of things, you must observe the small details for they will eventually lead you into the large.

So like all the good New Dealers and left-wingers of that time they argued constantly with rage and humor, with anger and affection, and with unrelenting enthusiasm. To cite one example that has lasted in my mind, a mammoth battle over the blues song “Go Down, You Little Red Rising Sun” went on for weeks, the point at issue being whether in the second line the singer had sung “you redder than rouge rising sun” with a voice break or “redder than ruby rising sun.”

Alan’s position was that no blues singer he had ever recorded would consider singing such an awkward and unpoetic line as “redder than rouge” while Ruth maintained that the only problem with that was that it was just what had indeed happened. And she had listened a sufficient number of times to prove it—eighty-five, perhaps, or eighty-six? She kept a running tally on the number of listenings she had devoted to each song and she would request from Alan a report of how many times he had listened to something.

By that time Alan had talked with, broken bread with, and contemplated the wonders of the world with hundreds of traditional singers. Ruth had not had that chance, and so they sometimes arrived at different though mostly complementary conclusions. Alan and Ruth represented very different human beings from different backgrounds with different ways of perceiving aesthetic systems, but they were trying together to do something new and honest, groundbreaking and important. And as I watched

them struggle, I began at my tender age to absorb some of the subtleties of art and the complexities of change.

I also began to shudder at the thought of the thousands of such difficulties that must be faced in the construction of a past reality. In every case there are the facts about what actually happened, the unassailable on-the-record rendition of the performance that Ruth held was the vital element, the almost holy data. But then there are the issues that she could not really take into account because they were not immediately perceivable on the disc—things like the details of the singer’s age and background, the health or sickness of the surrounding community, the intensity of a particular historical tradition or moment, the customary ways of telling a story in a particular community—all the surrounding information that can be summarized as context. And those are the things Alan tended to insist were vital. Where should the weight fall? Which was more important? Could some new amalgam of perspectives develop? Well, they struggled and they sweated and, to my mind, they came up with a volume that was worth all the work—not as a final solution, but as a pretty darned good beginning. And I am sure that, whether they recognized it or not, it was worth it to them.

For if you really dig into something, all that energy comes back into you and makes you just slightly different than before. I believe that my brother was enormously influenced by Ruth’s firm and loving identification with the unassailable recording and the depth and capacity of the sound of the music. She in turn was deeply affected by my brother’s ever-attentive focus on the uncharted and complex relations between aesthetics and life itself, especially the sophistication and depth of the transmitted message. To my mind, both Alan’s cantometrics research and Ruth’s three volumes of children’s folk songs stand as later independent creations giving testimony to the impact of those two intellectuals on each other.²

We are all fortunate that Ruth and Alan met at a time in our history when it was a glowing compliment to be called truly “radical” and at a time when there was a project worth their combined efforts. And as a woman I feel especially lucky to have had the opportunity during my impressionable years to watch a healthy, passionate, intelligent woman undertaking a groundbreaking job. Ruth Crawford Seeger set lofty standards for herself, fulfilled her personal and professional responsibilities impeccably, and left at least one seventeen-year-old girl a noble goal to reach for.

Notes

A version of this chapter originally appeared in the *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

1. *Our Singing Country*, ed. John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax (New York: Macmillan, 1941; reprint Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2000).
2. Alan Lomax, *Folk Song Style and Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1968); Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948; reprint Turtleback, 1980), *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1950; reprint Hamden, Conn.: Linnet, 1993), and *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953; reprint Hamden, Conn.: Linnet, 1999).

Chapter Eight

Philosophical Counterpoint

A Comparison of Charles Seeger's Composition Treatise and Ruth Crawford Seeger's Folk Song Appendix

Taylor A. Greer

Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford Seeger formed one of the most unusual artistic partnerships in twentieth-century American musical life. In a recent essay Judith Tick portrays the collaboration between them in musical terms:

The two shared so much in their evolution from modernist warriors, battling for what Crawford called “modern American dissonant music,” to urban folk song revivalists that Seeger’s prescription for new music in the 1920s fits the texture of their odyssey: “Sounding apart while sounding together.” This phrase . . . captures the range of interactions within the *intellectual counterpoint* [italics mine] of this marriage: language shared, sources cited, subjects repeated, ideas borrowed, projects jointly undertaken.¹

This chapter will explore two of the fruits born from this partnership: *Tradition and Experiment in the New Music*, a compendium of criticism, philosophy, and music composition, which Seeger and Crawford Seeger began in 1929 but which was published posthumously in 1994; and *The Music of American Folk Song*, Crawford Seeger’s lengthy appendix originally intended for the second Lomax anthology of folk songs, *Our Singing Country* (1941), but which was ultimately rejected and published only recently as a freestanding monograph.² Tick’s metaphor of “counterpoint” serves as a useful starting point for such a comparison since, in all, we can identify three different species: first, “personal” counterpoint, that is, the artistic and intellectual collaboration between two distinct but complementary temperaments that led to the creation of the two treatises; second, “philosophical” counterpoint,

which encompasses their similarities as well as their differences; that is, although both works rely on a single philosophical principle, each adopts different assumptions and addresses a unique audience; and finally, “historical” counterpoint, or the relationship between the broader cultural and historical forces that characterized the period during which both documents were written. This chapter, though considering each level of this contrapuntal hierarchy, will focus more on the second species.

There has been some debate in recent years regarding the authorship of works traditionally attributed to Seeger and Crawford Seeger. As regards the treatise, the latter’s role in its genesis seems to have been significant. In the summer of 1930 she typed and he dictated the manuscript, and together they integrated the teaching regimen for her private composition lessons with his various theories of philosophy, musicology, and criticism. Yet differences of opinion regarding her exact contribution abound. In a meticulous study of the creation of the treatise, Nancy Rao speculates on Crawford Seeger’s influence by examining the shifts in theoretical focus between Seeger’s initial teaching notes and the later revised manuscripts.³ Based on his scrutiny of the treatise’s manuscripts, Joseph Straus believes that the treatise “would not have taken its present form and, indeed, might not have been written at all, without her.”⁴ One indication of her role appears in the margins of one of the manuscripts where she left detailed comments and suggestions for revision that have been transcribed as endnotes in the published edition.⁵ Seeger’s dedication is also revealing: “To Ruth Crawford of whose studies these pages are a record and without whose inspiration and collaboration they would not have been written.” More important, Seeger explicitly acknowledged her essential role in this document’s creation by offering to include her as a joint author, an offer she refused. In a letter written to him in the fall of 1931 Ruth describes the project as “our book, our child. And I am ‘unhumilitious’ enough to say that I know I helped, and even that I helped a great deal.” Then she concludes: “But, nevertheless, you are the writer of ‘our’ book and yours the vision, and the ideas, and the pacing up and down a goat-house expressing them, and the fifteen years previous thinking about them.”⁶ Since the creation of the treatise coincided with the blossoming of their relationship from teacher and student, to romantic lovers, and finally to husband and wife, perhaps it was unthinkable for her to accept half of the credit. However, in the absence of any new empirical evidence one way or the other, the controversy as to how much of the text and the music examples she actually wrote will never be resolved.

The Music of American Folk Song was also the product of their unusual musical and intellectual partnership. Yet in this case the previous roles were reversed. Here Crawford Seeger was the principal author, while Seeger was more of a coach or critic. For one thing his growing deafness prevented him from participating in the painstaking work of transcription. In a letter to

John Lomax she confessed that Seeger “has had to have [the appendix] talked at him, read to him, and thought out to him, with plenty of suggestions from him and ideas and new angles resulting.”⁷ In the Music Preface that eventually appeared in the anthology, she thanks him for his “day-to-day encouragement, consultation and collaboration.”⁸ Apparently his “collaboration” at times was rather substantive. Based on her study of handwriting on the various manuscripts of the appendix, Tick argues that Seeger should be credited with the idea of explaining transcription as a multilayered process, that is, presenting a group of transcriptions of a single song arranged within a hierarchy of gradually increasing precision.⁹

Finally, there is the connection between *The Music of American Folk Song* and several essays on folk song research that Seeger published after her death. By comparing similar passages from the appendix and two of Seeger’s essays on such topics as transcription, singing style, tempo, and dynamics, Tick reveals his tendency to borrow ideas without acknowledging their original source.¹⁰

In light of these observations, I have no interest in tracing intellectual ownership, that is, in trying to determine who owned, loaned, or borrowed what idea in either the treatise or the appendix. Above all, it must be emphasized that both documents were joint undertakings—the former probably more so than the latter. Instead it is more productive to identify areas of similarity and of difference between the two. In particular, the philosophical ideas that first appear in the treatise were a source of inspiration, indeed a kind of intellectual compost that both authors cultivated for the rest of their lives. Whereas in my previous study I examined in what ways Seeger developed some of these ideas in his later writings, here I explore how they matured in Crawford Seeger’s own theoretical masterpiece.

Tradition and Experiment in the New Music consists of two parts. The first part includes three separate projects: a general theory of criticism; a reappraisal of the basic elements of music such as rhythm, pitch, dynamics, and so on; and a new theory of melody. The second part is more practical in nature, consisting of a technical regimen for experimental composers. One of the striking characteristics about this bipartite structure is the underlying progression from general to specific: Seeger begins with a philosophical discourse about the most fundamental questions of human knowledge—How do we think? How do we form judgments about art? What forms of knowledge shape artistic experience? Then he proceeds to general matters concerning musical experience itself, introducing the framework traditionally used to describe sound and then raising questions about it. In Part II when he finally turns to the practical realm of how to write dissonant counterpoint, readers who have not absorbed the general material in Part I will likely be at sea. Although in his writings Seeger often expressed doubts about the discipline of philosophy, the message conveyed in the treatise is that philosophical theory and compositional practice are inextricably bound.

Like the treatise, *The Music of American Folk Song* is divided into two parts—one entitled “A Note on Transcription,” the other “Notes on the Songs and on Manners of Singing.” Yet these two works differ vastly in size and scope. The treatise is wide-ranging and diffuse, full of proposals and speculations about a whole symphony of topics. By contrast, Crawford Seeger’s work is more of a monograph—a short, systematic study of the intricacies involved in transcription from recordings and in the performance practices of this singing tradition. The appendix can also be interpreted as a guidebook for the uninitiated, that is, “the city or town dweller” who is literate, by which she means the “average person, unfamiliar with the tune or with the idiom.”¹¹ The result is that she frequently shifts between two points of view—from the generalist to the specialist—and their corresponding narrative styles. At times, it seems as if she were delivering a lecture to two different classes assembled in the same audience: an introductory course in American folk music combined with an advanced seminar in the methods of ethnomusicology.

An illustration of the generalist style occurs near the beginning of part I where she enumerates the typical features (she calls them “mannerisms”) found in art song, which are absent in folk song. They include such things as the emphasis of phrase endings by a change in tempo, fluctuation of mood, continual shifts in dynamics, and, finally, the typical tone quality of the trained voice. She then suggests that, over time, these differences can acquire a “positive rather than negative value”;¹² that is, if a listener hears enough performances of folk music, then the absence of these features may become a merit rather than a shortcoming. The approach she uses in this comparison is more subtle than it might initially appear. She not only foresees the reader’s typical biases against this form of singing, she hopes that, by exposing them, she will defuse them.

The second narrative voice is that of the professional scholar. In part II she considers in depth one of the above features: metrical irregularity such as the prolongation or contraction of beats within a measure. She poses the following question: does this kind of irregularity reflect the rhythmic freedom of the individual performer—the idiosyncrasies of the singer whom the Lomaxes happened to record—or is it a permanent feature of the song regardless of who sings it? Here we see a glimpse of her role as both an analyst and a theorist of folk song. She is interested not only in the intrinsic properties of the collection of recorded songs themselves, but also in their relationship to the broader oral tradition. Having briefly introduced the treatise and the appendix, we are now in a position to consider their similarities and differences.

The first point of similarity between the treatise and the appendix is their common skepticism toward language. To understand the significance of this question, we must return to a dilemma Seeger initially posed in several essays during the 1920s. In short, since composing or listening to music is

inherently a nonverbal experience, he insisted that anyone who attempts to describe music in language betrays it. Since composers, critics, and listeners all commonly use language to talk about music, they are caught in an insoluble dilemma, which he dubbed the “linguo-centric predicament.”¹³ By the time he and Crawford Seeger had finished a revised draft of the treatise in 1931, he had tempered his earlier skepticism. What he had earlier labeled as a “predicament” now became a limit that music critics in particular must try to overcome. Although language will always fall short of representing the richness of musical experience, the critic’s reason for being is to perfect the art of expressing the inexpressible.

In the appendix, Crawford Seeger reiterates Seeger’s fears that language cannot adequately represent musical experience. However, instead of addressing the general question of incompatibility, she focuses on one type of music and one kind of language: the process of transcribing recorded folk songs using written notation. She warns her readers, “it must be apparent what a small part of the original song and its manner of singing is represented to the reader in customary notation.” In her mind, the challenge of preserving an oral tradition that had never been written down “often strips the song of many or most of the finer subtleties of its particular style of performance, and leaves not much more than a skeleton of the original singing.”¹⁴ She then describes what kind of “finer subtleties” might be lost in transcription. The first is a song’s exact rhythmic and/or pitch material; for example, an extended duration that does not conform to a consistent meter, or so-called blue notes that do not fit into either the chromatic or diatonic scales. She also bemoans the inability to express in notation the subtleties of performance practice, that is, the countless details that distinguish one performance of a song from another. Examples include the quality of a singer’s attack or release of a single pitch as well as the way a performer connects two adjacent pitches in a melody.

After enumerating various problems facing the scrupulous transcriber, Crawford Seeger refuses to lapse into skepticism, but rather offers a compromise solution. The strongest justification for publishing an anthology of folk song transcriptions is that a knowledgeable reader could provide what is missing in the notation: “re-creation of the tune by the reader must depend to no small extent on his ability to put back upon the more or less skeleton notation [its] ‘flesh, blood and nerve fibre.’”¹⁵ Her vivid metaphor emphasizes all the more the extent of underlying optimism. While there was no guarantee her readers would possess this “ability,” she hoped that her recommendations would persuade them to become more familiar with the sound of folk music before trying to learn the tunes.

The second resemblance between the two documents is the most profound of all: the principle of mediation. An excellent introduction to this principle appears in a short exchange between Crawford Seeger and Seeger

found in the margins of one of the revised manuscripts of the treatise. My reasons for concentrating on this manuscript rather than the published version are twofold. To begin with, the marginalia serve as an abbreviated correspondence between Crawford Seeger and Seeger, a partial transcript of their conversations about the treatise. The issues she explores in her comments and the tone with which she explores them reveal her personality as a thinker beginning to emerge. As an aside, her suggestion to either relocate the passage as a whole or integrate it better into the text is ironic because, in the end, he omitted the passage altogether. The second reason is that this “marginal” conversation serves as a lens to view the whole document for it presents in microcosm one of the treatise’s central themes that later reappeared, though somewhat transformed, in Crawford Seeger’s own writings on folk song.

In the narrow margins of chapter 2, Seeger waxes eloquent on the differences between science and art in what I will call the parable of the “Apple and the Knife.”¹⁶

CHARLES: “The ‘thing’ that a speaker speaks of may be likened to an apple. The ‘Apple of meaning’ is cut by a knife (language) into many irregular pieces (words), while the juice runs away and the odor is dispelled, the form destroyed, and the complex of functions we associate with ‘apple’ interrupted. The difference between the scientist and the artist is this: the scientist tries to fit these all together again so as to be as much as possible like the original, while the artist, regardless of the nature of the original, proceeds to make a new construction independent of any original. The scientist is interested in what *is*: the artist in what *seems*. The scientist, in Aesthetics, can cut up this apple, too, the ‘apple of seeming,’ and pursue still farther his favorite interest by asking what the ‘meaning’ of ‘seeming’ ‘is.’ The artist, however, has found an absolute end of *his* interest. Value has been established, as far as he is concerned, in the ‘seeming.’ . . . Here again, however . . . [t]he scientist is much more of an artist, and his ‘results’ much more art-constructions, than we generally admit. So too, the artist is more of a laboratory worker and his materials more facts than we ordinarily suppose. Perhaps this dilemma will be settled someday even as were the dilemmas of squaring the circle and of Achilles and the tortoise—by more exact statement.”

RUTH: “I like the apple *immensely!* But I don’t quite see it fitting in here. Can you lead up to it, or make the reference clearer? (I see, of course, the *general* link, but think it should be more particular.)”

This parable is a succinct and colorful introduction to the philosophical ideal of mediation. He begins by drawing the traditional distinction between analysis and synthesis, associating the analytical impulse with the methods of science and the synthetic impulse with the creative world of the artist. Throughout the treatise the theme of dualism or the juxtaposition of two equal but opposite concepts is writ large. Examples include such pairs as consonance versus dissonance, intuition versus reason, individual versus collective taste, and past versus present musical traditions. For Seeger, however,

identifying an opposition was merely the first stage in a longer process of mediation in which a balance is achieved between opposites. In the initial chapters of the treatise Seeger presents this concept of mediation as though he were unveiling a new philosophical principle or an immutable aesthetic truth.

The story of the origins of this process of mediation is too long to summarize in this short space. Indeed, in the treatise as in many of his writings, Seeger was rarely interested in documenting or even acknowledging the historical roots of his formulations. In short, his fascination for the concept of mediation was inspired by two contemporary European philosophers, Henri Bergson and Bertrand Russell. In a striking essay written in 1914 Russell proposes an ideal union between two opposite but complementary faculties: the gift of intuition and the power of logical reasoning. Beginning in the 1920s and continuing throughout his life, Seeger adapted this ideal of balance for his theories about music criticism, composition, and folk music.¹⁷

Like many philosophers, Seeger was long on abstract theories but short on ways of putting them into practice. The parable illustrates well this tendency for he asks the reader to conduct a mental experiment. One way to mediate between art and science is to imagine to what degree the artist relies on scientific logic and, likewise, to what degree the scientist relies on artistic intuition. Such an exercise, while not a true fusion of the original pair of opposites, leads to a new, more refined view of each one. Of course, if we pursue this reversal far enough, eventually we arrive at a pair of contradictions: illogical scientists and ultrarational artists. Yet this pair plays directly into Seeger's overall plan in the treatise: a mixture of logical exposition and mystical paradox. In sum, this reversal is merely a beginning, a first step within the longer process of achieving some kind of mediation.

This parable is also significant in that it encapsulates one of the treatise's central questions: how can a written document that employs logical argument help inaugurate a new approach to musical composition? Seeger was well aware of this problem. Indeed, his awareness of it may help explain his enthusiasm for the principle of mediation in the treatise. Throughout the compendium his attitude toward the methods of science was contradictory. On the one hand, he repeatedly voiced his doubt and skepticism about using logical reasoning to explain and, especially, to renew the imaginative spirit. To write, understand, or judge music was, first and foremost, a matter of artistic intuition. On the other hand, he was also convinced that scientific inquiry, when conducted judiciously, could liberate artists by opening up new possibilities in composition. In the treatise this contradiction is never fully resolved; indeed, it constitutes one of the document's defining characteristics.

A careful study of the appendix reveals that the two documents share an unmistakable philosophical legacy. Indeed, the appendix is suffused by the

concept of mediation; in all, there are six separate references to the idea of a middle course between extremes, five in part I and one in part II.

Near the beginning of part I, Crawford Seeger elegantly describes the songbook's potential for building a link between different musical cultures: "Music notations of folk songs serve, then, as a bridge between, mainly, two different types of singers. Over this bridge a vital heritage of culture can pass, from the rural people who, for the most part, have preserved it, to the urban people who have more or less lost it and wish to recapture it." Then she presents the opposition between extremes: "If [the notations] are to be used for strictly scientific study rather than for singing, the transcriber will wish to include in them all details—rhythmic, tonal and formal—perceptible to him. If they are to be published in song books for school or community use, he will . . . feel constrained to indicate only the outline, the bare skeleton of the song." By contrast, her aim is "to follow a course midway between these extremes: to catch a just balance which will convey as much as possible of the rich complexity of the folk singer's art, yet in simple enough terms to allow ready grasp by the interested amateur."¹⁸ This excerpt contains the underlying mission she shared with the Lomaxes, the *raison d'être* of the whole anthology. She hopes to preserve in written form their collection of field recordings and, at the same time, transform them into a version that will be accessible to the general public. Her desire to strike a balance between opposites is unequivocal. In this case the opposites are two different audiences: the specialist as musicologist and the public as amateur performer.

The second example of mediation appears in Crawford Seeger's detailed demonstration of the strategies and end results of musical transcription. Rather than simply stating her conclusions and then proceeding to the songs themselves, she allows her readers to reenact the process of transcription and discover her conclusions for themselves. In all, she considers excerpts from nine songs, and for each excerpt she presents three different transcriptions, each with its own level of exactitude. One level is exceedingly complex, often including one or two changes of meter; one level is simplified to the point of distortion. Her ideal aim is the "midway between extremes," and it serves as the prototype for the 205 songs contained in the anthology.¹⁹

The most striking thing about this explanation is that most of the so-called middleground transcriptions consist of two different versions, sometimes three. The four transcriptions of "Trouble, Trouble" presented in example 8.1 are a case in point.

Level A is the scientific version notated in 7/8 meter; level C in 4/4 time is the simplest and easiest to perform. Most important, there are two levels labeled as B. The reader discovers that recording in notation a musical performance of folk music is never a single, inevitable decision, but rather is a

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Trouble, Trouble." Each system consists of four staves labeled A, B, B', and C, representing different transcriptions of the same piece. The first system covers the lyrics "Well, it seem like trou - ble" and includes a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 66$ and a 7/8 time signature. The second system covers the lyrics "go'n' let me _____ to my grave." and includes a 6/8 time signature. The notation features various rhythmic values, including triplets and slurs, and changes in key signature and time signature between systems.

Example 8.1. Four transcriptions of “Trouble, Trouble.” Reprinted by permission of the family of Ruth Crawford Seeger.

continuous process of generating multiple versions and then choosing which one is better, or rather, less bad. These samples illustrate dramatically that the attempt to transcribe recorded folk songs using Western notation is a kind of translation from one musical language to another.

Crawford Seeger also adopts the concept of mediation as a tripartite model of classification. On two occasions she uses this approach as a shorthand form of description in order to characterize briefly a singer’s manner of performance as “midway between the complex and the simple.”²⁰ In part II she recapitulates the same ideal of balance between the scientist and the amateur when explaining her approach toward notating a given song’s metrical irregularities.²¹ Finally, she uses this tripartite approach to explain the idea of the “model tune.” This concept is her solution to the problem of how to record variations in the musical setting of a song’s different verses. The question is whether to write out the music of all stanzas or to simplify

the song by recording either the first stanza only or a composite of several stanzas. After juxtaposing the usual extremes of the scientist and the amateur, she opts for a middle course, the model tune, which she defines as “the tune of one single stanza of one song as sung in one performance.”²²

In sum, the concept of mediation is central to Crawford Seeger’s transcription project and to her eloquent explanation of it. To borrow her metaphor, this concept creates a methodological bridge between the treatise and appendix, between the arcane world of avant-garde composition and the revival of traditional folk music.

At this point it is important to highlight four points of contrast between the two documents: a different emphasis between analytical and creative impulses; the difference between a written and an oral musical tradition; their contrasting pedagogical approaches; and their relationship to the canon. To understand the first difference between the two documents, it is useful to return briefly to the parable of the apple. Whereas Seeger presents a clear dichotomy between the scientific and the artistic approach, in the end each document fuses them together but in different proportions. In the treatise the mixture is nearly half and half. On the one hand, it is a compendium of musical science, addressed to various specialists including musicologists, critics, composers, and philosophers. From the first page, he assumes that analyzing the compositional process with the tools of the scientist is an end in itself. On the other hand, Seeger was no less an “artist” than he was a “scientist.” His assortment of abstract arguments and theoretical experiments was justified if it succeeded in either inspiring or guiding avant-garde composers, that is, if it bore some connection to the living art. To return to the parable, he was as eager to create “new” fruit out of old apple slices as he was to reconstruct the original apple. In sum, the balance he achieves in the treatise is as much synthetic as it is analytic in character.

In her appendix Crawford Seeger, too, fuses scientific theory with musical practice, but the proportion between the two impulses is entirely different from that found in the treatise. On the creative side, it could be said that Crawford Seeger “brought the powers of a composer”²³ to the project in terms of her musical taste and, more important, her respect for the recordings’ musical integrity as revealed by her standards of precision and thoroughness. As Anthony Seeger concludes, Crawford Seeger “never stopped being an avant-garde composer, but she used her skills in a different way with the Library of Congress recordings. She also believed her transcriptions were her art.”²⁴ While the transcriptions reveal a creative ear and eye, on the whole, the appendix is an analytical tour de force. She treated the business of transcription as an empirical science, employing impartial procedures and enlightened definitions of norms and exceptions to the norm. She hoped to renew the art of folk music by helping preserve its past. Yet this renewal did not include any guidance for composing new songs or developing new

singing traditions. In contrast to the treatise, in this project her *métier* as a musical anthropologist outweighed her calling as a composer.

The next difference between the documents, while more rarified, is nevertheless crucial: their different approaches toward the identity of a musical work of art or its ontology. Like most treatises in the Western European music tradition, *Tradition and Experiment in the New Music* makes two assumptions: (1) that each musical work has a single author; and (2) that each performance of that work preserves or honors the original by realizing the directions in the score with a customary degree of integrity and precision. Thus, a musical work's identity is determined by the written score in that the work is not a single performance, but rather a family of performances that fall within a range of interpretive freedom agreed upon by general convention.

The approach Crawford Seeger adopts in the appendix diverges sharply from these two assumptions. To begin with, a given folk song's authorship is collective, not individual, because it is shared by more than one composer. As expected in an oral tradition, a singer usually learns a new song by ear and performs it without referring to a written score. Furthermore, since in most cases it is impossible to determine who originally composed what work, preserving the identity of a given folk song is no longer a question. Crawford Seeger observes: "Passed on year after year from one person to another, a majority of the songs can be said to have been modified in many ways, and . . . styles of performance in the singing [of] any one song can differ radically." She speculates that the concept of invention or composition still exists but "mainly as added increment to a current stock or repertoire unaffected, except in rare instances, by considerations of authorship, copyright, publication or critical review."²⁵

The third difference is pedagogical in nature. Dissonant counterpoint, one of the treatise's most famous proposals for avant-garde composers, is based on a principle of negation. This compositional regimen is an adaptation of J. J. Fux's celebrated classic *Gradus ad Parnassum (Steps to Parnassus)* written in 1723, which fused a new appreciation of consonance and dissonance with the study of melodic line. Over 200 years later, Seeger turned Fux's pedagogic formula on its head. Instead of beginning with a purely consonant texture and then gradually introducing specific dissonant intervals, Seeger does the opposite; he recommends that students compose strictly dissonant textures first, and then gradually employ selected consonant intervals. The motivation for this reversal, however, was not primarily to oppose or parody his Viennese predecessor. Rather, by reversing the traditional definitions of consonance and dissonance treatment, he hoped to expand contemporary composers' perception of interval quality, and, by extension, of other musical parameters such as rhythm and dynamics. In short, Seeger adapted Fux's eighteenth-century pedagogical approach, and

in the process anchored his peculiar brand of modernist composition within the mainstream of European art music.

The appendix, by contrast, belongs to a different pedagogical tradition steeped in musical anthropology. Like Béla Bartók and George Herzog, Crawford Seeger and the Lomaxes hoped to cultivate the traditions of rural folk song amid a musical climate that strongly favored European art music. By popularizing a new musical ideal, they hoped to preserve it. As mentioned above, near the beginning of part I, Crawford Seeger goes to great lengths to highlight the stylistic and aesthetic differences between the two traditions. After suggesting that her reader might end up preferring folk singing over classical singing, she concludes that whether or not

. . . he comes to define [folk music] in terms of epic quality is not of such import . . . as is the probability that, through this closer acquaintance with American folk singing, his re-creation from notation of similar songs in similar idioms will undoubtedly ring truer and “come more natural” than before.²⁶

This comment clearly reveals the encouraging and moderate tone that permeates the entire appendix. Rather than pontificating, she beckons her readers to discover the pleasures of traditional music for themselves. Her work is a lesson in musical tolerance rather than a lecture on musical technique.

The last difference between the two documents is more a preliminary observation than a full-fledged argument, for to conduct a detailed comparison of the modernists of the 1920s and the urban folk revivalists of the 1930s would require a full-length study. *Tradition and Experiment in the New Music* and *The Music of American Folk Song* differ sharply with respect to how much they rely on the aesthetic values of the Western European musical tradition or what is often called the Eurocentric canon. If we define “canon” as either an “accepted principle or rule” or “a body of principles, rules, standards or norms,” then music that does not share the same aesthetic rules, standards, or norms of eighteenth and nineteenth-century music falls outside the European canon.²⁷ Let us first consider the treatise.

In his writings from the 1920s and early 1930s Seeger reacted against the music of the leading experimental composers of his generation such as Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Scriabin to whom he referred disparagingly as “the three S’s.”²⁸ Though he was often discontent with their experiments, his own aesthetic vision belongs to the same rarified idiom and was addressed to the same elite audience. Since the 1910s and 1920s, however, early twentieth-century experimental composition has emerged as a kind of mainstream of its own with the corresponding conditions of membership, degree of conformity, and so forth. In short, the boundaries of the Western canon have grown so as to include such works as *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Verklärte*

Nacht, and “Men and Mountains.” That music historians are beginning to classify composers such as Crawford Seeger, Ruggles, and Cowell in the same group as Stravinsky and Schoenberg is a sign of the artistic success and prestige the former have achieved. Joseph Straus’s recent analytical study confirms this observation for, in his view, her compositions have strong affinities with “the European modernist mainstream”—that is, the music of the second Viennese School, and, to some extent, of Stravinsky.²⁹ Rather than overthrowing the experimental tradition of early twentieth-century Europe, the American modernist composers of the 1920s and 1930s helped broaden it.

The Music of American Folk Song differs dramatically from the treatise in that it challenges the supremacy of the Western European art music tradition. Like the previous Lomax anthology, *Our Singing Country* and its overgrown appendix belong to the cultural upsurge called the urban folk music revival. The reason Crawford Seeger juxtaposes the practice of art music and folk music so often in part I of the appendix is that she expected most of her readers would consider the latter second rate and certainly not worth preserving in the form of an anthology. According to Tick, her purpose was a form of “double proselytizing: to reach out to city people who could then embrace their lost heritage and to box the snobbish ears of Eurocentric professional musicians.”³⁰ Crawford Seeger was determined to unseat the widespread bias against folk music as an inferior, simple-minded diversion. By showing that an oral tradition is capable of sustaining scientific study, she confirms that folk song constitutes its own parallel tradition, and, accordingly, deserves its own place alongside art music in the pantheon of American culture.³¹

To complete this brief comparison, it is necessary to consider resemblances that scholars have recently proposed between musical modernism and the urban folk music revival. According to this line of thinking, they share two kinds of affinities: social-political and technical. The first kind grows out of a mutual resistance to the dominant musical traditions in America during the 1920s and late 1930s and 1940s. As Tick observes, “conventional classical music marginalized folk and avant-garde musics.”³² In brief, modernist and folk composers were united by the fact that both were excluded by the prevailing musical tastes.

The second kind of affinity is less convincing. It begins with what Anthony Seeger calls a common “appreciation of craft.”³³ In the foreword to a collection of folk songs published in 1938 Crawford Seeger identifies two specific technical resemblances: sparse textures and the free use of dissonance.³⁴ While her observation rings true in selected folk arrangements and experimental compositions, initially it seems more like a provisional hypothesis than the results of a thoroughgoing stylistic comparison. For example, there are enough differences in the pitch and rhythmic organization of such compositions as “Adam in the Garden Pinnin’ Leaves” and

Schoenberg's *Book of the Hanging Gardens*," Op. 15 that any claim of widespread internal similarities between the two traditions seems questionable.³⁵ The resemblance between the two musical traditions lies less in any shared compositional technique than in the common philosophical approach that Seeger and Crawford Seeger adopted toward them.

Despite these reservations, it is significant that Crawford Seeger herself believed enough in such a resemblance to describe it in print. At different periods in their lives she and Seeger pursued modernist composition and folk music with equal passion, imagination, and intellectual vigor. Indeed, her perception of a stylistic intersection offers us a glimpse of how much her own aesthetic ideals had evolved. During the late 1930s and 1940s both searched for ways of integrating these diverse musical worlds into a single compositional approach. In his unpublished memoir Seeger confides: "Getting folk music and the so-called art music connected [was] the thing we talked about all the time."³⁶ In a letter to Seeger, Crawford Seeger describes her ambitions more precisely: "to combine my two desires: to make use of the old technique [presumably dissonant counterpoint], but to make use also of folk material."³⁷ It is tragic that she died before discovering a way of uniting the two art forms she so adored.

Having explored all three "contrapuntal" textures, we are in a position to offer a few reflections. Seeger and Crawford Seeger each had a peculiar blend of contrasting temperaments: logical versus intuitive, systematic versus spontaneous. Since *Tradition and Experiment in the New Music* and *The Music of American Folk Song* were collaborative efforts, each could be described as a blend of temperaments. For both authors, the principle of mediation was more than some rhetorical method of argument: it was a way of living. When we place the treatise and the appendix side by side, they reveal a single philosophical conception. The principle of fusing opposites is central to each project—from the transformation of theoretical ideals into compositional procedures, on the one hand, to the translation of folk melodies from magnetic tape to manuscript paper, on the other. Yet this principle also underlines a fundamental difference in style of thought between the two works. For Seeger, mediating between extremes is as much a speculative as it is a pedagogical tool—the stock-in-trade of a composition teacher turned philosopher. In Crawford Seeger's hands, the principle of mediation emerges as something more pragmatic, a working tool in the daily life of a composer whose folk anthologies helped inaugurate a new musical anthropology.

For a final point of contrast between the treatise and the appendix, let us return to the parable of the apple. In essence, the treatise is a complete portrait of Seeger's dual temperament of scientist and artist. Full of abstract experiments and musical insights, the treatise is essentially a book about inspiring others to compose. For the rest of his life, he seldom tried to put

his own compositional theories into practice. By contrast, the portrait of Ruth Crawford Seeger revealed in her appendix to *The Music of American Folk Song* is fundamentally incomplete for, by giving free rein to her scientific inclinations, she neglected her gift for writing music. One can only imagine what new artistic vision she might have achieved had she lived longer. In a letter to Varèse in 1948 she confides:

I am still not sure whether the road I have been following the last dozen years is a main road or a detour. I have begun to feel, the past year or two, that it is the latter—a detour, but a very important one to me. . . . Whether I ever unfold the wings and make a start toward the stratosphere and how much of the dust of the road will still cling to me, is an interesting question, at least to me. If I do, I will probably pull the road up with me.³⁸

Notes

1. Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger, and ‘The Music of American Folk Songs,’” in *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology*, ed. Bell Yung and Helen Rees (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 110.

2. See Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929–1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Ruth Crawford Seeger, “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music*, ed. Larry Polansky with Judith Tick (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2001). Pescatello prefers a different title for the treatise: *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*.

3. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, “Partnership in Modern Music: Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford, 1929–31,” *American Music* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 352–80.

4. Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

5. See Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II*, 267–73.

6. Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131–32.

7. Judith Tick, “Historical Introduction: The Salvation of Writing Things Down,” in “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings*, xxxvi.

8. *Our Singing Country, Folk Songs and Ballads*, ed. John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax (New York: Macmillan, 1941; reprint Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2000), xxxvi.

9. See Tick, “Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger,” 116.

10. *Ibid.*, 117–23.

11. Crawford Seeger, “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings*, 12–13.

12. *Ibid.*, 12.

13. This term first appears in Seeger’s essay “Prolegomena to Musicology: The Problem of the Musical Point of View and the Bias of Linguistic Presentation,” *Eolus* 4 (1925): 18. The concept is also strongly implied in “On the Principles of Musicology,” *Musical Quarterly* 10 (1924): 244–50. For more details on this “predicament,” see

Taylor A. Greer, *A Question of Balance: Charles Seeger's Philosophy of Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 36–39.

14. Crawford Seeger, “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings*, 11.

15. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

16. See item #18, Charles Seeger Archives, Music Library, University of California, Berkeley; transcribed in Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929–1979*, 269.

17. For more details on the philosophical sources of this mediation, see Greer, *A Question of Balance*, chapters 1–3.

18. Crawford Seeger, “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings*, 13.

19. *Ibid.*, 14.

20. *Ibid.*, 17.

21. *Ibid.*, 58.

22. *Ibid.*, 26.

23. Tick, “Historical Introduction,” xxii.

24. Anthony Seeger, “Review of *Ruth Crawford Seeger* by Judith Tick,” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 171–74.

25. Crawford Seeger, “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings*, 7–8.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: George and Charles Merriam, 1980), 160.

28. Charles Seeger, “Reviewing a Review,” Part 2 of “Revolt of the Angels,” *Eolian Review* 3, no. 1 (November 1923): 21.

29. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 2.

30. Tick, “Historical Introduction,” “*The Music of American Folk Song*” and *Selected Other Writings*, xxvi.

31. As an aside, it is worth remembering that, by transcribing only the Lomaxes' collection of recordings, Crawford implicitly accepted their vision of folk music, which reflected their particular set of political values. For more information, see Benjamin Filene, “‘Our Singing Country’: John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly and the Construction of an American Past,” *American Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (December 1991): 602–24; and Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 47–75, 133–82.

32. Tick, “Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger,” 111.

33. A. Seeger, “Review of *Ruth Crawford Seeger* by Judith Tick,” 173.

34. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Nineteen American Folk Tunes for Elementary Piano* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1995), n.p.

35. A transcription of “Adam in the Garden Pinnin’ Leaves” is published in *Our Singing Country*, 4.

36. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 251.

37. *Ibid.*, 254.

38. Quoted in *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Carol Neuls-Bates, revised ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 309.

Chapter Nine

Composing and Teaching as Dissonant Counterpoint

Roberta Lamb

Ruth Crawford Seeger is known for her systematic and analytical approaches to composing, transcribing, and teaching. At the same time, her work in these fields has been characterized as warm, spontaneous, and intuitive. Though appearing to represent opposing polarities, these descriptors are fundamental to the makeup of Crawford Seeger's character, as can be demonstrated through an examination of her music, her writing, her children's folk song anthologies, and the comments of friends and family. How different this picture is from the one filling my mind thirty years ago—that of a woman composer whose gifts were never fully realized due to an oppressively sexist society, a Victorian husband, and the challenge of raising four children. The more I have learned about Ruth Crawford Seeger, the more I realize how much more complex she is than that stereotypical image of the oppressed woman composer might suggest. Much has been made of the conflicts she experienced between her folk music work and her music composition, yet very little has been said about her teaching. While these varied roles often competed with each other and at times led to considerable frustration, she did not simply give up composing in order to teach children. My goal in this chapter is to challenge the rigid separation we ascribe to “composer” and “teacher,” which consequently limits our understanding of the relationship between artistry and scholarship.

A good portion of this particular argument rests in rehabilitating teaching as an activity and mode of thinking that is simultaneously creative and analytic; intuitive and systematic; and solitary and interpersonal. Working from the assumption common in educational theory that teaching is both an art and a science, I will reexamine the musical and educational value of Crawford Seeger's pedagogical works that to date have received insufficient attention from scholars. I propose that her compositional credo and folk

song transcription principles can be found in her teaching materials, demonstrating that her teaching was as scholarly as her transcriptions, and as creative as her compositions.

Crawford Seeger began her public life as a composer in the mid-1920s before becoming a folk music scholar/transcriber in 1937 and finally a teacher in 1941. As she moved from one phase of her life to another, she did not reject or abandon previous experiences or principles that proved trustworthy, sometimes repairing or modifying them for a new situation. Consider, for example, Crawford Seeger's thoughts on modern composition in a letter she wrote to Edgard Varèse in 1948, a time when she was seriously contemplating a return to writing art music. In the communication, she outlined her now famous compositional credo, in which she suggested that modern pieces should adhere to:

- Clarity of melodic line
- Avoidance of rhythmic stickiness
- Rhythmic independence between parts
- Feeling of tonal and rhythmic center
- Experiment with various means of obtaining, at the same time, organic unity and various sorts of dissonance.

Crawford Seeger stated that these principles “typify my music of the type of **STRING QUARTET** 1931 . . . I still feel strongly about them. I believe when I write more music these elements will still be there.”¹

Scholars have analyzed Crawford Seeger's art music compositions,² with Taylor Greer revealing a role for the compositional credo in her *Quartet*.³ However, the relationship of the credo to her teaching materials and pedagogical strategies has gone unexamined. By 1948 Crawford Seeger was deeply immersed in producing folk song anthologies; *American Folk Songs for Children* (1948) was about to be released, and *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (1950) and *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (1953) would soon follow. Although, as she mused in her letter to Varèse that she was beginning to contemplate a return of modernist composition, it seemed a distant plan, and her attention was still firmly focused on “making books.” Thus, it is conceivable that her 1948 compositional credo might have been influenced by the folk music and teaching that had been central to her life during the preceding years. A close reading of the prefatory remarks to her three folk song anthologies, her 1941 Appendix to Lomax's *Our Singing Country* anthology (later published as *The Music of American Folk Song*⁴), and the settings she created for folk songs, reveals a strong connection between her compositional credo and her teaching theories and practices.

Theory of Teaching: The Composition Credo

While Crawford Seeger's 1941 Appendix is directed to the scholar rather than to the general reader, it was, and remains, a valuable pedagogical document that provides early insight into her thinking about music education. The Appendix thoroughly explores and documents the transmission of folk music through transcriptions and singing practice. Her organization and presentation of folk materials in the anthologies, coupled with her approach to teaching music, formed an educational bridge for transmitting folk music to a new generation of American children, although few teachers or parents realized the depth of her work as a folklorist, and to date her pedagogy and transcriptions are not fully credited.

We may have trouble comprehending teaching children as a highly theorized practice that can be intellectually and creatively akin to the work of an ultramodernist composer. However, by comparing her approach to folk music as presented in the Appendix to those in the three children's folk music anthologies, we can see evidence that Crawford Seeger likely used her five-point composition credo as an organizing structure for teaching. The direct correlation of her composition credo to teaching materials is further illustrated by examining two contrasting songs from her collections, "Little Bird" and "Hush 'n' Bye," both of which were popular with the young children I have taught.⁵

1. *Clarity of Melodic Line*

How to notate the melodic line is *the* issue for Crawford Seeger, as she outlines in the first section of her Appendix, "Part I. A Note on Transcription." She discusses thoroughly the problems the transcriber faces in translating the sounds from the recorded-in-the-field performance to Western notation. Simultaneously, as an educator, she considers her students as her audience and struggles with ways to best communicate these songs to them. Crawford Seeger compares notation to a bridge over which "a vital heritage can pass," explaining that the complexity of notation depends on the purpose of the bridge for the songs. "If they are to be used for strictly scientific study rather than for singing, the transcriber will wish to include in them all details . . . perceptible to him. If they are to be published in song books for school or community use, he will no doubt feel constrained to indicate only the outline, the bare skeleton of the song." She also describes a third, moderate way to transcribe: "*midway between these extremes: to catch a just balance which will convey as much as possible of the rich complexity of the folk singer's art, yet in simple enough terms to allow ready grasp by the interested amateur*" [emphasis in original].⁶

Examining transmission of culture as a type of education allows us to understand this discussion of transcription theory as educational theory. The central point becomes this: How does a transcriber/teacher communicate the richness of folk music to the scholar, to the amateur, and to the young child, all of whom are students of folk song at their own stage of cognition or experience? Each has a different experience, ability, and purpose, so that what each requires from the transcription is different. In every transcription, however, for every context, Crawford Seeger concerns herself with the clarity of the melodic line.

The songs provide examples of melodic clarity as both compositional and theoretical factors in music. Both “Little Bird” in Example 9.1 and “Hush ‘n’ Bye” in Example 9.2 demonstrate melodic clarity in their deceptive simplicity.

The melody is the most important element in these folk song settings. “Hush ‘n’ Bye” contains only six notes: D–F–G–B_♭–C–D’. The three phrases of the melody differ only by the rhythm of the words. Minor thirds and major seconds dominate the melody, which is contained within a very singable octave. The melody feels minor, due to the repeated D–F interval, but cadences on B_♭. So while the melody is clear, the tonality is blurred.

“Little Bird” is slightly more complex, although the melody lies within an even more comfortable major sixth: D–E–F_♯–G–A–B. It features a contrasting verse and refrain based on the melodic direction rather than specific notes or intervals. The notes are much the same but the word rhythm changes the emphasis, so that the refrain features rising major seconds and major thirds, while the verse features falling intervals. The meter shifts between two and three in the verse while remaining in two throughout the refrain. Thus, the verse and refrain project a different character even though each is made up of the same notes and rhythms. This “Little Bird” melody resides strongly in D major, with the final melodic cadences of both verse and refrain featuring a scalewise descent from A to D. These scale passages contribute to the song’s melodic clarity.

Another way that Crawford Seeger emphasizes melodic clarity is seen in the introduction to *American Folk Songs for Children*, which she wrote with the teachers and mothers of preschool children in mind. She tested all the materials with the “music mothers” and the young children at Silver Spring Cooperative Nursery School, beginning in 1941. She wrote her text with the same integrity she applied to her Appendix; yet, the audience was always the amateur musician, parents, and teacher. There is no sense here that she might be writing for a specialist or scholar and she never mentions specifically the “clarity of the melodic line” in the *American Folk Songs for Children* text. She talks about the meaning of the words of the song in a straightforward manner, occasionally adopting metaphor and example and avoiding technical terminology. She provides rules for “Singing the Songs” as follows:

Little Bird, Little Bird

Very fast $\text{♩} = 112$ SOUTH CAROLINA

D **A7**

Lit - tle bird, lit - tle bird, go through my win - dow,

D

Lit - tle bird, lit - tle bird, go through my win - dow,

A7 **D**

Lit - tle bird, lit - tle bird, go through my win - dow, And buy mo - lass - es can - dy.

REFRAIN **A7** **D** **A7** **D**

Go through my win - dow, my su - gar lump, Go through my win - dow, my su - gar lump,

A7 **D**

And buy mo - lass - es can - dy.



Hush 'n' Bye

ALL THE PRETTY LITTLE PONIES

Moderate $\text{♩} = 60$

SOUTH CAROLINA

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo is marked 'Moderate' with a quarter note equal to 60 beats per minute. The first system has a key signature change from B-flat to E-flat. The second system has a key signature change from E-flat back to B-flat. The third system has a key signature change from B-flat to E-flat and then back to B-flat. The lyrics are: 'Hush 'n' bye, don't you cry Oh, you pret-ty lit-tle ba-by, When you wake you'll have sweet cake, And all the pret-ty lit-tle pon-ies, A brown and a gray and a black and a bay, And all the pret-ty lit-tle pon-ies.'

Hush 'n' bye, don't you cry Oh, you pret-ty lit-tle ba-by,

When you wake you'll have sweet cake, And all the pret-ty lit-tle pon-ies, A

brown and a gray and a black and a bay, And all the pret-ty lit-tle pon-ies.

When we sang a song from Alabama about "all the pretty little ponies," Virginia Vose's mother remembered a similar song which her nurse had sung to her when she was a child in South Carolina. She sang us her version, and we all liked it so much that we learned it. It became a favorite.

Almost a first requisite in singing with small children is the natural and wholehearted pleasure which the singer finds in the song. *It is the song which is important*, to both singer and listener. And often an “untrained” voice (untrained in *bel canto* singing) will convey to the child a greater enjoyment of the song itself. [emphasis in the original]⁷

What is important is that the melody is understood. All her rules for singing focus on melodic clarity, “sing the songs simply,” and “sing it for its own sake.”⁸ These examples also illustrate her ability to adapt her writing voice to her projected audience and demonstrate her capability and sensitivity as a teacher who makes changes in her delivery to ensure communication and comprehension. Her pedagogical and musical competencies interweave to ensure melodic clarity.

2. Avoidance of Rhythmic Stickiness

Ruth Crawford Seeger’s term “rhythmic stickiness” refers to the romantic excesses of rubato and expressivity.⁹ The shared aesthetics of the folk music singer and the ultramodernist composer shun this particular feature of rhythm, while maintaining a place for metrical irregularities, shifting meters, and a contrast between strict time and free singing styles. Her discussion of rhythmic factors encompasses about 45 percent of the Appendix, suggesting the centrality of rhythm to her transcription of folk materials.¹⁰ Rhythm also appears as fundamental in her teaching materials of the folk song anthologies. As Tick points out, “Little Bird” shifts between 2/4 and 3/4 meter, but it appears this shifting meter is the solution to a transcription problem, rather than a slight intrusion of modernism.¹¹ That is, in performance, the meter does not really shift because the song “keeps going” with this steady pulse while the children sing and play a game. The game movement emphasizes the steady pulse, not a 2 + 3 meter. Classically trained musicians encounter more difficulty when reading shifting meter than does the folk musician singing the song or the child playing the accompanying game, both learned in an oral tradition. The pulse is steady, the little birds fly, and nobody gets stuck.

Throughout the anthologies, Crawford Seeger provides a suggested metronomic tempo at the beginning of each song. The notations do not indicate any change in that given tempo, although tempo might change for different verses due to a child’s improvisation. For example, children might sing “sleep in the buggy, Miss Mary Jane” with a very slow tempo or they might sing “run in the buggy Miss Mary Jane” at a very fast tempo. Crawford Seeger suggested the following variations to “Riding in the Buggy” in the cardboard songbook used by Silver Spring Nursery School, the precursor to *American Folk Songs for Children*: “This song lends itself readily to improvisation.

The riding can be in bus, trolley, taxi, train, [illegible]. Or Sally can be any of the children, with a house anywhere and full of any absurd thing.”¹² However, the tempo change never occurs within a verse. Crawford Seeger counsels against the expressive “slowing-down which is so customary in fine-art music” at the end of a song.¹³ Similarly, the little bird might decide to “rest on my window,” indicating a slower pulse for that verse than for the one when the little bird flies through the window. She tells the adult song leaders to:

Sing most of the songs with strong accent on the first of the measure. Feel the beat of the song—its pulse—as a thing which continues throughout the singing of all stanzas. . . . Remember that most of the songs are used to being sung at a fairly fast speed. . . . If you have no metronome, the second hand of your watch can be of help. . . . Do not, however, take these tempo marks too literally. They are only a guide to the speed, and so to the spirit, of the song.¹⁴

Even as she allows for personal taste in a performance tempo, she becomes adamant about certain rhythmic features—no expressive rubato and “keep the song going” until it ends. Ruth Crawford Seeger gives the same value to avoiding rhythmic stickiness that she does to melodic clarity. Both rhythm and melody should be straightforward and obvious in folk song and in art-music composition.

3. *Rhythmic Independence Between Parts*

Crawford Seeger provides fewer direct comments on rhythmic independence in either the “Appendix” or *American Folk Songs for Children*. Yet some rhythmic independence is implied in the discussion of heterophony and the role of accompaniment in the performance of folk music in the Appendix.¹⁵ A great number, if not most, of the songs in *American Folk Songs for Children* originate as play-parties, dances, and finger plays. Such movement is an independent rhythm. It is not the same as the melodic rhythm. It involves simultaneously performing two different rhythms independently. In other words, the folk music involves movement that is either an elaboration of the song melody or an ostinato. While the song can be sung without the movement, the movement or dance adds a particular quality to the vocal expression.

Further examples of rhythmic independence between parts are found in the folk song settings composed by Crawford Seeger, such as her left-hand piano accompaniments for “Little Bird” and “Hush ’n’ Bye.” The texture is thin, and the left- and right-hand parts move independently. What, at first glance, looks like a rather standard boom-chick accompaniment to “Little Bird” becomes musical clarity and depth, moving in steady contrary motion,

uniting on the last phrase of stanza and refrain. For “Hush ‘n’ Bye” she announces the dotted quarter-eighth pattern before it happens in the melody and imitates it in every measure of the tenor line of the setting where the dotted pattern does not occur in the melody. For variety within the setting she substitutes an eighth-quarter-eighth pattern in each measure where there is an internal anacrusis in the melodic phrase. This tenor line is a rhythmic and melodic counterpoint to the song melody. A rocking bass B, to D half note suggests the cradle. As with any of her song settings, these examples bear more aesthetic resemblance to modern two-part inventions, such as Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*,¹⁶ than to our conceptions of traditional folk music.

4. *Feeling of Tonal and Rhythmic Center*

Crawford Seeger’s concepts of “majority usage” and “model tune” from the Appendix may be relevant to understanding the significance of the feeling of tonal and rhythmic center in folk and modernist music.¹⁷ She prescribes the *feeling* of center, not an actual strong tonality or cadential formula, in her compositional credo. This feeling of tonal center is an impression or sensitivity. Her discussion of the variations in tunes and the difficulty of choosing which tune to transcribe as the model tune demonstrates that tonal center is much more fluid than one might imagine for a supposedly simple music. She observes the puzzle of a tune sung in the major mode in one stanza and the minor in another; the variations in rhythm that include prolongations or extra rests outside of the apparent meter; and the intonation that changes from one version to another. Crawford Seeger states that decisions about the tonal and rhythmic center cannot be made without scholarly analysis of the tune aggregate. She argues for majority usage as a sensitive standard to meet in choosing which tune variation and which rhythm provide the impression of center for teaching young children. In fact, she welcomes the opportunity to present more than one version of a tune, as in this letter to a Canadian folklorist, Helen Creighton, written while completing *Animal Folk Songs for Children*:

Do you feel, as I do when transcribing the music of a folk song, that you wish you could publish all variations the singer makes in the tune, from stanza to stanza? It is sometimes very hard to decide which to choose. In this animal book, and the fish-bird one to follow, it has given me great pleasure, with respect to a couple of songs previously published, to contribute to the public another tune-variation or tune-stanza (from the same singer’s singing) than that previously published. I like to think this enriches the song literature a bit.¹⁸

She includes suggestions in the prefatory materials to *American Folk Songs for Children* to support the feeling, or impression, rather than the fact of

tonal and rhythmic center. She reminds parents and teachers, “Do not be concerned if some tones are too low for your voice. Traditional singers often dismiss such tones in a half-sung, half-spoken manner.” Even though she composed the settings for these folk songs, she expresses some reservation about the use of the piano, “In fact, the piano often gives to the tune a sharpness of line, and to the song-experience a finality, which is not fitting to this music.”¹⁹ She is much more interested in fluidity than finality in the musical experience.

As stated earlier, the melody in “Hush ’n’ Bye” feels minor, and yet, Ruth Crawford Seeger constructs the setting to be major, B_♭ to E_♭ to B_♭. The slave mother’s lament shifts to a more uplifting security, yet the chords in open position leave something wistful, simultaneously secure and malleable. There is similar openness in “Little Bird,” but that song setting does not suggest the possibility of complex, competing emotions. Rather the open fourths and fifths suggest a joyful folk instrument, such as guitar or mandolin, with a fiddle or fife entering on the last four measures of countermelody. The feelings of tonal and rhythmic center are apparent, although they may not be what would be suggested by a more traditional harmonic practice.

5. Experiment with Various Means of Obtaining, at the Same Time, Organic Unity and Various Sorts of Dissonance

Taylor Greer observes an inconsistency in Crawford Seeger’s composition credo, “. . . she juxtaposes the word ‘experiment’ with the notion of organic unity.”²⁰ In educational theory, however, there is no inconsistency in these concepts. A frequent recommendation made by educational theorists is for teachers to assist students in finding similarities, those characteristics held in common, among different objects. Where the objects are sounds, the similarities become the unifying factors that hold a piece of music or a song together. Once the similarities have been identified and analyzed, students can find the differences. Crawford Seeger suggests an experiment with dissonance in which a teacher might initially introduce one “difference” at a time. In other words, a teacher can help students to discover how much difference or dissonance they can interject into a tune and at the same time maintain the musical characteristics that identify it as “That Particular Song.”²¹ The instructions to parents and teachers for a variety of possible games and ways to sing, and the piano settings of “Little Bird” and “Hush ’n’ Bye” demonstrate such an approach.

This fifth axiom of her composition credo brings together the four previous points to produce the musical work, or in this case, the lesson in theory and practice. The theory is one of maintaining consistency so that the young children know what to expect and what is expected of them, a social organic

unity, while allowing for and encouraging the individual creative dissonance. Musically the children experiment with inventing words and movement to become a part of the song, while retaining its authentic folk character. They develop independence and cooperation. The teacher experiments by taking the risks of not knowing all the answers or what the end product will sound/look like and of losing control as the leader. But there is also the possibility that the lesson could turn into the most magnificent musical theatre piece. Throughout her teaching practice, Crawford Seeger mixed various sorts of dissonance and organic unity, both musical and experiential, into a song cycle of related lessons.

Practice of Teaching: Creativity and Composing in the Classroom

Crawford Seeger did not like joining groups, particularly women's groups. So while the neighborhood mothers organized the Silver Spring Nursery School in the spring of 1941, Crawford Seeger debated the value of joining ranks with the "cooperating mothers," wondering if having her third daughter, Barbara, in the school would provide her with more freedom to compose. She finally joined, assuming the position of "music chairman," and began to gather appropriate materials for use in the classroom. Between the first classes of nursery school in September and the end of the year, several fifty-eight-page books were created, duplicated on hectograph, glued onto construction paper and cardboard, hole-punched, and distributed to each "music mother."²²

To begin her project that would eventually result in her *American Folk Songs for Children* collection, Crawford Seeger examined hundreds of children's songbooks and school textbooks.²³ She recounted the process:

I began to cull, from among the songs I knew and from the many collections of American folk music, folk journals and phonographic field recordings at the Library of Congress, songs which would fill our needs. And I found plenty of them—plain tunes, melodically simple, rhythmically vital, whose traditional texts possess the spirit of work and play and thought and speech of small children.²⁴

The first draft from this extensive research became the homemade book for Silver Spring Nursery School entitled *American Songs for American Children*, signed "Ruth Crawford Seeger." The note between the title and her signature, noting the material is protected under law, may suggest that she envisioned a future substantial publication.²⁵

Crawford Seeger's homemade songbook featured fifty-eight songs with handwritten notation and text, with additional lyric sheets typed for songs

with many verses. She attributed each song to a published collection (e.g., #54, “Little Bird”—Tune text and directions from Alan Lomax’s *Our Singing Country*, pp. 74–75), a particular singer, and/or the Archive of American Folk Song of the Library of Congress (e.g., #55, “John the Rabbit”—Tune and text from phonograph recording AAFS2975, sung by school girls of Emory, Mississippi). Many songs include her directions for classroom use, as in #18, “Did You Go to the Barnie?” “Many other stanzas may be improvised. Other animals may be introduced. Or the child may have gone to a friend’s house, or to school, to a store, to the zoo, etc.” Improvisation is one of Crawford Seeger’s frequent suggestions. At the bottom of #55, “John the Rabbit,” she observed, “The list of vegetables may be extended. Or John the Rabbit may have other habits—as for instance . . . Getting up in the morning and washing his face and brushing his teeth and combing his hair, putting on his clothes, his shirt, his sox and his shoes. And if he’s ready when the clock says 8, he’ll have his breakfast and he won’t be late.” In #58, “Adam Has Seven Sons,” she provides game directions, “This game can be played freely in ‘follow the leader’ manner or more formally, in the manner indicated on the recording from which the song was transcribed.” Rhythmic patterns often feature as an important aspect of game directions and/or dramatic play developed from the song. For example in #14, “Who’s That Tapping at the Window?” Crawford Seeger suggests:

This song can be used as a simple tapping song (on backs or sides of chairs)—most likely to rhythm of [hand-drawn 2 eighth notes]; less likely [hand-drawn 2 quarter notes]. Or it may be accompanied by varying degrees of dramatic play—from substitution of two children’s names for mammy and pappy, to the more elaborate acting out of the three respective parts, questioner, mammy and pappy) with the remainder of the children as audience. In the latter case, a number of rhythmic combinations are possible, as for instance, the audience clapping throughout; mammy and pappy tapping 2 eighths.²⁶

Crawford Seeger’s pedagogical children’s song collection, informed by meticulous research, was only one step in developing a curriculum based on American folk music rather than art music or creative expression—a unique venture that was at the forefront of progressive education. She argued convincingly that the folk music experience should be an integral part of education:

If it is one of the aims of education to induct the child into the realities of the culture in which he [she] will live, may we not say that this traditional music and language and ideology, which has not only grown out of but has in turn influenced that culture—and is still influencing and being used by it—should occupy a familiar place in the child’s daily life.²⁷

Progressive education reached its apex in the 1940s, which coincides with Ruth Crawford Seeger’s work as a music teacher in schools. Not surprisingly its influence can be seen in her consideration of the music classroom as a

laboratory where “we decided to try an experimental year in which we would sing chiefly American folk songs.”²⁸ Her decision was in stark contrast to the practice of adding folkish words to European melodies or composing new melodies for folk rhymes, both common pedagogical practices throughout the 1930s. “Make America Musical”—a nationalistic movement she abhorred—continued this derivative practice along with “child-like” composed melodies for teaching purposes.

As a music teacher, Crawford Seeger demonstrated many of the characteristics associated with her work as a composer and folk song transcriber/scholar. Her curricular materials were drawn directly from her folk song collection and transcription work, and served as a springboard for pedagogical practice. For example, her sixteen “Suggestions for singing the songs in this book,” initially published in *Our Singing Country*, were reprinted in *American Folk Songs for Children* under the sections “Singing the Songs” and “Accompanying the Songs.”²⁹ In the latter she expanded her suggestions into a chatty conversation designed to encourage the amateur musician, teacher, and parent to feel comfortable with the repertoire and its use with young children. This understated conversation is an example of the way Crawford Seeger purposefully made her teaching appear to be something that any mother could do, fitting in with the era’s image of appropriate womanly character. Although she presented her means of teaching as natural and organic, her role in that pedagogy was no more unrehearsed or unplanned than her part in any one of her compositions. As a means of providing an example to ease other parents and teachers into sharing folk song in educational settings, she described her own classroom practice:

What we are doing, then, teacher and children, is making something together, fresh each day—a sort of composition. And in any process of composition, large or small, some days are more productive than others. There are valleys and there are high places. The high places are rich with giving and taking between group and teacher. And with giving and taking, the valleys can sometimes reach to high places which are especially satisfying because they promised so little. Certainly if the teacher’s first aims are a keen awareness of each child’s smallest actions or words or thoughts, and a readiness to follow as well as to lead, there will be a spirit of freshness within the teacher as well as the children, a sense of exploring, of trying something a little differently. To a tentative basic plan will have been added a vital element: spontaneity.³⁰

Crawford Seeger’s description of her classroom experience reveals her awareness of the similarities between teaching and composition. She states explicitly, “we are making a composition.” Her words underscore the unpredictable and relational aspects of creative teaching where the ideal instructor must be knowledgeable and flexible regarding the capabilities of young children, and willing to experience failure as well as success. This teacher takes risks in spontaneity and following the children.

Her compositional principle, “Experiment with various means of obtaining, at the same time, organic unity and various sorts of dissonance,” provides guidance for the flexible and skilled teacher who approaches the classroom. Yet, the artistry and scholarship reside, also, in the lesson as performance. Within her teaching practice, Crawford Seeger constructed a pedagogy of dissonant counterpoint that provided an organic learning experience for her young students. Folklorist Sidney Robertson Cowell, who attended an in-service workshop where she presented these experiments noticed

. . . Ruth’s talent for this sort of thing: She made the session a kind of small drama, with climaxes, diminuendos and changes of pace, but always moving directly from one thing to another so that the session made a continuous flowing pattern of activity, movement or song: I had never seen anything like it nor even imagined such a thing.³¹

Her creative and analytic mind, striving to understand and communicate as an educator, did so in a manner compatible with her ultramodernist compositions or her painstaking folk song transcriptions. Her classes looked natural, organic, and improvised. This seamless quality was the culmination of an extremely well-organized, prepared, insightful and capable teacher. In Robertson Cowell’s words, she played the part of “the conductor of a small and receptive orchestra of children.”³²

A sample of Crawford Seeger’s lesson outlines shown in Figure 9.1 illustrates how provisional her basic plans were.³³ Simultaneous “organic unity and various sorts of dissonance” is not obvious in the written lesson plan. This plan is the bare-bones aide-mémoire for an experienced teacher, which confirms the importance of the workshops Crawford Seeger provided for teachers. A teacher who did not understand Crawford Seeger’s goals or lacked her musicianship or teaching skills could fail miserably. It is small wonder that she amazed others with what she could do from this outline. This lesson is for five-year-olds (senior kindergarten). Immediately one must be aware that most children of this age express abundant energy and know themselves as central to the universe. They play joyfully, frustrate easily, and have little concept of social rules.

First, into this lesson plan Crawford Seeger puts a flow of rest and activity, with children doing similar but individual activities together. The children come into the music room singing “Shoo-li-loo” (A) and sit in their small chairs by the end of the song. Crawford Seeger might be accompanying this song on the piano or autoharp. Without giving directions she switches to singing the next song (B). It is likely she would do the hand actions with the children, so that these two songs would be a cappella, accompanied only by the rhythm of the body movement. Crawford Seeger then introduces three songs that involve gross locomotion. Again, she would likely teach nonverbally, by example, until the children assimilated the routine. Once they were

November 1941

Sample Music Period

Older Group

A. Shoo-li-loo (R.C.S. 1)

(The children finally sitting in their chairs.)

B. Open shut them (McCarteney No. 24)

Clap your Hands (R.C.S. 2)

C. Out of chairs: (And back to them at end of each song)

Little Horses (R.C.S. 3)

Little Pig (R.C.S. 4)

Going Down to Town (R.C.S. 5)

(November 24: being sung and played for first time)

B^I. In Chairs:

Eency Weency Spider (R.C.S. 6)

A^I. Percussion Instruments

(To the music of Shoo-li-loo, Clap your hands, I'm going down to town, especially good for this)

In or out of chairs (while someone, preferably a participating mother, collects the percussion instruments)

Sing "What shall we do when we all go out"

(Nov. 18; just learning) (R.C.S. 7)

(Can be sung while sitting in chairs, or played with appropriate actions)

Percussion work: We are concentrating at present on starting and stopping together. Toward this end, it appears desirable to use tunes to which the children are accustomed, and to play these tunes only once or twice through at each stretch. We are making distinctions between loud and soft (i.e., loud throughout an entire piece or soft throughout), and between different sorts of instruments (drums playing throughout one entire piece, bells throughout another, etc.)

To signal the children to come back to their chairs in some of the action games, a fast trill may be played until they have all returned.

Figure 9.1. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for American Children*, #21.

comfortable with the routine, Crawford Seeger would go to the piano or autoharp to accompany the children. The teacher would need to vary the accompaniment to meet the needs of the children. S/he would need to judge the children's energy and concentration to know when to end the song with the fast trill on the piano, which would indicate that the children should return to their chairs (C). Once the children have had this active period, they sing a quiet song with a finger play, "Eency Weency Spider" (B¹). Now that the children are quiet and focused, the next section of the lesson returns to "Shoo-li-loo" (A¹), but this time the song is accompanied by the children playing percussion instruments. This is an exciting time, easily prone to chaos. Thus, the written direction, "We are concentrating at present on starting and stopping together." After that goal is accomplished the class can move on to other important facets of musicianship. Notice the remaining directions to teachers about the percussion instruments: playing each song only once or twice; distinguishing dynamics; distinguishing timbre.

More recent child-development research substantiates these two concept areas as being the first children recognize. To ensure organization rather than chaos, Crawford Seeger suggests that a participating mother collect the percussion instruments at the end of the songs. Then she continues with another song involving movement, either finger play or gross locomotion, in order to release the energy created by playing percussion instruments. If it is a newer song in the "just learning" phase, then it would be sung while seated. Although it is not mentioned in this lesson plan, there would be a final song the children sing while leaving the music area or room to return to other activities. The totality of Crawford Seeger's outline, when read between the lines, reveals a competent lesson plan.

In addition, Crawford Seeger's compositional mind appears in this outline as a palindrome, a form she favored in her art music such as *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (1930) and the fourth movement of *String Quartet 1931*. The outline is marked to identify the subsections of the palindrome. The first A is the simple movement to gather children together while singing. B consists of movement, a finger play, focusing on fine motor coordination and rhythmic independence of hands and voice. A returns with percussion instruments rather than locomotion. C features creative movement songs that could be seen as an elaboration of A. The final A might be identified as an A/B counterpoint with percussion replacing the finger play. The melody (song) is the same as A, or might be another movement-inspiring song. The plan includes all five points of her composition credo: melodic clarity; avoid rhythmic stickiness; rhythmic independence between the parts; a feeling of tonal and rhythmic center; and experiment with various means of obtaining, at the same time, organic unity and various sorts of dissonance. Additional examples follow.

As in her compositions, Crawford Seeger encouraged music teachers to avoid "rhythmic stickiness" that might lead to loss of clarity and muddle the

child's experience with folk music. Likewise, she reminded teachers to "Keep the song going!" The steady pulse of folk song becomes central to the lesson. The movement changes, what the children do changes, but it is always moving, allowing no place for boredom or disengagement. This does not mean the lesson's energy level remains constantly the same. That would lead to one or the other of the two extremes of boredom and chaos. She suggested:

The changing needs and moods of the children will be your guide on each occasion. Be ready with quiet music if you see unconstructive wildness growing out of too much activity—but do not force a quiet song for the sake of variety.³⁴

Just as the folk song itself often has a measure in a different meter or an inserted rest for a breath, so the lesson will develop in what appears as a natural unfolding. But this only happens when the teacher is skilled in paying attention to the small words and movements of the young students and adjusts to their needs. She encourages teachers toward patience and attention, to make giving and taking central to teaching practice. It is the improvisational quality within a steady lesson plan that maintains the integrity of folk music while acknowledging the integrity of the children. The song keeps going and the children become part of it, making it their own. Ruth Crawford Seeger reminds the teacher that a child's actions may indicate that "at that moment he may be finding his way of living-through what the song means for him." To assist these possibilities, she suggests "small dramas," specifically listing such song and story sequences for "Building the Railroad" and "The Cotton Patch" in the index. Just as composers should avoid rhythmic stickiness, she argues teachers should not "attempt to control the attention of everyone in the group," such that "the nursery becomes a concert hall."³⁵

Movement, hand-clapping gestures and play-parties constitute rhythmic independence when teaching young children. The melodic rhythm contrasts with the rhythm of the traditional play-party. The children's improvised movements and the development of each child's ability within the community of the music class demonstrate independent moving lines. Rhythmic independence is a focal point in the improvisations, Ruth Crawford Seeger suggests throughout *American Folk Songs for Children*. She provides a complete rhythmic index to the anthology that suggests songs especially conducive to clapping and rhythm band; galloping; jumping or hopping; marching or walking; hammering, knocking, or tapping; riding; rolling; running; skipping; stretching; and swinging. She suggests that these folk songs "adapt themselves with special ease to a variety of activities and rhythmic change," and notes that, "Ten sample rhythmic variations have been given with the song Jim Along Josie."³⁶

Returning to "Little Bird," she provides directions to two simple games that can be played while singing the song, as well as observing, "This song

lends itself to free rhythmic play.”³⁷ Free rhythmic play appeals to young children’s sense of humor and their love of repetition. A young one can sing a phrase of “Little Bird” repeatedly, trying out different motions or sticking with a favorite one. For the game, one child becomes the little bird who flies in and out the windows formed by the circle of children holding their hands up. The little bird stops in front of the child s/he is nearest to at the end of the stanza and that child gives the little bird a make-believe piece of candy. The children trade places and a new little bird traces a body pattern in and out the windows. This game continues until every child has been a little bird. More examples abound throughout the book: the “getting up stairs,” or dressing according to “John the Rabbit” or “Mary Wore a Red Dress.” Developing rhythmic independence permeates the folk song anthologies because Ruth Crawford Seeger understands the central importance to children’s learning that all these movements make. Children learn by imitating, acting out, moving, and doing. Rhythmic independence is the beginning of personal independence.

Crawford Seeger encouraged children to experiment with self-expression in music through a focus on word improvisation and tone play, but it was always on a variation from something concrete. Word-improvisation and tone-play activities were always grounded in the folk tradition and knowledge of the idiom.

We must remember that both the old and the new are essential to a folk song’s staying alive—that, although the song grows and spreads partly through its ability to gather fresh experiences from whatever is happening around it . . . it will lose its identity if these new elements crowd out or obliterate the old.³⁸

In remembering these essential qualities, students and teachers remain true to the clarity of the melodic line. Although leading children to improvisation and creativity, she always maintains the integrity of the folk song. The focus on the tune and the story ensures that the song retains its original folk character throughout the improvisation process. The feeling of tonal and rhythmic center is never separated from creativity. Tone play can be a matter of imitating the tones of the end of a phrase or fitting new words to a phrase ending. It can be creating animal sounds (as in “Bought Me a Cat”) or imitating industrial sounds (as in a train whistle or an airplane engine). Crawford Seeger rightly argues that the improvisation increases children’s musical comprehension: “Improvising new words to a song helps children toward feeling comfortable with music, because they are themselves being active about the song.”³⁹ Improvising new words often means finding a way to put the child’s name into the song, which also increases their comfort with the music. In doing so tones and rhythms may be adjusted but the central characteristics of the folk song are maintained.

The Folk Song Anthologies Then and Now

The need for immediate curriculum materials as well as household financial considerations propelled Crawford Seeger into teaching music to young children and to developing the songbooks that became *American Folk Songs for Children*. What began as a booklet of a few songs with simple piano accompaniments that the “music mothers” could play either on the school piano or at home, expanded into a major book project that would encompass seven years of her life. She tested the songs and activities extensively while teaching very young children at the National Child Research Center (1943–44), the Foxhall Nursery School (1943–45), the Green Acres School, and again with older elementary-age children at the Whitehall Country School (1945–47), the Georgetown Day School, and the Potomac School (1948–49).

American Folk Songs for Children (1948) was followed by *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (1950) and *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (1953). Like their predecessor, the animal and Christmas volumes included lengthy introductions that outlined her research and transcription methods in great detail, and carefully acknowledged all her sources. These collections became the first scholarly pedagogical foundation for integrating American folk songs into elementary education in the postwar United States. During the 1950s they were adopted by a wide range of educators from the Lutheran Synod to Silver Burdett to Harvard and other universities, where they became texts for music education courses.

Crawford Seeger’s consistent comments, thoroughness, directness, and humility demonstrate an integrity that connects with today’s music educators. There is a sense of social justice and responsibility in her idea of sharing a song, of the “collective” of mothers at the Silver Spring Cooperative Nursery School, in her comments made at the Midcentury Folklore Symposium,⁴⁰ and in the Introductions to *American Folk Songs for Children* and *American Folk Songs for Christmas*. Very aware of the politics of folk music, she did not want folk songs to be made pretty, to sound sweet, or to have the words sanitized. The injustice of the Great Depression and the growing conservatism of the 1940s concerned her, such that she emphasized the particularity of the situation and the social function of the music. Crawford Seeger used authentic melodies and texts, giving the songs to the children so they could create their own meaning. The children became part of a living tradition connecting past with present as a means of approaching the future.

Crawford Seeger’s anthologies of North American folk songs attained great popularity among teachers, parents, composers, and folk song collectors when they first appeared. Writing for the *New York Times*, William Tyrell commented that *American Folk Songs for Children* was “not only an introduction to authentic, traditional American music but it is also a source of real

fun and a stimulus to active participation.”⁴¹ The prominent music educator Beatrice Landeck reviewed *American Folk Songs for Children* for the *People’s Songs Bulletin*, concluding that:

It is my feeling and sincere hope that this book’s philosophy of music education will, in the not-too-distant future, supplant the dry pedagogy still practiced in most schools. Parents can do much to bring about this change. They will derive benefit from reading this book and pleasure from making a generous use of its songs.⁴²

Lilla Belle Pitts, professor of music education at Teachers College, Columbia University and the most prominent music educator in the United States from 1940s through 1960, wrote the forward for *American Folk Songs for Children*. She praises Crawford Seeger:

Dear Ruth:

The proof came and I’m enchanted! How the book has grown in both beauty and strength too! I can’t begin to tell you all the good things that your written part deserves to have said.

What you have in the opening chapters has all of the qualities that make folk songs good: freshness, simplicity, human understanding, sincerity and the rightness of age-old wisdom. In great humility I bow before a great teacher: Ruth Crawford Seeger. At the same time I’m filled with pride and joy that this job is done. It could not have been as easy as it looks in finished form, but such a creation is worth the pains it may have cost.⁴³

Arnold Gesell, the Yale University child psychologist who contributed greatly to progressive early childhood education in the 1930s and 1940s, wrote to Crawford Seeger:

Dear Mrs. Seeger:

Thank you for the opportunity to see your delightful volume which almost bursts into song as you open its pages. I have already heard Patsy sing some of these songs, and I am pleased to find her counterpart in the pleasant company of page 151. It is refreshing to come upon a book of children’s songs so carefully and authentically constructed. The value of the book is greatly enhanced by your introductory chapters. So thank you again and good wishes for your continuing work in this important field.⁴⁴

Beatrice Spaulding, the music instructor at the influential and progressive Nursery Training School in Boston, sent Crawford Seeger a handwritten note:

I find not only the music but the foreword of special benefit. It makes it clear to the “prospective teacher” that folk songs are not songs to be taught, but songs to be played with, laughed about, danced to, and approached generally with lightness and flexibility.⁴⁵

Many early childhood educational institutions recommended the folk song anthologies to parents, all the while using the books in their teacher education curricula. Hazel G. Kinsella, National Chairman (1950–52) of the MENC (Music Educators National Conference) Committee on Folk Music and music education professor at the University of Washington recommended *American Folk Songs for Children* in her column, “Folk Music Aids” in the *Music Educators Journal*.⁴⁶

Crawford Seeger’s second collection, *Animal Folk Songs for Children*, was listed in the *New York Herald Tribune*’s list of “100 gift books of the year.”⁴⁷ Vanett Lawler reviewed *Animal Folk Songs for Children* in the *Music Educators Journal*, stating:

[*Animal Folk Songs for Children*] bids fair to be as popular as was Mrs. Seeger’s previous book, *American Folk Songs for Children*. It is hoped that this musician and student of folk lore, teacher and parent, will continue to give children more books of this kind.⁴⁸

Composer and music critic Virgil Thomson highly recommended her third volume, *American Folk Songs for Christmas*, in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

[*American Folk Songs for Christmas*] is beautiful stuff for children. And the piano accompaniments, while ever so easy to play, are musically impeccable. The authenticity of these simple songs and taste of their musical presentation make the book one of the great ones for home use.⁴⁹

In spite of all this positive response to the folk song anthologies, these same books disappeared from the music education canon within fifteen years of publication, undoubtedly due to several factors. First were the increasing conservatism of American politics in the postwar era and the effect of the House Un-American Activities Committee on U.S. society, which included the end of the progressive era in American education. Second, the folk song anthologies were published by a trade, not a textbook, publisher. Music series textbook publishers advertised in the journals and magazines read by music educators, but trade publishers advertised in popular and parents’ magazines. Third, Crawford Seeger’s early death precluded additional publications. And finally, extensive changes within the music education field worked against continued use of her books.

During the late 1950s and into the 1960s, teaching was professionalized, and a scientific model for delivering instruction was adopted. The repertoire for classroom music instruction and the process of teaching changed rapidly, due to increasing demands on schools from politicians, communities, and the profession itself. No repertoire was eliminated entirely; however, the emphasis shifted from a curriculum that privileged Western European classical and folk musics to a more expansive field of study that included North and South American art and folk musics. Popular genres

were added in the late 1960s and “teacher-proof” music series textbooks became standard in the school music curriculum. Behavioral objectives and mastery learning were as central to music education in the 1980s as they were to other school curricula. Music educator Eve Harwood comments:

The apparent ability of textbooks to compensate for the lack of musical training in those assigned to teach music, helped contribute to the dominance of text driven instruction and the assumptions that go with it. . . . Hence a source such as Seeger’s is only one of many, and is not seen as necessarily central to the music teaching mission.⁵⁰

Next, world musics, electronic and digital technologies, and arts integration were added to the music curriculum. All the while, the performance-based curriculum of bands, choirs, and orchestras predominated, no matter what educational theorists, politicians or communities said. This led to the 1990s explication of pragmatic and praxial philosophies to support what was actually happening in music classrooms. Consequently, American folk music became only one small part of music education in classrooms. Generally, today’s students are more interested in popular musics of all kinds. They are more interested in writing their own songs, forming garage bands, and experimenting with digital technologies than they are in exploring folk culture or playing in conventional bands and orchestras. Composition and creativity have become more important than a specific national heritage and music appreciation.

Finally, the music education profession’s tendency to recognize its male leaders but not its female ones further diminished Crawford Seeger’s influence. This is not to say that there have not been women leaders or innovators throughout music education history, but that many of these women have not been recognized as crucial to music education’s growth at a level comparable to the men who made similar contributions. These realities still confront contemporary school use of Crawford Seeger’s anthologies.

The second wave of North American feminism sweeping through the continent in the 1970 and 1980s increased interest in Crawford Seeger, especially among young feminist scholars looking for women’s history in music. Crawford Seeger’s ultramodern concert pieces were rediscovered in the 1970s, yet the revival of her pedagogical works did not occur until after Judith Tick’s 1997 biography and the adoption of *American Folk Songs for Children* as a central text in the Kodály method training programs at Holy Names University and Silver Lake College. The Kodály method, dating back to the work of Hungarian women music teachers who worked with composer Zoltán Kodály in the 1950s, emphasizes musical literacy through singing and reading from notated folk music of the student’s “mother tongue.” In addition to *American Folk Songs for Children*, many Kodály-associated materials include

songs Ruth Crawford Seeger transcribed. Eve Harwood wonders if the Kodály movement in North America was a “method in search of a repertoire.” Indigenous folk song literature is preparation for art music in the Kodály methodology. It is organized conceptually, including an introduce–make conscious–review teaching sequence, and contains a hierarchical scope and sequence of discrete skills. Thus, Harwood suggests Crawford Seeger’s anthologies are a “folk song repertoire that had some claim to authenticity” to be cherished. She sees “drill and practice routines, breaking concepts and musical ideas into small parts” being applied to the folk songs because of the prevalence of mastery learning, behavioral objectives, and behavior modification principles in North American elementary education from the 1960s through 1980s, the same time that the Kodály methodology was introduced to North America.⁵¹ While Kodály is an excellent method for teaching singing and music reading and writing of standard notation, it is not progressive but prescriptive. Those teachers who follow the Kodály methodology specifically include songs from *American Folk Songs for Children* in their repertoire, which is listed in Kodály curricula as an excellent resource. However, the three anthologies remain missing from the music education canon because they are not being represented in more general music pedagogies.

While many music teachers use songs from Crawford Seeger’s anthologies, they often do not attribute the source of the songs. When Martina Miranda compared two popular contemporary U.S. elementary music series textbooks, Macmillan and Silver Burdett, she discovered thirty-five songs from *American Folk Songs for Children* that lacked attribution, other than geographic reference such as “American folk song” or “Kentucky folk song.”⁵² Not surprisingly, Jill Trinka found that school music series textbooks simplified and stereotyped folk song melodies and rhythms, and often attached spurious identification materials that muddled the song’s original social and cultural traditions.⁵³ If we compare the paucity of reference material found in today’s music series textbooks with the scrupulously detailed references and sources of Crawford Seeger’s collections, we can see that a significant aspect of American folk tradition is being lost, even as the songs are being sung in educational settings.

Crawford Seeger is important as an educational theorist who integrated original composition and heritage in a unique but accessible and pragmatic manner. Today’s teachers should be as aware of the compositional value of her writing and folk song settings to the same extent as many teachers are aware of the anthologies as preservation of heritage and as singing texts. Music educators should appreciate this integration of heritage and creativity in Crawford Seeger’s folk song anthologies, and employ her texts as sources rich in compositional and cultural opportunities for a contemporary music curriculum.

Recognition of Crawford Seeger as an innovative educator who contributed significant new teaching materials and new approaches is growing today in

three contexts: where music educators—particularly members of North American Kodály associations—demonstrate interest in developing and maintaining an authentic North American folk music as a significant part of their work; where folklorists, folk musicians, and parents are reviving living folk traditions for and with children; and where parents, students, teachers, and historians seek out the contributions of women to musical life. Music educators' neglect of a notable woman educator and musicologists' disregard for music education have helped to obscure the musical significance of the folk song settings and the pedagogical innovations of Crawford Seeger.

This neglect also demonstrates the dissonance that still exists in American society between composing music and teaching music, and between engaging in modern intellectual creativity and participating in a living folk tradition. The synthesis of composing and teaching essential in Crawford Seeger's life was not necessarily happy or successful. Teaching or transcription as the focus of those last two decades of her life might not have been her choice had her financial circumstances evolved differently. Certainly, she taught and transcribed in order to provide for her family. We could imagine how different her life might have been had she been affluent or lived another thirty years. The reality was that teaching and composing worked together through transcriptions and "making books," constituting a practical synthesis of the creative and the scholarly while contributing to the monetary necessities in her life. This was a dissonant counterpoint for her—a not-so-subtle, life-enriching opposition. When music educators, scholars, and performing musicians recognize this richness and share it with their students and the broader public, Ruth Crawford Seeger's pedagogical work will finally receive the recognition it deserves.

Notes

1. Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memoirs, Memories, Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986), 213.
2. My first efforts to examine Crawford Seeger's pedagogical work according to her credo were inspired by Judith Tick's biography, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 311–12; and her chapter, "Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger, and 'The Music of American Folk Songs,'" in *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology*, ed. Bell Yung and Helen Rees (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 109–29. Joseph Straus's discussion of the principles of the compositional credo has also influenced my work in this direction. See Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
3. Taylor A. Greer, "The Dynamics of Dissonance in Seeger's Treatise and Crawford's Quartet," in *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology*, ed. Bell Yung and Helen Rees (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 13–28.

4. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *"The Music of American Folk Song" and Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music*, ed Larry Polansky with Judith Tick (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2001). A shorter version of the Appendix was first published in *Our Singing Country: Folk Songs and Ballads*, collected and compiled by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax (New York: Macmillan, 1941), xxix–xxxvi. More than one document of the Appendix exists; therefore, in the interest of clarity, all references in this chapter are to the 2001 publication.
5. "Little Bird" appears in Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948), 118–19, and "Hush 'n' Bye" appears in *ibid.*, 178.
6. Crawford Seeger, *The Music of American Folk Song*, 13.
7. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 25–26.
8. *Ibid.*, 25.
9. Crawford Seeger, *The Music of American Folk Song*, 31–34.
10. *Ibid.*, 33–66.
11. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 331.
12. Ruth Crawford Seeger, "American Folk Songs for American Children" (unpublished, homemade songbook, n.d.), #22, housed at the Silver Spring Nursery School, July 2006.
13. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 25.
14. *Ibid.*, 26.
15. Crawford Seeger, *The Music of American Folk Song*, 69 for heterophony and 72–75 for accompaniment.
16. Crawford Seeger mentions Bartók in, *The Music of American Folk Song*, 71 n. 41 and 72 n. 44.
17. *Ibid.*, 22–25 for "majority usage" and 26–27 for "model tune."
18. Ruth Crawford Seeger to Helen Creighton, March 30, 1950.
19. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 28.
20. Greer, "The Dynamics of Dissonance," 25.
21. Ruth Crawford Seeger, "Keep the Song Going!" *NEA Journal* (February 1951): 95; and *American Folk Songs for Children*, 27–28.
22. These songbooks were carefully catalogued and counted. The board secretary records that "One of the new mothers will be asked to help Mrs. Seegar [sic] by recalling the music books of suspending [sic] members and giving them out to new members" (April 21, 1942, Executive Board Meeting Minutes). Three years later rental fees were instituted by the board, "It was agreed that 45 cents will be the maximum amount charged for the use of the music books; the balance of their cost to be made up by voluntary contributions" (March 24, 1942, Executive Board Meeting Minutes). Crawford Seeger was always "Mrs. Seeger" as a teacher. Her name is frequently misspelled in the minutes.
23. Among the most prominent progressive music series in use in the 1930s were: Hannah Matthews Cundiff and Peter W. Dykema, *School Music Handbook: A Guide for Teaching School Music* (Boston: C.C. Birchard and Company, 1923) excerpted in *Source Readings in Music Education History*, ed. Michael L. Mark (New York: Schirmer, 1982), 180–82; Walter Damrosch, George Gartlan, and Karl Gehrckens, *The Universal School Music Series* (New York: Hinds, Hayden and Eldredge, 1923), excerpted in Mark, *Source Readings*, 177–78; and Horatio Parker, Osborne McConathy, Edward Bailey Birge, and W. Otto Miessner, *The Progressive Music Series: Part One*, Vol. II (Boston: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1916), excerpted in Mark, *Source Readings*, 179.
24. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 18.

25. The note reads: "American Folk songs for American Children (Volume 1: Nursery School) has not been published, and is fully protected under common law. This copy is the property of the Silver Spring-Tacoma Park Cooperative Nursery School. It is loaned for temporary use only, and must be returned to the school when the pupil using it leaves the school. It must not be copied or transferred without the consent of the author." It is typed on the cover of the homemade book. See note 10 above.
26. Crawford Seeger, "American Folk Songs for American Children," #14.
27. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 21.
28. *Ibid.*, 14.
29. *Ibid.*, 25–26, 43–46. Lomax, *Our Singing Country*, xxxi–xxxiii.
30. Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 217.
31. *Ibid.*, 114.
32. *Ibid.*, 114.
33. Figure 9.1 transcribes #21, "American Folk Songs for American Children," by Ruth Crawford Seeger, unnumbered second page, tipped in purple hectograph on construction paper (property of Silver Spring Nursery School).
34. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 36.
35. *Ibid.*, 37.
36. *Ibid.*, 187.
37. *Ibid.*, 119.
38. Crawford Seeger, *Animal Folk Songs for Children*, 11.
39. Ruth Crawford Seeger, "Keep the Song Going!" *NEA Journal* (February 1951): 95.
40. The record of Crawford Seeger's comments can be found in "Making Folklore Available," in *Midcentury International Folklore Conference, Four Symposia on Folklore*, ed. Stith Thompson, July 21–August 4, 1950, Indiana University Publications, Folklore Series No. 8. 1953; 191–94, 209, 243. She prepared a formal presentation for the Second Session of Symposium III, "Making Folklore Available," 191–94. Crawford Seeger contributed shorter responses to the discussion in the third (209) and fourth (243) sessions.
41. William G. Tyrell, "American Folk Songs for Children by Ruth Crawford Seeger," *New York Times*, December 19, 1948.
42. Beatrice Landeck, Typescript of review of *American Folk Songs for Children* for the *People's Songs Bulletin*, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.
43. Lilla Belle Pitts to Ruth Crawford Seeger, July 13, 1948, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.
44. Arnold Gesell to Ruth Crawford Seeger, January 17, 1949, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.
45. Beatrice Spaulding to Ruth Crawford Seeger, October 15, 1949, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.
46. Hazel G. Kinscella, "Folk Music Aids," *Music Educators Journal* 38, no. 4 (February–March 1952): 52.
47. *New York Herald Tribune*, December 3, 1950.
48. Vanett Lawler, "Animal Folk Songs for Children Book Review," *Music Educators Journal* 37, no. 3 (January 1951): 54.
49. Virgil Thomson, *New York Herald Tribune*, March 7, 1954.
50. Eve Harwood personal communication with author, January 10, 2003. The text-driven instruction referred to by Harwood involves teachers using curriculum documents and materials prescribed by the school board. The primary assumption is the

idea that a properly constructed curriculum and teaching materials may actually be substituted for professionally educated musician-teachers. Another is that curriculum must be standardized so that it is the same across all schools with the textbook becoming the means of standardization. In other words, the textbook determines both content and process.

51. Ibid.

52. Martina Miranda, "Ruth Crawford Seeger: Composer and Folk Song Collector," unpublished paper, 1999.

53. Jill Trinka, "The Performance Style of American Folksongs on School Music Series and Non-School Music Series Recordings: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Factors," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1987).

Chapter Ten

“Cultural Strategy”

The Seegers and B. A. Botkin as Friends and Allies

Jerrold Hirsch

Today Ruth Crawford Seeger, Charles Seeger, and B. A. Botkin are recognized as vital cultural mediators in the construction of a public memory of American folklore and roots music. During the New Deal, they tried to forge a new role for the federal government in American culture by establishing national folklore institutions that would create an arc between folklore research and the dissemination of that research to a broad audience of culturally minded Americans. They developed what they called a “cultural strategy”¹ that sought to create a place for folklore research within the federal government. But that was only a means to a larger end: the promotion of a new and more expansive vision of American nationality that would be inclusive and democratic rather than exclusive and coercive. It would not only validate folklore as part of the national culture and heritage, but it would also gain respect, understanding, and justice for marginalized and oppressed groups who, in their minds, had created some of the nation’s greatest works of art. They could not conceive of folklore research that did not promote a new sense of American identity rooted in intercultural understanding among the citizens of a diverse nation. It was a conception of folklore that rejected chauvinistic and racist myths. Finally, they thought of folklore as art that could create a new consciousness that spoke to the dilemmas of modernity and to the needs of what liberal-leftists called “progressive democracy.”²

The key to unlocking the work of Botkin and the Seegers is recognizing that they were artists before they were folklorists: Crawford Seeger composed pieces in the 1920s and early 1930s that are today regarded as major achievements of American modernist music; in his early career Seeger conducted European orchestras and composed classical music; Botkin began his career

as a poet. Art, creativity, and imagination, more than scholarship, shaped the contours of their professional identities. As opponents of the genteel tradition and proponents of an American art that would not merely echo Europe, they each tried in their work to address questions about the materials that would constitute the basis for an American modernism. All three expressed concern about the relationship between the artist and tradition, the artist and his or her audience, and the artist and the greater society.

The problem they faced as American artists regarding the relationship between tradition and individual talent dominated their initial work. But even before the stock market crash they had been reflecting on the role of art in culture and society. The economic suffering they witnessed during the Great Depression gave a greater urgency to their thinking about the relationship between art and the culture and the society they wanted to help build. Like so many intellectuals and artists of the time, Marxist perspectives sharpened their liberalism and influenced their cultural politics. The crisis of the Great Depression and their view of American modernism led each of them to think increasingly about the role folklore might play in shaping a cultural strategy for achieving a modern and more just society. Crawford Seeger's contributions to the folklore revival were her research-based folk song collections that aimed to introduce the children of the urban middle class to the wealth of American folk music. Seeger and Botkin worked more avidly at developing cultural theory and at attempting to build public organizations that would put into practice their ideas about the role of folklore in a modern, pluralist, industrial society. But it was Crawford Seeger who most succeeded in demonstrating theory working in practice though her activities as a teacher and a compiler of popular folk song collections. This difference in approach may have been a result of Crawford Seeger's willingness to stay in touch with her creative artistry more than Seeger or Botkin was able to.

The lives and ideas of these three artists-turned-cultural workers began to intersect after they met in Washington, D.C. in 1938. Crawford Seeger, a Midwestern preacher's daughter, Seeger, the scion of patrician New Englanders, and Botkin, the descendant of Jewish immigrants to urban America, each joined a larger liberal-left intellectual community of cultural nationalists, pluralists, and cosmopolitans who appreciated the expressive culture of provincial and marginalized groups.³ Their Washington years together laid a basis for a continuing conversation about cultural strategy and for the collaborative projects that Botkin and the Seegers undertook. While Crawford Seeger's tragic early death in 1953 ended her part in that ongoing conversation, her voice and concerns continued to influence Seeger's and Botkin's later works.

Ruth Crawford grew up with the Methodist hymns sung in her father's church every Sunday, and may also have known something of the southern mountain music her father had grown up with in Cabin Creek, West Virginia.⁴ It would, however, be mistaken to see Crawford's later interest in folk song as the patriot revivalist's pride in a local culture disdained by dominant national groups and buffeted by the changes brought by industrialization. Her work with American folk song emerged in more complex ways than family heritage can explain, and her modernist composer's sensibility was part of the story.

There was a transcendental modernist side to Crawford's musical aesthetic as well as an abstract formalist one. Crawford developed a "spiritual concept," which she pursued during her time studying at the American Conservatory in Chicago and her early years in New York. One interpretation is that Crawford would later reject this spiritual concept, her variation on the "individualism of the [1920s] avant garde," in the face of the sobering realities of the Depression. In this interpretation, all these attitudes became "relics of her earlier life as a composer."⁵ It is possible, however, to read the evidence in a way that shows how Crawford's later work in folk song illustrates continuity with her 1920s interest in the soul world and spiritual idealism. Although Crawford lost her belief in evangelical Christianity's personal God, she did not completely reject the concept of spirituality. Crawford's diaries clearly reveal that she was impressed by composer Dane Rudhyar's interest in Theosophy and Eastern mysticism, which had implications for her interest not only in dissonance in formal composition but also in the pluralist vision of American culture, and the place of folk song in that culture, that she, Seeger, and Botkin came to share.⁶ She was deeply affected by what Rudhyar referred to as his "vision of the brotherhood of man, which blends all as human beings, despite slight exteriors which are discordant. To bring together in harmony far-related objects is a glorious achievement. . . . And so we see that dissonance is all a matter of point of view. It depends on us whether we look at it from a tribal or a universal approach."⁷

Crawford's "soul concept" also had roots in her reading of the nineteenth-century American Renaissance writers. Finding in Whitman "a model for the spiritualizing of the vernacular," "the democratizing of inspiration," and a way to endow "everyday life with artistic expressiveness, penetrating the surface of the mundane for creative content," Crawford was already on a road that would lead to the modernist folkloristics that she, Seeger, and Botkin developed during the Popular Front and its aftermath.⁸

In the then small Midwestern town of Elmhurst, Crawford met Carl Sandburg, self-proclaimed heir to Whitman. She became an "informal daughter" and piano teacher for Sandburg's daughter, and contributed

musical arrangements of folksongs for his *The American Songbag*.⁹ Sandburg’s populism had a political appeal for Crawford that foreshadowed the cultural strategy she later tried to advance in her folk song work. From these early years, folk populism was not, for Crawford, something in opposition to her modernist sensibilities, but rather a realm of culture that would become integral to her life and work. Regarding Sandburg, Crawford wrote in her diary, he was “right to search among down and outers for underlying poetry.” She was convinced that he was “ten times more likely to find it there than in more polite circles.”¹⁰

Crawford did not completely abandon the spiritualist and individualistic modernism she developed in the 1920s to reshape her commitments during the economic suffering of the Great Depression—a standard story line for explaining the reorientation of American artists after the crash. In a 1927 diary entry, Crawford wrote: “What an inconceivably beautiful thing is this soul world, and the thought that existence among people, which I sometimes deplore as banal and boring, could be a glorious thing if one could speak to the soul and not to the brain.”¹¹ Recall that the soul world was, in a significant part of the romantic tradition, the spirit of the people, the world of the folk, dominated by the heart and not the brain, a pure reflection of consciousness without self-consciousness. In this way, the settings Crawford created for American folk songs beginning in the late 1930s were musical moments intended to create the conditions for an experience of consciousness, not simply accompaniments for singing a song.

For Crawford, being modern initially meant composing classical music that was American in large part because it no longer followed European models. It is significant how compatible the words she and Seeger used to describe a modernist music are with the very language they and Botkin later used to describe the pluralist cultural nationalism they sought to develop. In the circle of fellow American composers Crawford identified with in New York, traditional triadic harmony was rejected “in favor of new harmonic combinations, new melodies, and new rhythms.”¹² “Make it new” was their watchword. Not only was dissonance left unresolved, it replaced consonance as the building block of a new music. Crawford and her fellow American modernists stressed heterogeneity and multiplicity over unification. Charles Seeger, one of the leading theoreticians in this group, talked about “sounding apart as opposed to sounding together.”¹³ Following their marriage in 1932, Crawford and Seeger’s musical philosophies and political commitments became more deeply intertwined as they struggled to integrate their commitments to modernism and progressive politics with their growing interest in American folk music.

In his history of the folk revival, Robert Cantwell described New England-born Charles Seeger (1886–1979) as “a man of cool aristocratic bearing [and] Prussian temperament,” who was “constitutionally incapable of descending to the level of the common people.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, Seeger realized that the “very concept of social class was ‘un-American’ . . . hair-trigger reactions of anger about superiority-inferiority could be expected, ranging from ‘I’m as good as you are’ to ‘You’re as good as I.’”¹⁵ For Seeger, the second formulation, not the first, captured some of his embarrassment and guilt over his own sense of privilege.

Seeger disappointed his father by not wanting to become a gentleman-businessman; instead he committed himself to the study of classical music. He did, however, follow in his father’s footsteps when he entered Harvard, graduating magna cum laude in 1908. Seeger then set out to pursue a career in classical music performance and scholarship, relocating in Germany where he studied for three years and conducted the Cologne Opera, then returning to the United States to accept a full professorship in music at the University of Berkeley at the age of only twenty-six. In conventional academic terms, Seeger appeared to be at the beginning of what would be a successful career as a composer and music theorist. At that time he showed little interest in music outside Western art tradition, or issues of social justice, or the relationship between music and society. In keeping with the early twentieth-century thinking, he dismissed folk music as the aesthetic relics of a dying past. But during his Berkeley years he would begin to develop a broader vision.¹⁶

Alfred Kroeber, a student of Franz Boas and a fellow faculty member of Seeger at Berkeley, introduced Seeger to anthropology.¹⁷ Boas had attacked evolutionary anthropologists who thought all races could be rated on a scale from the most primitive to the most advanced, thereby rejecting the concept of racial hierarchy and challenging the popular belief that individuals in certain groups were incapable of becoming American citizens. He favored a pluralist model, arguing that distinctive cultures developed unique folk traditions and mythologies in response to specific historical experiences.¹⁸ When Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger met Botkin in 1938, they were familiar with the Boasian anthropology that had influenced Botkin, and that was becoming part of the shared intellectual discourse of liberal and radical intellectuals.

Seeger began to worry about the social responsibilities and the relevance of the composer of art music long before the Great Depression. Addressing a Harvard audience in 1916 on “The Value of Music,” Seeger declared:

I can compose music for \$5,000 a year. But there has just been published a Congressional survey of living standards [in the United States]. A very large percentage of peoples in this country are living on substandard wages. It bothers me to think that

my salary represents the difference between starvation and minimum living standards for [many] people and a comfortable life for me.¹⁹

He later attributed his inability to continue composing to his inability to resolve the social and moral dilemma of his role as a composer: "In the late teens and early twenties, I [gave up] composition because I couldn't approve of the music I liked and I couldn't like a music that I approved, and I couldn't make either one of them connect in any way with the social situation I found."²⁰ The social and political commitments he took on during the Depression did not lead to a return to composing.²¹

World War I intensified the social and moral crisis Seeger already was experiencing as a composer and as a citizen. As a committed pacifist, he publicly denounced the war and paid a price. In 1919 Berkeley fired him because of the outspoken position he had taken against the war. Seeger later resumed his career in New York, where he emerged in the late 1920s and the early 1930s as a prominent voice among American ultramodern composers.²² Following their arrival in New York, Seeger and Crawford Seeger became for a time what he later called "very loyal fringe members of the Communist front."²³ Seeger helped organize the leftist Composers' Collective in 1932. In his view, it was the job of avant-garde composers to give the "people" the music he and his friends thought they needed.²⁴ Writing columns for the *Daily Worker* under the pseudonym Carl Sands, Seeger dismissed the relevance of folk song as art that was "complacent, melancholy, defeatist, intended to make slaves endure their lot."²⁵ Crawford Seeger rarely attended meetings of the Collective, but its goals and work captured her spirit as well as her husband's, and during this period, she composed settings for two political poems, "Sacco, Vanzetti," and "Chinaman, Laundryman."²⁶

Crawford Seeger introduced her husband to Sandburg's *American Songbag* and occasionally gave guest lectures on folk music in the classes he taught at Juilliard. Together they discovered the riches of the vernacular shape note music and attended the famous "Saturday Nights," where painter Thomas Hart Benton and his students Charles and Jackson Pollock joined in on performances of southern folk songs such as "Old Joe Clark" and "Cindy."²⁷ Still, when rural Kentucky singer Aunt Molly Jackson performed her pro-labor folk songs for the Composers' Collective and they in return played some of their music for her, Seeger recalled each had little use for, or comprehension of, the other's music.²⁸ By 1935 the Seegers were disenchanted with the Collective's approach and had become increasingly interested in the "songs of the people," to borrow from the language of the emerging Popular Front period.²⁹

Charles Pollock's recommendation that the federal Resettlement Administration (RA) hire Seeger to work on a musical program for the

Special Skills Division of the RA in 1935 came none too soon, for the Seegers were in dire economic straits. The RA was one of the most idealistic and utopian of New Deal programs. Headed by the visionary planner Rexford Tugwell, its goal was to bring marginal and displaced Americans from the countryside and the city together to create model communities. One serious problem was that the new residents came from different backgrounds and in these brand-new towns they had no shared sense of common tradition.³⁰ Here was Seeger's opportunity to develop a new model given all that he had learned from the failure of the Collective's top-down approach. Seeger thought that music as a participatory form of art and recreation could create bonds of community and he knew that he had support from the top down in the New Deal: "Mrs. Roosevelt and Tugwell and the other people in Washington had the idea that music might be able to harmonize some of these difficulties."³¹ No longer did he cast the musician as the provider of music to musicless people.

In place of class conflict as the engine of historical change, Seeger articulated a commitment to building an inclusive and unified community based on cooperation and planning. It was a transition that many on the left made during the Popular Front. Seeger maintained that the music program in the RA settlements also spoke to larger national needs: "Though seen here in miniature, it is, in the final analysis, a problem national in scope—the reintegration of the fine arts in the rapidly evolving culture of America upon a basis of community rather than personal values."³² In this new phase of "our job," the Seegers focused on the songs of the people they framed as folk; Seeger from a bureaucrat and scholar's point of view, Crawford Seeger from a composer and music teacher's perspective. For all their experiences with folk music in New York, they had arrived in the capital still convinced that folk music in America had all but vanished. They quickly came to believe otherwise. Seeger was learning that "the traditional music is alive and flourishing among millions of people who still introduce fresh variants and new material in the old idiom."³³ Crawford Seeger saw folk music as an ally in her modernist fight with the fine arts musical establishment, and argued for a common bond between modernism and tradition. For her, folk song was *not* the "essence of simplicity" but a product of "musical sophistication and stylistic otherness."³⁴

In this period, Crawford Seeger began a new role as a composer and music teacher who created settings for folk songs and would work to find ways to try to make Western notation capture an oral tradition in print. In 1937 she compiled *Twenty-two American Folk Tunes*, a collection of folk songs arranged for the elementary-level piano student. Crawford Seeger's preface to the songs reflects two points that would guide her work, proclaiming that:

just as the child becomes acquainted with his own home environment before experiencing the more varied contacts of school and community, so should the music student

be given the rich musical heritage of his own country as a basis upon which to build his experience of the folk and art music of other countries.³⁵

She also framed American folk music as part of her view of the relationship between vernacular musical tradition and modernist composition:

to present this music in an idiom savoring as much as possible of the contemporary, preferring a bareness rather than a richness of style, and accustoming the student's ear to a freer use of the fifth, fourth, and seventh, and second intervals so abundantly used in most contemporary music.³⁶

She always had more success in her first goal, which became a guiding precept of the folk revival, than she had in her goal of convincing other composers of looking at it in this way. At the very moment when many American composers embraced folk music in their compositions as the essence of simplicity, she “endowed the vernacular as a new kind of dissonant music.”³⁷

Seeger found it difficult to create a permanent place in the federal bureaucracy for the cultural programs the New Deal was willing to support as part of its efforts at providing relief, recovery, and reform. The RA became a casualty of the attack that conservative anti-New Dealers launched on “Rex the Red” Tugwell, who was dismissed, and the RA was dismantled. Following a short-lived position with the Farm Security Administration, Seeger accepted a position with the Federal Music Project in June 1938.

It was at this point in 1938 that Botkin arrived in Washington on a Rosenwald Fellowship to study southern and black folklore, two great interests of the Seegers. The problem of race relations, segregation, and the feudal economic conditions of the South were touchstone issues for every liberal and radical during this period. Sharing similar cultural and political commitments, Botkin and the Seegers would soon become close friends and allies.³⁸

* * *

Benjamin A. Botkin (1901–1975) was a poet before he was a folklorist. The child of poor Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, he began writing and publishing verse during his high-school years in Boston.³⁹ He also fits the plebian category of artists and writers who came from poor and immigrant backgrounds to emerge as important cultural workers in the Popular Front.⁴⁰ Scholarships made it possible for him to enter Harvard at sixteen, where he majored in English and studied and wrote poetry. Undergraduate papers on Wordsworth and Sandburg reveal an aspiring poet focusing on writers he thought had renewed the language of poetry by turning to rural

scenes or to urban, industrial life. In 1921 Botkin completed a master's degree in English at Columbia University, where Boas taught anthropology. From Boas he learned how the particular historical experience of different groups resulted in cultures that were both products of and responses to specific conditions.⁴¹

When Botkin began teaching at the University of Oklahoma in 1921, what he wanted most was to be a poet who contributed to a new American literature that would help in "restoring the oral popular tradition to poetry."⁴² The realities of pluralism, the growth of cities, and the spread of factories affected Botkin and other modernist writers who were concerned with cultural issues such as social fragmentation and alienation.⁴³ Botkin participated in the poetry and ballad revival on the University of Oklahoma campus. Thus, he later wrote, "grew my interest in folk song, particularly the play-party song,"—a form of adult recreation that combined song and movement, wholly avoiding religious objections to dancing.⁴⁴ He welcomed the use of play-party songs *and* the descriptions of these social gatherings in the work of contemporary novelists, a development he saw as having ample and distinguished precedents: "Interest in folklore has always been attended by exploitation in literature. So it was in the Romantic Movement, and so it has been in the new movement in poetry in this country—a movement concurrent with the revival of American folk song and the birth of the blues."⁴⁵

In his 1937 dissertation on the Oklahoma play party, Botkin argued that this lore was created not by a classless community that existed only in the distant past, but rather by one that was constantly being recreated on the edge of the advancing frontier by an increasingly stratified and heterogeneous community.⁴⁶ He rejected the classic communalist position that regarded folk song as a group composition created by a "community or folk, not a section or clan of that community, and not a single writer."⁴⁷ Even among scholars who argued that individuals had played a role in creating the popular poetry of the ballad, most maintained this creativity had happened a long time ago when the folk were a classless and homogeneous group.⁴⁸ Botkin disagreed.

In the early years of the Depression, Botkin argued cultural diversity was not a danger, but a source of vitality: "There is," he wrote, "not one folk in [America] but many folk groups—as many as there are regional cultures or racial or occupational groups within a region."⁴⁹ He insisted it was time "to recognize that we have in America a variety of folk cultures, representing racial, regional, and even industrial cultures; that this very variety . . . constitutes the strength and richness in American lore, and that in the very process of transplanting, these imported cultures and traditions have undergone changes that make them a new tradition."⁵⁰

In 1937 Botkin readdressed in deeper theoretical and more leftist formulations the view of approaching folklore as merely survivals. His first move was to attack evolutionary anthropology. Seizing on the functionalism in the

work of ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski and the pluralism of Boas, Botkin insisted that the “modern folklorist has come to see that folk phenomena . . . are the product of a complicated process of cultural isolation, conflict, change, and adaptation rather than of simple survival—the results of acculturation as well as diffusion.”⁵¹ Botkin shifted the argument from an evolutionary view of culture to a view of the function of lore in the history of a group’s past and contemporary life: “our many folk cultures are not behind us at all but right under us. Below the surface of the dominant pattern are the popular life and fantasy of our cultural minorities and other nondominant groups—nondominant but not recessive, not static but dynamic and transitional, on their way up.”⁵² If writers acted like ethnographers, Botkin argued, they would not only be performing important cultural work, but also would be modernists who would aid in “restoring the basic integration of work patterns and ethical patterns” and thereby also show that the source of modernist dreams could be fulfilled: “Then the breach between expression and experience, universality and personality, the artificer and the maker, the subjective and the objective will be healed.”⁵³ Ultimately the ideal is romantic, liberal, and reformist:

And these are the values that folklore can restore to the individual and that the individual should seek to recover from folklore for literature—a sense of the continuity of human nature; a sense of art as a response instead of a commodity; a sense of social structure, based on social intelligence and good will; and a sense of pattern in its primitive use as a model and a guide rather than a limit.⁵⁴

* * *

Not long after Botkin became the folklore editor for the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) in the spring of 1938, he enthusiastically informed his wife, Gertrude Botkin, “I have been invited by the American Council of Learned Societies [ACLS] to attend a meeting of some 10 Federal Project people to discuss a plan for cooperation in research in the folk arts. This may lead to something.”⁵⁵ Botkin also kept his wife informed about meeting the Seegers, touting their accomplishments:

This noon Mr. and Mrs. Seeger were with me. . . . The Seegers are both working on articles, and we read each other’s MS. He is a fine chap. You will find him and his wife both in the Who’s Who—at least he is in it. There are articles about both in Henry Cowell’s book on modern composers. Seeger taught at California and Juilliard for many years.⁵⁶

Botkin and the Seegers would develop a close friendship with room for spontaneous and impulsive, but purposeful activities, as Botkin wrote his wife in the summer of 1938:

I bumped into Seeger at the door of the building this afternoon and decided to join him on a trip to North and South Carolina. . . . I am finishing a hurried lunch after having gone home to pack my bag. I have my shirts, thanks. I'll be back Wednesday and will write you en route.⁵⁷

Several days later Botkin wrote again, describing a trip that mixed together enthusiasm for folklore performance, the middle-class search for authenticity, and social conscience.

The mountain dance festival was in the true nature without the frills and fun of Miss Knott's show. The dance teams were all different in their styles, from heavy clog to a light mincing step, and there was the usual stunt fiddler (playing on his back, etc.) and the harmonica player who did the Fox Hunt, and a sisters' number (four little girls singing lonesome songs). The children have the same sad faces as their parents, but all seemed glorified by the spirit of the dances and songs. Crawford Seeger says they look as if they don't have enough to eat, which is true, but they seem to have a joy and zest in their entertainment, which we somehow miss. Seeger wished he could take photographs of the peoples' faces at the festival and away from it to show the contrast.⁵⁸

Together Botkin and Seeger began work to establish national folklore institutions by advancing their ideas in public forums. Botkin presented a paper, "Bread and Song: WPA Folklore Research," at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1939, and he and Seeger presented papers on "Folklore as a Neglected Source of Social History," and "Folk Music as a Source of Social History" at the 1939 meeting of the American Historical Association.⁵⁹ After assuming full-time responsibility for the FWP folklore studies in 1938, Botkin created a Joint WPA Folklore Committee. Donald Daugherty of the ACLS suggested that the various New Deal agencies gathering material on American culture consider how the results of their research could be preserved and made available to scholars. New Deal experts on folklore, folk music, and the folk arts exchanged information regarding collecting, preserving, and utilizing these materials. An equal emphasis on utilization meant that representatives from the WPA recreation and education divisions needed to be involved as well as those from the Writers, Music, Theater, and Art Projects.⁶⁰ WPA officials regarded folklore as having a social and educational dimension. Like John Dewey, they thought of art as a social activity, an experience that should be made available to all citizens in a democracy.

The Joint Committee was designed to provide a way for interested WPA officials to exchange ideas and information about folklore collecting among themselves and with outside agencies. Botkin chaired the committee and Seeger became vice chairman. Their guiding principals included an emphasis on cultural pluralism and relativism and an insistence that music outside the Western high art tradition be evaluated by standards other than

those of classical music. Seeger and Botkin realized that insisting on the humanity of discriminated groups was to aid reform. In a publicity release, Botkin announced that the committee saw itself as "bringing together and using all the oral, popular, and traditional materials that express ways of living in one country."⁶¹

Seeger and Botkin saw the Joint Committee as just the beginning of creating a structure for folklore studies in the government. Botkin wrote his wife, "according to Daughtery and Spivacke [director of the music division of the Library] there are big plans underway for the WPA in the Library in connection with [Archibald] MacLeish's cultural program."⁶² The circle of individuals and institutions Seeger and Botkin were trying to involve in their cultural strategy was widening. The support of poet Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress, had even more dramatic implications for their effort to divorce their cultural projects from relief programs. MacLeish's interest in Seeger and Botkin's program flowed logically from his cultural commitments as reflected in his *America Was Promises* (1939), a book-length poem/photomontage about the disparity between promise and reality in Depression-era America and his role as an active figure in Popular Front cultural endeavors.⁶³

Botkin and Seeger's desire to find an institutional base for folklore in the Library of Congress and to secure the support of the ACLS became a pressing necessity as it became clear in the spring of 1939 that all of the Federal Arts Projects were under attack. In June the Congress abolished the Federal Theatre Project, and severely curtailed the scope of the other arts projects.⁶⁴ These events brought the Seegers and Botkin closer together, as they redoubled their efforts to find a way to support their programs. Their hopes were raised and crushed as the WPA arts projects, which had offered new opportunities, were dismantled in response to the growth of a powerful conservative coalition in the Congress and the coming of World War II. Reorienting their efforts, Seeger and Botkin turned to the Library of Congress as a possible new base for their work. They brought to the Library of Congress a distinct vision of American culture and the lessons they had learned from their earlier New Deal experiences. Working together on the Joint Committee, Seeger and Botkin had developed a network of contacts among the cultural programs nestled within the interstices of the federal government. They pursued their ideas with a heady and idealistic enthusiasm. As Botkin noted, "Seeger's latest idea (though we have discussed it before) is to make our Joint Committee a government committee on American Culture with MacLeish as chairman."⁶⁵ While they did not succeed in institutionalizing their vision, they continued to search for ways to further their cultural strategy.

With the demise of the Resettlement Administration in 1937, Seeger's work with the Special Skills Division had been moved into the Farm Security Administration, another New Deal program that while addressing farm

problems also sought to document American culture. As with other New Deal cultural programs, the funding for this program was always subject to dramatic changes. After a long layoff, Seeger was hired in 1938 by Federal Music Program director Nikolai Sokoloff to administer and develop programs in traditional music, to which the classically trained Sokoloff was at best indifferent, at worst unsympathetic.⁶⁶ As the Arts Projects were being cut back in the summer of 1939, Seeger and Botkin scurried to find a future for themselves and their projects.

In December 1939, Seeger, according to Botkin, was offered the directorship of the Archive of the American Folk Song with his salary to be paid by the WPA Music Project and one-third of his time was to be devoted to the work of the Joint Committee. "What it means," Botkin wrote his wife, "is that [Seeger] will still be on the Music Project but loaned to the library. There is no archive of American Folklore yet, but I shall work closely with Seeger in any case."⁶⁷ Whether Seeger changed his mind or the bureaucratic arrangements broke down is unclear. Trying to get their cultural program into the library through "the back door," as Seeger described it, proved complicated, full of uncertainties, and extraordinarily stressful not only for Seeger and Botkin but also for their families. In 1941, Seeger took a position with the Pan-American Union as the director of their Inter-American Music Center and Chief of the Musical and Visual Arts Division, where he worked to promote cultural dialogue between the Americas, which in his vision involved the musical education of children. He remained there until 1953, when the Red Scare led to his resignation.⁶⁸ He later accepted an appointment in the department of musicology at the University of California in Los Angeles.

With MacLeish's support, Botkin made a transition from the FWP to the Library of Congress. In 1939 he became the chief editor of the Writers' Unit of the Library of Congress. When that work came to an end in the summer of 1941, Botkin became a fellow at the Library. As Botkin recalled "the appointment came as a surprise, on the recommendation of MacLeish, about the time the [Writers'] Project was getting put away in storage. . . . The appointment (which is paid for out a Carnegie grant) is for one year. My duties consist principally of developing and interpreting (through catalogs and bibliographies) the folklore collections."⁶⁹ Although not sure what would happen when the fellowship ended, Botkin nevertheless continued to work and hope. Then, in the fall of 1942, Alan Lomax left the Library of Congress to work for the Office of War Information and Botkin was named "assistant in charge of American Folk Song." As Botkin wrote his brother, "it's just what I want to do, and the only job of its kind in the country . . . the Music Division is the liveliest and most creative in the Library. My appointment was approved from MacLeish down, and Spivacke tells me there were no other candidates, as every one knew the job was mine."⁷⁰ In 1944 he became director of the Archive of American Folk Song.

Despite their best efforts, Seeger and Botkin failed to achieve their goal of establishing a permanent federal government base for folklore that would go beyond collecting and archival indexing to a program stressing the public utilization of folklore.⁷¹ There were, however, limited but significant successes. The cataloguing project Seeger headed completed the monumental three-volume *Check List of Recorded Songs in the English Language in the Archive of American Folk Song to July 1940*. This was one indication that the Library was on its way to becoming what Botkin called a "sound library." Given the *Check List*, a study of folk music that was based only on the study of texts could no longer dominate the field. As music and text were integral to the folk who made the songs, they would now become integral partners in the scholarly study of folk song. In addition, the *Check List* extended the field of folk song study by suggesting that commercial records, as well as field recordings, could reflect a folk ethos.

Botkin stayed on at the Library until he stepped down in 1945. He tried to shape the Archive's public program along the lines he had outlined in a 1939 article for *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, in which he argued for the public utilization of folklore research, a central tenet of Botkin and the Seeger's cultural strategy. Specifically, Botkin contended that folklore collecting should be "research not for research's sake but for use and enjoyment by the many," that such research should be seen "as a public function and folklore as public, not private property," and that folklorists had the moral obligation to give back to the people the lore "that rightfully belongs to them, in a form in which they can understand and use."⁷² Botkin's call for utilization was also a call for scholarship based on the assumption that he shared with the Seegers that the relationship between research and public access should be seamless. He not only oversaw the organization and microfilming of the FWP's ex-slave narratives at the Library, but also later published a selection of the material in his 1945 oral history of slave narratives, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*.⁷³ While at the Library, he wrote about "Folklore as a Neglected Source of Social History, worked with music educators, and oversaw the release of some of the first releases from field recordings deposited by John and Alan Lomax in the Archive of American Folk Song."⁷⁴ In addition he participated in conferences where he spoke about new directions that the study of folklore should take and the role of scholars in editing this material for a lay audience.⁷⁵ He also wanted the Library's "sound library" to be available to the larger public, and to make sure they knew about the collection of Anglo-American ballads and Negro religious and work songs, he obtained permission from the Library to write an article, "The People's Music U.S.A.," for the popular magazine *American Music Lover*.⁷⁶

When one road to implementing their cultural strategy was blocked, Botkin, Seeger, and Crawford Seeger did not abandon their vision but

attempted to find another path to fulfilling it. Botkin turned to the commercial book world to publish a series of folklore anthologies meant to acquaint a wide array of Americans with their nation's folk riches. He maintained a life-long effort to utilize folklore programs to promote intercultural understanding, which in 1953 he began to call "applied folklore." Seeger, working at the Pan-American Union, sought to use folklore to foster intercultural understanding throughout the Americas. Crawford Seeger continued her activities setting folk songs, and made major contributions to the values the three of them held in the folk song books she completed for children.

By the spring of 1940, Botkin was working with Crown publishers on his *Treasury of American Folklore (TAF)*. *TAF* was the first substantial collection of American folklore that did not confine itself to a single region or to a single genre. The 900-plus page collection, first published in 1944, featured hundreds of folk tales, legends, boasts, lies, pranks, anecdotes, play-party games, ballads, and folk songs representing a variety of American ethnic and regional traditions.⁷⁷ Indeed, Botkin did not rely on traditional genre categories in arranging his material, nor provide detailed comparative notes, numerous variant texts, or references to standard motif indexes that were common in more scholarly folklore collections. This was not merely an effort to make the book appeal to a popular audience. Rather, it was part of Botkin's argument that American folklore, developing contemporaneously with literacy, print, and machinery, and having a diversity of folk groups unlike more homogeneous societies, had to be approached in a different way from its European counterpart. Botkin wanted categories that emerged from the study and interpretation of local and regional American traditions—"Backwoods Boasters," "Local Cracks and Slams," "Tall Talk," and "Cowboy Songs" were, in his view, more useful categories than the allegedly universal genre classifications of folk tale, myth, and ballad favored by European folklorists.

In organizing his material for *TAF*, Botkin attempted to integrate texts, documentation, and commentary in a way that helped the reader learn about both the lore and its cultural background. Folklorists, he argued, needed to avoid "the unfortunate compromise between public appeal, popular appeal, and scholarly value" that was "the result of most commercial publication of folklore." By following a functionalist approach folklorists could edit collections in a way that went beyond "folklorists talking to themselves, or folklore in vacuo" and instead spoke to the general reader.⁷⁸

Botkin's desire to display America's traditional treasures to a broad American audience who had little contact with or appreciation of folk expression was a natural outgrowth of the cultural strategy he shared with the Seegers. For Botkin, *TAF* was a practical means of putting Americans in touch with their cultural heritage, which celebrated the artistic triumphs of the nation's "common" men and women. Seeger served as music consultant for the book and contributed a number of songs he had edited for a

Resettlement Song Sheets collection. He, Crawford Seeger, and his son Pete Seeger transcribed a half-dozen tunes for the final section of the book.

Botkin's decision to leave Washington in 1945 was made possible in part by the enormous commercial success of the *TAF*. He decided to move to Croton-on-Hudson, New York, where he devoted himself to editing folklore anthologies of American folk traditions including *A Treasury of New England Folklore* (1947), *A Treasury of Southern Folklore* (1949), *A Treasury of Western Folklore* (1951), *Sidewalks of America* (1954), and *New York City Folklore* (1956). The trajectory of these anthologies recapitulated his movement during the interwar years from a focus on regional traditions to an emphasis on urban and industrial lore.

* * *

The relationship between the Seegers and the Botkin did not end with his departure from Washington, as they continued to work on joint projects. When Botkin made trips back to Washington in the late 1940s and early 1950s to do work at the Library of Congress he visited and sometimes stayed with the Seegers. Despite the postwar conservatism and lack of institutional support for the public folklore work they envisioned, the three of them never abandoned the underlying values of their cultural strategy. Botkin and Crawford Seeger's most fruitful collaboration came in 1951 when he asked her to work with him on selecting the songs and transcribing folk tunes for his *Treasury of Western Folklore* (*TWF*). The work had to be done around the regular schedule of piano lessons that Crawford Seeger conducted at home. Botkin, it seemed, did not mind. He was happy to be there and talking “folklore shop” with the Seegers.⁷⁹ Crawford Seeger immersed herself in the meticulous process of transcribing tunes drawn primarily from Library of Congress field recordings made by folklorists Sidney Robertson, Sam Eskin, Austin and Alta Fife, John and Alan Lomax, Charles Seeger, and Botkin. In the introduction to the *TWF* collection that was published in 1951, Botkin thanked Crawford Seeger for “serving as music consultant and for her excellent transcriptions,” the latter numbering more than two dozen tunes.⁸⁰

Botkin had good reason to expect that Crawford Seeger would produce more satisfying musical notations than those that had appeared in his earlier collections, for she had honed her listening and transcribing skills in preparing her first highly successful folk song collection, *American Folk Songs for Children* (1948). Crawford Seeger's interest in this area began as early as 1936 when she first heard children's folk songs performed in rural Resettlement communities. The project took shape in the late 1930s when she began thinking about compiling a collection of traditional American folk songs with suitable piano accompaniment. It took on an ideological

dimension as she became caught up with Seeger's and Botkin's effort to return folklore to the people—in this case to make appropriate folk songs available to parents and teachers who wanted to expose their children to America's cultural heritage.

Ironically, the folk song book project grew from conflicts Crawford Seeger faced as a mother and artist, but that Seeger and Botkin did not face as fathers. In the fall of 1941, Crawford Seeger decided to send her third child, Barbara, to a cooperative nursery school—the adjective reflected the liberal-left cultural politics of the era. Silver Spring Cooperative Nursery emphasized the need for children to learn to live in a society based on cooperation. Crawford Seeger would work one day a week at the school as did every other mother. She reflected: “It sounds logical, and I can improve plenty as a mother, heaven knows. But I hate to give up the time. I wanted it for my music, here at home.” Soon she was using her time at the school to work out a folk music program. A little more than half a year later she had put together a small booklet, “American Songs for American Children,” for use in the classroom.⁸¹

For the 1942 Music Educators National Conference, Crawford Seeger, in conjunction with Seeger, Botkin, and Alan Lomax, put together a songbook. They helped change the nation's music education policy, which until then had virtually ignored American folksong.⁸² The initial demand for the booklet was so great that “the edition of the Conference booklet was soon exhausted.”⁸³ Spivacke, Seeger, and Botkin published a series of articles in the *Music Educators Journal* to make their ideas and the materials available to as wide an audience of music teachers as possible. Unfortunately, Ruth Crawford Seeger's name and ideas are never mentioned in these articles. Drawing on Seeger's research, Spivacke pointed out that a study of music textbooks showed that few American folk songs were included in these works aimed at young children. Indeed, foreign folk songs were more commonly found in these books than “the indigenous music of our own country.” The Library, he informed music educators, was working to make some of its field recordings available “to give the teacher a balanced unit.”⁸⁴ In the next issue of the *Music Educators Journal*, Seeger sought to enunciate principles for children's music education that spoke to larger issues of his “cultural strategy.” It was past time, Seeger argued, to end the conflict in the United States between high culture (mostly imported) and folk culture. Instead, it was essential that music education help reunite the two cultural streams—an idea about culture Botkin had been advocating since 1929. It would be an education that would further American's need to develop both an “ability to be at home with itself” and an “ability to be at home in the world at large.”⁸⁵

In his *Music Educators Journal* article, Botkin credits Seeger for principles that Crawford Seeger may have developed, for as Seeger said, “Ruth approached the work with actual American children in the concrete.”⁸⁶ Botkin maintained that folk music is basic to music education:

This axiom is basic not only to music education but also to American education, for to know American folk music is to know the American experience . . . inextricably bound up. And because folk music, like folk tradition generally, is part of a world stream, there is no conflict there between being "at home" with their own music and giving a home to the music of the rest of the world.⁸⁷

One can see the impact of Botkin's thinking in general and *TAF* in particular on Crawford Seeger's *American Folk Songs for Children (AFSC)* volume.⁸⁸ A mere four years separates the publication of the two books. Crawford Seeger was as concerned as Botkin was that American folklore was "not" as he put it "more widely known and appreciated."⁸⁹ Just as Botkin intended to interest the general reader in American folklore, Crawford Seeger sought to make the singing of genuine American folk songs part of every child's experience. For Botkin, folk song was not only a heritage, but also a "functional activity of the group."⁹⁰ Crawford Seeger not only supported this viewpoint, but provided guidelines and settings for making traditional American folk song part of the functional activity of children.⁹¹ Crawford Seeger shared Botkin's view that participation was central to understanding cultural functioning of folk songs and strove to provide a means for children to participate in folk song activity that provided continuity with the past and also built bonds of community in the present.

Botkin argued that folk songs functioned to provide a people's view of America as they commented on everyday life situations around them.⁹² Crawford Seeger maintained that knowledge and experience of past American folk song would give children a valuable perspective on the Americans who preceded them and would allow them to use lore to comment on their lives in the present.⁹³ She built on Botkin's description of folklore as "patterned by common experience; varied by individual repetition" and his argument that folk artists found a "proper balance between remembering and inventing" and how new words were fitted "to old tunes and old texts [were fitted] to changing circumstances."⁹⁴ Crawford Seeger not only repeatedly made this point, but encouraged children with adult guidance to become part of the process of variation, while cautioning parents and teachers that while changing textual content was an open possibility, invention had to be balanced with a need to value the integrity of the original folk song.⁹⁵ Botkin talked about American folk song creation and performance as "participation made spontaneous."⁹⁶ Crawford Seeger sought to develop this process in a nursery-school setting.

Crawford Seeger's *AFSC* did for children and parents what Botkin's *TAF* had done four years earlier for the general reader. Like Botkin in *TAF*, but unlike Seeger, Crawford Seeger had a gift for writing for a lay audience without being patronizing and without oversimplifying. Consider her easily accessible answers to questions commonly asked by parents and educators:

“Why American Folk Music for Our Children?”

This kind of traditional or folk music is thoroughly identified with the kind of people who made America as we know it. It is a music they liked and still like. They made it *and are still making it.* (emphasis added)

“Where did folklore come from?”

Some of it came with them from other countries and has been little changed. Some of it came with them from other countries and has been much changed. Some of it grew here.

“Why learn about folksong?”

This music has been a natural part of work, play, sleep, fun, ridicule, love, and death. It has grown out of and passed through many ways of living and doing. . . . It knows and tells what people have thought about ways of living and the things that happened.⁹⁷

Crawford Seeger’s comments, “Using the Songs at School,” could be read as a treatise on the role of the individual and the group in creating lore, an account of what she called elsewhere in the book “a spontaneous laboratory.”⁹⁸ As she pointed out “first there was the link between the children and me” and all the “songs knocking around in my head.” But the songs she was bringing from rural groups had to connect with urban children: “Thus each song-and-action session with the children must be a joint creation of theirs and mine.” The great “gain was the feeling we had of making something together.” She was convinced, as Botkin would have been, that the

experiencing of a combined individual and group accomplishment can mean a great deal to the individual taking part in it. He has not only made a contribution: he receives a contribution from the group in return. And perhaps here was the most important link of all—the link created from the individual to the group, and vice versa.⁹⁹

In *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (1950), Crawford Seeger reiterated the importance of the “use value” of folklore. She insisted that her approach not be dismissed as mere popularization, and like Botkin, she claimed there was no inherent conflict between “research and practical use value.” It was, she maintained, possible to address both folklore scholars and “people who like to sing,” in the same book.¹⁰⁰ Proof came in a favorable review of her children’s folk song collection by the firmly academic-based folklorist W. Edison Richmond.¹⁰¹

Botkin thought Crawford Seeger’s last book, *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (1953), was her best because it gave the most attention to the general folklore and cultural life in which the songs were embedded. Botkin’s glowing review of the book had a bittersweet tone to it, for it also constituted an obituary for his good friend.¹⁰² Perhaps Crawford Seeger’s introductory statement that one of the major goals of her Christmas song collection was “to give back to the

people songs that belong to them” was her final tribute to Botkin, who had written in 1939 that “if giving back to the people what we have taken from them is vulgarization, then we need more of it.”¹⁰³ Botkin’s review and memorial made it clear that he empathized with the struggles Crawford Seeger faced in trying to fulfill her roles as wife and mother, author of folklore books, and modernist composer who wanted to return to composition.

Ruth Crawford Seeger never totally abandoned her own composing, and in what were to be the final years of her life she pondered what direction her own compositions might take in the future. She was uncertain what role, if any, folk song would play in her future compositions, noting in a 1948 letter to composer Edgard Varèse that she was not sure whether “the road I have been following for the last dozen years [folk music] is a main road or a detour.”¹⁰⁴ In theory, she maintained, the two streams of folk and fine art music were related, but she was not sure that she was going to try to reunite them. She certainly gave no sense that she thought it would be as easy a task as Botkin had made it seem it would be for creative writers during his Popular Front years. She did, however, make it clear that she had no intention of going back to the romantic nationalist composers who placed folk melodies within the traditional harmonies of fine art music.

Seeger and Botkin had given up on the art they were engaged in as young men long before Crawford Seeger died. Seeger had abandoned composition before the Great Depression. Botkin published his last poem in the early 1930s. Although Seeger in his old age was a revered and honored musicologist, his lament that no one wanted to argue with what he had written became part of his legend. Botkin thought that his role as an editor suited his poetic temperament well as he searched for patterns in cultural fragments from which he created treasuries. Although he continued to encourage folklorists to use the lore they studied as a means to celebrate cultural diversity and to promote cross-cultural understanding, Botkin was dismayed and hurt that much of his work was dismissed by academic folklorists like Richard Dorson.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless Botkin held on to the idea that the folk revival was a phenomenon that would vindicate his ideas.¹⁰⁶ When Seeger, nearing the end of his long life, brought together many of his most important scholarly articles, he honored Botkin’s influence on his own work by closing the book with “The Folkness of the Non-Folk and the Non-Folkness of the Folk,” which he pointed out had as its starting point what he called Botkin’s “prescient” article “The Folkness of the Folk.”¹⁰⁷

* * *

Botkin’s and the Seegers’ cultural strategy had an impact. Robert Cantwell maintains that Crawford Seeger’s introduction to *American Folk Songs for*

American Children (1948) can be viewed “as one of the master texts of the expanding [post–World War II] folk revival.”¹⁰⁸ Pete Seeger (Charles’s son by his first wife), Mike Seeger, and Peggy Seeger (Charles and Ruth’s children) became prominent players in that revival.¹⁰⁹ Despite some reservations about the transformations and translations that folk revivalists presented, Botkin and the Seegers saw the revival as a partial fulfillment of their cultural strategy of introducing different groups of Americans to each other’s folk music. For a time, that cultural strategy was also part of the music education of American children.¹¹⁰ They helped raise African American folk tradition to parity with the Anglo-American tradition, thereby contributing to the struggle for equal rights for all American citizens. They each fought the assumptions that there was any inherent conflict between an appreciation of folk and high art, or between appreciating indigenous national traditions and being open to the traditions of other peoples. And they never wavered from the core principle that folk art should be given the same attention and prestige that were accorded to high art.

Even during the unpromising 1950s when formalism, Cold War triumphalism, and a rush by humanities scholars to appear scientific dominated the study of American culture, Seeger and Botkin did not abandon their cultural strategy. In a 1953 article titled “Applied Folklore: Creating Understanding through Folklore,” Botkin reiterated their cultural strategy for a new time:

The ultimate aim of applied folklore is the restoration to American life of the sense of community—a sense of thinking, feeling, and acting along similar, though not the same lines—that is in danger of being lost today. Thus applied folklore goes beyond cultural history to cultural strategy, to the end of creating a favorable environment for the liberation of our creative energies and the flourishing of the folk arts among other social and cooperative activities. In a time of increasing standardization, it becomes an increasingly important function of the applied folklorist to discover and keep alive expressions that might otherwise be lost.¹¹¹

As in the 1930s, the vision was more important than existing academic structures: “a pure folklorist might tend to think of folklore as independent discipline, the applied folklorist prefers to think of it as ancillary to the study of culture, of history or literature—of people.”¹¹²

In 1961 Botkin issued a call for the creation of an applied folklore center. After the stasis of the Eisenhower years, the country was, in the words of the Kennedy Democrats, moving again. The Botkin/Seeger cultural strategy envisioned the world in multicultural terms where: “Folklore and the folk arts are a bridge between the humanities and the social sciences, a key to the understanding of and between cultures, regions, and social and economic groups.”¹¹³ The goal was “not to eliminate differences but to enable groups to become better acquainted with one another’s differences.” He also hoped

that the proposed center would "help bridge the gap between pure and applied folklore."¹¹⁴ Although the center was never created, the ideas that the Seegers and Botkin had first developed and struggled to keep alive never died, and by the mid-1960s a new generation of folklorists—some no doubt brought up on Botkin's treasuries and Crawford Seeger's songbooks—were ready to rethink and transform the Botkin/Seeger cultural strategy into what would become known as public folklore.

Following decades of struggle, public folklore finally took root in various federal and state government agencies during the late 1960s and 1970s. Folklorist Archie Green, who knew both Seeger and Botkin, played a crucial role as advocate and lobbyist for legislation leading to the establishment of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1967, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Folk Arts Program in 1973, and the creation of the American Folklife Center in 1976. The Smithsonian Folklife Festival, spearheaded by folklorist and revivalist musician Ralph Rinzler, combined field research and public presentation of folk music, dance, story telling, foodways, and material culture in an event that became an annual two-week summer celebration of American heritage on the Washington D.C. National Mall. The NEA Folk Arts program made federal funding available for a plethora of folklore collecting and documentation projects, festivals, and exhibitions, as well as providing seed money for folk arts programs in state and local agencies across the country. Alan Lomax's sister Bess Lomax Hawes, who as a teenager had assisted her brother and Crawford Seeger in compiling materials for their 1941 folk song collection *Our Singing Country*, became the first director of the NEA Folk Arts program.¹¹⁵ The American Folklife Center, created in concert with the American Folklife Preservation Act of 1976, assumed responsibility for the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture and coordinated nationwide efforts to document American folk and regional traditions. Steeped in a philosophy of cultural pluralism and conservation, and committed to the public dissemination of folklore research, the American Folklife Center resembled in many ways the vision Seeger and Botkin had for the Library of Congress back in the New Deal and World War II years. By the late 1980s, over forty states had established folklife preservation and presentation programs through various arts, heritage, and educational agencies. These state and local programs, like their federal counterparts, championed diversity, democratic values, intercultural understanding, the dissemination of folklore research to broad public audiences, and the view that there need be no conflict between a public and a scholarly role for folklorists.¹¹⁶

It would be a mistake to assume that this last point has always been so self-evident, or to fail to acknowledge the number of folklorists and ethnomusicologists in academe who still do not take public folklore seriously, and the number of academic scholars who oppose, or are indifferent to, the idea that

scholars can be public intellectuals in the style of Ruth and Charles Seeger and B. A. Botkin. Despite their growth since the late 1960s, the ongoing viability of public folklore programs remains subject to the unpredictable currents of national politics and the economy. Indeed, with the present uncertainty surrounding the future of folklore departments in American universities, pessimists might be tempted to think that the study of folklore in the United States will remain forever in crisis. And this may make the Seegers' and Botkin's legacy all the more relevant. They were always open to, and seeking, new ways to achieve their cultural strategy. They were willing to work through universities, government agencies, private organizations, commercial publishers, and private recording companies. Achieving the goals of their cultural strategy, not the means that were employed, was what mattered. They were not hemmed in by public folklore agencies that divided approaches to folklore into humanities scholarship or programs in the arts, or by an academic world that often wants to place a folklorist in either an English or anthropology department or an ethnomusicologist in a music conservatory that will judge his or her work primarily by narrow disciplinary standards. They remind us that in times of crisis, battening down the hatches and providing credentials for individuals and numbers for agencies is not a creative response. Most important, they remind us to find ways to enjoy and participate in the folk arts as well as to study them, and to help ordinary Americans do the same. The Seeger/Botkin legacy, however, does not work on automatic pilot. To benefit from their work we need to revisit, study, and absorb it—and then to make new paths of our own.

Notes

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Abbreviations used in these references are as follows: BP = Benjamin A. Botkin Papers, University of Nebraska Archives, Lincoln, Nebraska; FWPNA = Federal Writers' Project files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

1. The term "cultural strategy" is used repeatedly in Botkin's and Seeger's official correspondence. See, for example, Charles Seeger to Walter Spivacke (Head of the Music Division, Library of Congress), April 4, 1940, Box 212, Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration Records Group 69, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Botkin also used the phrase in later writings, sometimes in connection with Charles Seeger's plans. See Benjamin Botkin, "Folklore and World Understanding," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 8 (1952): 157; Botkin, "Applied Folklore:

Creative Understanding through Folklore.” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 17 (1953): 205–6; and Botkin, “L. Zemplajonva on Folklore and Democracy,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 2 (1965): 226.

2. Benjamin Botkin, “WPA and Folklore Research: Bread and Song,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 3 (1939): 14.

3. For an overview of the development of a cosmopolitan liberal intelligentsia in the early twentieth century see David Hollinger, “Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Emergence of the American Liberal Intelligentsia,” *American Quarterly* 27 (1975): 133–51.

4. Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 40.

5. Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept’: The Sound Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924–1930,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44 (1991): 256.

6. *Ibid.*, 222–32. See also Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44–54.

7. Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept,’” 234.

8. *Ibid.*, 229.

9. Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1927] 1955). See Judith Tick’s discussion of Crawford Seeger’s interaction with Sandburg in “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept,’” 230 and *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 54–58.

10. Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept,’” 231.

11. *Ibid.*, 256.

12. Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 215.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 40.

15. *Ibid.*, 365; Charles Seeger, “Music and Class Structure in the United States,” *American Quarterly* 9 (1957): 287.

16. Richard Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience: The Musical Odyssey of Charles Seeger,” *Western Folklore* 38 (1979): 222–24.

17. *Ibid.*, 224.

18. For an account of Boas’s contributions to models of cultural pluralism and relativity see George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1968] 1981), 195–233.

19. Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 225.

20. *Ibid.*, 226.

21. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 198.

22. Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 226.

23. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 189.

24. For more discussion on the Seegers’ involvement with music and class struggle, see Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 188–97, 228–29; Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 227–31; and Charles Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands: The Composer’s Collective Years,” *Ethnomusicology* 24 (1980): 159–68.

25. Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 229.

26. For further commentary on Crawford Seeger’s songs “Sacco, Vanzetti” and “Chinaman, Laundryman,” see Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 189, 191–93, and Ellie Hisama’s chapter in this volume.

27. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 235–36.
28. *Ibid.*, 236. See also Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 229–30 and Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 166–67.
29. See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 228–29; Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 230–31; and Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 159–68.
30. See Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 231–40; Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 167–68; and Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger: A Life in American Music* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 140–41.
31. Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 167–68.
32. Charles Seeger as quoted in Janelle Warren-Findley, “Introduction to the Publication Charles Seeger and Margaret Valiant: Journal of A Field Representative,” *Ethnomusicology* 10 (1980): 180.
33. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 236–37.
34. Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger, and ‘The Music of American Folk Songs,’” in *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology*, ed. Bell Yung and Helen G. Rees (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 111.
35. Quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 241.
36. *Ibid.*, 242.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Jerrold Hirsch, “Folklore in the Making: B. A. Botkin,” *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1987): 17, and Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers’ Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 179–84.
39. Jerrold Hirsch, “My Harvard Accent and ‘Indifference’: Notes Toward the Biography of B. A. Botkin,” *Journal of American Folklore* 109 (1996): 308–9, and B. A. Botkin, “The Autobiography of a Boy” (manuscript in author’s possession, 1918).
40. Hirsch, “Folklore in the Making,” 9; Hirsch, “My Harvard Accent and ‘Indifference,’” 312–14; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Verso: London, 1996), xv.
41. Hirsch, “Folklore in the Making,” 9–10.
42. B. A. Botkin, “Folk-Say and Space: Their Genesis and Exodus,” *Southwest Review* 20 (1935): 323–24.
43. For an extended examination of Botkin and modernist literature see Jerrold Hirsch, “T. S. Eliot, B. A. Botkin and the Politics of Cultural Representation: Folklore Modernity, and Pluralism,” in *Race and the Modern Artist*, ed. Heather Hathaway et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16–41.
44. Botkin, “Folk-Say and Space,” 323–34.
45. B. A. Botkin, reviews of *Poems* by T. S. Eliot, *Daily Oklahoman*, March 6, 1927.
46. Botkin’s 1937 dissertation was later published as *The American Play Party Song* (New York: Frederick Younger, 1963).
47. Francis Gummere, *Old English Ballads* (Boston: Ginn, 1897), 52.
48. MacEdward Leach succinctly states the positions of the vast majority of early ballad scholars who either supported individual authorship or the view that ballads were produced by homogeneous and classless societies. They agreed that the conditions under which the ballad had been created were set in the distant past and irretrievable. See Leach, “Ballad” in *Funk and Wagnall’s Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, ed. Maria Leach (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1948), 110–11.
49. “The Play-Party in Oklahoma” in *Foller de Drinkin’ Gou’d: Publications of the Texas Folklore Society*, no. 7, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Austin: Texas Folklore Society, 1929), 12.

50. B. A. Botkin, “Introduction” in *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1930), 16.
51. B. A. Botkin, “The Folkness of the Folk,” *English Journal* 26 (1937): 466.
52. B. A. Botkin, “The Folk and the Individual: Their Creative Reciprocity,” *English Journal* 27 (1938): 126.
53. *Ibid.*, 128–29.
54. *Ibid.*, 135.
55. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, May 29, 1938, BP.
56. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, June 3, 1938, BP.
57. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, August 4, 1938, BP.
58. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, August 6, 1938, BP.
59. Botkin, “WPA and Folklore Research”; B. A. Botkin, “Folklore as a Neglected Source of Social History,” in *The Cultural Approach to History*, ed. Caroline F. Ware (New York: Columbia University, 1940), 308–15; Charles Seeger, “Folk Music as a Source of Social History” in *The Cultural Approach to History*, ed. Caroline F. Ware (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940): 316–23.
60. Draft: Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore, Folkmusic and Folk Art, Federal Project Number One, Works Progress Administration, November 23, 1938, box 195, FWPNA; Minutes: First Meeting Joint Committee on Folk Arts, W.P.A., October 4, 1938, box 195, FWPNA.
61. *Ibid.*
62. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, January 2, 1939, BP.
63. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 62, 81–85.
64. Hirsch, *Portrait of America*, 211–16.
65. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, December 16, 1939, BP.
66. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 240, 250.
67. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, December 12, 1939, BP.
68. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 347.
69. B. A. Botkin to Harry and Rhoda Botkin, November 14, 1941, BP.
70. B. A. Botkin to Harry and Rhoda Botkin, October 27, 1942, BP.
71. Botkin, “WPA and Folklore Research,” 6–14.
72. *Ibid.*, 10, 14.
73. B. A. Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945).
74. Botkin, “Folklore as a Neglected Source of Social History,” 308–15; B. A. Botkin, “American Songs for American Children, M. E. N. C. Committee on Folk Music of the United States,” *Music Educators Journal* 30 (1944): 24–25.
75. See, for example, Botkin’s 1942 conference remarks, which were later published in “Publication on Conference on the Character and State of Studies in Folklore,” *Journal of American Folklore* 69 (1946): 520–22.
76. B. A. Botkin, “The People’s Music, U.S.A.,” *American Music Lover* 10 (November 1943): 67–68.
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78. Botkin, “Publication on Conference,” 520–21.
79. B. A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, February 21, 1951, BP.
80. *A Treasury of Western Folklore*, ed. B. A. Botkin (New York: Crown Books, 1951), xxvi.
81. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 282, 283.

82. *Ibid.*, 283–87.
83. Botkin, “American Songs for American Children,” 24.
84. Harold Spivacke, “Archive of American Folk Song,” *Music Educators Journal* (September–October 1942): 30, 31.
85. Charles Seeger, “American Music for American Children,” *Music Educators Journal* 31 (1942): 41–44.
86. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 284.
87. Botkin, “American Songs for American Children,” 24.
88. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children* (New York: Doubleday, 1948).
89. Botkin, *Treasury of American Folklore*, xxi.
90. *Ibid.*, 818.
91. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 25–48.
92. Botkin, *Treasury of American Folklore*, xxvi.
93. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 21–24.
94. Botkin, *Treasury of American Folklore*, xxi, 819.
95. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 27–28.
96. Botkin, *Treasury of American Folklore*, 819.
97. Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 21.
98. *Ibid.*, 16.
99. *Ibid.*, 29.
100. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 11.
101. W. Edison Richmond, “Review of *Animal Songs for Children* by Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *Hoosier Folklore* 9 (December 1950): 126–27.
102. B. A. Botkin, “Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 10 (1953): 73–74.
103. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), 11; Botkin, “WPA and Folklore Research,” 11.
104. As quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 312.
105. A leading academic folklorist of the 1950s and 1960s, Richard Dorson attacked Botkin’s treasuries as “fakelore,” and cast utilization and applied folklore as enemies of his goal of establishing the legitimacy of folklore studies as a doctoral-granting department within the university. See Richard Dorson, “Folklore and Fake-Lore,” *American Mercury* 70 (1950): 335–43.
106. Jerrold Hirsch, “‘A Yorker by Preference, A Folklorist by Persuasion’: B. A. Botkin Public (Folklore) Intellectual,” *New York Folklore* 21 (1995): 75–102.
107. Charles Seeger, “The Folkness of the Non-Folk vs. the Non-Folkness of the Folk,” in *Folklore and Society: Essays in Honor of Benjamin Botkin*, ed. Bruce Jackson (Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1966), xx–v.
108. Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 278.
109. See the chapters in this volume by Ray Allen and Lydia Hamessley.
110. See the chapter in this volume by Roberta Lamb.
111. Botkin, “Applied Folklore,” 204.
112. *Ibid.*, 196.
113. Botkin, “Proposal for an Applied Folklore Center,” 153.
114. *Ibid.*, 153, 154.
115. See the chapter in this volume by Bess Lomax Hawes.

116. The scope of government-sponsored public folklore activity during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s is considered in *The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists and the Public Sector*, ed. Burt Feintuch (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), and *Public Folklore*, ed. Robert Baron and Nicholas Spitzer (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

Chapter Eleven

Performing Dio's Legacy

Mike Seeger and the Urban Folk Music Revival

Ray Allen

On November 18, 1953, the day Ruth Crawford Seeger succumbed to cancer, her two oldest children sang at a Washington book fair to promote their mother's newly published volume, *American Folk Songs for Christmas*. Twenty-year old Mike and eighteen-year old Peggy strummed guitars, picked banjos, and caroled songs of rejoicing shepherds and crooning angel bands only hours before their mother was spirited away.¹ The *Washington Post*, in an announcement of the upcoming book fair, reported that Mike felt a "special thrill" to be performing songs from his mother's new book.² Dio (Mike's childhood name for his mother) would undoubtedly have felt quite a thrill herself had she been well enough to realize that her children were now playing the very folk songs that had fascinated her for nearly two decades.

In her final years, Dio had good reason to suspect that her oldest daughter, Peggy, might pursue a career as a serious musician. She was a quick learner at the piano, a strong singer, and had just entered Radcliffe College where she hoped to make music part of her studies. But Mike was another story. Although he demonstrated a keen interest in the southern folk music that permeated the Seeger household and had a good ear for singing, he refused piano lessons and quit classical guitar instruction when his teacher reprimanded him for taking liberties with the written notation. Worse yet, he had dropped out of George Washington University in 1952 and was living at home, teaching himself to play the five-string banjo and frequenting local square dances—hardly the career path she and Charles, themselves the products of rigorous conservatory and academic training, had planned for their oldest child and only son. But neither she nor Charles could have imagined on that dismal fall day in 1953 that within a decade Mike would

be recognized as one of the central figures in the urban folk music revival that would soon sweep the country.

Mike Seeger's remarkable career embodies many of the fascinating paradoxes associated with the revival of folk music in twentieth-century urban America. Born and bred in the city and suburbs, he embraced the songs and dance music of a southern mountain culture with which he had little direct contact. The son of an erudite musicologist and esteemed avant-garde composer, he rejected the academy and formal musical training, choosing to collect and play, rather than notate and analyze, American folk music. An outspoken critic of commercialized media music, he has cultivated a repertoire based heavily on the commercial hillbilly recordings of the 1920s and 1930s, has recorded and produced more than three dozen LPs and CDs of traditional music, and has been nominated for six Grammy awards. A romantic figure nostalgically devoted to old folks and old-time music, Mike has always been intrigued by the evolution of new folk music styles.

These cultural contradictions are further complicated by the fact that Mike Seeger is no ordinary urban banjo picker. He and his sisters Peggy, Penny, and Barbara were quite possibly the only children in America who were literally reared on folk music field recordings during the 1930s and early 1940s, and who gathered together regularly with family and friends to sing traditional American folk songs from books that their parents had helped compile. From this unique family environment, Mike emerged as a premier collector, promoter, and performer of American folk music and a pioneer in the revival of southern old-time music. Over the past forty years he has managed to support himself playing folk music, an admirable accomplishment considering he never wrote or recorded a hit song.

Mike's passion for southern mountain music was unquestionably sparked by his childhood immersion in Dio and Charles's folk song projects. His work as an adult to collect, perform, and disseminate folk music was a natural extension of his parent's ideas about what constituted authentic traditional music and how that music might be shared with wider audiences. But Mike would not choose Dio's road as composer and compiler of folk song collections, or Charles's path as a musicologist and government folk culture advocate. Rather, as this biographical chapter explores, he made a radical break from his parents' world of printed notation and academic high-mindedness in order to forge his own vision of folk music and its place in the modern world.

The Early Years in Washington

Born in New York City in 1933, Mike moved with his family to Washington, D.C. in 1935 when Charles took a job with the Resettlement Administration.

The Seeger home in Silver Spring, Maryland, where the family moved in 1938, was, by all accounts, overflowing with music.³ Mike recollects Dio and Charles refused to allow a radio in the house because they believed “you should make your own music.”⁴ Dio and Charles “played ‘Get Along Home Cindy’ on the piano to get us to go to bed at night. They played European piano music and southern folk songs for us as we danced a circle around the couch and family desk in the middle of our huge living room. Singing was always around the house, and by the time I was five or so I knew all the words to ‘Barbara Allen.’”⁵

Learning ballads was apparently great fun for five-year old Mike, but when Dio attempted to sit him down at the piano, he rebelled: “I couldn’t stand the idea of practicing and wouldn’t do it. Perhaps I was already absorbing my parents’ new devotion to traditional music and the informal ways one can pick it up.”⁶ Indeed Mike did begin to “pick up” a deeper appreciation for folk music when he discovered the unusual sound recordings that his parents were beginning to collect:

When I was around seven, I was given the great honor of being allowed to use the variable-speed record player that my mother used for folk song transcription. . . . I couldn’t use it on her desk, so I sat on the floor with it. I sharpened the cactus needle we used to play the 200 or so aluminum field recordings that made up the largest part of our family record collection and listened to Jimmie Strothers, Leadbelly, and The Ward Family of Galax, Virginia. I also listened to our very few commercial recordings, which included Dock Bogg’s “Pretty Polly,” Gid Tanner’s “Fiddler’s Convention in Georgia” (I almost wore it out), and artists such as Sonny Boy Williamson, Fats Waller, Norman Phelps and the Virginia Rounders, Billie Holiday (“Strange Fruit”), Meade Lux Lewis, Sidney Bechet, Josh White, and Winifred Christie playing Bach’s *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*.⁷

By the time the Seeger family moved to Kirke Street in Chevy Chase, Maryland, in 1944, eleven-year-old Mike was steeped in a variety of musical traditions, ranging from Dio’s classical European piano repertoire to the jazz and folk music he listened to on disk. Although Mike continued to resist formal music instruction, he had assimilated a number of crucial lessons that would shape his attitudes toward music for the rest of his life. Through family singing sessions and listening to recordings, he became familiar with a wide range of southern folk music, from ballads and blues to spirituals and dance music. He would return to these songs often throughout his career as a soloist, with Peggy and his other siblings, and with his folk trio, the New Lost City Ramblers. Moreover, the field recordings and early hillbilly disks exposed him to a variety of southern regional folk music styles that had not been rearranged and tidied up for distribution to urban audiences. As he “wore out” Gid Tanner’s fiddle records and field tapes made by his father and the Lomaxes, he absorbed the subtle

nuances of vocal inflections, melodic variations, and rhythmic irregularities that characterized much southern mountain folk music.⁸ In the broader social realm, the family singing sessions demonstrated that folk songs were not merely words and notes on paper, but rather living expressions that could be performed and reinterpreted by urban folks who had little or no direct contact with rural southern culture. For Mike and his sisters, singing a ballad or dancing around the couch to a fiddle tune seemed as natural as hearing a church choir or attending a recital. Finally, and perhaps most important, he began to embrace Dio and Charles's belief that American folk music was aesthetically and culturally as valuable as Western art music, and that efforts must be taken to ensure that this music did not disappear as the result of the homogenizing effects of an ever-expanding commercial media that was coming to dominate postwar American life.

Into the Field: Collecting Folk Music

The Korean War was in full swing in the spring of 1951 when Mike graduated from the Woodstock Country School in Vermont and prepared to enter the University of Maryland. But as the fall term was about to begin, he was shocked to learn of the university's ROTC requirement. Perhaps having inherited Charles's pacifist sentiments, Mike refused to enroll, and a week later was admitted to George Washington University (GWU), a school with no military obligation. Meanwhile, at Dio's urging, he began taking guitar lessons. His first instructor, Charlie Byrd, taught him rudimentary chords and allowed him a great deal of freedom to interpret individual pieces. But a second teacher, Sophocles Pappas, insisted he adhere to strict classical technique and written notation. When he suggested a bland arrangement of "I Gave My Love a Cherry" on a nylon string banjo, Mike terminated what would be his last formal music instruction.⁹

Mike showed little interest in academic studies, and to his parent's dismay dropped out of GWU in early 1952. What followed was a pivotal time in Mike's life when, in the midst of applying for conscientious-objector status and the onset of his mother's cancer, his interests in traditional music resurfaced. He began to teach himself the banjo, and eventually record the music he had grown up listening to.

My mother was very upset that I didn't go to college, but what I was doing in a way was going to my own version of college. I was going around to square dances, hanging out with these musicians, trying to learn the banjo, and listening to these old-time music tapes, just educating myself about traditional music. It was an intense learning time for me. . . . I just started playing a lot of music, with local square dance bands like the one Ralph Case led at weekly dances in downtown D.C. I'd just hang out in the back of the

band, playing banjo, trying to learn the Scruggs style a bit. And during that time I started hanging out with people who collected old records, like Dick Spottswood. I began meeting traditional musicians and recorded a few of them with the family tape recorder.¹⁰

The family tape recorder appeared sometime in 1952 when Charles brought home a reel-to-reel machine from his office. Mike was taught to operate the recorder and soon began hauling it to music sessions. Around Thanksgiving of that year Mike made his first recording that would eventually be issued on a commercial disk. Peggy had discovered that the family's African American domestic worker, North Carolina-born Elizabeth Cotten, was a superb guitar player. Taken by her lilting picking style and broad repertoire of blues, ragtime, and church songs, Mike turned on the machine, and with a hand-held microphone recorded fifteen pieces. His career as a collector of traditional music had begun.¹¹

In the aftermath of Dio's death, Mike moved to Pikesville, Maryland where in 1954 he began his conscientious-objector alternative service in the Mount Wilson State Hospital. There he came in contact with a number of Appalachian migrant musicians, including Hazel Dickens and her family of old-time and bluegrass players. Soon he, Hazel, and other friends were making weekly Sunday afternoon pilgrimages to two country music parks, the New River Ranch in Rising Sun, Maryland, and Sunset Park outside of Oxford, Pennsylvania, that featured bluegrass and honky-tonk performers. Now equipped with his own tape recorder—a forty-pound portable Magnecord model he bought in 1955 with his first royalty check from sales of his mother's songbooks—Mike set up and recorded influential bluegrass and country musicians including Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, the Osborne Brothers, Flatt and Scruggs, Roy Acuff, the McGee Brothers, the Louvin Brothers, and Grandpa Jones. At that time Mike had no plans to use the material for commercial recordings or radio broadcast; he simply wanted to document the best practitioners of what he viewed as a new style of traditional music:

My attitude at the time was that this [bluegrass] was an emerging country music, that was based on the music that I was reared with, those older styles. And, it had as much validity as those other musics did, for that reason. And that was basically the reason why I did it. And shortly after that I realized that they were playing it different each time, in those days, which they don't anymore. They were always creating, especially Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs.¹²

Mike's growing interest in and expertise with the five-string banjo did not go unnoticed by his half-brother Pete, whose success with the popular folk ensemble the Weavers had made him a leading figure in the burgeoning folk music revival. In 1956 Pete urged Moe Asch, owner of Folkways Records

and producer of many of Pete's early albums, to contact Mike about recording an album of traditional three-finger banjo styles. The idea, Mike later reflected, was to document the evolution of the Earl Scruggs rolling, arpeggiated three-finger style—the hallmark of the new bluegrass sound—and to include a broad selection of players he had influenced, including Mike himself.¹³ Accepting Asch's invitation and a \$100 production fee, Mike traveled to South Carolina to find Snuffy Jenkins, one of the earliest banjo pickers to record and broadcast the emerging three-finger style that Earl Scruggs would later popularize. After approximately a week of recording in the South, Mike returned to the Baltimore-Washington area to document several of the local banjo players he had been playing with. The album, released by Folkways in early 1957 under the title *American Banjo: Tunes and Songs in Scruggs Style*, included ten pieces by Jenkins as well as performances by J. C. Sutphin (a southwestern Virginia native), Junie Scruggs (Earl's older brother and a North Carolina native), and twelve other players including Mike. The *American Banjo* LP was quite a success by Folkways standards. Writing for *Bluegrass Unlimited* in 1985, Dick Spottswood called the record "a landmark LP . . . one of the first 33 1/3 discs devoted to bluegrass," and noted that Folkways's distribution to city specialty shops made it "a significant influence in spreading the bluegrass sound to an emerging generation of young city pickers."¹⁴ The companion booklet, clearly aimed at urban consumers, included an informative introductory essay on the three-finger banjo style by Ralph Rinzler and detailed notes on the artists and tunes by Mike.

Encouraged by the success of the *American Banjo* LP, Mike stepped up his recording and production activities. In late 1956 and early 1957 he began a series of recording sessions in Elizabeth Cotten's home in Washington, D.C. The result was *Negro Folk Songs and Tunes*, a collection of Cotten's guitar instrumentals and songs issued by Folkways in 1958.¹⁵ Over the next decade Mike would return to the South to record dozens of prominent traditional folk artists for Folkways, ranging from autoharp virtuoso Kilby Snow and coal miner/banjo picker Dock Boggs to Grand Ole Opry stars the McGee Brothers and Arthur Smith and bluegrass legends the Country Gentlemen.¹⁶ By the early 1970s he was even recording younger musicians, who, like himself, were reared outside of the rural South but were playing old-time mountain music for urban audiences.¹⁷

In spite of his success as a folk music collector and record producer, Mike saw no professional future for himself as a folklorist. He had witnessed firsthand the frustrations his father, Ben Botkin, and Alan Lomax had experienced trying to establish government-based folklore programs, and by the late 1950s funds for folk music research were scarce and jobs nearly nonexistent. Given his own lack of formal education and reserved personality, following Charles's path as an academic or government cultural specialist

was out of the question. But Mike's rapidly developing skills on the fiddle, banjo, guitar, and autoharp would open up another career path, one that his stepbrother Pete had been pursuing for a number of years.

Onto the Stage: Performing and Presenting the Folk

In June 1958 Mike learned that two New York acquaintances would be playing on a Washington FM radio folk music show. He called the show's host, John Dildine, and asked if he could join the program with John Cohen, a folksinger, photographer, and recent Yale graduate whom Mike had met at Pete's home in Beacon, New York, and Tom Paley, a guitar/banjo virtuoso and Yale mathematics instructor with whom Mike had played at a Maryland music party. Sharing an intense passion for traditional hillbilly music, the three immediately connected.¹⁸ Following the successful radio broadcast, Cohen was able to convince Izzy Young, a Greenwich Village-based folk music promoter, to set up an engagement for the group in New York City. Since the arrival of Lead Belly, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Woody Guthrie, the proliferation of the left-leaning People's Song movement, and the success of Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers in the 1940s, New York had been a hotbed of folk music activity. By the 1950s the movement was losing its political edge, as the Weavers, Burl Ives, and Josh White popularized more mainstream arrangements of folk material, foreshadowing commercial trends that would sweep the country in the wake of the release of the Kingston Trio's 1958 hit "Tom Dooley."¹⁹

The Seeger/Cohen/Paley trio presented yet another nascent branch of the revival—city folks attempting to recreate, with a high degree of accuracy, the sounds of southern Appalachian folk singing and dance music. The trio's September 1958 debut sold out Carnegie Recital Hall, and the next day they recorded their first album for Moe Asch, who had already issued three of Mike's field recordings and a record of Mike and his sisters on his Folkways label.²⁰ After some discussion, the trio agreed to call themselves the New Lost City Ramblers, a name that Philip Gura claims reflected "an amalgam of a favorite tune, J. E. Mainer's 'New Lost Train Blues,' a favorite group, Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers; and a reference to the urban setting in which they [Seeger, Cohen, and Paley] played 'old-timey' music."²¹

Following an enthusiastic reception at the first Newport Folk Festival in the summer of 1959, the New Lost City Ramblers took their old-time music on tour. In the notes to their first LP, *The New Lost City Ramblers* (1958), Mike explained that the group's repertoire was drawn from recordings by "commercial companies and the Library of Congress in the southeastern mountains between 1925 and 1935," a time of "great experimentation,

when country people were learning new instrumental and vocal techniques, affected sometimes by urban or Negro music."²² The material on their early recordings comes almost exclusively from white mountain singers and instrumental groups, ranging from hillbilly luminaries like Uncle Dave Macon, Charlie Poole and his North Carolina Ramblers, Gid Tanner and his Skillet Lickers, the Carter family, and Fiddlin' John Carson, to local players like the Rich Family of Arthurdale, West Virginia, and Mr. and Mrs. Foy Grant of Austin, Texas, who made Library of Congress recordings in the 1930s for Charles Seeger and Alan Lomax, respectively. In an effort to educate their urban listeners about southern old-time music, the Ramblers' albums always included extensive liner notes on the songs and their sources as well as full transcriptions of the lyrics and occasional commentary on instrumentation.

The Ramblers built their sound around the classic hillbilly ensemble of fiddle, banjo, and guitar that had become popular in the upland South by the early twentieth century. Playing instrumental pieces in a pre-bluegrass style, they rarely took flashy breaks or improvised solos, but rather played in a polyphonic mix with the fiddle carrying the main, ornamented melodic line, the banjo picking or strumming a simplified version of the melody, and the guitar adding chords and an occasional counterpoint bass line. The fiddle is bowed using short, slightly syncopated strokes to produce a shuffling or rocking pulse that propels the music forward; notes are often slurred together and double-stops (use of an open drone string) are common. The banjo is picked using two or three fingers to create a bouncy arpeggiated effect, or brushed with the back of the fingernails in a rhythmic style known as frailing or clawhammer. In either case the unfretted fifth banjo string provides a constant drone. Guitar chordal accompaniments for the most traditional material are structured around simple major I, IV, and V combinations, with occasional use of flatted-seventh and minor harmonies. A smaller number of more modern pieces influenced by ragtime and popular song incorporate major II and VI chords into their tonic/subdominant/dominant progressions.²³ John Cohen and Tom Paley switched back and forth between guitar and banjo, with Tom occasionally doubling on the Hawaiian slide guitar. Mike did the fiddling and enriched the instrumental mix with the addition of autoharp, mandolin, and harmonica. All three members sang, rotating the lead vocal, and often harmonizing in two or three parts organized around the notes of the major triad. Their spare, vibratoless, slightly nasal vocal style was suggestive of singing commonly heard on field recordings of southern white mountain singers and early hillbilly bands.²⁴

On their early recordings the Ramblers consciously sought to showcase a variety of traditional southern folk genres and instrumental combinations. The group's first Folkways album, *The New Lost City Ramblers*, opens with a

rollicking breakdown, "Forked Deer," featuring the aforementioned fiddle/banjo/guitar configuration. The popular hillbilly song "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down" follows with John singing the lead vocal and Tom providing a tenor harmony on the chorus; the lilting guitar, banjo, and fiddle accompaniment closely follows the original 1925 recording by Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers. Next comes a tragic love song, "I Truly Understand You Love Another Man," sung by Tom accompanying himself on frailing banjo and featuring a mournful three-part vocal chorus. The recording continues with "The Dallas Rag," a bouncy ragtime instrumental with Mike and Tom trading the melody on mandolin and banjo, respectively, followed by "Tom Cat Blues." The latter is described in the liner notes as a "white folk blues," and features Tom on vocal and slide guitar accompanied by John on second guitar. "Railroading and Gambling," an adaptation of an Uncle Dave Macon banjo stomp, is sung by John, accompanying himself on frailing banjo. The fiddle/banjo/guitar ensemble returns for "Colored Aristocracy," a ragtime-tinged fiddle tune based on a 1936 field recording by Charles. Next is a lamenting ballad, "Sailor on the Deep Blue Sea," sung in two-part harmony by Mike and John and accompanied by autoharp and banjo. The remainder of the recording presents an array of ballads, breakdowns, blues, and gospel numbers, including Mike's unusual arrangement of the ballad "Roving Gambler" with banjo and harmonica accompaniment, John and Tom's double guitar rendition of "Brown's Ferry Blues," and the entire group singing the gospel song "Crossed Old Jordan's Stream" to mandolin and slide guitar accompaniment.

The group's unpretentious style, described in 1961 by *New York Times* critic Robert Shelton as "archaic" and possessing a "rough-hewn quality," presented a sharp contrast to the affected mannerisms and flashy arrangements that characterized much urban folk music of the early revival.²⁵ Mike and the Ramblers not only recognized but sought to highlight those differences by engaging in an exercise in self-authentication, aligning themselves with an idealized folk culture that stood in opposition to what they saw as the pretentious elitism and destructive commercialism of the music industry. In the liner notes to the Rambler's first album, John Cohen criticized the "intrusion of Art (Capital A)" by city singers to "make the music more palatable," and Tom Paley, noted "we avoid the most commercial aspects and try to stay fairly close to genuine 'folk' material."²⁶ In the introductory notes to the Ramblers' fourth LP, Mike drew sharp distinctions between urban folk groups like the Ramblers who paid close attention to folk style, and "art" folksingers like Richard Dyer-Bennett and "popularizers" like the Kingston Trio and Burl Ives who gleaned words and tunes from written collections and took little heed of the subtleties of performance style. He encouraged fellow urban singers not to dress up folk songs with artsy or popular mannerisms, but rather to use "vocal styles and accompaniments

from those already existing in authentic folk music.”²⁷ In their self-conscious embrace of what they perceived to be genuine rural folk styles, Mike and the Ramblers attempted to position themselves as champions of authentic folk music who provided an alternative to the commercially oriented folk music that had come to dominate the urban scene by the late 1950s.

Mike gave credit to his father, Charles, along with folklorists Alan Lomax and D. K. Wilgus, for underscoring the importance of authentic folk style, and for recognizing that urban audiences would respond positively to homespun, unadorned folk performance.²⁸ It is probably not coincidental that the Ramblers appeared on the scene at a critical time when folk music specialists like Lomax and Charles—who for two decades had been experimenting with technology that allowed them to record the totality of aural performance—were reconsidering the question of what constituted authentic folk music.²⁹ In the late 1950s Lomax and Charles both published influential articles that urged folk music scholars to extend their analysis beyond the melodies and lyrics that appeared in written folk song collections to include singing and instrumental performance styles captured on tape—that is, to consider more seriously the performance of textural elements such as vocal timbre, subtle melodic ornamentations and pitch variations, irregular rhythmic and metrical patterns, the organization of vocal parts, instrumental accompaniments, and so forth.³⁰ In a 1959 piece written for the popular folk music magazine *Sing Out!*, Lomax challenged urban folk music enthusiasts to master “folk singing style” in order to successfully “interpret for his city audience, the lives and feelings of the past or of a far off society—to link them emotionally.”³¹ By moving the criteria for folk authenticity away from printed lyrics and tune notations toward elements of aural style that could be captured and replicated on recordings, Lomax and Charles provided both a rationale and encouragement for urban musicians like the Ramblers to attempt to recreate regional folk styles.

Just how successful the Ramblers were in conveying the sounds of what Mike referred to as “authentic folk music” was a matter of debate. Writing in 1966, folklorist Ellen Stekert somewhat dismissively labeled folk groups like the New Lost City Ramblers as “imitators.” While admitting that imitators sought to genuinely absorb the style and mannerisms of those musicians they emulated, she found it “incongruous” that city and suburban singers like the Ramblers should even attempt to sing in traditional mountain style.³² Reflecting twenty-five years later on her piece, Stekert expressed regret at her use of the “unconsciously disparaging” term “imitator,” but admitted that at the time (1966) she still had trouble “see[ing] beyond imitation to the potentials for creativity in their approach.”³³ Country music historian Bill Malone noted that the Ramblers had “achieve[d] something no

other urban folk performers have ever attained or tried before; they have come amazingly close to recreating the styles of a culture completely different than their own. Their instrumentation sounds almost like a carbon copy of the early string band styles.” But Malone’s assessment of the group’s singing was more guarded: “Their vocal styles, also intended to be as accurate as possible, do not fare as well; in many cases, the New Lost City Ramblers give the impression of trying to sound country.”³⁴ Such criticisms by Stekert and Malone demonstrate the dilemma Mike and the Ramblers faced: they sought to stay true to regional folk styles in order to avoid the pitfalls of commercial dilution or artsy affectation, but in doing so ran the risk of being dismissed as sterile imitators or quaint antiquarians by urban audiences who were steeped in a modernist sensibility that favored creative innovation.

Pulled between the forces of tradition and innovation, and facing charges regarding their ability to recreate and their motivations to preserve traditional styles, the Ramblers struggled to defend their position. John Cohen readily admitted that “the constant desire to preserve style” was central to the Ramblers’ mission, and that “song and style cannot be divorced—if the aim is to present rather than interpret.”³⁵ Yet he objected to charges that groups like the Ramblers were merely imitators with a reactionary desire to preserve the past, arguing that they were simply following in the path of country musicians they admired like Charlie Poole, Earl Scruggs, and Bill Monroe, whom he described as “artistically progressive innovators” in their day. Such artists, Cohen claimed, saw their music as a living, evolving entity, rather than as the “dying folk music” that academics said was “finished and belonged only to history.”³⁶ Mike further explained: “In learning our music, we choose material from musicians that appeal to us and mix our esthetic with theirs. We may copy closely or rearrange completely, but in nearly all cases, the outcome differs from the original.” He concluded: “It is important today that we preserve and create among the old forms and make room for the best of the evolving forms.”³⁷

Several early critics agreed with Mike and John’s assessment of the group’s attempt to combine tradition and innovation. Writing for the *Reporter* in 1962, Nat Hentoff noted that groups like the Ramblers were adept at balancing their “respect and affection for tradition” with an ability to “express their own particular skills and interests. They begin to realize that they can legitimately bring their own backgrounds and personalities to various styles of folk music and get as much satisfaction from music making—in their city way—as the ‘ethnic’ folk singers have done.”³⁸ Peter Welding was more explicit when he declared in *Sing Out!*: “What they [the New Lost City Ramblers] offer are not mere slavish imitations of what they’ve heard on old 78s, for this would inevitably lead them up a blind alley. No, they have succeeded—by dint of thoroughly steeping themselves

in the music of the period—in capturing the spirit of old-timey music, not its letter.”³⁹

Hentoff, Welding, and the Ramblers advanced an intriguing thesis—through intensive study of authentic traditional styles via old recordings, urban musicians could capture the feeling of southern folk music while adding their own stamp on the final product. The group’s early recordings do reveal examples of instrumental arrangements that sound almost indistinguishable from the original sources, such as their banjo/fiddle/guitar accompaniments for Charlie Poole songs. But in most instances the instrumentation was changed, at times substantially, from the original. Working as a trio the Ramblers could not recreate the exact sound of four- and five-piece fiddle bands, and substituting a mandolin or autoharp for a banjo or guitar was common practice. Chords were sometimes added or deleted and tempos changed. Variations in vocal styles were obvious—the Ramblers never did sound like Uncle Dave Macon, Charlie Poole, or Riley Puckett, and certainly they could not recreate the female vocals of groups like the Carter Family. The early recordings confirm that Malone was correct in asserting that when the Ramblers tried too hard to recreate distinctive southern vocal styles they did sound somewhat affected. But more often than not the group succeeded in forging a unique sound that combined their deep reverence and understanding of regional styles with their superb skills at selecting and arranging material in creative ways that would please their sophisticated urban audiences.

In addition to their recording and touring activities, the Ramblers became active promoters of southern folk musicians whom they occasionally brought north to perform at urban folk festivals, colleges, and coffee houses. Mike’s first experience with presenting a traditional performer to a college audience came in 1960 when he booked Elizabeth Cotten and himself for a joint concert at Swarthmore College.⁴⁰ Cotten was well received, and in December of that year performed in New York City with the Ramblers in a concert that helped launch the New York Friends of Old Time Music (FOTM).⁴¹ Led by John Cohen and Ralph Rinzler, the FOTM was a loose-knit organization that produced more than a dozen concerts between 1961 and 1965, featuring southern hillbilly and blues artists. Mike, along with Cohen, Rinzler, and Alan Lomax, served as an informal presenter for the events, introducing the artists and advising them on appropriate repertoire selection.⁴² Following a successful tour of Midwest colleges in the spring of 1960, the Ramblers worked with promoter Mike Fleischer who organized the first University of Chicago Folk Festival, which took place in February 1961. To assure that the program would include southern traditional artists as well as city folksingers, the Ramblers invited Cotten, Kentucky banjoist/singer Roscoe Holcomb, and the Virginia bluegrass ensemble the Stanley Brothers to perform at the festival.⁴³ Folksinger and writer Sandy Paton, a participant in the event, recalled:

The audience was alternately enchanted and electrified by each of these great artists. The producers of the festival must have known moments of trepidation prior to the first program, for people who were active in the field had long assumed that, in order to get urban audiences to listen to folk music, one had to “interpret” them—that is to say, translate them into a more familiar vocal style, namely that of “art” or “pop” music. That first evening in Chicago proved, without a doubt, that this was no longer true, if, indeed, it had ever been true at all. Urban audiences not only could but most certainly *would* appreciate the opportunity to hear genuine folk artists in live performances.⁴⁴

Mike arranged for traditional Texas fiddler Eck Robertson, whose classic 1922 recording of “Sallie Gooden” is one of the first instrumental breakdowns released on commercial disc, to perform at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. As a member of the festival’s board of directors between 1963 and 1967, Mike encouraged field research to locate living traditional artists and worked with Rinzler to bring Robertson, Holcomb, Maybelle Carter, Dock Boggs, Cousin Emmy, and Arthur Smith and the McGee Brothers to Newport.⁴⁵ Mike and the Ramblers continued to serve as part-time promoters throughout the 1960s and 1970s by arranging national and European tours for traditional southern artists.

In festival concert and workshop settings, members of the Ramblers would often appear on stage with the musicians they promoted to provide background information on individual artists and their music, to help with repertoire selection, and to serve as musical accompanists.⁴⁶ In this capacity the Ramblers played the role of cultural mediators who helped connect traditional rural performers with cosmopolitan urban audiences eager to experience “genuine” folk music. On stage the Rambler’s educational and ideological goals intertwined as they sought to foster understanding and appreciation for the regional folk performers they presented while advocating for the conservation of endangered regional styles that they believed stood as alternatives to homogenized mass culture. The efforts by the Ramblers and Rinzler to locate, stage, and interpret traditional folk musicians at the Newport and Chicago Folk Festivals and at the New York City FOTM concerts provided early models for recontextualizing informal folk performance in formal stage settings—models that would be further developed by Rinzler and other professional folklorists working in government-sponsored cultural events such as the annual Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife and National Folk Festival.⁴⁷

Reflecting on his years with the Ramblers, Mike Seeger mused that the group’s “crusade” for old-time music was basically a two-pronged mission: “to get city people to listen to and appreciate the old music and the old recordings and to encourage them to actually play the music themselves.”⁴⁸ Most early critics such as Welding, Shelton, and Hentoff seemed to agree, with Welding pronouncing in *Sing Out*: “As the foremost proponents of (southern) hill country music, the New Lost City Ramblers have single-handedly

sparked a great revival of interest—primarily among college students, who represent the principal market for their recording—in this rollicking native music form.⁴⁹ But perhaps more important are the comments of historians and folklorists who wrote from a broader time perspective. The fact that Bill Malone, a champion of southern working-class music and culture, would pay homage to a trio of northern citibillies in his seminal history *Country Music USA* is not insignificant.⁵⁰ Writing a decade later for the *Journal of American Folklore*, ethnomusicologist David Evans observed the emergence of a “new wave of revivalism spurred on by performers like the New Lost City Ramblers, who strove for authenticity in re-creating folk music styles.” The Ramblers and their followers were responsible, according to Evans, for helping to usher in a new stage of the urban folk revival which was “characterized by an increasing competence and authenticity in the re-creation of folk style and a strong tendency toward conscious specialization and regionalism or ethnicity.”⁵¹ Cultural studies historian Robert Cantwell described the Ramblers as the band that “pioneered the revival of old-time string-band music and continued its dissemination for nearly twenty years without a rival.”⁵²

Surveying four decades of accomplishments, Philip Gura observed that the Ramblers not only sparked the revival of southern mountain music across the country, but contributed significantly to the larger cultural heritage movement that has swept America over the past quarter century. He concluded that the Ramblers helped to “initiate a cultural movement in which music became the marker for a renewal of interest in the oldest kinds of communities, those built on respect for tradition The [New Lost City Ramblers’] long-term sponsorship of the bonds of community that are maintained through a studied devotion to one’s roots—Appalachian, Cajun, Yiddish, no matter what they are—constitute their largest achievement.”⁵³ By the time the Ramblers began to cut back their touring and recording in the early 1970s, they had left an indelible imprint on the urban folk revival, and could take heart in seeing the proliferation of old-time music in urban centers such as New York, Chicago, the Bay Area, Seattle, and Durham/Chapel Hill.⁵⁴

Finding a Solo Voice

In the summer of 1962, with the Ramblers in transition following the departure of Tom Paley, Mike approached Moe Asch about producing a solo recording.⁵⁵ Mike had been splitting his time between the Ramblers and solo performance since he began playing music full-time in 1960, garnering more than half his income from solo engagements, even during the Ramblers’ busiest years.⁵⁶ Asch agreed, and later that year Folkways issued *Oldtime Country Music—Mike Seeger*, featuring Mike singing and playing the

fiddle, banjo, dulcimer, guitar, harmonica, mandolin, and autoharp. Many of the selections are overdubbed, allowing Mike to play several instruments at once and to add harmony tracks to his lead vocal line. On the recording Mike performed a range of southern dance tunes, ballads, and mountain blues, arranged to reflect closely the form and style of the original Library of Congress field recording and early hillbilly records from which they were drawn. But in a harbinger of things to come, Mike began experimenting with various instrumental combinations that were rarely heard on the source recordings. The British Child ballad “Lord Thomas,” for example, was accompanied by autoharp; the American ballad “Story of the Mighty Mississippi” was accompanied by autoharp and harmonica; the dance tune “Sourwood Mountain” was played on autoharp and dulcimer. With “Handsome Molly,” an old ballad sung to a droning solo fiddle accompaniment, he created a distinctively spare, haunting effect that would become one of the hallmarks of his solo work.⁵⁷

A second solo LP entitled *Mike Seeger* was released on Vanguard Records in 1964. Mike played a similar repertoire of southern dance tunes and traditional songs accompanied on guitar by his wife Marge, but this time with no additional overdubbing of voices or instruments. In the liner notes, folk song scholar D. K. Wilgus praised Mike’s “fidelity to tradition,” noting that he “has mastered a range of variations within the tradition, without slavishly imitating individual performances.” For Wilgus, a strong advocate of performance style, Mike’s attempts to “re-present folk music on its own terms and within its own limits” resulted in a recording that “should communicate to the [urban] listener some of the values inherent in the rich area of authentic American folk music.”⁵⁸ Commenting that same year on the first two solo albums for *Sing Out!*, critic Jon Pankake concluded that Mike’s music was a synthesis of his studied devotion to traditional vocal and instrumental techniques and his own creative sensibilities: “It is now impossible to distinguish in a Seeger performance just where the influence of a Fiddlin’ John Carson or an Ernest Stoneman leave and Mike’s own interpretive genius takes over; the total effect is that of a smoothly expressive musical whole, and the individual guiding touch is Seeger’s alone.”⁵⁹ Pankake also reviewed Mike’s 1972 solo release on Mercury records, *Music from the True Vine*, but this time for the widely circulated rock magazine *Rolling Stone*.⁶⁰ There he touted Mike as a soul-searching, latter-day Emerson, lauding his arrangements for “the newness of their conceptions” and for being “as clean and crisp as any acoustic music now being played.”⁶¹ Wilgus and Pankake were among the earliest critics to recognize Mike’s talent for subtle but compelling reinterpretations of traditional material that reflected a deep understanding and reverence for authentic southern styles.

Mike’s more recent solo projects are marked by an even freer approach to interpreting traditional material. In his 1991 Rounder release, *Solo—Oldtime*

Country Music, he announced “I have definitely changed almost every arrangement from my source and sometimes tunes and harmonies, not necessarily because they needed it, but because it happened and somehow I trust the years of old-time and bluegrass experience enough to follow my imagination.”⁶² “Candy Girl,” a solo fiddle piece recorded by Uncle Bunt Stephens for Columbia records in the late 1920s is performed on mandola and harmonica; the North Carolina fiddle tune “Tucker’s Barn” is transformed into an autoharp solo; the Cajun dance tune “Prairie Ronde Waltz” is played on fiddle and harmonica; and Texas fiddler Eck Robertson’s rendition of the familiar dance tune “Sallie Gooden” is reinterpreted on the Jew’s harp. The album also includes one of Mike’s few original pieces, “Quill Ditty,” featuring him “hoodling” into a set of five-tone quills accompanied by a homemade shaker made from bottle caps and pieces of tin. *True Vine*, released in 2003, further demonstrates his ability to weave together traditional vocal and instrumental styles in innovative combinations. Mountain dance tunes, usually reserved for the fiddle and banjo, are picked on arch-top guitar, twanged on the Jew’s harp, and strummed on autoharp. A whimsical holler is accompanied by quills and shaker, a bouncy Texas waltz is interpreted on fiddle and harmonica, and an eerie modal rendition of “Don’t Let Your Deal Go Down” is sung with droning fiddle accompaniment interspersed with unison fiddle and harmonica lines. Noting in the liner notes that Mike’s inventive reinterpretations of traditional material were based on a lifetime of exploration of musical style, folklorist Jay Orr observed: “From the fertile ground of American folk music, through the roots of field recordings, vintage discs, and personal encounter with traditional artists and their families, [Mike’s] creative spirit finds flower again.”⁶³

Solo—Oldtime Country Music and *True Vine* reflect Mike’s skills at selecting unusual but engaging material, presenting each piece in an exceptionally well-rendered arrangement, and sequencing the final mix to highlight the immense breadth of southern folk sounds. Choice of instruments and sequencing are crucial, for as a solo performer who shuns multi-tracking, Mike has always faced the danger that his recordings might sound repetitive and bland to listeners unfamiliar with old-time music.

Mike’s ambition to thoroughly plumb the stylistic possibilities of a single traditional instrument was the impetus for his 1998 release, *Southern Banjo Sounds*.⁶⁴ Drawing from his collection of nearly two dozen banjos, he leads listeners on a century-and-a-half guided tour of traditional Afro- and Anglo-American banjo styles. A bluesy, semi-improvised piece is frailed on a gourd and stick precursor to the modern banjo, a North Carolina ballad is sung to the two-finger picking accompaniment on a nineteenth-century mandolin banjo, and hillbilly and bluegrass songs are accompanied by an array of two- and three-finger picking styles played on factory built and handcrafted five-string banjos with various combinations of frets, tone rings, and resonators.

The final piece on the recording, a remarkable arrangement of Lester Flatt's popular bluegrass song "I'm Head over Heels in Love," is played on a nineteenth-century fretless minstrel banjo and features Mike's own hybrid style that combines older clawhammer brushing techniques with more modern Scruggs-style finger picking. Copious notes accompany each selection, explaining tunings and picking/strumming techniques as well as sources for the styles and songs. A result of Mike's lifelong commitment to the banjo, the collection underscores his desire to preserve style, to reinterpret tradition, and to provide his audience with substantial historical and technical information to enhance their appreciation of the instrument and to inspire them to play.

In addition to his work with the Ramblers and his solo projects, Mike has been involved in a number of significant collaborations. Two *Farewell Reunion* albums, released in 1973 and 1994, featured Mike in dozens of combinations with the Ramblers and various traditional artists and noted folk revivalists including Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, David Grisman, and Jean Ritchie.⁶⁵ In 1988, with funding from a Guggenheim Fellowship and the help of a number of younger players, Mike set out to explore "alternative ways that the [old-time] music might have been played or ways that it still might be developed without losing its country feel or spontaneity."⁶⁶ The result, *Fresh Oldtime String Band Music*, is a potpourri of unconventional pieces that include Mike playing the viola with a classical string quartet on a Texas fiddle breakdown, a humorous Caribbean-tinged rendition of "Cotton-Eye Joe" by the Ithaca-based Agents of Terra, and edgy tunes by another Ithaca band, the Horse Flies, whose alternative fiddle tunings and unorthodox chordal accompaniments produced modernist sonorities rarely associated with traditional southern fiddle music.

Mike and his siblings paid tribute to their mother on three recordings of children's folk songs. In 1978 Rounder Records released *American Folk Songs for Children*, featuring Mike and Peggy performing songs taken directly from Dio's first songbook for children. Based on the success of *American Folk Songs for Children*, Peggy and Mike joined with sister Penny and three Seeger children, including Mike's son Kim, to compile *American Folk Songs for Christmas* in 1989, and again with Penny and Barbara and six Seeger grandchildren for *Animal Folk Songs for Children* in 1992.⁶⁷ Comparing the recorded performances with Dio's original book transcriptions is instructive. The printed lyrics are closely adhered to, sung almost verbatim from each of the respective song collections. While their sung melodies generally conform to the written transcriptions, they are peppered with the slides, slurs, and bent notes common to southern mountain singing but often not fully captured in notation. Not surprisingly, vocal timbres favor the slightly nasal, tense mountain style over the pure tonality of art song. Two- and three-part harmonies not appearing in the book arrangements are occasionally heard. But

the most striking differences between the aural performances and printed book versions are the instrumental accompaniments. Dio's songs were arranged for simple piano accompaniment (with basic chord changes listed above the staff), while the recorded material featured an array of traditional instruments, ranging from guitar, banjo, and fiddle to concertina, harmonica, and Jew's harp.⁶⁸ Although Mike and Peggy encouraged listeners to consult their mother's songbooks, they remained wary of the written notations, warning, "Too much adherence to the written note produces automatic singing, self-conscious singing."⁶⁹ Through subtle alterations in melodic line and vocal ornamentation, and more radical changes in instrumental accompaniment, Mike and Peggy engaged in the sort of folk song process their mother believed in, but could never convey through written notation.

Carrying on the Seeger Legacy

Mike Seeger's musical inheritance runs deep. Dio and Charles instilled in him a profound appreciation for southern folk music as well as an unwavering commitment to bring regional folk styles to wider American audiences. But Mike's parents also provided him with a broad framework for conceptualizing folk music that would help him in later years to mediate the inherent tensions between tradition and innovation. Tradition, as articulated through adherence to authentic folk music style, and innovation, as expressed through the dynamism of the folk song process, were the twin pillars of the Seeger philosophy that would inform Mike's work as a collector, performer, and stager of folk music.

Dio's own obsession with authentic folk style drove her transcription projects, resulting in incredibly meticulous notations that tried to capture the nuances of melodic, rhythmic, and metrical irregularities of her source field recordings. Yet Dio realized the shortcomings of her efforts to capture the totality of the sounds she heard, admitting in the expanded introduction to Lomax's *Our Singing Country* volume, "From the above analysis it must be apparent what a small part of the original song and its manner of singing is represented to the reader in customary notation, especially when dealing with the freer singing-styles."⁷⁰ She warned that the reader would have to "put back upon the more or less skeleton notation such 'flesh, blood, and nerve fiber' as can best approximate for him the character of the original song and its singing."⁷¹ Listening to phonograph recordings would increase familiarity with the material and would help to recreate the notated songs in a fashion that would "undoubtedly ring truer and 'come more natural' than before."⁷² In the original 1941 introduction to the Lomax collection, she encouraged readers to sing in a "natural," as opposed to a "trained, bel canto" voice, and to accompany the songs whenever possible on traditional

instruments such as the guitar, banjo, fiddle, or dulcimer and to avoid obtrusive piano.⁷³ Perhaps Dio realized, as biographer Judith Tick hints, that sound recordings might eventually render her song collections “obsolete,”⁷⁴ for she recommended that readers of her later collections listen to phonograph recordings of the songs. In her introduction to *Animal Folk Songs for Children* volume, she claimed that after years of listening to recordings “I have come to feel that the way folk singers sing and play their music is almost as important as the music itself,” and readily admitted that “Listening of this sort can yield an enjoyment and understanding which reading of notes or words cannot give.”⁷⁵

The centrality of style and the shortcomings of conventional notation in conveying that style were not lost on Charles. Penning the first record reviews for the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1948, he proposed a stylistic continuum, ranging from “authentic folk” to “fine art or concert” in order to connect various folk, popular, and classical idioms, emphasizing the continual hybridization of these three forms.⁷⁶ In the 1950s, following Alan Lomax’s lead, Charles urged folk music scholars to base their studies on the analysis of sound and style, not text and repertory. In a 1958 article for the journal *Western Folklore*, appropriately entitled “Singing Style,” he argues for more strenuous analysis of structural concepts of pitch, loudness, timbre, tempo, proportion (division of sung syllables), and accentuation, and advocates the use of electronic devices for the comparative graphing of sound performances.⁷⁷ Writing at the time of Dio’s death, he took folklorists and city revivalists to task for “stressing written tradition almost to the exclusion of oral tradition,” warning that overemphasis on “authentic texts” from written sources might sound the death knell to the oral transmission process. He concluded: “The disc and tape, for example, at last puts in the hands of folklorists and revivalists alike, a means of bypassing the bottleneck of the notation of folk song. Millions are now learning to sing from hearing the voices of authentic singers.”⁷⁸

An obsessive concern for authenticity of style anchored Mike’s approach to folk music throughout his career. Expanding on the previously cited ideas he outlined in early New Lost City Ramblers LP liner notes, Mike wrote a brief article for *Sing Out!* in 1966 in which he separated the elements of a folk song into three categories: the text (words), the music (primary melodic line and chordal accompaniment), and the performance (style) or arrangement. Like his father, Mike warned that performance style is rarely taken seriously by city singers who tend to remain overly dependent on written sources.⁷⁹ Although he failed to delve deeper into the specific parameters of style, for urban singers he advocated a “musical education consist[ing] of ‘learning the rules’ by ear from watching and listening to performers and phonograph records of traditional folk musicians in order to play more or less within the tradition.”⁸⁰ We can assume that the “rules”

of southern folk performance style include accompaniment by traditional instruments (banjo, guitar, and fiddle picked and bowed in traditional ways as opposed to piano arrangements of simple melodic lines and chords), employment of a straightforward, slightly tense vocal delivery, attention to subtle vocal and instrumental ornamentations including bent and slurred notes, use of irregular metrical and rhythmic patterns, and so forth.

Mike took to heart his parents' pronouncements on learning authentic style through careful study of traditional sound recordings. Circumventing his mother's transcriptions, and noting with some humor that he never learned to read music, Mike went directly to the aural sources. Field and commercial recordings were treated—to use Charles's terminology—not simply as “descriptive” records of performances, but as “prescriptive” blueprints for learning the music. When possible, he would seek out and record old-timers in order to document genuine traditions, to learn new styles and additional repertoire, and to absorb the feeling of the music and the culture that produced it. Accepting the dictum that authenticity of style demanded learning the “rules” of how material was performed, Mike wore out the recordings and sat at the knees of the old masters, absorbing by ear technique and interpretive skills with all the rigor and passion a student of the conservatory would bring to a written score.

After locating and documenting a significant number of traditional musicians, and achieving a level of musical competence in southern folk styles, Mike turned to the mission of disseminating both style and repertoire—the songs, and the way they were sung and played—to larger urban audiences. But it would be through recordings and live performances, rather than his parents' songbook collections, that Mike would reach a large public in the 1960s and 1970s. Millions would hear, as Charles predicted in the early 1950s, the voices of Mike, his siblings, and the Ramblers, as well as dozens of traditional performers whom Mike had recorded and promoted. Moreover, by selecting individual traditional performers to record and present on stage, and by choosing certain traditional styles to reinterpret through his own recordings and live performances, Mike would help shape the parameters of what constituted authentic southern folk styles for audiences of the urban folk music revival.

The dynamic nature of aural tradition that allowed and even encouraged innovation lay at the heart of the folk song process and the second paradigm that shaped the Seeger approach to folk music. Although scholars of folk music had always recognized variation over time as a hallmark of aural tradition, influential collectors like Francis James Child and Cecil Sharp emphasized stability over time, and looked askance at textual variation, especially if induced by the influences of the popular media. The Seegers, along with Lomax, Botkin, and Wilgus, were pioneer folk song scholars who understood the malleability of aural forms, the ubiquitous nature of cultural

creolization, and the natural blending of aural folk and mediated popular idioms.⁸¹

Charles focused on the processual features of folk music in many of his writings, stressing the dynamism of aurality and interconnectedness of various realms of cultural expression that allowed artists to move naturally along a folk, popular, art music continuum.⁸² He railed against folklorists and revival singers who became overdependent on written collections that froze tradition in print, insisting “we must view it [folk music] not alone as a dead repertory but perhaps even more importantly as a living process.”⁸³ Dio likewise observed that “It is the nature of oral tradition . . . to change,” and that modification and variation are inevitable as traditional songs are passed down through generations, and exchanged among city and country people.⁸⁴ In her introduction to *American Folk Songs for Children* she observed: “Songs like these are not finished in the sense that a piece of fine-art (‘classical’) music, or popular music, is finished. They are always ready to grow. They are forever changing, adapting, themselves to meet new situations and needs.”⁸⁵ She devotes entire sections of the collection’s introduction to suggestions for improvising on the words⁸⁶ and modifying the instrumental accompaniment to suit the occasion,⁸⁷ including encouragement to improvise and not to fear “wrong (or rough) notes.”⁸⁸ She urged readers to move beyond printed music and become creative participants in the aural transmission process.

As noted above, when Mike and Peggy sat down to record their mother’s song books they heeded Dio’s advice, employing the folk song process to vary tunes, chordal accompaniment, and vocal arrangements, and to create unique but traditionally appropriate instrumental accompaniments for the songs in her books. Mike’s solo projects and work with the Ramblers demonstrates a similar, albeit cautious, respect for the folk song process. His earliest material reflects a reverence for original sources and his tendency to present rather than reinterpret. This pattern slowly loosened as his career progressed, especially in his solo recordings where he took greater liberties in rearranging traditional material, often through the introduction of unusual instruments like the Jew’s harp, quills, and gourd banjo, or the use of more conventional instruments in unique combinations. Through years of immersion in the music he gradually came to rely on his own sensibilities and to grant himself space to innovate within a traditional frame, resulting in an artistic process that Robert Cantwell observes “at once imitates and reinvents,” one marked by “authenticity while at the same time claiming it as something both original and exotic.”⁸⁹ From this perspective Mike emerges not only as a living repository of old styles, but as a creative artist who used the folk song process to consciously fashion new sounds from old traditions.

This said, it is worth noting that Mike never embraced the folk song process as deeply as siblings Pete and Peggy, who took more liberties in rearranging

traditional songs and creating new songs inspired by tradition. Mike's decision not to pursue song and tune composition apparently stems from his own creative limitations rather than from a purist stance toward traditional expression. He has asserted his unabashed admiration for Pete and Peggy's songwriting talents, praised urban songsters Bob Dylan and Ewan MacColl for their ability to write folk songs that were natural "extensions(s) of tradition," and acknowledged Johnny Cash, Buck Owens, and Roger Miller as "folk-based singer-writers of the first order."⁹⁰ Like his parents, Mike was appreciative of the gradual evolution of new folk styles, but Dio's art of composition was not part of his personal inheritance. For Mike, the folk song process involved the careful selection and subtle reinterpretation of traditional material; the creation of new songs was left to Pete, Peggy, and other singer-songwriters who could adapt folk styling to modern-day experiences.

Coda

Reviewing an early folk song recording for the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1948, Charles observed, without "fatherly solicitude," that his son Pete was progressing steadily away from the concert hall/urban popular style in the direction of a more authentic folk sound.⁹¹ At that time he had no reason to suspect that his fifteen-year-old son Mike would eventually pursue that authentic sound with far more persistence than Pete. But Charles remained relatively silent about Mike's accomplishments in the 1960s and 1970s. The senior Seeger's attitudes are difficult to gauge, considering his overall ambivalence about the folk song revival—a phenomenon he once characterized as "an American shotgun wedding of oral (folk) and written (fine and popular art) idioms"⁹²—and his damning pronouncement that "inheritance always shows" when it comes to distinguishing authentic folk style.⁹³ One can only wonder if Charles ever fully realized the profound impact that Mike and the Ramblers had on the urban folk revival by focusing attention on regional and ethnic styles, and the extent to which their recordings and tours popularized the theoretical ideas that he and Lomax had struggled to articulate in the scholarly arena.

Dio, on the other hand, did not live long enough to see her son bloom into one of the leading figures of the folk music revival. We can only speculate that given her great love of southern folk music, her fascination with the variety and complexity of vernacular sounds, her fastidious attention to style, and her desire to spread the music to wider urban audiences, she would have been tremendously supportive of Mike's projects and proud of his achievements. She would have been disappointed, to be sure, in his rejection of the formal instruction, written notation, and theories of modern composition that were the foundation of much of her musical life. But

she no doubt would have been more than compensated had she known her son would succeed in bringing her folk songs to a new generation of city listeners who were eager to consume authentic sounds through commercial recordings, radio broadcasts, and live performances rather than through old-fashioned songbooks.

Throughout his solo career and his work with the Ramblers, Mike has struggled to balance his commitment to authentic folk style with the modernist paradigm of creation and reinterpretation. The contours of that struggle were shaped by his parents' notions of folk authenticity and creativity, principles that contributed tremendously to his success as a cultural liaison between the southern rural folk whom he revered and the northern urbanites who constituted his primary audience. Mike and the Ramblers were on the leading edge of a national movement that embraced the electronic media and the urban stage in the name of cultural preservation. The generational baton was passed on as the folk music process was extended in new directions that Dio and Charles could anticipate in theory but never realize in practice.

Notes

1. In order to avoid confusion with family names, this chapter will refer to Mike Seeger as "Mike," Ruth Crawford Seeger as "Dio," and Charles Seeger as "Charles."
2. "Christmas Early for Book Fair," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1953.
3. Accounts of Mike's childhood and the early Seeger household are found in Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 247–67 and 280–309. See also Mike Seeger, "Thoughts of Silver Spring, 1938," and Peggy Seeger, "About Dio," in *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Modernity, Tradition, and the Making of American Music*, ed. Ellie M. Hisama and Ray Allen (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, 2001), 12–13. Additional recollections concerning Mike's early years are drawn from, Mike Seeger, interview by Matilda Gaume, Globe, Arizona, November 7, 1977; Mike Seeger, interviews by author, Brooklyn, N.Y., March 15, 2002, and Washington, D.C., June 29, 2002.
4. Mike Seeger, interview by author, June 29, 2002.
5. Mike Seeger, "Thoughts of Silver Spring, 1938," 12.
6. Mike Seeger, "A Few Personal Words about Ruth Crawford Seeger's *The Music of American Folk Song*," in Ruth Crawford Seeger, *The Music of American Folk Song and Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2001), xvi.
7. Mike Seeger, "Thoughts of Silver Spring, 1938," 12–13.
8. For example, Mike recalls being fascinated by a field recording of the fiddle tune "Colored Aristocracy" made by Charles at a 1936 folk festival. Mike and the New Lost City Ramblers would eventually record the piece in 1958, with Mike on fiddle, for their first Folkways LP (FA 2369). Mike Seeger, interview by author, June 29, 2002.
9. Mike Seeger, interview by author, March 15, 2002.

10. Mike Seeger, interview by author, June 29, 2002.
11. One of Elizabeth Cotten's recordings made in the Seeger home on November 19, 1952, was a lovely guitar version of the familiar church song "In the Sweet Bye and Bye." The recording was later issued on *Close to Home: Old Time Music from Mike Seeger's Collection—1952–1967*, Smithsonian Folkways CD 40097, 1997. The CD includes other early field recordings Mike made of African-American fiddler Will Adam of Kensington, Maryland, and of string-band music played by members of the Sutphin family of Wittman, Maryland.
12. Mike Seeger, interview by author, June 29, 2002.
13. Mike Seeger, liner notes to the CD reissue of *American Banjo: Three Finger & Scruggs Style*, Smithsonian Folkways CD 40037, 1990. The original LP was issued under the title *American Banjo: Tunes and Songs in Scruggs Style*, Folkways Records LP 2314, 1957.
14. Dick Spottswood, "Mike Seeger," *Bluegrass Unlimited* (May 1985): 61.
15. *Negro Folk Songs and Tunes*, Folkways Records FG 3526, 1958, was reissued by Smithsonian Folkways under the title *Elizabeth Cotten: Freight Train and Other North Carolina Folk Songs and Tunes*, Smithsonian Folkways CD 40009, 1989.
16. In 1957, with the help of Ralph Rinzler, Mike assembled *The Stoneman Family & Old Time Southern Music*, Folkways Records FA 2315, a compilation of traditional tunes and songs performed by Ernest Stoneman (originally of Carroll County, Va.), J. C. Sutphin (originally of Patrick County, Va.), and H. N. Dickens (originally of Carroll County, Va.). That same year he returned to the South several times, recording Grand Ole Opry stars Sam and Kirk McGee with fiddler Arthur Smith, and autoharp specialist Kilby Snow and old-time fiddler Wade Ward from southwestern Virginia. A McGee Brothers and Arthur Smith LP was released as Folkways Records FA 2379, 1957; and *Mountain Music, Bluegrass Style* was issued as Folkways Records FA 2318, 1958. Subsequent Folkways releases included recordings of the *Country Gentlemen* on Folkways Records FA 2409, 1959; *The 37th Old Time Fiddler's Convention at Union Grove, NC*, Folkways Records FA 2434, 1961; banjoist Dock Boggs on Folkways FA 2351, 1963; and autoharp music by Kilby Snow, Ernest Stoneman, and Neriah Benfield on Folkways Records FA 2365, 1956–61. Highlights of Mike's early field recordings can be heard on the above cited 1997 *Close to Home* Smithsonian Folkways recording.
17. In 1972 Folkways released Mike's recordings of young Bay Area musicians under the tongue-in-cheek title *Berkeley Farms*, Folkways Records FA 2436. Heard on the album are key figures in the urban old-time music revival including Jody Stecher, Hank Bradley, Larry Hanks, Mac Benford, and Walt Koken.
18. Philip Gura, "Roots and Branches: Forty Years of the New Lost City Ramblers. Part I," *Old Time Herald* (Winter 1999): 28.
19. Background on the early folk music revival in New York City is found in Ronald Cohen's *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940–1970* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 3–124.
20. Mike Seeger, interview by author, July 21, 2002. In 1957 Mike and his sisters, Peggy, Barbara, and Penny, recorded *American Folk Songs Sung by the Seegers*, Folkways Records F 2005, for Moe Asch. Mike can be heard playing the fiddle, banjo, guitar, and mandolin as well as singing.
21. Gura, "Roots and Branches," 28.
22. Mike Seeger, liner notes to *The New Lost City Ramblers*, Folkways Records FA 2396, 1958.

23. An in-depth discussion of traditional fiddle, banjo, and guitar styles employed by the Ramblers is found in John Cohen, "Introduction to Styles in Old-Time Music," in *Old-Time String Band Songbook*, ed. John Cohen and Mike Seeger (New York: Oak Publications, 1964), 6–13.
24. Alan Lomax characterized the traditional southern white mountain voice as being "rigidly pitched, somewhat higher than the normal speaking tone, confined to a limited range of vocal color; it is often harsh, hard, nasal." Lomax, "Folk Song Style," *American Anthropologist* (1959): 930.
25. Robert Shelton, "Country Music Comes to Town," *New York Times*, June 20, 1961.
26. John Cohen and Tom Paley, liner notes to *The New Lost City Ramblers*, Folkways Records FA 2396, 1958.
27. Mike Seeger, liner notes to *The New Lost City Ramblers, Volume 4*, Folkways Records FA 2399, 1961.
28. *Ibid.*
29. See Neil Rosenberg's discussion of Lomax and Seeger's influence on redefining notions of folk authenticity based on performance practices in "Introduction," *Transforming Traditions: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 10–17.
30. See Charles Seeger, "Singing Style," *Western Folklore* 17 (1958): 3–11, and Lomax, "Folk Song Style." The concept of musical style as an ethnographically derived summary of sound structure and social behavior was first introduced to the study of folk music by Alan Lomax in the latter article.
31. Alan Lomax, "The 'Folkniks'—and the Songs they Sing," *Sing Out* 9 (Summer 1959): 31.
32. Ellen Stekert, "Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folk Song Movement: 1930–66," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 97. The essay was originally published in *Folklore and Society: Essays in Honor of Benjamin A. Botkin*, ed. Bruce Jackson (Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1966), 153–68.
33. *Ibid.*, 97.
34. Bill Malone, *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 39.
35. John Cohen, "Introduction to Styles in Old-Time Music," 6.
36. John Cohen, liner notes to *The New Lost City Ramblers, Volume 3*, Folkways FA 2398, 1961.
37. Mike Seeger, liner notes to *Rural Delivery Number One: The New Lost City Ramblers*, Folkways FA 2496, 1964.
38. Nat Hentoff, "Citibillies," *Reporter*, May 24, 1962, 42.
39. Peter Welding, "Crusaders for Old Time Music: New Lost City Ramblers," *Sing Out!* (December/January 1961): 7.
40. Mike Seeger, interview by author March 15, 2002.
41. Gura, "Roots and Branches," 30.
42. The southern folk artists introduced to New York audiences at the FOTM concerts included Clarence Ashley, Mississippi John Hurt, Fred McDowell, Dock Boggs, the Stanley Brothers, Maybelle Carter, Roscoe Holcomb, Gus Cannon, Hobart Smith, Furry Lewis, Doc Watson, Bill Monroe, the McGee Brothers and Arthur Smith, Bessie Jones and the Sea Island Singers, Horton Barker, Joseph Spence, Jesse Fuller, the Galax String Band, and Almeda Riddle. John Cohen, interview by author, Putnam Valley, N.Y., December 13, 2005. For more on the FOTM see also R. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 172–73.

43. John Cohen, interview by author, December 13, 2005. For more on the first Chicago Folk Festival see R. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 168–70.
44. Sandy Paton, “Folk and the Folk Arrival,” in *Dimensions of the Folk Song Revival*, ed. David De Turk and A. Poulin (New York: Dell, 1967), 41–42.
45. Mike Seeger, e-mail communication with author, December 6, 2005. Richard Kurin discusses the efforts of the Newport Folk Festival board of directors, which in addition to Mike included Ralph Rinzler and Alan Lomax, to advocate for the inclusion of traditional performers to balance out the more popular headliners like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul and Mary. They also encouraged field research and educational workshops stages. See Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By, and For the People* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, 1998), 105–8. Highlights of the Ramblers’ appearances at the 1963–65 Newport Folk Festivals with Maybelle Carter, Eck Robertson, Cousin Emmy, and other traditional southern artists can be heard on *NLCR: Old Time Music*, Vanguard Records 77011-2, 1994.
46. Mike Seeger, interview by author, June 29, 2002.
47. Ralph Rinzler, who worked closely with Mike and the Ramblers in locating and programming traditional artists at the Newport Folk Festival and at the FOTM concerts, went on to direct the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife that was first staged on the Washington, D.C. National Mall in 1967. For a discussion of the influences that Newport and other early 1960s folk music festivals had on the Smithsonian festival see Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 126–27. A useful reflection on the cultural and political ramifications of recontextualizing folk culture for urban audiences via the folk festival is found in Robert Cantwell, “Feasts of Unarming: Folk Festivals and the Representation of Folklife,” in *Public Folklore*, ed. Robert Baron and Nicholas Spitzer (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 263–305. See especially pages 295–97 for Cantwell’s discussion of the problems of interpreting folk practices through concert/theatrical and exhibitory festival presentations.
48. Mike Seeger, interview by author, June 29, 2002.
49. Welding, “Crusaders for Old Time Music,” 5.
50. Malone, *Country Music USA*, 39.
51. David Evans, “Record Reviews: Folk Music Revival,” *Journal of American Folklore* 92 (1979): 108, 109.
52. Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 197.
53. Gura, “Roots and Branches,” 24.
54. The Ramblers never officially disbanded, although their recording and touring activities were seriously curtailed by 1970. They held a twentieth-anniversary concert in Carnegie Hall in 1978, a twenty-fifth anniversary concert at the University of Chicago Folk Festival in 1983, and since the mid-1980s have continued to play occasional concerts. In 1996 the Ramblers came back together to record *There Ain’t No Way Out*, Smithsonian Folkways SF 40098, 1997. See Gura, “Roots and Branches,” for an account of the group’s later activities (18–20).
55. Tom Paley left the Ramblers in 1962. He was replaced by fiddler/vocalist Tracy Schwarz who continues to perform with the group today.
56. Mike Seeger, interview by author, June 29, 2002.
57. *Oldtime Country Music*, Mike Seeger, Folkways Records FA 2325, 1962.

58. D. K. Wilgus, liner notes to *Mike Seeger*, Vanguard Records VSD-97150, 1964.
59. Jon Pankake, "Mike Seeger: The Style of Tradition," *Sing Out* 14 (July 1964): 7.
60. Mike Seeger, *Music from the True Vine*, Mercury Records SRM1-627, 1972.
61. Jon Pankake, "Records," *Rolling Stone*, July 20, 1972, 50.
62. Mike Seeger, liner notes to *Solo-Oldtime Country Music*, Rounder Records CD0278, 1991.
63. Jay Orr, liner notes to *Mike Seeger-True Vine*, Smithsonian Folkways CD 40136, 2003.
64. Mike Seeger, *Southern Banjo Sounds*, Smithsonian Folkways CD 40107, 1998.
65. *Second Annual Farewell Reunion*, Mercury Records 0598, 1973, served as a retrospective on the first fifteen years of Mike's career, featuring him playing with the Ramblers, the Strange Creek Singers, and the Highwoods String Band; siblings Pete, Peggy, and Penny; traditional artists Elizabeth Cotten, Roscoe Holcomb, Lesley Riddle, and Kilby Snow; and renowned folk revivalists Ewan MacColl, Ry Cooder, and Maria Muldaur. Two decades later came *Third Annual Farewell Reunion*, Rounder Records 0313, 1994, again pairing Mike with the Ramblers, Pete, Peggy, and Penny, as well as new voices including West Coast citybillies Jody Stecher, Kate Brislin, Larry Hanks, and Hank Bradley; traditional performers Tommy Jarrell, Michael Doucet, Marc Savoy, John Jackson, and Ralph Stanley; and popular performers Bob Dylan, David Grisman, and Jean Ritchie.
66. Mike Seeger, liner notes to *Fresh Oldtime String Band Music*, Rounder Records 0262, 1988.
67. Mike and Peggy Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, Rounder Records CD 8001, 1996/1978; Mike, Peggy, and Penny Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Christmas*, Rounder Records CD 0268/0269, 1989; and Mike, Peggy, Penny, and Barbara Seeger, *Animal Folk Songs for Christmas*, Rounder Records CD 8023/8024, 1992.
68. For further commentary on the children's folk song recordings, see Hamessley's chapter in this volume.
69. Mike and Peggy Seeger, liner notes to *American Folk Songs for Children*.
70. Crawford Seeger, *The Music of American Folk Song*, 11.
71. *Ibid.*, 11-12.
72. *Ibid.*, 13.
73. Ruth Crawford Seeger, "Music Preface," in *Our Singing Country: Folk Songs and Ballads*, ed. John A. and Alan Lomax (New York: Macmillan, 1941), xxxi-xxxii.
74. Judith Tick, "Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger, and 'The Music of American Folk Songs,'" in *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology*, ed. Bell Yung and Helen Rees (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 119.
75. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Animal Folk Songs for Children* (New York: Doubleday, 1950), 10.
76. Charles Seeger, "Review of Four Folksong Records," *Journal of American Folklore* 61 (1948): 216. For further discussion of Seeger's stylistic continuum in relation to questions of folk music authenticity, see Rosenberg, *Transforming Traditions*, 14-15.
77. Seeger, "Singing Style," 216.
78. Charles Seeger, "Folk Music in the Schools of a Highly Industrialized Society," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 5 (1953): 40-44. Reprinted and quoted from Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology, 1935-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 333, 334.
79. Mike Seeger, "A Contemporary Folk Aesthetic," *Sing Out* 15 (February/March 1966): 59.

80. Mike Seeger, liner notes to *The New Lost Ramblers, Volume 3*.
81. For thorough coverage of the debates surrounding the role of stability and variation in folk music transmission, see D. K. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1959). Wilgus explores the hybridization of various rural and urban styles in, "Country Western Music and the Urban Hillbilly," *Journal of American Folklore* 83 (1970): 157-79. Alan Lomax's first clear statement on the blending of Anglo- and Afro-American folk styles is found in "Folk Song Style." See also Benjamin Botkin, "WPA Folklore Research: Bread and Song," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 3 (1939): 7-14.
82. For more on Charles Seeger's interest in folk music and process, see Helen Rees, "Temporary Bypaths? Seeger and Folk Music Research," in *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology*, ed. Bell Yung and Helen Rees (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 86-88.
83. Seeger, "Folk Music in the Schools," 334.
84. Crawford Seeger, *The Music of American Folk Song*, 28-29.
85. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948), 23.
86. *Ibid.*, 27-28.
87. *Ibid.*, 43-46.
88. *Ibid.*, 46.
89. Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Young: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 43.
90. Mike Seeger, "A Contemporary Folk Aesthetic," 61.
91. Seeger, "Review of Four Folksong Records," 217.
92. Charles Seeger, "The Folkness of the Non-folk and the Non-folkness of the Folk," in *Studies in Musicology, 1935-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 338. Reprinted from *Folklore and Society: Essays in Honor of Benjamin A. Botkin*, ed. Bruce Jackson. (Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1966), 1-9.
93. Seeger, "Review of Four Folksong Records," 216.

Chapter Twelve

Peggy Seeger

From Traditional Folksinger to Contemporary Songwriter

Lydia Hamessley

Two traditions were ever-present and interlaced throughout my childhood: the formal and the traditional. They presented me with a vision of music that is wide and elastic.

—Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*

In her prefatory remarks to *American Folk Songs for Children*, composer Ruth Crawford Seeger wrote, folk song “has crossed and recrossed many sorts of boundaries, and is still crossing and recrossing them. It can give [us] a glimpse of ways of life and thought different from [our] own.”¹ Her assertion can be used as a framework within which to examine the music of her eldest daughter, Peggy Seeger, one of the eminent voices of the folk song revival of the 1950s and 1960s. Peggy’s career has been shaped and defined by the constant crossing of boundaries. From her classical music training in a household filled with recordings of folk music to the two countries she has called home, and from her dedication to the folk idiom to her divergence from notions of authenticity in the service of her musical commentary on the world, Peggy crosses and recrosses numerous boundaries.² The contradictions, cross-fertilizations, and tensions that arise through these border crossings have molded a career rich in musical styles and political acumen. This chapter will explore the trajectory of Peggy’s career from traditional folksinger to contemporary songwriter, focusing in particular on the familial influences and musical traditions that laid the foundation for her distinctive use of folk music in her contemporary songs.

Peggy's Early Musical Training and Career

Peggy was born in 1935, just at the time that her parents, Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, were beginning to study folk song, intrigued by its possible usefulness as a resource for modernist composers who sought to develop a meaningful American musical style. At this time, Charles and Ruth were facing another difficult year of poverty when Charles took a full-time job with the Resettlement Administration in Washington, D.C., working with professional musicians who had lost their livelihood and were living in government housing in the South. The Seegers soon realized that traditional music was a vital American resource available not only to modernist composers but also to schoolchildren and their teachers. Ultimately, Ruth's work with this music resulted in a significant number folk song transcriptions, arrangements, and collections.

In 1937 Ruth began work as music editor for John and Alan Lomax's folk song collection, *Our Singing Country*, listening over and over to recordings and painstakingly transcribing in minute detail about 300 songs.³ Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, Ruth worked on several similar projects, completing more transcriptions and writing hundreds of piano settings and arrangements of folk songs.⁴ What Ruth's work meant for Peggy, as well as her brother Mike, was a childhood filled with the sounds of southern folk songs, fiddle tunes, ballads, spirituals, blues, and hollers; and Peggy absorbed these songs, their language, and style. But in addition to the sounds of singers, banjos, and fiddles, Peggy was interested in the piano. She asked Ruth for piano lessons at the age of seven, and she learned to read music and play Beethoven and Brahms piano duets with her father. But she also spent hours improvising songs and accompaniments with her mother. Ruth honed Peggy's eartraining skills by teaching her to transcribe folk songs.

I transcribed only very simple things when I was 11, 12. . . . I must have done about 40 or 50 of those. She'd give me simple things that were rhythmic and she'd come and correct them. I seem to remember I got a nickel a song, something like that. . . . I was thrilled!! I loved it!!! Absolutely loved it!!⁵

Ruth also put Peggy through her paces by having her play folk songs at the piano in all seven modes through the circle of fifths starting on all twelve pitches.

I remember spending several challenging weeks learning to play one tune right through the circle of fifths. Then I would take the tune through every mode in every key—and unless you've played "The Irish Washerwoman" in C# in the Lydian mode at the age of ten, you haven't lived.⁶

Thus, unlike her brother Mike, who would eschew lessons of any kind and never learn to read music, Peggy received a kind of musical training that one might suppose a conservatory-trained, but folk song-loving Ruth would provide. As a young teenager Peggy also learned to play the banjo along with Mike by reading their half-brother Pete's banjo manual to Mike when he was bedridden at the age of sixteen or seventeen with a case of shingles.⁷ "Mike said, 'Poo, poo, you can't learn the banjo from a manual.' So my mother said, 'Prove it.' And she bought a banjo, and Mike would lie up on his bed on his back, and I'd flashlight read him 'bum ditty, bum ditty, bum ditty.' And he would do it."⁸

Peggy began her recording career when she was eighteen, shortly after Ruth's death from cancer in 1953. At this time, Peggy had not yet begun to write her own songs; rather, she performed the type of repertoire she had learned through her mother's work. As a soloist, she recorded and performed English ballads, American folk songs, and banjo tunes. Her 1955 recording of "The House Carpenter" is a representative example of her early approach in which she performs a traditionally unaccompanied ballad at a quick tempo, adding a banjo with its attendant harmonies and driving rhythm. Of this type of performance on a recording from 1959, Peggy would later say:

I look on these accompaniments as competent and probably fairly sensitive assaults on the songs—but assaults nonetheless. The banjo and guitar put considerable harmonic and rhythmic strictures on [the singer], often forcing him to sing faster than he should. . . . In some cases, this unseemly haste made it impossible . . . to sing the melody properly. Sometimes the chords chosen would require him to change the tune from its original. . . . I never questioned whether the song needed me, my banjo or my guitar in the first place.⁹

Peggy, along with her siblings Mike, Penny, and Barbara, also performed and recorded folk songs drawn from Ruth's books for children, with Peggy and Mike trading off lead vocals as well as accompaniment on the guitar and the five-string banjo.¹⁰ Her early career, which extended into her move to England in the late 1950s, also included the publication of her own banjo method book in 1960 and a folk song collection in 1964.¹¹ Following the models that her mother had provided in her own books, Peggy did not strive to present a single authoritative or authentically performed version of songs, nor did she do any collecting of songs herself.¹² Rather, she placed herself within the folk process, saying:

The singer is but one link in the chain and if this is a book of "my" songs that means that this is the way one singer has treated the common heritage before handing it on. It is my way of adding a bit of the present to what the past has left. In this sense they are "my" songs for a while, but our songs all the time.¹³

Peggy's life and career changed dramatically in 1956 when, on a trip to England, she met British folksinger, songwriter, and actor Ewan MacColl, with whom she shared a loving and working relationship in England for over thirty years until his death in 1989. To their musical partnership Ewan brought the particular experiences and songwriting skills of an actor and scriptwriter who grew up singing traditional English and Scottish songs. Peggy brought her knowledge of American folk songs, her ability to read and write music, and her proficiency on a good number of instruments including guitar, five-string banjo, Appalachian dulcimer, and piano. Ultimately, they wrote hundreds of songs together without always taking full credit for their individual contributions. Peggy explains, "I was as directly responsible for much of his output as he was for mine. . . . If one of us had a song on the way and there were birth difficulties, we'd talk, criticise, discuss and wrestle it into existence."¹⁴ Despite their collaborative process and co-written works, there are songs to which Peggy can and does lay primary claim, and they each reveal, to varying degrees, Peggy's indebtedness to the folk music that she learned both as a child and as an adult, to the formal musical training she received from Ruth, and to Ewan's political and songwriting tutelage.

Peggy's Songs: Folk Influences

Peggy writes, "Traditional music gave me an approach to language and a knowledge of the tunes that had developed along with that language. It introduced me to a variety of forms and subjects."¹⁵ But her earliest songwriting attempts based in this idiom were ones she now considers failures or, at best, embarrassments. In them, she self-consciously replicated folk songs using clichés and generic cardboard characters as seen in "When I Was Young" (1957) and "I'll Never Go Back to London Again" (1958). These songs often employed an antiquated vocabulary and sentiments of love relationships she did not herself speak or espouse.¹⁶ For example:

When I was young I loved a lad and gaily we were wed;
 I knew no greater pleasure than to follow where he led;
 But when he went away to war, O sorrow be to me,
 For you cannot follow soldiers bearing guns across the sea.
 —"When I was Young," stanza 1¹⁷

Soon, however, Peggy found a successful voice by freely combining a musical folk idiom—"songs that *sound* like folk songs"¹⁸—with language and situations that were contemporary and often about very specific people or events. One of Peggy's earliest and most popular songs, "The

Ballad of Springhill” (1958), is an example that captures the events and emotions of a contemporary coal mining disaster in Nova Scotia (see example 12.1).¹⁹

In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia,
Down in the dark of the Cumberland Mine;
There’s blood on the coal and the miners lie
In the roads that never saw sun nor sky,
Roads that never saw sun nor sky.

—“The Ballad of Springhill,” stanza 1

Peggy sets her narrative in the Dorian mode and follows standard folk conventions such as the opening ascending fifth and the move into the upper register of the mode for the inner phrases. Even more striking is the open-ended final cadence on the dominant, a common folk element that was also a hallmark of her mother’s approach to constructing folk song settings and arrangements. Ruth advocated strongly for what she called “this keep-goingness, or never-endingness” of folk music, and she made use of this aesthetic in many of her accompaniments, settings, and even in her orchestral homage to a folk song, *Rissolty, Rossolty*.²⁰ Foremost among her techniques was the lack of a final tonic chord; instead she would end on the dominant or on occasion restate the opening phrase of the tune itself. This technique in “The Ballad of Springhill” propels the song through its harrowing account of the mine collapse to the final image of the mine as gravestone, leaving the listener with the feeling that there is more to the story. Peggy says this was the first song she wrote that she was proud to claim: “This song has actually entered the ‘folk tradition’ to such an extent that people either think that Ewan or ‘the folk’ wrote it. What a compliment!”²¹

Peggy continued to call on folk models for many of her early songs. In some she reset the tunes of traditional folk songs to new, unrelated texts as in “There’s Better Things to Do” (1957) and “My Old Man’s a Dustman” (1967).²² In other songs, she rewrote new words following the original form of the original text. Thus, “The Sailor’s Alphabet” became “N is for Nobody” (1971), a spelling out of N-I-X-O-N. She later transformed the original song into “The Housewife’s Alphabet” (1976):

A is for altar where we go astray,
B is for the bills that begin the next day;
C for the cuffs and the collars of shirts, and
D is for dishes and dusting and dirt.²³

Not all of her works modeled on folk songs are as directly or easily conceived as these. Of her “Song of Choice” (1967) she writes:

The Ballad of Springhill

alternative titles: "Springhill Mine (Mining) Disaster"
 words and music: Peggy Seeger
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moderate

In the town of Spring-hill, No - va Sco-tia,
 Down in the dark of the Cum-ber-land Mine;
 There's blood on the coal and the mi - ners lie
 In the roads that nev-er saw sun nor sky,
 Roads that nev-er saw sun nor sky.

*7 - a frequent variation

Example 12.1. "The Ballad of Springhill," stanza 1. By Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl. © Stormking Music Inc. Rights administered by Harmony Music Limited. Used by permission.

With this song, I really began to feel like a songwriter. I was beginning to get original ideas and write songs from scratch. Up to now most of my songs (1) had been copies of Ewan's pieces, (2) had been set to pre-existing tunes, or (3) were based on folk forms. In "Song of Choice," the concept, the subject, the style, the tune and words were mine, all mine! Furthermore, the song could be adapted to changing situations. Just add a verse, subtract a verse and the song is once more contemporary.²⁴

Despite her words to the contrary, this song, like “The Ballad of Springhill,” still reveals Peggy’s debt to folk music for its inspiration, particularly in its Dorian mode setting.²⁵ Nevertheless, “Song of Choice” marked a turning point for Peggy since she considered it a completely original work: “[Early on] I copied and borrowed by default because I lacked confidence. Later on, I copied and borrowed confidently, but I had to write several dozen original songs before I regarded myself as a *real* songwriter.”²⁶ While many of Peggy’s early songs were wholly dependent on folk models in a straightforward way, and her early original songs continue to reveal folk influences, some of her later works exhibit a more complex compositional process in which she composes in her own voice, but through the folk idiom, using folk elements intentionally to make the message of her song even stronger.

An illustration of this latter process—this confident borrowing—can be seen in her 1989 song, “The Judge’s Chair.” Although it is, in Peggy’s words, “consciously patterned after traditional ballad forms,”²⁷ “The Judge’s Chair” is a masterful and adept composition. Peggy does not merely follow a formula; rather, she writes a song that is simultaneously innovative and yet evocative of a folk genre, the traditional ballad. In *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, she analyzes the folk elements in this song, including the way the song begins in the middle of the action, the lack of identification of the speaker, the way time passes through naming days, weeks, and months, and the incremental use of word repetition, to name but a few characteristics.²⁸

Sunday, Monday passing by,
Thursday, Friday too;
Annie walks in the winter sun,
A week past she was due.

Pain floods into that place
Where love has come and gone;
Close the door, and close the door
And Annie’s walking home.

Men sit in the judge’s chair—
We are up on trial.
Woman, if you conceive
You must bear your child.
—“The Judge’s Chair,” stanzas 5, 9, and 12

Significantly, Peggy breaks with the ballad’s narrative, melody, and style in verse twelve to deliver an unambiguous message for the song’s ending. Through foregrounding the narrative conventions of the ballad by abandoning them at the end of the song, she draws a parallel between the

ancient ballad genre and the similarly outmoded beliefs that the judge espouses. “In concert [the song] is greeted by three or four seconds of shocked silence before applause begins. The assembled company has been jolted, and *I can hear them thinking* and carrying the story on from where I left it.”²⁹

Most of the albums Peggy has released since 1989, the year of Ewan’s death, have been primarily filled with original love songs for her new life-partner, Irene, including several songs they co-authored.³⁰ In these more recent songs, Peggy has not abandoned the folk techniques used in her earlier pieces. Although she has relied less and less on direct folk models, many of her songs still hint at folk music’s influence. One especially striking example is “Love Unbidden” (1990).³¹

Love: unbidden, unwelcome friend,
Wild Bird in my hand—
I hold you, trembling, terror-bound,
Yet am at your command.

Love: though I be one of those
That dare not come to claim thee—
Hold me till my heartbeat slows,
Wild bird, you have tamed me.
—“Love Unbidden,” stanzas 1 and 3

“Love Unbidden” has the melodic shape of an Aeolian mode folk song with Peggy’s somewhat characteristic ambiguous cadences at the end of stanzas. Significantly, Peggy writes a final cadence on tonic at the end of the third stanza, undoubtedly to reflect the taming of the singer by the wild bird. It is an intriguing, perhaps intentional irony that the text of “Love Unbidden” invokes Ewan’s most well-known love song to Peggy, “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” (1957).³²

The first time ever I kissed your mouth,
I felt the earth move in my hand—
Like the trembling heart of a captive bird
That was there at my command, my love,
That was there at my command.
—“The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face,” stanza 2

Also ironic is Peggy’s reclaiming of love with Irene through a suggestion of the phrase, “the love that dare not speak its name” with her line “Love: though I be one of those / That dare not come to claim thee.” Thus this song pays homage to her first partner Ewan while it also celebrates the possibility of new

love with Irene: “When [Ewan] died I went on my way, helped very, very much by my present partner [Irene Scott]. And I’m now independent in a way that I never was when I was with him.”³³

Peggy’s Songs: Formal Influences

Although Peggy’s love of folk music was initially sparked during her childhood, these early years were also a time of formal training in music.

I am glad to have had it. It lets me know in theory what I am doing in practice. It encourages me to see the relationships between the kinds of music that I enjoy. . . . Participation in [Ruth’s] projects gave me an invaluable skill which I have used ever since: the ability to hear a tune and write it down on paper. . . . Knowing how to read music helps me to grasp a tune quickly and makes it easier for me to pitch unaccompanied songs before opening my mouth to sing.³⁴

Indeed, many of Peggy’s songs reveal her indebtedness to her mother’s training. She writes, “My love affair with the Lydian mode has consciously led to songs like ‘Four-Minute Warning’ and the cross-relations I often use. My classical training has helped me to seek out different modes, formats and meters: ‘Emily,’ [a song about domestic violence] for instance, has been cast into 5/4 for unaccompanied singing because the subject cried out for an uneasy meter.”³⁵ Of course, a good number of Peggy’s folk-derived songs also feature modal mixtures and free, asymmetric rhythms; however, one can make a distinction between this musical idiom and a similar idiom that is more indebted to formal music theory training. Folk tunes, particularly ballads, are often rhythmically asymmetrical or free, and songs such as “Londonderry Down” (1968), “The Dead Men” (1968), and “Uncle Sam” (1970) that include cross-relations and shifting meters are actually re-texted folk tunes that merely shift between the leading tone and subdominant—fluctuating between major and Mixolydian or minor and Aeolian—or that exploit both inflections of the third scale degree.³⁶ Conversely, many of Peggy’s original tunes reveal a more formal approach to their composition.

“The Children” (1968) features modal manipulations and cross relations that are not folk derived (see example 12.2).³⁷ In the Phrygian mode on A, the melody of this tune highlights the minor second between A and B \flat in the first three phrases as well as the tritone between E and B \flat in the second and third phrases. The harmonic progression adds another element to the song: the cross relation on the third scale degree between the C \natural of the Phrygian melody and the C \sharp of the A-major I chord. In addition, the end of the song features another layer of ambiguity. The final chord is A minor, the expected inflection for the Phrygian I chord, but the mode remains indefinite since the Phrygian B \flat is replaced by a B \natural , a harmonic move much more

The Children

words and music: Peggy Seeger
 © 1992 Peggy Seeger (1)

Somewhat free

The chil - dren are born, they bud and they bloom,
 Four in a bed, eight in a room,
 A ta - pes - try wo - ven on po - ver - ty's loom.
 So build a wall where the chil - dren play
 Till the wel - fare comes to take them a - way.

Example 12.2. “The Children,” stanza 1. By Peggy Seeger. © Stormking Music Inc. Rights administered by Harmony Music Limited. Used by permission.

suggestive of D Dorian. Thus the song seems to end, as many of Peggy’s songs do, with a half-cadence.³⁸

The children are born, they bud and they bloom,
 Four in a bed, eight in a room,
 A tapestry woven on poverty’s loom.
 So build a wall where the children play
 Till the welfare comes to take them away.
 —“The Children,” stanza 1

Underscoring that this song’s style would be unfamiliar to most folksingers, Peggy instructs guitarists about how to navigate the parallel chord movement by retuning the sixth string.

Another example is one of Peggy’s most powerfully moving songs, written on the occasion of Ewan’s death. “Lost” (1989) is a mesmerizing lament in

D Mixolydian, with an occasional Lydian flavor as the final cadence on F# of every other stanza is approached through G#.³⁹

Lost, I lost my virgin treasure
 While that I was sleeping;
 Losing it was pleasure
 So it wasn't worth the keeping.
 —“Lost,” stanza 1

The disorientation of her grief is mirrored in this modal instability. The Lydian mode seems particularly suited for this effect since it, in essence, comprises two leading tones, one to the tonic and one to the dominant; losing one's way is always a risk in this mode. Of course, in this case, there is no leading tone to the Mixolydian tonic, but perhaps this can be read as another symbol of disorientation. On the recording, her son Calum frames the song with a haunting piano and harp prelude and postlude. Meandering through the modal mixture suggested by Peggy's song, he beautifully captures the atmosphere of grief and loss.

Peggy credits her “knowledge of harmonic progressions” for her ability to write songs such as “Nine-Month Blues” (1976) and “I'm Gonna Be an Engineer” (1971),⁴⁰ Peggy's most well-known song by far. In equal measure with its lengthy text that she calls “a tract, a rhymed essay,”⁴¹ Peggy uses techniques learned in her formal music training to further the message of the song. The galloping rhythm of most lines, the studied pacing of harmonic rhythm, and the adroit chord shifts effectively convey the humor and irony of “I'm Gonna Be an Engineer” (see example 12.3).

When I was a little girl, I wished I was a boy,
 I tagged along behind the gang and wore me corduroys,
 Everybody said I only did it to annoy
 But I was gonna be an engineer.
 Momma told me, “Can't you be a lady?
 Your duty is to make me the mother of a pearl.
 Wait until you're older, dear, and maybe
 You'll be glad that you're a girl.”
 —“I'm Gonna Be an Engineer,” stanza 1

As the song begins, the harmonic motion is static—the first three lines are sung to the tonic chord (with an optional one-beat dominant chord at the end of line two). But at the explanation of the little girl's tomboy behavior—“But I was gonna be an engineer”—the harmonic pace accelerates, moving abruptly from I to V⁷/V to V⁷/vi and ushering in the maternal (and societal) message of the next four lines regarding girl engineers, and it is in these subsequent lines that Peggy uses harmonic maneuvers for maximum effect.

The last four lines of the first stanza divide into two parallel phrases; and each time, an opening line with an unexpected chord shift gives way to a prosaic harmonic progression. This procedure captures both the girl's desire for an unconventional career and the immediate closing off of possibilities by her mother, society, and her husband. For example, in m. 9, at "Momma told me, Can't you be a lady," the harmony suddenly moves from I to V/V to V^7/vi , with the two secondary dominant chords (on melody notes A and B) occurring on "lady" in m. 10. This key word is highlighted not only harmonically but also melodically and rhythmically: the constant dotted rhythm halts at this point. Yet the opportunity for change suggested by this unusual harmony is cut off as the V^7/vi resolves deceptively to a IV chord on the word "duty" in the next line. The subsequent conventional message is set to a predictable harmonic progression that moves quite ordinarily toward a half cadence at m. 12. The next two lines begin the same way; however, the harmonic shift is even more coy. At m. 14, the melody of line three is identical to that of line one with an important change. The chords on the word "maybe" tease the listener, as well as the poor girl of the song, as the melody is stretched while the harmony is contracted. Rather than moving from A to B on "maybe," the melody prolongs the move to the pitch B by inserting a passing $A\sharp$ to end the line; the B is attained only at the beginning of the next and final line. Meanwhile, the harmonic progression is shortened on the word "maybe" by omitting the V/V altogether on the first note of the measure and moving directly to the V^7/vi , which now harmonizes the pitch A. The parallel deceptive move from V^7/vi to IV is shifted and transformed: it becomes V^7/vi to IV^7 and now occurs on the word "maybe" rather than bridging the two lines as it did in its first iteration.⁴² As before, the possibilities that these two chords suggest are quickly undercut with a perfunctory harmonic progression: the $A\sharp$ strongly propels the melody to B, harmonized with a I chord that initiates an emphatic I– V^7 –I to drive the message home: "You'll be glad that you're a girl." Indeed, the potential for change and possibilities suggested in this second harmonic shift on "maybe" is even greater than the first, making the antifeminist message with its clichéd harmony that much more defeating. Much like the engineer in this song, Peggy demonstrates that she has training (perhaps unusual for a girl) and knows how to use it. She declares proudly that this complex song "takes lung power, stamina, a large vocal range, a good sense of pitch, and quite a number of guitar chords."⁴³

Peggy's Songs: Political Influences

The earliest products of Peggy's career can be viewed as comparable to Ruth's work in method and in utilitarian spirit. And, like Ruth's collections, Peggy's early books and recordings did not have a political slant. Indeed, as

I'm Gonna Be an Engineer

alternative title: "Gonna Be an Engineer"
 words and music: Peggy Seeger
 © 1979 Stormking Music, Inc. (2)

with spirit

When I was a lit- tle girl, I wished I was a boy,
 I tagged a-long be-hind the gang and wore me cor- du- roys,
 Eve- ry - bod-y said I on- ly did it to an- noy
 But I was gon- na be an en- gi- neer
 Mom- ma told me, Can't you be a la- dy?

Example 12.3. "I'm Gonna Be an Engineer," stanza 1. By Peggy Seeger. © Stormking Music Inc. Rights administered by Harmony Music Limited. Used by permission.

Peggy said later in life, "I grew up in a household of classical musicians who were fascinated by folk music, but who didn't really have any class orientation. My folks were mildly liberal, but they didn't look on folk music as class music, as a mode of class expression."⁴⁴ However, the lack of a political voice in Peggy's music was short-lived. The pivotal moment occurred in 1956 when she met Ewan MacColl.

Through Ewan's influence, Peggy's career changed significantly as her political consciousness of folk music as an expression of class struggle grew: "I had a definite feeling of coming alive as a person when I met Ewan. Of all of a sudden realizing what the world was all about. . . ." "Ewan's working class; he was the first working class person I've been really close to."⁴⁵ "[I]t is to him that I owe the basis of my political education and commitment."⁴⁶ He "showed me who 'the folk' really are."⁴⁷ Through one of the earliest

Your du-ty is to make me the moth-er of a pearl.
 Wait un-til you're older, dear, and may - be
 You'll be glad that you're a girl. —
 Dain-ty as a Dres-den sta-tue, Gen-tle as a Jer-sey cow;
 Smooth as silk, gives cream-y milk, Learn to coo, Learn to moo,
 That's what you do to be a la- dy now -

Chords: C, G, Am, D7, G, B7, C7, G, D7, G, Em, Bm, Em, Bm, Cm, G, C, G, Em, Am, D7

Example 12.3. (*continued*)

projects Peggy worked on with Ewan, the eight-part *Radio Ballads* series (1957–64) for the BBC,⁴⁸ Peggy met bridge builders, carpenters, ditch diggers, professional boxers, and tinkers, to name but a few trades. She describes the innovative process of writing the scripts for these shows:

A radio ballad was a tapestry of *actuality* (material that we recorded from informants), sound effects, instrumental music, and songs. We felt that we didn't know enough about the subjects of each programme so we went to those who did know: the railway workers, road builders, fisherfolk, etc. These protracted encounters yielded information, terminology, experience, attitudes, mannerisms, speech patterns, breathing rhythms, vocal pitches, and a myriad of unspoken thoughts behind the spoken ones. The actuality formed the basis of the authenticity of the programmes. When the writing was finished, we always took the script and songs back to the people whom we had recorded. . . . Their reactions and comments helped us to finalise the programme.⁴⁹

She recalls these experiences “changed my perception of folk music very, very much. The songs were now more than just pretty pieces of music. I began to view folk music as a product of working-class life just as much as the skills and crafts.”⁵⁰ Clearly for Peggy, a working-class identity became a defining and central characteristic of folk song, and this newly found political awareness shaped the majority of the songs she would subsequently write.

Peggy refers to these songs as “social songs. . . . They’re ones that describe things how they are, and that say some day things will be better, they don’t say we’re going to seize power tomorrow.”⁵¹ In them, she critiques local, national, and international politicians; she protests poll taxes and other economic inequities; she advocates specific strikes, boycotts, and union organizing. Many of Peggy’s songs, particularly from but not limited to the 1970s, expose situations that women confront in their lives. The hardships of pregnancy, abortion, rape, domestic violence, household drudgery, and negative body images sparked, for example, “Nine-Month Blues,” “Emily,” “Talking Matrimony Blues,” “Different Therefore Equal,” “Reclaim the Night,” “Give ‘Em an Inch,” “B-Side,” “Vital Statistics,” and “Lady, What Do You Do All Day?” In addition to writing feminist songs, Peggy interrogates traditional folk songs about women through her workshop titled “A Feminist View of Anglo-American Traditional Songs,” in which she examines folk songs from various viewpoints: how they define the norms of women’s lives at home and at work, how these norms are enforced in song, the way women have fought against these strictures, what subjects of women’s lives have been omitted from folk songs (especially lesbian relationships), and finally how contemporary songwriters can address these formerly taboo subjects. Inspired by her activities with the Greenham Common Peace Camp in the 1980s,⁵² Peggy focused on environmental issues and nuclear proliferation through songs such as “Four-Minute Warning,” “Plutonium Factor,” “Please, Mr. Reagan,” “Carry Greenham Home,” “Tomorrow,” “If You Want the Bomb,” “Polonium 2-1-0,” “The Mother,” and “Bush Has Gone to Rio.” With such an array of topics, it is notable that Peggy wrote very few songs about Vietnam and Northern Ireland. She explained, “With Vietnam, it was probably the unspeakable enormity of the war. In the case of Northern Ireland, however, I think it was the mind-boggling complexity of its history.”⁵³

Recently, Peggy began issuing CDs that feature her immediate responses to current political issues. These inexpensive recordings, issued under the rubric of *The Timely Series*, are available only through her Web site or at her concerts. On them she includes only six or seven songs such as “Home, Sweet Home,” a song about “homeland insecurity, with percussion by the White House.” Songs from the first CD in this series include “Bush Went to Kyoto,” “You Men Out There 2004,” and “Cavemen,” her response to 9/11. She devoted the second CD to telling the story of Jimmy Massey, a marine

whom Peggy interviewed about his refusal to continue his tour of duty in Iraq. She writes, “He travels around the country talking about his experiences and what he’s learned. I interviewed him and have made a song for and about him. I’ve made a quick interim CD of the song and he carries it on his tours.”⁵⁴

Although her social songs stem from her personal political beliefs and activities, they do not always address issues particular to her life. Rather, she often advocates for other people, finding her identity by joining their struggles. “Song of Myself” (1968) is a testament to the political alliances she forged with people outside of her own experience.⁵⁵ She writes in the first two and last two stanzas:

I love those who labour, I sing of the farmers
And weavers and fishermen and miners as well;
Now all you who hear me, I pray you draw near me,
Before you grow weary I’ll sing of myself.

I was brought up in plenty until I was twenty,
A joy to myself as but children can be;
A joy to my father, a joy to my mother,
The pain of my country was nothing to me.

...

For I’ve learned to be angry, I’ve learned to be lonely.
I’ve learned to be many, I’ve learned to be one.
I’ve earned all my friends, even foes will commend me,
I stand with the many, I am not alone.

In the presence of fighters I find a new peace,
In the company of workers replenish myself;
Of miners and weavers, of rebels and dreamers,
When I sing of my comrades, I sing of myself.

—“Song of Myself,” stanzas 1, 2, 8, and 9

Often when Peggy wanted to write songs about political events and personal experiences different from those of her life, such as domestic violence, life in a wheelchair, or the disappeared in Chile, she adopted the interview technique from the process that she and Ewan developed on the *Radio Ballads*. She explains:

In order to write “Missing,” I spent a day with Murielita’s mother and sister and went home emotionally drained. The interview was so painful that I couldn’t start the song for six weeks. When I began to write the song I felt I had undergone a small part of the experience myself. Using this method, you almost merge with the person you are

interviewing. I begin the session by telling the person what I am going to do, that I am ignorant of what they have been through and would they please explain anything and everything to me. They cried and laughed and confided the most intimate details you can imagine. I am infinitely grateful to them for their trust and each time I finish writing a song in this manner I am looking forward to the next time.⁵⁶

Peggy's songs regularly give voice to people whose lives are outside her experience. She is dedicated to conveying their stories honestly and without melodrama or exaggeration. Similarly, when Peggy performs traditional music, in particular, Anglo-American ballads, she is equally committed to finding a performing style that honorably communicates the particular circumstances of another's life without stereotyping or histrionics. Many of the performance choices she makes are a result of her work in the 1960s with the Critics Group, a discussion and research group of friends and fellow folksingers that met to "clarify . . . their attitudes to the [folk] revival and to the tradition."⁵⁷

Performance Questions and Solutions

Throughout the 1960s Ewan and Peggy were at the center of the folk revival in Britain, and one of the most important venues for folksingers of all backgrounds was the Ballads and Blues Folk Club in London that Ewan had founded with Alan Lomax, A. L. (Bert) Lloyd, and Seamus Ennis in 1953.⁵⁸ As more and more singers performed songs they had not grown up with and in languages they did not know, the Audience Committee of the Club established two policies: that no one should sing in a language they did not speak and that no one should perform the same song more than once in a three-month period.⁵⁹ The need for learning new repertoire, along with a growing desire among the singers to discuss and study folksinging style, led to the formation in 1964 of the Critics Group. Peggy details their activities:

[T]he Critics Group was formed at the behest of several singers who also found that they were losing their way in singing traditional songs. We began to attract singers who wanted to study folksinging. You know, there is no set discipline for folksinging—it's an "anything goes" area even though real dyed-in-the-wool field singers are very specific about how they sing and what they sing. The purpose of the Critics Group was to make it possible for the singers who had not been brought up in the "folk" tradition to sing the songs in a way that would not abrogate the original intention of the makers. It was an attempt to keep the folk songs *folk songs*, not turn them into classical pieces or pop songs or anything-goes songs. We analysed accompanimental and vocal styles, tried to expand our abilities to sing in different styles so that we could tackle different kinds of songs (within the languages and dialects that we spoke) and still keep the songs true to themselves.⁶⁰

Indeed, the goal of the Critics Group was not to replicate folk styles, but to learn a set of principles by which one might perform folk songs for a contemporary audience while still retaining the spirit of the original. She felt strongly that the singers who had come to folk music “second hand . . . were absolutely butchering these songs by doing things to them that were outside of their parameters in creation. Which they wouldn’t dare do with classical music, . . . and the songs were being ruined. So we worked with that group for six years. And it was experimental. It was invaluable to me.”⁶¹

One of the most important performance issues that members of the Critics Group grappled with was that of singing style and, in particular, how and whether songs should be accompanied. For example, the ballads of Britain, as well as those of America, were traditionally *a cappella* songs; however, many singers had been performing them with obligatory guitar or banjo accompaniments, including Peggy herself in her earliest recordings. She now writes candidly about the performance styles of her first recordings:

Listen to me in my early years singing so fast that even I (who know the words of the songs) cannot understand what I am singing. Or listen to me accompanying Ewan on sloshy guitar or overharmonising with him on ‘Lassie Wi’ the yellow Coatie’. We all do these things in our youth and before we have understanding (just wish I hadn’t recorded them). Ewan did this himself in his early recordings and never pretended that he didn’t.⁶²

Peggy’s comments describe the practice of a young folk performer who valued virtuosity over nuance and lush instrumentals over sparse textures; in essence, all of her early accompaniment decisions were based on this aesthetic rather than on the stylistic requirements of an individual song. Of course, one of the lessons Peggy had learned from her mother was that folk songs could be accompanied since much of Ruth’s work was centered on writing folk song settings and accompaniments, work that meant more to Peggy than her original compositions.⁶³ Yet, Peggy also acknowledges that Ruth’s earliest accompaniments, like her own, did not follow the folk principles that her later ones did:

[T]here’s certain principles that you definitely do follow. And my mother did not stick to those. Ewan MacColl stuck to them. But my mother didn’t; I think she was learning by the time she died. If you compare . . . the accompaniments for the *Nineteen Songs* with the accompaniments for say *The Animal Songs for Children*, there’s a huge difference there. And I think it’s that she’s listened to folk songs. And she’s heard what they do. And she’s created that incredible preface that Larry Polansky has now put out which is *mind blowing*.⁶⁴

Like Ruth, Peggy grew to consider her accompaniments much more carefully than she had in her earlier years. While she did not reject the idea of accompanying songs that might not have been originally accompanied, she

did abandon the perfunctory inclusion of banjo and/or guitar on every piece. Instead, as a result of her study of a variety of folk song styles and accompaniments with members of the Critics Group, she began to apply the principles she learned to each of her songs, conscientiously tailoring her accompaniments to reflect, but not necessarily imitate, folk practices.

As part of the Critics Group, I did something that would probably please my mother a lot. I looked to contiguous cultures where melody was the most important element, which it is in the English and Scottish and Irish, and looked at how these other cultures were accompanying a melodic song. And it was a fascinating exercise. I played dozens and dozens and dozens of records. And taking songs that were a little bit like what we had and seeing, no matter what instrument they were playing, what was the principle of accompaniment. . . . [Ruth] would have liked that approach of studying, which I think is what she was doing when she created some of her later accompaniments. She was studying the nature of the accompaniment. Or what the song required without being melodramatic on it.⁶⁵

Early in this process, Peggy and Ewan, among others in the Critics Group, vigorously enforced their newfound views on performance practice. Although they were not advocating performances that were exact imitations of folk styles, she and Ewan did challenge artists to learn about folk music's origins and to adapt their performances accordingly. Nevertheless, Peggy did not ultimately conclude that ballads should not be accompanied or that folk songs should not have innovative or creative accompaniments. Indeed, her performances feature her wide-ranging skills as an instrumentalist; she regularly accompanies herself on guitar, banjo, autoharp, English concertina, and piano. But her post-Critics Group accompaniment choices are based on her many years of study of folk songs' origins and traditional performance styles and on a careful consideration of what type of accompaniment will complement a particular song and be true to its character, even if the final performance is not a replication of a traditional rendition: "When you're accompanying it should be the song that's the most important."⁶⁶

Peggy's most recent recordings of Ruth's folk song collections for children illustrate a wide range of accompaniment decisions she and her siblings have made.⁶⁷ Many of these recordings quite closely follow Ruth's arrangements, although a good number of others take the music a step beyond the piano accompaniments, interpreting her musical settings on a variety of instruments. In her collections, Ruth set folk songs to piano accompaniments she believed were representative of the style and spirit of those she heard on the original recordings, and for some songs Ruth essentially transcribed banjo or fiddle figurations for the piano. "Cross-eyed Gopher" has an idiomatic banjo figure and "Wolves a-Howling" places the metrically asymmetrical fiddle melody in the left hand. Mike and Peggy followed their mother's lead and recorded these songs with the instruments suggested by

the figuration and comments in the score.⁶⁸ For other songs, however, instrument choices and performance practice seem based on the style and text of the tune. The syncopated rhythm of “The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster Laid the Egg” is captured by the accompaniment the Seegers choose; the plunky notes of the thumb piano, banjo-ukelele, and banjo-guitar along with the scratching of the sandpaper create a barnyard scene more vividly than piano.⁶⁹ “Crocodile Song,” a folk song from Nova Scotia in 6/8 meter, begins with a shipwreck. The choice of English concertina and whistle suggests a sea chantey style much more than the piano could have done.⁷⁰ Peggy and Mike also accompany another shipboard tune, “Fire Down Below,” with concertina, which, despite its maritime resonance, is an unexpected addition to Ruth’s rather sparse, mostly unison piano setting.⁷¹ Indeed, Peggy and Mike are much more likely to diverge from Ruth’s accompaniments by thinning them, often singing in unison with no accompaniment whatsoever, particularly in call and response songs such as “Oh, John the Rabbit” and “The Train is A-Coming.”⁷² In a similar vein, they have recorded play-party songs featuring hand games and/or call and response sections with rhythmic accompaniment only: thigh slaps and scraping a banjo head as in “Hop, Old Squirrel,” cheek slaps as in “Juba,” or hand claps as in “All Around the Kitchen.”⁷³

Ironically, Peggy has, in the past, paid the price for a rigorous enforcement of a “no accompaniment” rule that she never held, but was often believed to have inspired. In the 1960s and 1970s, a folk club in Liverpool that “prided themselves on being traditional” invited Ewan to perform but did not include Peggy “because she doesn’t sing traditional; she sings accompanied.”⁷⁴ Peggy now responds to the memory with laughter and the remark that these days the folk label simply means playing acoustic instruments, making it difficult to know just what rules one is playing by anymore.⁷⁵

The Critics Group studied not only singing styles and accompaniment options but also “folk theatre and folk techniques of creation.”⁷⁶ Building on their approach for representing particular characters for the *Radio Ballads*, Ewan taught the members of the Critics Group how to create a character in a folk song performance by using a technique he developed. Peggy refers to it as “The Idea of ‘IF’” and describes it through the traditional American murder ballad “Omi Wise.”⁷⁷

Essentially, it runs like this: if you are singing “Omi Wise,” in which the loving pregnant Omi Wise is murdered by her lover John Lewis, you (the singer) do not pretend that you are Omi Wise (or, if you prefer, John Lewis). It’s not possible. You are NOT these people and can only believe for a limited amount of time that you are. This belief system is exhausted by the time you sing the song ten, fifteen, twenty times and can contribute to your getting tired of the song. But try saying to yourself, “IF I were a servant girl, in love with the well-off neighbour’s son, IF he promised to marry me, IF he took me up and away on horseback ostensibly to marry me, IF he then told me at the

riverside that he was going to murder me, IF he then shoved me in the river, went home, was then jailed . . . then HOW would I sing this song?" Now, this is possible. Your singing of the song answers whatever IF questions you have asked yourself . . . and because you can change the given circumstances of those questions at will, the answers also change and you keep yourself, the singer, eternally interested. This technique is wonderful to apply while singing. You make up a new story every time—it is as fresh to you as it is to those who are listening.⁷⁸

Ewan also reminded the singers in the Critics Group that the characters who filled folk songs were not just stock characters, "but they are people, and you have to give them more than they are in the song."⁷⁹ To achieve this perspective, Ewan often had the singers enact scenes from songs they intended to perform. Thus Peggy once found herself in the position of Omi Wise, sitting in her living room, staring at an imaginary river, and talking with another member of the group, Jim O'Connor, who was enacting the part of John Lewis, the man who shoves Omi into the river where she drowns. Their scene took about fifteen minutes and ended with Jim/John leaving, declaring he was going to marry someone else. He did not ultimately shove Peggy/Omi into the river, yet the lesson Peggy learned was palpable:

[M]y terror . . . has informed that song right along. "Pity, oh pity, spare me my life." Whenever I sing, "Pity, oh pity," I get chills up the back, and I'm sitting there by that line on the carpet thinking Jim O'Connor is going to shove me over it. [laughter] . . . And that's what you do in something like "Omi Wise," when she's riding down to the river, and she sees he's going to throw her, and then "Pity, oh pity." You call on all the related emotions you've had in your life of fright, terror, foreboding, all of that, and you put it all into "Pity, oh pity." And it's not . . . histrionics. In no way is it histrionics, it's merely you're thinking.⁸⁰

Thus Peggy brings a conscious, purposeful process to her performance choices. She is acutely aware of the cerebral approach she brings to her work, which was first pointed out to her by her father. "My father once told me, . . . 'Peggy, when you sing and play, I can hear you thinking.' And it was not a compliment. 'I can hear you *thinking*.' You know on the folk songs. And that is exactly what I do, I think. I think. And it's part of the enjoyment."⁸¹

Thinking and Feeling/Classical and Folk

The oppositional and sometimes problematic notions of thinking and feeling surface in much of Peggy's writing about folk music and about her mother. "To me [Ruth's] music compositions represent a glorious melding of head and heart, although heavy on the head-side."⁸² Just as Peggy was able to hear the audience thinking at the end of a performance of "The Judge's

Chair,” she “can hear [Ruth] thinking, carrying each melody to its limit” in *Nineteen American Folk Songs for Piano*. In her introductory remarks to this publication, Peggy analyzes several of Ruth’s accompaniments and comments on their “mathematical precision.”⁸³ Peggy attempts to clarify this thinking/feeling dichotomy by exploring the distinctions between classical and folk music.

The most exciting book . . . was the *Folk Song U.S.A.* because you could hear the accompaniments taking shape downstairs and you could hear her playing the record that she got the idea from, and then virtually transposing the ideas to something that was viable on the piano. And I used to love hearing these accompaniments take shape and that area of her work really thrills me. . . . I’ve been doing more listening to her compositions; partly because I have more to listen to and I would probably retract or soften the harshness of my earlier statement that I didn’t understand her compositions, her classical compositions. I think that like any creative person in the arts, she had two sides; she had one which was the more emotional side and one in which she just liked to sit down and use her brain. And I think the folk song was the more emotive side although I’m not saying she didn’t use her brain when she made those extraordinary accompaniments; of course she did. But the compositions almost strike me as mathematical, rather than as just a love of music, of melody, of communicating a feeling. To me now, in her compositions, she’s communicating her brain and her pride in being able to think and manipulate in the best sense of the word, all the different voices against each other as the instruments play.⁸⁴

However, this dichotomy of thinking equals classical/feeling equals folk quickly breaks down when Peggy states, “Folk musicians achieve results by a kind of studied impromptu approach.”⁸⁵ During her years in England and through her study with the Critics Group, Peggy had the opportunity to meet with and interview a good number of traditional folksingers such as Joe Heaney and Paddy Tunney. She and Ewan were especially interested in discovering the processes by which folksingers made musical choices of style and accompaniment, and she learned that the notion of unthinking spontaneity in folksinging was often a stereotype held by classically trained musicians.

The classical person’s idea of what a folk performer is I think has to be investigated. Because I know that a lot of the good folksingers do think about what they’re doing when they do it. . . . I think the idea of the folk as a kind of spontaneous thing, that they just do it because they don’t know any better . . . is part of . . . the patronizing about folk people. I think they knew exactly that they’re doing and they plan it all out. . . . When you listen to somebody like Reed Martin play the banjo, wow! I’m sure he’s worked all of that out. And he wants to be different. But different within a constant that already exists.⁸⁶

Thus Peggy reveals that the different aesthetics of the folk and the classical are not so clearly aligned with notions of emotional investment and rational precision. On the one hand, she views folk music as a genre that accesses one’s emotional self, and on the other, she insists that folk music is just as

carefully constructed as classical music. Perhaps the resolution to this contradiction is found in Peggy's comments about her mother's process of setting folk songs: "She was thinking and feeling at the same time."⁸⁷ Both qualities are necessary for folk songs to be compelling, and ultimately, it is this dual nature of folk music that she values. In particular, she finds the forgiving spirit of the folk music process, a sign of this balance, attractive.

Yes, the freedom. That's one of the reasons I can get along in folk music where I never could get along in classical music. If I make a mistake in folk music, I just resolve it, then repeat it three verses later, and it's immediately on purpose and sometimes the mistakes are very, very good—they test your ingenuity of getting out of a difficult situation. Sometimes you find out quite extraordinary things during a performance when you make a mistake.⁸⁸

In addition to her views on the nature of folk and classical music, Peggy has very strong opinions about the relationship between these genres. She is particularly adamant that there should be "strong lines drawn between the musics."⁸⁹ The use of folk music by classical composers "as an ideas-bank . . . for rejuvenating the content of so-called 'classical' music" troubles her.⁹⁰ She views the borrowings and settings of folk tunes by Britten and Vaughan Williams, for example, as patronizing, believing that they propagate the myth that folk tunes are nascent musical ideas needing to be brought to fruition by the classically trained composer. She observes that "folk musicians never dreamed, for the most part, to my knowledge, of taking classical tunes and turning them into folk tunes. Why do it the other way around unless you feel that your store of music is impoverished—that you can't dream these things up yourself?"⁹¹ Some of Peggy's views on this matter may have been shaped by her mother, who did not find an alliance between her musical goals and those of, for example, Antonín Dvořák. Instead Ruth was inspired by the music and methods of Bartók.

Judith Tick has written extensively about the similarities in philosophy shared by Bartók and Crawford Seeger. They both were reacting in opposition to the "excesses of Romanticists," finding modernist inspiration in folk music's "subversive harmonies" based on fourths, fifths, seconds, and sevenths, and in its reliance on pentatonic and gapped scales. Further, both felt the "same dissatisfaction with facile thematic appropriations."⁹² Peggy herself recognizes and comments on the similarities between her mother's approach and Bartók's, particularly with regard to the way elements of folk tunes are isolated and reworked in accompaniments.⁹³ But what Peggy seems most taken with are not Bartók's accompaniments or settings of folk tunes, but rather his compositional process, which she views as his adoption of the folk process.

Bartók, for the most part, dreamed up his tunes himself. They were like folk tunes and many of the things he did, especially in his piano works, I find are so reminiscent of the

way that the folk bands play, . . . it's like getting the best of what the folk can do and using it in classical music without debasing it—without having it lose its dignity.⁹⁴

Peggy explains Bartók's success through what she believes is his lack of sentimentality about the tunes as well as his borrowing of the atmosphere or aura surrounding the tunes.⁹⁵ "Bartók said, listen to the folk. Observe the processes with which they create, and imitate the processes rather than the final creation."⁹⁶ For her, using folk tunes "lock, stock, and barrel"⁹⁷ is unacceptable, while using the folk process yields pleasing results. Thus, for Peggy, the uneasy balance between folk and classical music is again mediated by an understanding of the folk process.

Further easing the tensions between these musical traditions for Peggy is a willingness on the part of classical composers to study and take folk music seriously, as she explains her mother did when she painstakingly transcribed hundreds of folk tunes. "[Ruth] understood so completely the relationship between two musics that are supposed to be at two ends of the pole. . . . But they both have their rules, they both have their disciplines."⁹⁸ Peggy also suggests that movement between these two poles is more easily achieved by folk rather than classical musicians, and Ruth again is a case in point. "She respected and was astounded at the way unlettered musicians could play. She tried to do it herself; she tried to learn to play by ear and to improvise. It was a bit stiff because it's very hard to come from classical to folk. I think it's easier almost to go from folk to classical."⁹⁹ Indeed, Ruth's move toward folk music prompted Peggy to observe:

I think she would understand the link between the folk and the conscious classical knowledge, because I have that. She began with the classical and went to the folk. I began with the folk and went to the classical. And they, we, have the same kind of musical intelligence.¹⁰⁰

There are parallels between the issue of how classical composers might use folk music in an acceptable way in their compositions and the question of how revivalist or nontraditional folksingers might perform folk music. In the first instance, the key for Peggy is that composers should privilege the folk process over the use of quoted folk tunes. Similarly, Peggy would argue that the solution to the second question is also about process. Effective performances are ones that capture the essence of the music without adhering to rigid notions of authentic performance practice and slavishly imitating folk style. As a revival folksinger, Peggy has had to grapple with these questions for most of her career.

I didn't grow up with this music on my front porch. I grew up with it being played on the gramophone, and occasional visiting singers. And influences from all over the place. And as an intelligent musician, trying to sort out what is valid to put on a folk

song and what is not valid so that it doesn't abrogate the intentions of the quote original creator, it's very difficult.¹⁰¹

Peggy's understanding and study of the folk process as well as her formal musical training have contributed to her success in this endeavor, prompting folklorist and folksinger Ellen Stekert to recognize Peggy as one of the revival folksingers working within what she terms the "new aesthetic."

The Folk Process and the New Aesthetic

In her study of the urban folk revival of the 1960s, Ellen Stekert grapples with the questions about the relative validity of a variety of folksingers, "who 'should' sing folk songs, and how they 'ought' to be sung."¹⁰² She sets out a taxonomy of folksingers that can be useful in untangling the various threads of traditional and revivalist folksingers. She begins with the traditional singers, those "who have learned their songs and their style of presentation from oral tradition as they grew up."¹⁰³ She then moves on to consider three categories of revivalists: the emulators, the utilizers, and the new aesthetic. Emulators are those who completely immerse themselves in a particular style and strive for performances, and even speech patterns and a lifestyle, that closely replicate the folk model; she places the Greenbriar Boys and members of the New Lost City Ramblers, including Peggy's brother Mike, into this category.¹⁰⁴ She divides utilizers into two groups: urban pop and urban art. These singers begin with a folk song and alter its various elements of music, words, and performance style through their own aesthetic of popular or art music. The Kingston Trio is representative of the pop aesthetic with Alfred Deller and Richard Dyer-Bennet in the art aesthetic camp.¹⁰⁵ The final group Stekert establishes, the new aesthetic, is the one into which she places Peggy. Stekert asserts that this group "developed its own set of aesthetic criteria," and thus, they fall somewhere between the traditional singers and the utilizers—too "overstated" when compared to traditional singers, but "the traditional embodiment of understatement" in the company of urban and pop utilizers. This group also uses a combination of traditional and classical styles in their accompaniments.¹⁰⁶

Peggy is a case in point for the revivalist folksinger who filtered traditional music through a new aesthetic lens. The songs she writes certainly reinterpret folk models while calling on her classical training for their sophistication. And her approach to performance is grounded in a study of traditional styles but leavened with her own musical taste and desires. Her intellectual approach is what marks her as a new aesthetic folksinger: her study of folk song, her privileging of the folk process, her thinking about folk style and accompaniment, and her adherence to principles and methods of folk song performance all shape the choices Peggy makes in her performances of folk songs.

As an artist who embraces her placement within the new aesthetic, Peggy asserts, “I am not [a folksinger]; I am a singer of folk songs,” and this fine distinction bears further examination.¹⁰⁷ She recognizes two factors that are responsible for this position, her middle-class upbringing and her willingness to sing folk songs in a variety of styles:

I’ve done my share of “changing” the folk songs. Had to. I wasn’t brought up on the front porch of a cabin in the Appalachians and I don’t care to pretend that I was. I had a middle-class classical musical training and that’s hard to shake. But I don’t pretend to be a folksinger or that the folk songs (as I sing them) are “ur” versions. I am a singer of folk songs and I hope that my lullabies are lullabies and the words of my ballads are intelligible. Ewan MacColl was one step nearer to being a folksinger than I, having been brought up in a Scots community in Salford.¹⁰⁸

Of even more significance than her middle-class position is her assertion, “I do all kinds of things in my music and in my singing style, even when I sing folk songs, that I realize perfectly clearly is not folk style.”¹⁰⁹ Peggy makes the distinction between those whom she believes sing folk songs within the folk process, traditional singers and emulators, and those who, like herself, sing folk songs in a way that pleases them artistically, consciously allowing more rapid and marked change. Certainly, all folksingers put their own stamp on the music they sing, but Peggy would argue that folksingers, whether from within the tradition or outside it, like her brother Mike, “add their little bits, what they add. But they’re added at an acceptable rate so that the music doesn’t change too quick. You know, it’s an evolving music, folk music. Whereas classical music is static.”¹¹⁰ Conversely, of her own position as a singer of folk songs, Peggy explains:

I think . . . I took the medium further . . . and combined it with something else in an intellectual way. . . . Mike . . . is a very valuable resource, he is a link in the chain the way each generation of folksingers is a link in the chain. Mike has *become* a folksinger. I am not. I am a singer of folk songs. I add things that aren’t in the [style]; I am a number of steps up all of a sudden. He is one step up slowly. And we need those people. Absolutely need them, because when Tommy Jarrell dies, Mike knows how to play Tommy Jarrell’s songs. And Mike is a respected person who can then disseminate this to a number of people, they will learn to play as Tommy Jarrell plays.¹¹¹

Peggy feels an affinity with her mother when considering these issues, saying “I do the kind of thing she did.”¹¹² While Ruth was precise in her transcriptions, capturing minute nuances of pitch bending, flexible rhythms, and ornamentation, she was not ultimately an emulator. In her transcriptions, she meticulously preserved the performances of recordings of folk songs. But she did not do any fieldwork herself (although she used others’ field recordings), and she created versions of folk songs that did not necessarily adhere closely to the originals except, of course, in spirit. Ruth explained:

This, then, is the free use of the material, the giving to the children the feeling that this music could be made theirs, but this without losing the face of the original. In publishing books I have thought it extremely important that what we might call the authentic, as we heard it in traditional recordings or in the field, should be given to the public. They have a right to know it in its most vigorous form; they have a right to know the words as they are. Then if we want to suggest that things be done with it, that should be a separate thing. Somehow let them have a taste of the thing itself. In selecting material, we must also make it usable for the people who are going to use it. In other words, *though we have love for the folk, we also have love for the people we are giving it to, and we must make it as usable by them as possible.* And it often requires the hearing of twenty versions before you find the one which fits both these ideals. Also important, very important I think to the person using this material is that he gets the feeling of the idiom and not just the feeling of the beauty of the song itself. These are a few of the objectives that I feel are important, in any use of folklore for children.¹¹³

Ruth, like Peggy, studied the details of folk music style and valued undiluted representations of the tradition. Yet both also looked to their own artistic desires and the needs of their audiences for their final inspiration in presenting this music. Judith Tick has remarked that both Ruth and Charles “confront[ed] ambiguities of mediation in a direct and honest way,”¹¹⁴ an attitude that signals an acceptance and understanding of the new aesthetic position that Peggy would come to occupy.

Contradictions and Explanations

Despite her belief in their shared perspective, Peggy paradoxically maintains she did not learn much about folk music from her mother even though she was immersed in American folk music while growing up. For instance, of her experience with the Critics Group, she states, “I learned more there about folk music than I did from my mother, but what I did learn from my mother was a love of the music, ‘cause she really did love it.”¹¹⁵ Peggy also credits her mother with instilling in her an open-mindedness about music; further, she learned from Ruth that music was necessary and possible for everyone and that music was “a part of everyday life.”¹¹⁶ But, despite Peggy’s statement, “My musical memory of [Ruth] is folk songs,”¹¹⁷ she emphasizes Ewan’s influence on her own understanding of folk music. Certainly, Peggy did learn a great deal about the folk process through her relationship with Ewan and their work on the *Radio Ballads*, with the Critics Group, and on other projects. Further, Peggy and Ewan did interview several English, Scottish, and Irish folksingers, and they collected numerous folk songs. Peggy learned much about folk music apart from Ruth, even though she had been immersed in folk music through Ruth’s work. Perhaps the tensions between these two positions can be mitigated by an understanding that Peggy’s comments do

not address the issue of what she learned about folk music *as* music—adapted and performed—but what she learned about folk music as a product of the working class and as a vehicle for social and political commentary.

What Peggy learned from Ruth was that folk music “can be simultaneously skilled, informal, and improvisational.”¹¹⁸ She often speaks of her mother’s insight into the spontaneity as well as the craft of the folk tradition, and Peggy’s penchant for approaching folk song from an analytical perspective seems also to be a by-product of her early training with Ruth. And we should not forget that this instruction included a classical grounding in music theory that gave Peggy the tools to be able to absorb and replicate the folk idiom quickly, perhaps even making up, to some degree, for the fact that she was not from the southern Appalachian mountains or the deep South. Indeed, it was this early training with Ruth in both folk and classical music that provided Peggy with a foundation on which she was subsequently able to develop her own musical voice. Further, Peggy’s process of shaping folk materials with respect for the original but without feeling bound to strict authenticity seems to have been influenced by Ruth’s own approach to her transcriptions and settings. And Peggy’s exposure to a vast folk repertoire through Ruth’s work gave Peggy a context into which she could later situate her study of folk song with Ewan and the Critics Group. But Peggy did not learn from her mother about the social context of folk music. Rather, it was through Ewan that she was introduced to the notion that folk music was a working-class music that could be used in the service of political struggles.¹¹⁹ Clearly, Peggy’s distinctive use of traditional music idioms in her folk songs owes much to the cross-fertilization between her early and intense exposure to folk music with her mother and her study of folk music with Ewan. That she really credits only Ewan with teaching her about folk music reveals how central her belief is that “folk music is the expression of the people at the bottom of the heap.”¹²⁰

Even though Peggy and Ruth differed in their awareness and understanding of the links between folk music and the working class, they both had purposes for their music that did not dictate that it be kept in its original form. Ruth sought “to acquaint [children] with a small part of the traditional (i.e., ‘folk’) music of *their own country*,” and she believed that a musical education must begin with the “rich musical heritage of [ones’] own country.”¹²¹ More generally, Ruth also looked to folk music for inspiration as she sought to develop an American musical idiom that built upon folk music’s more contemporary rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic characteristics. Conversely, Peggy employs folk music as a vehicle for her social and political commentary on the world:

I’ve written harmless little songs about pride in being a mature (forget the senior crap) citizen, about farting as a weapon against smokers, about deep ecology, fascism, domestic violence. I believe it’s my job to put into song what many people are feeling these

days: that there is a better world up ahead of us there and there's nothing more worth while doing than to envision it and make it happen. Each in our own way. . . . My battlefield is the concert stage, the lecture hall. My job, like so many songwriters, is to place (in a memorable and enticing form) a message that, were it in non-hummable form, might not be so easily remembered.¹²²

Each woman's aesthetic stamp on the music comes from a strong artistic personality that approaches the folk music tradition with a grounding in the classical music tradition, and each responds with music for the perceived needs of her times.

Certain defining questions have framed Peggy's musical life: should the artist concern herself with fidelity to a tradition, or should folk music be adapted in ways that allow it to better serve as a vehicle for a social message? How can one balance these two sometimes competing ideals? Because Peggy's primary purpose in writing and singing folk songs is to reach people with social and political messages through the medium of traditional musical styles, she is not concerned with adhering to notions of authenticity when she writes or performs in a folk idiom. Rather, she strives to pay homage to the social and political context of this music and to the folk tradition in general, and she accomplishes this with a great deal of musical craft and expertise. Peggy said,

I think [Ruth's] open-mindedness as far as music, I have definitely inherited, much to the distress of many friends and people in both folk music and classical areas that I've been in. A lot of the songs that I make up cross the lines all the time and because of this, they work. If I kept them strictly within the folk idiom, they might not.¹²³

Ultimately, it is Peggy's dual citizenship, her straddling of the boundaries between political and aesthetic concerns, between traditional and classical idioms, that gives her music its distinctiveness and power.

Notes

I thank Ray Allen and Ellie Hisama for their guidance in the shaping of this chapter. I would like to acknowledge Judith Tick for her generosity in providing me with several transcripts of personal interviews she and others conducted with Peggy Seeger. Thanks also to Heather Buchman for her many ideas and support.

1. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 22.
2. I use the term "classical" in this chapter in the general way that Peggy means when she uses it: the tradition characterized by musical literacy, musical theory, and encompassing art music by known composers.
3. John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, eds., *Our Singing Country* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).

4. The most well-known of these collections are John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, eds., *Folk Song U.S.A.: The 111 Best American Ballads* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1947); Ruth Crawford Seeger, ed., *American Folk Songs for Children; Animal Folk Songs for Children* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1950; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Linnet Books, 1993); Ruth Crawford Seeger, ed., *American Folk Songs for Christmas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953; rpt. North Haven, Conn.: Linnet Books, 1999); and Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Nineteen American Folk Songs for Piano* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1995).
5. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, Franklinton, N.Y., March 16, 2003.
6. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook, Warts and All: Forty Years of Songmaking* (New York: Oak Publications, 1998), 8.
7. Pete Seeger, *How To Play the 5-String Banjo*, 3d rev'd. ed. (Bethlehem, Pa.: *Sing Out Magazine*, 1996), first published by the author in 1948.
8. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.
9. Peggy Seeger, *Folk Songs of Courting & Complaint*, Folkways Records FA 2049, 1955. Peggy Seeger, liner notes to Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *Classic Scots Ballads*, Tradition TCD 1051, 1997; originally issued as Tradition Records TLP 1015, 1959.
10. Peggy Seeger, *Animal Folk Songs for Children*, Folkways Records FA 7551, 1957; Peggy Seeger, Mike Seeger, Penny Seeger, and Barbara Seeger, *American Folk Songs Sung by the Seegers*, Folkways Records FA 2005, 1957; Peggy Seeger, Penny Seeger, and Barbara Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Christmas*, Folkways Records FA 7553, 1957.
11. Peggy Seeger, *The Five-String Banjo American Folk Styles* (New York: Hargail Music Press, 1960). Peggy Seeger, *Folk Songs of Peggy Seeger: 88 Traditional Ballads and Songs* (New York: Oak Publications, 1964).
12. “[The folk song collection] wasn’t done with a great deal of thought. I just took the songs that were my favorite ones at the time, or the ones that hadn’t been anthologized very much, but in a way, one could continue forever doing such things, because I’d learned a lot of my songs from books, from other singers, from records. They weren’t ones that I’d learned from my family. They were all from sources which were easily available to anybody who could look them up if they wanted. And yet, [people] would buy my book because it had the name of the singer they liked.” Peggy Seeger, interview by Judith Tick, Beckenham, Kent, England, August 14–15, 1985.
13. Peggy Seeger, *Folk Songs of Peggy Seeger*, 5.
14. Peggy Seeger, ed., *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook* (New York: Oak Publications, 2001), 20. Peggy in effect establishes authorship in her two collections of songs: one of Ewan’s songs, *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook* and one of hers, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*.
15. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 15.
16. *Ibid.*, 16.
17. *Ibid.*, 40.
18. *Ibid.*, 16.
19. Published in Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 43. Recorded on Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *The New Briton Gazette*, vol. 1, Folkways Records FA 8732, 1960.
20. In her *Animal Folk Songs for Children*, 12, Ruth explains: “Perhaps most characteristic among the traditions of this music, and most important for us to retain as we sing and play it, is the keeping going, the insistent moving on, the maintaining of pulse

and pace and mood unbroken throughout the singing of a song. Songs are sung as though they might continue into space. . . . In making the piano accompaniments for this book this keep-goingness, or never-endingness, has been a thing cherished. The last measure of a song has often been left up in the air, with no final home chord (tonic) tempting the player to retard or to stop and pay homage to the approaching double bar. It is hoped that such avoidance of tonal finality will help the player feel this last measure not as an ending but as part of a continuing song; that it will pull him past the double bar he has been taught to observe as stop sign, and on back to the beginning *without loss of the song's speed or pulse*. And, when at last it really comes time to stop, perhaps (having no comfortably padded home chord to relax into) he may find he likes taking leave of a song as folksingers do—casually, as though soon to meet again” [emphasis in original]. Peggy says in the “Introduction” to Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Nineteen American Folk Songs*: “It’s always ‘going’ somewhere, even when the final note has been reached—and then, where else but back to the beginning?” Ruth also used this characteristic to distinguish between folk and classical music: “Here were things that weren’t just beautiful melodies—a sort of unfinishedness in the music, it kept on going. Professional music isn’t like that; it always tells you when it is going to end.” Ruth Crawford Seeger, quoted in *Four Symposia on Folklore*, ed. Stith Thompson, Indiana University Publications Folklore Series No. 8 (Bloomington, 1953). From Symposium III, “Making Folklore Available,” 2d Session, 192. For a history and analysis of *Rissolty Rossolty*, see Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 259–64.

21. Peggy Seeger, “The Songwriter,” www.pegseeger.com/html/1_songwriter.html (accessed November 7, 2003).

22. “There’s Better Things to Do” derives from “Better Things,” a traditional American tune; “My Old Man’s a Dustman” from “Lonnie Donegan,” a traditional British tune.

23. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 130.

24. *Ibid.*, 75.

25. “That’s the one Ewan liked. Everything in Dorian.” Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

26. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 16.

27. *Ibid.*, 17. Recorded on Peggy Seeger, *An Odd Collection*, Rounder CD4031, 1996.

28. *Ibid.*, 25; the song appears on 250–51.

29. *Ibid.*, 25 (emphasis mine).

30. *An Odd Collection; Almost Commercially Viable*, Fellside FECD 130, 1998; *Love Will Linger On*, APR 1039, 2000. See Amber Good, “Review of Love Will Linger On,” *American Music* 20 (2002): 240–42. Peggy’s first love for traditional Anglo-American folk songs has fueled her most recent project, a three-CD set called *The Home Trio* (also referred to as *The Home Trilogy*). The first installment, *Heading for Home*, Appleseed APR-CD-1076, 2003, features only one original song among the company of traditional songs. *Love, Call Me Home*, Appleseed APR-CD-1087, 2004, contains ten American folk songs and two written by Seeger. She describes the album as “a mix of heavy and light traditional songs with a few new songs that are in the Anglo-American folk idiom. *She’s Coming Home* (2005) will be almost entirely in a light and bawdy vein.” Peggy Seeger, “Heading for Home, the album, the notes,” www.pegseeger.com/html/headingforhome.html (accessed December 6, 2005); see also Peggy Seeger, “CDs and Songbooks,” www.pegseeger.com/html/about.html (accessed December 6, 2005).

31. Published in Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 281; recorded on Peggy Seeger, *An Odd Collection*.
32. Ewan MacColl in *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook*, 28–29. There are numerous recordings of this song; one of the most accessible is Ewan's performance on *Black and White: The Definitive Collection*, Cooking Vinyl COOKCD 038, 2001; original release date 1991). Peggy's version can be heard on Peggy Seeger, *The Folkways Years 1955–1992: Songs of Love and Politics*, Smithsonian/Folkways CDSF 40048, 1992.
33. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003. 2. Peggy Seeger: "I think she [Ruth] was on her way to this kind of independence when she got ill and died, when she starting composing again in 1951 and '52, around there sometime."
34. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 14.
35. *Ibid.* "Four-Minute Warning" (1980) is an unambiguous Lydian melody on F. It is recorded on Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl, *Kilroy Was Here*, Blackthorne Records BR1063, 1980 and is currently available only on Folkways Records FW 8562, 1980. The most accessible recording of "Emily" (1977) is on Peggy Seeger, *An Odd Collection*.
36. *Ibid.*, 86–87; 91; 100–101. The tunes' original titles are "The Jolly Tinker," "Little Sir Hugh," and "Brown's Ferry Blues," respectively. "The Dead Men" and "Uncle Sam" are recorded on Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl, *At the Present Moment*, Rounder Records ROUN4003, 1973.
37. *Ibid.*, 90. Recorded on Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl, *Folkways Record of Contemporary Songs*, Folkways Records FW8736, 1973.
38. My thanks to Ellie Hisama for her insights about this final phrase.
39. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 258–59. Recorded on Peggy Seeger, *An Odd Collection*.
40. *Ibid.*, 14.
41. Peggy Seeger, "The Songwriter." In concert (March 15, 2003), Peggy also referred to this song as her albatross.
42. The IV⁷ chord functions more as an augmented 6th chord than a secondary dominant. Peggy reveals her understanding of the passing nature of this melody note as well as her classical training by notating the pitch as A#, not B, even though she indicates a C⁷ for the accompaniment.
43. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 110. There are numerous recordings of Peggy singing this song. Two of the most accessible are Peggy Seeger, *The Folkways Years* and Peggy Seeger, *Period Pieces*, Rykodisc Tradition TCD1076, 1998.
44. Quoted in Scott Alarik, "For Peggy Seeger, It's 'Kind of a Turning Point,'" *Boston Globe*, October 9, 1990, 58. For more on Peggy's early thoughts about the working-class identity in folk music, see Irwin Silber, "Peggy Seeger—The Voice of America in Folk Song," *Sing Out!* 12, no. 3 (1962): 4–9.
45. Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985.
46. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 11.
47. Peggy Seeger, *Folk Songs of Peggy Seeger*, 6.
48. Ewan wrote the scripts and songs; Peggy did the musical arrangements and the directing; Charles Parker was the producer and editor. As Peggy notes, "The final programs . . . were considered revolutionary for their time. They opened up new vistas and techniques for radio documentaries and many of Ewan MacColl's most popular songs were made for them." See Peggy Seeger, "The Radio Ballads," www.pegseeger.com/html/rb.html (accessed November 7, 2003). See also Ewan

MacColl, "The Radio Ballads: How They Were Made, When and by Whom," www.pegseeger.com/html/radioballads.html (accessed November 7, 2003).

49. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 26.

50. Quoted in Alarik.

51. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

52. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 176.

53. *Ibid.*, 188.

54. Peggy Seeger, "Peggy's Timely Series," www.pegseeger.com/html/timelyseries.html (accessed December 6, 2005). The three CDs are: *Songs for October 2004*, Timely #01; *Jimmy Massey*, Timely #02; and *Enough is Enough*, Timely #03.

55. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 82–83. This song is also notable for its masterful use of an internal rhyme scheme occasionally in line one and more frequently within lines three and four of several stanzas; e.g., Stanza 1: Now all you who *hear me*, I pray you draw *near me*, / Before you grow *weary* I'll sing of myself. Stanza 8: I've earned all my *friends*, even foes will *commend* me, / I stand with the *many*, I am not alone.

56. *Ibid.*, 26, 212–13.

57. Ewan MacColl quoted in *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook*, 386.

58. Peggy Seeger, "Ewan MacColl," www.pegseeger.com/html/ewan.html (accessed November 7, 2003).

59. Peggy Seeger, "Ewan MacColl Controversy," *Living Tradition*, issue 39, www.folk-music.net/htmlfiles/edtxt39.htm (accessed October 11, 2003).

60. *Ibid.*

61. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

62. Peggy Seeger, "Ewan MacColl Controversy." The album to which she refers earlier in this quote is *Classic Peggy Seeger: Songs in the American Tradition*, Fellside Recordings FECD 105, 1996. This is a reissue of songs she recorded and originally released on Topic Records: 01T9, 1958; TOP72, 1962; TOP73, 1962, and 12T113, 1964.

63. Peggy stated that Ruth's "accompaniments of folk music, to me anyway, mean more to me than her work as a composer." Quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 330.

64. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003. The preface is that in Ruth Crawford Seeger, "*The Music of American Folk Song*" and *Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music*, ed. Larry Polansky (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2001).

65. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Mike Seeger, Peggy Seeger, and Penny Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Christmas*, Rounder Records CD 0268/0269, 1989; Mike Seeger, Peggy Seeger, Barbara Seeger, and Penny Seeger, *Animal Folk Songs for Christmas*, Rounder Records CD 8023/8024, 1992; Mike Seeger and Peggy Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, Rounder Records CD 8001, 1996.

68. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Animal Folk Songs for Children*, 20 and 79.

69. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

70. *Ibid.*, 72–73.

71. Ruth Crawford Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*, 162–63.

72. *Ibid.*, 100–101 and 150–51.

73. *Ibid.*, 109, 91, and 94.

74. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Ewan MacColl quoted in *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook*, 386.
77. Recorded on Peggy Seeger, *Heading for Home*.
78. Peggy Seeger, "The Singer," www.pegseeger.com/html/2_singer.html (accessed October 11, 2003). This technique bears some similarities to Stanislavsky's methods as described by Richard Boleslavsky in his *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949). My thanks to Carole Bellini-Sharp for pointing out this connection.
79. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.*
82. Peggy Seeger, "About Dio," in *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Modernity, Tradition, and the Making of American Music*, ed. Ellie M. Hisama and Ray Allen (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, 2001), 14.
83. Peggy Seeger, in Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Nineteen American Folk Songs*.
84. Transcription of "Recollections Taped by Peggy Seeger MacColl" for Matilda Gaume (July 22, 1977), 8–9. A portion of this excerpt is cited in Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memoirs, Memories, Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986), 187–88.
85. Peggy Seeger, in Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Nineteen American Folk Songs*.
86. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Notes by Peggy Seeger in "Foreword," *Nineteen American Folk Songs*.
91. Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985. Peggy fails to mention, however, the frequency with which popular musicians borrow classical tunes for pop songs.
92. "This crucial assertion of commonality between contemporary composition and oral tradition would recur frequently in her work as a foundation for the integration of folk and art musics. . . . In discovering vernacular idioms at home, Crawford found roots for her own musical difference. At a period of re-emerging folk consciousness among American composers, when the ideology of folk simplicity would guide the course of most 'Americanist' composition, she endowed the vernacular as a new kind of dissonant music. She planned to act on this insight within an incipient urban folk song revival movement." Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 242.
93. Peggy Seeger, in Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Nineteen American Folk Songs*.
94. Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985.
95. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.
96. Peggy Seeger, *Folk Songs of Peggy Seeger*, 5.
97. Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985.
98. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.
99. *Ibid.*
100. *Ibid.*
101. *Ibid.*
102. Ellen Stekert, "Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folk Song Movement: 1930–66," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 84–106. The essay was originally published in *Folklore and Society: Essays in Honor of Benjamin A. Botkin*, ed. Bruce Jackson (Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1966), 153–68.

103. *Ibid.*, 96.

104. In her original article in 1966, Stekert identifies this first category as imitators rather than emulators. When some twenty-five years later she was offered the chance to write an introductory essay about her article, Stekert advocated for changing the term imitator to emulator (90). In her commentary, she contextualizes her work as that of a folksinger who had been “puzzled by peopple such as John Cohen and Mike Seeger, who were beginning to take on the mannerisms of the southern mountaineers whose music they were beginning to master.” She now admits that she “still had a way to go in order to see beyond imitation to the potentials for creativity in their approach” (87) and recognizes that her discussion of these artists was “unconsciously disparaging” (86). In deference to her revised idea, I use the term “emulator” in this discussion, and the term should not be understood to have a negative connotation in my argument. Rather, it is a descriptor of a set of ideals held by a good number of musicians who remain quite faithful to folk models while simultaneously bringing innovative elements to their performances.

105. Bill C. Malone, in his *Southern Music, American Music* (Louisville: Kentucky University Press, 1979), similarly observes: Urban folksingers were “interpreters of folk traditions with which they had only remote connections. Their material was taken from the folk, but . . . it was performed for a nonfolk audience and in styles compatible with either cultivated or popular tastes. The audience who heard [them] sing came away with a broader perception of the kinds of songs available to southern folk, but they received no inkling of ‘how’ the folk sounded” (33).

106. Stekert, “Cents and Nonsense,” 99.

107. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

108. Peggy Seeger, “Ewan MacColl Controversy.”

109. Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985.

110. *Ibid.*

111. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003. Tommy Jarrell (1901–1985) was a fiddler and banjo player from Mount Airy, N.C. Numerous musicians throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s made the pilgrimage to his home to learn his music and style.

112. *Ibid.*

113. Ruth Crawford Seeger in Thompson, *Four Symposia on Folklore*, 194. (Emphasis mine.)

114. Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 300. Tick is referring to their foreword in *Folk Song U.S.A.*

115. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

116. “My mother’s greatest gift to me was the sense of music as a part of everyday life,” Peggy Seeger once said.” Quoted in Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 290. Her greatest legacy to me is “the belief that everybody has an ability to create.” Peggy Seeger, interview by Judith and Ron Rosen, Beckenham, Kent, England, February 21, 1972.

117. Peggy Seeger, interview by author, March 16, 2003.

118. Peggy Seeger, *The Peggy Seeger Songbook*, 15.

119. In one of their interviews Peggy (PS) and Judith Tick (JT) discussed whether Peggy had ever gone to fiddler’s conventions or festivals. Peggy replied, “I never went to any of the really good ones. I’d love to go now.” . . . JT: “You know it’s funny. You’ve got the music and then you found the context later.” PS: “Yeah, that is strange, isn’t it? Yeah, Ewan got it together. His father was a singer, and he got the class allegiance, the understanding music all in one, and understood them as a unit or as

being produced—as being an artistic whole.” Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985.

120. *Ibid.*

121. Ruth Crawford Seeger, “Foreword,” *Nineteen American Folk Songs*.

122. Peggy Seeger, “Activist with an Attitude,” www.pegseeger.com/html/3_activist.html (accessed November 7, 2003).

123. Peggy Seeger, interview by Tick, August 14–15, 1985.

Selected Discography

All recordings are compact discs unless otherwise noted. Dates are from Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composers' Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

The Adventures of Tom Thumb (1925)

- Jenny Lin, piano; Timothy Jones, narrator. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

American Folk Songs for Children (1948)

- Mike Seeger & Peggy Seeger. Rounder 11543/44, 1980.
- Pete Seeger, Smithsonian Folkways SF 45025, 1962 (LP).

Animal Folk Songs for Children (1950)

- Mike Seeger, Peggy Seeger & Penny Seeger. Rounder 8023, 1992.
- Peggy Seeger. Smithsonian Folkways SF 7551, 1957 (LP); reissued SC 7551, 2001 (CD).

American Folk Songs for Christmas (1953)

- Mike Seeger & Peggy Seeger. Rounder 0268, 1989.

Andante for Strings (arr. Andante from String Quartet 1931)

- Cleveland Orchestra; Christoph von Dohnányi, conductor. Musical Heritage Society MHS 5161597, 2001.
- Schönberg Ensemble; Oliver Knussen, conductor. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.

Caprice (undated, 1924–29)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Diaphonic Suite No. 1 for Solo Oboe or Flute (1930)

- Joseph Ostryniec, oboe. CRI 658, 1993.
- Christian Hommel, oboe. CPO 999670, 2000.

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- Otto Eifert, bassoon; Roy Christensen, cello. Gasparo GC-108CX, 1981 (LP).
- Wolfgang Rudiger, bassoon; Helmut Menzler, cello. CPO 999670, 2000.

Diaphonic Suite No. 3 for Two B \flat Clarinets (1930)

- Larry Combs and John Bruce Yeh, clarinets. Musical Heritage Society MHS 912229Z, 1988 (LP).
- Walter Ifrim and Ian Semple, clarinets. CPO 999670, 2000.

Diaphonic Suite No. 4 for Oboe and Cello (1930)

- Robert Morgan, oboe; Barbara Haffner, cello. Musical Heritage Society MHS 912229Z, 1988 (LP).
- Christian Hommel, oboe, Helmut Menzler, cello. CPO 999670, 2000.

Five Canons (1924)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Five Songs to Poems of Carl Sandburg (1929)

- Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano; Gilbert Kalish, piano. Elektra/Nonesuch 79178, 1988 ["White Moon" and "Joy"].
- Ann E. Feldman, mezzo-soprano; Abraham Stokman, piano. Musical Heritage Society MHS 912229Z, 1988 (LP).
- Lucille Field Goodman, soprano; Harriet Wingreen, piano. Cambria 1037, 1990.
- Dawn Upshaw, soprano; Margo Garrett, piano. Nonesuch 79364-2, 1996 ["White Moon"].
- Dawn Upshaw, soprano; Gilbert Kalish, piano. TDK Mediactive DVUS-VTDU, 2004 (DVD) ["Home Thoughts," "White Moon," and "Joy"].

Jumping the Rope (1927–28)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Kaleidoscopic Changes on an Original Theme Ending with a Fugue (1924)

- Virginia Eskin, piano. Troy 297, 1998.
- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Little Lullaby (undated, 1924–29)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Little Waltz (1922)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Music for Small Orchestra (1926)

- Boston Musica Viva; Richard Pittman, conductor. Delos 1012, 1987.
- Schönberg Ensemble; Oliver Knussen, conductor. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.

Mr. Crow and Miss Wren Go for a Walk: A Little Study in Short Trills [before 1928]

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Nine Preludes for Piano (1924–25; 1927–28)

- Joseph Bloch, piano. CRI 658, 1993.
- Sarah Cahill, piano. New Albion Records 114, 2001.
- Virginia Eskin, piano. Northeastern Records NR 204, 1981 [Preludes Nos. 6–9] (LP).
- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.
- Rosemary Platt, piano. Capstone Records CPS-8714, 2003.

- Steffen Schleiermacher, piano. MP&G Records 613 1265-2, 2005.
- Cheryl Seltzer, piano. Musical Heritage Society MHS 513493M, 1993; reissued by Naxos 8.559197, 2005 [Nos. 1 and 9].

Nineteen American Folk Songs for Piano (1936–38)

- Virginia Eskin, piano. Troy 297, 1998 [Selections].
- Abraham Stokman, piano. Musical Heritage Society MHS 91229Z, 1988 (LP)

Piano Study in Mixed Accents (1930)

- Joseph Bloch, piano. CRI 658, 1993.
- Sarah Cahill, piano. New Albion Records 114 CD, 2001.
- Reinbert de Leeuw, piano. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.
- Virginia Eskin, piano. Northeastern Records NR 204, 1981 (LP).
- Alan Feinberg, piano. Decca 436 925-2, 1993.
- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001 [Three Performance Versions].
- Rosemary Platt, piano. Capstone Records CPS-8714, 2003.
- Cheryl Seltzer, piano. Musical Heritage Society MHS 513493M, 1993; reissued by Naxos 8.559197, 2005.

Preludes Nos. 1–9 for Piano. See *Nine Preludes for Piano*.

- Rat Riddles. See *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg*.
- Ricercari. See *Two Ricercari*.

Rissolty, Rossolty (1939)

- Schönberg Ensemble; Oliver Knussen, conductor. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.

Sonata (for piano) (1923)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1926)

- Ida Kavafian, violin; Vivian Fine, piano. CRI 658, 1993.
- Catherine Tait, violin; Barry Snyder, piano. Gasparo GSCD-300, 1995.
- Mia Wu, violin; Cheryl Seltzer, piano. Musical Heritage Society MHS 513493M, 1993; reissued by Naxos 8.559197, 2005.

String Quartet 1931 (1931)

- Arditti String Quartet. Gramavision R2 79440, 1990.
- Composers Quartet. Nonesuch H-71280, 1973 (LP).
- Marijke van Kooten and Heleen Hulst, violins; Karin Dolman, viola; Hans Woudenberg, cello. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.
- Pellegrini String Quartet. CPO 999670, 2000.

Suite No. 1 for Five Wind Instruments and Piano (1927; rev. 1929)

- Aventure Ensemble; Reinhard Roth, piano. CPO 999670, 2000.
- Members of Continuum; Joel Sachs, conductor. Musical Heritage Society MHS 513493M, 1993; reissued by Naxos 8.559197, 2005.

Suite No. 2 for Four Strings and Piano (1929)

- Charleston String Quartet; Virginia Eskin, piano. Troy 297, 1998.
- The New Music Consort. New World Records, NWCD 319, 1984.
- Pellegrini String Quartet; Reinhard Roth, piano. CPO 999670, 2000.

Suite for Wind Quintet (1952)

- Aventure Ensemble. CPO 999670, 2000.
- Govert Jurriaanse, flute; Marieke Schut, oboe; Pierre Woudenberg, clarinet; Wilma van den Berge, bassoon; Hans Dullaert, horn. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.
- The Lark Quintet. CRI 658, 1993.

Theme and Variations (1923)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

Three Chants for Women's Chorus (1930)

- Amanda Pitt, soprano; Jeanette Ager, alto; New London Chamber Choir; James Wood, conductor. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.

Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg for Contralto, Oboe, Percussion, and Piano (with optional orchestral ostinati for strings and winds) (1930–32); also known as *Rat Riddles*

- Patricia Berlin, mezzo-soprano; Joseph Ostryniec, oboe; Paul Hoffman, piano; Dan Armstrong, percussion. CRI 658, 1993.
- Nan Hughes, mezzo-soprano; Marsha Heller, oboe; Cheryl Seltzer, piano; Erik Charlston, percussion; members of Continuum; Joel Sachs, conductor. Musical Heritage Society MHS 513493M, 1993; reissued by Naxos 8.559197, 2005.
- Beverly Morgan, mezzo-soprano; members of Speculum Musicae; Paul Lustig Dunkel, conductor. New World Records 80543-2, 1998.
- Lucy Shelton, soprano; members of Schönberg Ensemble; Oliver Knussen, conductor. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.

Two Ricercari for Voice and Piano

- Ann E. Feldman, mezzo-soprano; Abraham Stokman, piano. Musical Heritage MHS 91229Z, 1986 [“Chinaman, Laundryman”] (LP).
- Lucy Shelton, soprano; Reinbert de Leeuw, piano. Deutsche Grammophon 449 925-2, 1997.
- Nan Hughes, mezzo-soprano; Joel Sachs, piano. Musical Heritage Society MHS 513493M, 1993; reissued by Naxos 8.559197, 2005.

We Dance Together (1926)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

When, Not If (Unaccompanied Three-part Round) (1933)

- Jody Diamond, Mary Ann Haagen, and Larry Polansky, voices. Musicworks MW 80, 2001 [CD accompanying *Musicworks* 80].

Whirlygig (undated, 1924–29)

- Jenny Lin, piano. BIS-CD 1310, 2001.

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*Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds:
Innovation and Tradition in Twentieth-
Century American Music*
Edited by Ray Allen and
Ellie M. Hisama

Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds: Innovation and Tradition in Twentieth-Century American Music offers new perspectives on the life and pioneering musical activities of American composer and folk music activist Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–53). The collection is interdisciplinary, with contributions from musicologists, music theorists, folklorists, historians, music educators, and women's studies scholars.

The first woman to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition, Ruth Crawford developed a unique musical style in the 1920s and early 1930s. With her *String Quartet 1931* and other works, she played a vital part in the “ultra-modern” school of composition in New York City, a group of composers that included Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, and Dane Rudhyar.

Shortly after her marriage to musicologist Charles Seeger in 1932 and the birth of her first child in 1933, Ruth Crawford Seeger stopped composing and turned to the work of teaching music to children and of transcribing, arranging, and publishing folk songs, projects she would continue until her untimely death from cancer at fifty-two. Through her transcriptions and arrangements of traditional American music, she emerged as a leader in the folk song revival of the 1930s and 1940s. Her children Mike Seeger and Peggy Seeger carry on her legacy through their careers as performers and advocates of American folk music.

Ruth Crawford Seeger's modernist compositional work and tireless advocacy of folk music reveal how innovation and tradition have intertwined in surprising ways to shape the cultural landscape of twentieth-century America.



"*Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds* marks a new phase in the consideration of her music and thought. For many years, her work was neglected, unknown, unpublished, unavailable and—worst—misunderstood. What a joy finally to be able to read a set of intelligent essays about her pieces, theoretical ideas, and folk music scholarship. It might be said that all scholarship on Ruth Crawford is, by definition, too late. But with this collection we are a bit closer to catching up."

—Larry Polansky, Jacob H. Strauss Professor of Music, Dartmouth College, and editor of Ruth Crawford Seeger's "*The Music of American Folk Song*" and *Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music*

"Allen and Hisama have collected a lively and thoughtful group of essays on Ruth Crawford Seeger that includes contributions from all of the most authoritative voices on her life and work. The collection exemplifies interdisciplinarity at its best, bringing elegant insight to both of her major professional arenas—modernist composition and folk song collection—as well as shedding fascinating light on the bridges she built between the two."

—Ruth A. Solie, Sophia Smith Professor of Music, Smith College, and editor of *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*

"How very important to have these collected essays concerning the worlds of Ruth Crawford Seeger available. The breadth of understanding and scholarship contained in this book is deeply valuable for the education of all about her life and works. The book shares perspectives on the legacy of an extraordinary and creative woman."

—Pauline Oliveros, composer and Distinguished Research Professor of Music, Arts Department, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

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