

FAMILY VALUES RE-VISITED:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LUKAS FOSS' *THE PRAIRIE*

Presented at the 19th Annual National Conference on Liberal Arts and the Education of Artists:
"In the Global World: American Art and Art Education" (October 19-21, 2005, School of Visual Arts)

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When discussing 20th century music, scholars and historians point to two phases or revolutions that shaped the generation's music. The first coincided with World War I; the second occurred at the end of World War II. Interestingly, both developments had their roots in the past even as they strove toward the future. As a result, a new generation with new interests and outlook came into prominence after WWII. The 1940s witnessed tremendous growth in American populism through the fine arts, exemplified by the works of Aaron Copland, Martha Graham, Norman Rockwell and many others. America was fighting a war in two theaters, soldiers were listening to Glenn Miller and Tokyo Rose while ogling Betty Grable's legs. At home, civilians supported their country by planting victory gardens, buying war bonds and reading Ernie Pyle's columns. It also was the time for purely "American" artistic endeavors.

Lukas Foss' *The Prairie* is a fascinating work in that it captures elements of both phases of 20th-century musical revolution and blends them in peaceful co-existence. Foss himself said it best: "Composing music once meant to me writing the music I like. Now it means to me writing out of a deep concern for new music and for the cause of new music."¹ This quote begs the question: Have we lost our musical imagination and spirit of inquiry? Are we content merely to be "consumers" or purveyors of musical ideas instead of creators of new music? What has become of American populism in music and what exactly are those elements today? Is it still a viable compositional device? Are populist musical works "popular?"

After WWII a new generation with new interests and a new outlook came into prominence. This broadening musical public gradually accepted the masterpieces of the earlier 20th century and began to take an interest in the music of its contemporaries.² In theatres and arts centers undamaged by the War, repertory became symptomatic of this new audience, which began to take an interest in contemporary music, including jazz and popular songs. The eminent European composers who fled Nazi Germany also had a profound effect on American musical developments – Schoenberg, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Bartok, Krenek, Martinu and Weill – many of whom took teaching posts in major colleges and

universities and contributed to America's collective musical voice through their own masterworks. Aaron Copland opined, "The art of music in America will always be essentially a museum art until we are able to develop a school of composers who can speak directly to the American public in a musical language which expresses fully the deepest reactions of the American consciousness to the American scene."³ The American composers who lived in the post-Romantic era were really Romanticists who had come too late. In the world arena they were overshadowed by their European contemporaries, who were heirs to a rich musical past.

The Americans were pioneers dedicated to a lofty vision. However, the first generation of the modern American school faced a difficult task. They had to effect the transition to the modern era and they had to discover what an American music would be like. During the first quarter of the 20th century the serious composer was a stepchild in his own country. His music faced a two-fold handicap: 1) it was contemporary; 2) it lacked the European pedigree that resonated with the public. Additionally, there were no powerful publishers to champion the cause, no system of grants or fellowships to enable full-time composition, no famous conductors to bring performances of new works. However, the forces were slowly gathering to make the United States more hospitable to American music. Composers representing European modernism traveled here to conduct and promote their works. Emergence of a strong native school became a source of national pride. Prosperity encouraged private patronage through grants and fellowships, with commissions from the League of Composers, Ditson Fund, Coolidge Foundation and Koussevitzky Foundation. American composers banded together, forming associations to foster new music: the International Composers Guild, League of Composers, American Composers' Alliance. Conductors who promoted new works included Koussevitzky, Stokowski, and Mitropoulos.

European political upheavals prior to WWII influenced our musical development in the most immediate way. There was an influx of European musicians seeking a haven from Nazism and war. As a result, the United States became the world's musical center. During the Jazz Age of the 1920s college and university music departments became centers of progressive musical activity, hiring composers to teach composition. Composers historically had enriched their art with elements drawn from folk and popular music, and American composers realized that jazz could serve as the basis for serious music. American composers concentrated on those features of the home scene not found in Europe: Indian lore, Negro, cowboys, songs of southern mountaineers, patriotic songs of the Revolutionary period and Civil War, minstrel shows, work songs and jazz. Further cementing this musical relationship, George Gershwin categorized jazz as an American folk

music.⁴ The music of the American school follows no single formula. Instead, it reflects contradictory tendencies in our national character, our idealism and our worship of material success, our individualism, our visionary daring, our practicality, our emotionalism, and our intellectualism.

The 1930s were the years of the Great Depression. A somber mood prevailed in the country, resulting in increasing awareness of its spiritual resources, of which music was one of the most rewarding. A strong current of populism emerged as the decade unfolded. The government undertook patronage of the arts through the WPA and Federal Theatre Project. This also was the period of the “proletarian” novel – Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*.⁵ Folk and popular music was evident in the music of Virgil Thompson (*The River*, 1937), Aaron Copland (*Billy the Kid*, 1938), George Gershwin (*Porgy & Bess*, 1935), Roy Harris (*Folksong Symphony*, 1939). The larger radio networks – NBC and Columbia – adopted the policy of commissioning new works.⁶ Most important, a new public emerged that was interested in hearing and supporting American music. Composers began to write film music, ballets, music for high school students, music for civic celebrations, narrowing the gulf that had separated them from their public. By the end of the 1930s the American composer was fairly well established as a working artist within the frame of his own country.⁷

During more than 50 years of composing, Lukas Foss has embraced everything from Americana to postmodern eclecticism. The sheer range of his talents has resulted in a curiously diffuse, unfocused career, which never attained the high-profile, superstar status one might have expected. Critics long ago despaired of categorizing him; spin-doctors would describe him as the “whole package” – conductor, composer, pianist and pedagogue. Lukas [Fuchs] Foss emigrated to the United States with his family in 1937 and continued his musical studies by attending the Curtis Institute. There, he studied composition with Rosario Scalerò; conducting with Fritz Reiner.⁸ Incredibly gifted, Foss began to compose at age 7. Prior to attending Curtis, he studied piano and music theory in Berlin with Julius Goldstein. The family resided in Paris from 1933 to 1937 and Foss studied with Lazare Levy (piano), Noel Gallon (composition) and Louis Moyse (flute).⁹ Additionally, Foss studied composition with Paul Hindemith as a special student at Yale. And, at age 23, he was the youngest composer to win a Guggenheim Fellowship.¹⁰

At the youthful age of 22, Foss’ identification with his new homeland found expression and won him great acclaim for the cantata *The Prairie*, based upon Carl Sandburg’s poem. *The Prairie* emanates from Sandburg’s book *The Cornhuskers*, published in 1918.¹¹ Foss’ use of Sandburg’s text takes its cue from the times, incorporates the posi-

tive imagery of the poem, and serves as a reaction of American consciousness to industrialization and the environment. After its première under the direction of Robert Shaw in 1944, Foss' work received the New York Music Critics Circle Award for best new American work. This Americanist strain commingled in his style with the Romantic heritage of Mahler, the neoclassicism emanating from Hindemith, and the inescapable influence of Stravinsky.¹² This cantata is a first period work (1944-60), predominantly neoclassical and eclectic in nature with an element of American populism. Foss' works exhibit a distinct personality: enthusiastic, curious, witty and receptive to new musical ideas. More important, through his musical works Foss instills this same inquisitive spirit in his audiences that Sandburg inspires in his readers.

Like Foss, Sandburg was virtually unknown as a writer when, in 1914, a group of his poems appeared in *Poetry* magazine.¹³ At age 40 Sandburg published another volume of poems in 1918: *Cornhuskers*. His experiences working and traveling greatly influenced his writing and political views. Sandburg worked from the time he was a young boy. He quit school following graduation from eighth grade in 1891 and spent several years working a variety of jobs – delivering milk, harvesting ice, shining shoes – before traveling as a hobo in 1897. As a hobo he learned a number of folk songs that he later performed at speaking engagements. He collected folk songs and related materials in *The American Songbag* (1927) and *Carl Sandburg's New American Songbag* (1950).¹⁴ He also witnessed first-hand the sharp contrast between rich and poor, a dichotomy that instilled in him a distrust of capitalism.

Following service in the Spanish-American War, Sandburg enrolled at Lombard College (now Knox College). There, he joined the Poor Writers' Club and benefited from the advice and encouragement of professor Phillip Green Wright, a talented scholar and political liberal.¹⁵ 1940 was a stellar year for Sandburg. Following the 1939 publication of his *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, he won the Pulitzer Prize for history. Elected to the Academy of Arts and Letters, he also received honorary doctorates from Harvard, Yale, Wesleyan and New York Universities and Lafayette College. Through his childhood memories and adult experiences, Sandburg had fallen in love with America. *Cornhuskers* is Sandburg's tribute to the American Midwest and the people who settled it. Known as the Bard of the Midwest for his unrhymed free verse that uses precise and vivid images to portray the energy and brutality of American urban industrial life and ethnic diversity, Sandburg became a central figure in the flowering of literature in Chicago from 1912 to 1925. It was said in the 1920s that if you didn't like free verse, you would once you heard Sandburg.¹⁶

Many view Sandburg as successor to the 19th-century poet Walt Whitman as the proclaimer of the American spirit.¹⁷ He writes in a direct vernacular language and demonstrates an appreciation of the land, people and creatures of the United States. At age 85 Sandburg looked back on his life's work and declared, "Being a poet is a damned dangerous business."¹⁸ That may be so, but in *Cornhuskers* he created one of the first great poetic testaments of the 20th century¹⁹ and it had a profound effect on Foss, compelling him to set the text to music.

In 1942 Foss became a naturalized U.S. citizen and fell in love with his new homeland.²⁰ "Shortly after I left Europe and emigrated to this country as a boy of fifteen, I fell in love – with America." Foss read "The Prairie" at age 19 and began to set it to music. A colleague after reviewing the sketches asked Foss, "Why are you trying to write so American?" Foss answered: "I wasn't. I was in love. I had discovered America."²¹ Many of Foss' works connect folk styles or traditional classical styles with contemporary dissonance.

The Prairie's première was given on May 14, 1944, at New York's Town Hall Theatre under the direction of Robert Shaw, by his Collegiate Chorale and members of the NBC and CBS Concert orchestras. Virgil Thompson, then music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, wrote in his May 16, 1944, review: "The work itself showed musicianship, imagination and direct expressive powers of no mean order. ... Mr. Foss' language is elegant, scholastic, dainty ... and it is adjusted for precise depiction rather than for emotional excitement."²² Irving Fine, in the May/June 1945 issue of *Modern Music*, was equally complimentary: "*The Prairie* was an extremely ambitious undertaking ... [and is] one of the most impressive contributions to American choral literature. ... Foss' writing involves counterpoint and a rich harmony which is not as pure as Copland's."²³

In January 1945, Artur Rodzinski conducted the Westminster Choir and the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra in a performance of the work. The critics were less enthusiastic. Donald Fuller wrote, "... Though far too long and weighted down by the fruitless choice of a Carl Sandburg text, it is impressive for its controlled handling of such a full medium."²⁴ Similarly, *TIME* magazine commented, "... Foss' music is far from Sandburg's prairie: it is modern, ... sophisticated, plainly rooted in Europe ..."²⁵ The work's only recording was released in 1976 to coincide with the Bicentennial and launch of Foss' *An American Cantata* by the Long Island Symphonic Choral Association, Gregg Smith, conductor, and was supported, in part, by a Ford Foundation grant.

The Prairie, scored for solo voices, SATB choir and chamber orchestra, is 50 minutes in

duration and crafted in rounded binary (A-B-A) form. The work is intended to be performed without intermission. Foss himself adapted excerpts from Sandburg's "The Prairie" without the aid of a librettist. "Someone advised [Foss] to obtain permission from the author before getting too deeply into the work. But [he] was already half-finished when [he] sent [a] long, pleading letter to Carl Sandburg. Sandburg responded promptly with a copy of a note he sent to [Holt]: 'This young man has the right sporting spirit; give him a break.'"²⁶ There is significant rearrangement of Sandburg's text to craft the seven movements that comprise the work. For purposes of this paper the following movements will be discussed: 1) "I Was Born on the Prairie," 2) "Dust of Men," and 3) "Tomorrow." The first movement is titled "I was Born on the Prairie."

The text for the movement is:

I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan. Here the water went down, the icebergs slid with gravel, the gaps and the valleys hissed, and the black loam came, and the yellow sandy loam. Here now a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber claims and cow pastures, the corn belt, the cotton belt, the cattle ranches. Here the gray geese go five hundred miles and back with a wind under their wings honking the cry for a new home. Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water. The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart.

This excerpt is taken directly from the first stanza of Sandburg's original poem without editing.

The meaning conveyed by the text is that of a sense of self, a sense of place, a sense of contentment. Sandburg expresses this in the text through the words, "a song and a slogan," "I know will hanker after nothing," and "I rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart." The overall structural form of this through-composed aria is sonata-rondo form. It begins with a short introduction of open-spaced augmented chords, very reminiscent of Aaron Copland's style. The setting is text-inspired and is chant-like in character as a result of the manner in which Foss has chosen to set Sandburg's text. The movement is scored for tenor solo and string orchestra with wind instrument accompaniment in the "B" section of the piece. There is a prominent oboe solo beginning at measure 26 and continuing through measure 37. Noteworthy, too, in keeping with the medieval style, the opening tenor line skips up a minor fifth (A to E).

There are numerous meter changes throughout the movement; again, Foss is crafting the music to accommodate Sandburg's text. For example, at [5] the meter is in 2/2 when the tenor enters; by measure 26, the beginning of the oboe solo, the meter and tempo have changed to 3/4 moderato. Beginning in measure 63 through measure 83, resultant of Sandburg's text, Foss alternates between 6/8, 3/4, 9/8, 7/8 and 8/8 time signatures. The movement includes an instrumental interlude beginning at measure 84 with the woodwinds in the upper range, characterized by an extremely lyrical line that is stepwise in nature, followed by staccato skips echoed in the strings. The dialogue exchange between the winds and strings occurs from measure 84 through 89 and again beginning in measure 90 through 95. Measure 95 is marked by both a character, tempo and meter change. The tempo is agitato and also characterized by a dialogue between the French horn and the tenor soloist, accenting the text "here." This alternation of pitch between instrument and vocal soloist serves to not only amplify the meaning of the text, but also reinforces the sense of place or "in the moment." At measure 105, Foss accents the meaning through the orchestra, specifically the words "the gaps and the valleys hissed," characterized by repeated step-wise patterns in the upper strings and winds. Following the text, "here," at measure 115 the brass leads an instrumental ritornello of 10 measures in dialogue with the rest of the orchestra characterized by string arpeggios against step-wise movement by the brass. At measure 127 the soloist re-enters with the text "here a morning star." Notice that by the use of the leap of an augment fifth, Foss chooses to accentuate the text and the meaning of the morning star.

The second movement is entitled, "Dust of Men." The text of the movement is:

I am here when the cities are gone. I am here before the cities come. I nourished the lonely men on horses. I will keep the laughing men who ride iron. I am dust of men. I am dust of your dust, as I am brother and mother to the worker in flint and clay, the singing women and their sons a thousand years ago marching single file the timber and the plain. I hold the dust of these amid changing stars. I last while old wars are fought, while peace broods motherlike, while new wars arise and the fresh killings of young men. I fed the boys who went to France in the great dark days. I who have seen the red births and the red deaths of sons and daughters, I take peace or war, I say nothing and wait.

The meaning conveyed by the text is that of the stamina, endurance and productivity of the land and the people who inhabit the land, despite challenges and hardships. Sandburg's text also makes reference to WWI and WWI with the text, "while old wars are fought, while peace broods motherlike, while new wars arise." The overall structural

form for this movement is rounded binary. It is scored for soprano, alto, tenor and bass soloists, choir and orchestra. Foss achieves an industrial sound by beginning the movement with an instrumental introduction characterized by driving staccato eighth notes in the strings and upper woodwinds. At measure 78, the choir is joined by tenor and bass soloists. The eighth note pattern continues to serve the industrial theme. Noteworthy is the use of syncopated patterns in the strings. In the opening, the oboe assumes the melody after the strings complete it. Following the oboe solo, the melodic shape is transferred to the bassoons and following that, the lower strings continue the same melodic shape, with a final return of the melody line to the upper strings. The upper strings are joined by the flutes; then finally the entire string section takes the movement's staccato eighth note pattern of the melodic shape employed in the beginning of the movement. This is then assumed by muted trumpet and the other brass instruments. Note also that the opening statement of the choir's tenors and basses is sung in unison – a device used to reinforce the text. While the vocal line is very smooth and lyrical, the underlying string accompaniment is characterized by a light, accented staccato pattern. When the choir enters it is singing four-part harmony in homophonic texture. Foss varies the texture by staggering the entrances of the voices. The tenor solo is in the extreme upper range for the voice. Beginning at measure 185 Foss doubles the male choral vocal lines with bassoon and trombones. Note the unison singing at the end of the movement commencing at measure 201. Also note the manner in which Foss ends the movement: a great sonorous major chord, not unlike J.S. Bach.

The final movement, "Tomorrow," employs the following text:

O prairie mother, I am one of your boys. I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full of pain over love. Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water. I speak of new cities and new people. I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes. I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down, a sun dropped in the west. I tell you there is nothing in the world only an ocean of tomorrows, a sky of tomorrows. I am a brother of the cornhuskers who say at sundown: Tomorrow is a day.

The text of "Tomorrow," which conveys the typically American pragmatic spirit of hope, begins with a trumpet solo, supported by muted brass accompaniment. The tempo is moderato and the trumpet solo continues through measure 18 at which point the strings, woodwinds and timpani enter with a very agitated figure, interrupted by chordal patterns in the brass; then the tenor solo enters at measure 29. The shape of the melody is chant-like in its derivation with the text alternating with the orchestra. The tenor solo explores

the vocal range to its fullest capacity. An *a tempo* at measure 43 is in imitation of the figure first presented at measure 19. At measure 54, there is a *tempo primo* and the tenor soloists enter with the text, “Here I know will hanker after nothing.” The clarinet obbligato line in support of the tenor solo occurring in measure 64, given over to the violins, oboe and returning to the clarinet at measure 70. The horns enter and initiate a brief instrumental ritornello beginning with a chord cluster which is assumed by the violins and the woodwinds, followed by a caesura in preparation for the entrance of the choir at measure 79. The tempo is *sostenuto* at measure 79 where the alto, tenor and bass vocal lines enter singing in homophonic style, supported by horns and trombones. The text at this point is, “I speak of new cities and new people.” Foss amplifies the meaning of the text by using repetition of pitch on the words, “I tell you.” He also emphasizes the past by the use of a minor seventh.

As the text continues, Foss changes the character of the movement to minor to reflect the past, death, etc., as exemplified in the text, “the past is a bucket of ashes,” beginning in measure 95. Again, in fitting the text to the music it is treated in the manner of chant, signified by the use of repeated notes, rhythmic figures, antiphonal singing between male and female voices best exemplified in measures 97 through 104. At measure 105 the choir again sings in homophonic texture. Also at this point there is a very lyrical, but melancholy English horn solo that serves as a fine obbligato line to the choir and supplements the meaning of the text. Interestingly, too, Foss has “word painted” certain words: “sun dropped” is configured by a descending fifth; “in the west” is characterized by an ascending arpeggiated triad. The tempo changes at measure 173 to *allegro* and is marked by an antiphonal brass fanfare with trumpet, trombone and French horns. The choir enters in imitation of the brass with repetition of pitch – a device used by Foss to enhance text. Equally noteworthy is the use of antiphon. Wind soloists enter in measure 209. First, the tenor and bass soloists enter together in harmony, followed by the soprano, joined by the alto, and they sing antiphonally until measure 228, at which point the choir enters again with the text “I speak,” “I speak.” Foss reinforces this by repetition not only in terms of pitch but also in terms of rhythm and text. “I speak” is repeated four times. Foss also uses the orchestra to enhance and support the vocal lines by doubling. In measure 260 the industrial sound presented by the orchestra dropping down a fourth and back up (e.g., Eb-Ab-Ab-Eb; Ab-Eb-Eb-Ab). This repetition is characterized by staccato eighth notes in the upper winds, and lower brass. Complementary to that, the French horns hold out a pedal tone during this section. At measure 332 the tempo changes to *meno mosso ma vivace*, characterized by a syncopated moving eighth note pattern with the bass clarinet, bassoon, percussion and *col legno* strings providing a very industrial sound which is counterfoil for a very homophonic texture in the choir. Even though they are singing

staccato, they are singing in a homophonic texture.

Noteworthy too is Foss' repetition of text, "an ocean of tomorrows" beginning at measure 356 and continuing through measure 375. This occurs as multiple text is being presented in both the solo lines and the choir. The soloists are singing "I tell you of tomorrow" while the choir is repeating "an ocean of tomorrows." The movement continues to build by adding voices, adding instrumental lines, and repetition of text ("an ocean of tomorrows") to measure 400 when the choir holds the word "tomorrow" and then continues on with the text, "I am a brother of the cornhuskers." At this point only the basses are singing this line and they are accompanied in unison by the bass and celli in the orchestra. Foss again begins building the closing section by adding voices, continuing the driving eighth note rhythmic pattern that he has used so far in this movement underlying the text, "I am a brother of the cornhuskers," to the work's conclusion at measure 411. Here, he uses the text, "say at sun down" – sun down is emphasized with a chord cluster in the brass and the choir sings "Tomorrow is a day." At this point in measure 416, this device is in exact imitation of the opening measures of the cantata itself, "I was born on the prairie." In fact, this is how Foss achieves structural unity in the cantata.

At the time it was written *The Prairie* spoke to American values and reflected the country's spirit in a well-crafted, high-quality musical composition. In 2005, however, the question of relevancy remains. Is *The Prairie* a relevant work and is it representative of the present American culture and values matrix? Following the September 11th attacks, did Americans share the same enthusiasm or patriotism as Foss and his contemporaries exhibited during WWII? If so, those feelings were demonstrated in a significantly different manner, looking to pre-existing musical works to express our grief, national pride and values, rather than generating new musical compositions. Have we sublimated our artistic creativity and spirit of inquiry? Are we content merely to be consumers and purveyors of musical ideas instead of creators of new music?

Certainly, attitudes to the music of the past, as well as the present, were made more complicated in the late 1960s and early 1970s by 1) the introduction into the public domain of medieval and Renaissance music; 2) the arrival of non-Western music from Asia, Africa and elsewhere that now took on a wide appeal and new significance; and 3) the rapid expansion of world communications that brought different music and performing styles to much larger audiences along with recordings, radio and television that brought music of all kinds to increasing numbers.²⁷ The search for originality was a prime motivating force in the work of many composers in the 1950s and it survived until at least the early 1970s.²⁸ At the end of World War II, composers of art music in Western cultures found

their craft radically affected in three different but related ways: 1) historical: composers had to face the consequences of the largest and most horrific war in history; 2) technical: the burst of industrial growth which accompanied and followed the war fundamentally altered both the tools of the composer's trade and music's economic and social position; 3) institutional: the postwar view that specialization is prerequisite for progress provided composers with a new means of support, while deeply altering their relationship to their audience.

American countries were in no way devastated by World War II: No battles were fought here, schools and industries were stimulated rather than destroyed. As a result, the United States emerged from the war as a colossus, dominating world economy, and the war furthered the growth of urban, industrialized societies. Also, the stream of refugees and émigrés became a flood during the 1930s and 40s; in contrast, the new refugees were highly educated and culturally sophisticated. Some were composers, performers or musicologists, many of whom found homes in orchestras and universities. Similarly, the explosive growth of the postwar music industry was fuelled largely by new recording technologies (tape and LP) developed in part in wartime Germany.²⁹ Postwar thought about what would be produced, though, was divided. Moderates argued that the threads of pre-war culture remained and could be rewoven into a new international fabric. For radicals, however, the war was a watershed; civilization had changed fundamentally and irrevocably.

During the first postwar decade, the dominant response was conservative, emphasizing the centralization of power and all the concomitants of the Cold War. The next 15 years witnessed a more libertarian outlook, which stressed limitations on power and the control of control. The entire period from 1945-70 was, essentially, the working-out of a dialectic centered on control. Postwar art music, too, had its moderates and radicals. Representing the former were New World composers who continued down paths that had been mapped before the war; together with European colleagues they formed an "international avant-garde" which remained faithful to the European art-music tradition. Other progressives pursued nationalist or regional styles. The originals called into question the most basic purposes and techniques of music. They argued that postwar civilization required a new beginning, and the central issue concerned control.

Despite this parallel, art music remained essentially separate from the social mainstream. Music for mass consumption addressed and responded directly to social needs; art music self-consciously stood apart. Since the end of the 19th century, most art music had been avowedly elitist and defiantly esoteric. Its inherent self-preoccupation was only furthered

by the development of academic sanctuaries, and its separatism was highlighted by the great flowering of popular music in the postwar era. Indeed, like most intellectuals during the postwar years, composers essentially abrogated their responsibilities as citizens in the name of their art.

In the postwar period, music technology was transformed by the development of tape recorders and of long-playing records. The two were interconnected: the new “high fidelity” depended on editing and mixing procedures made possible by tape recorders. But, they also came to symbolize the two extreme consequences of the new technology: tape recording seemed to promise access to an extraordinary new creative domain, while the commercial recording industry apparently imposed an unprecedented musical conformism. The recording industry was using tape technology for the production of consumable goods. This fundamentally altered the economics of musical commerce. In popular music, performers became more important than composers, and small groups supplanted large ones. The new economics, together with cheap postwar materials, made possible the production of unprecedented quantities of recordings; national distribution and the growth of “deejay” radio created a mass audience where previously there had been regions and factions. In all these ways, the postwar recording industry imposed a new uniformity on musical culture, first in the United States and subsequently elsewhere.

Postwar technology embodied a kind of dialectic exhibited by the relationship between creativity and consumption, the individual and mass production. It was both a boon and a threat to composers: By enabling composers to produce esoteric sounds in expensive, exclusive studios, it protected their status and furthered their isolation; by providing the public with access to repertory and to new electronic instruments, it threatened to snatch creative initiatives away from academic specialists. The new technologies were most convincingly used by rock musicians, not academics; and it was rock and pop music that most directly expressed its culture’s fears, hopes and anger.³⁰

Although the vast majority of composers in the Americas are employed by universities, their position usually does not directly depend on their compositional work. Rather, they are primarily pedagogues whose purpose is to promote the system which justifies their employment. Also, art music has been associated with an outdated ruling class and educational model; it was relegated to history and confined to performance museums like the Lincoln or Kennedy Centers. The values attached to it came to have less to do with its import than with tradition or uniqueness. As a result, there was little incentive to perform professionally except in the protected environs of academia and the concert hall.

It was outside the domain of art music that creative professionals came to flourish. Three stylistic distinctions can be distinguished: 1) those who continued developing the late Romantic or neoclassical styles prevalent before the war; 2) those who adopted the twelve-tone method technique; and 3) those who adapted the new technology to traditional aesthetic purposes. Collectively these groups constituted the mainstream of art music. Their members were male, Caucasian and self-selecting; most were university-trained and formed the backbone of academic and conservatory faculties in the 1950s and 60s. To them was granted primary responsibility for certifying the legitimate heirs of the European tradition. The 1950s and '60s also were marked by a greater diversity of genres. Orchestras, opera companies and standard chamber groups became increasingly devoted to music of the past, and composers were less inclined to write for them. They turned to new genres and to performers who specialized in new music, and these contributed further to the fragmentation of the mainstream.

The 1960s witnessed a mixture of cultural optimism, social unrest and fluctuating economic conditions in different countries, which makes it difficult to generalize about music. But radical tendencies permeated everyday life to an unusual extent, and this inevitably had an effect even on the music of the “cultivated” tradition.³¹ By 1965 a number of factors had combined to wash out what remained of the channel cut by postwar mainstream composition. In its place there was a kind of new-music delta – complex, fertile and treacherous. The loss of musical norms to some degree paralleled that of cultural norms in the late 1960s, particularly in the United States. The new “counterculture,” new political and ecological paradigms, a new emphasis on individualism – all these lent indirect support to composers who wished to break away from the traditions of their teachers. In art music, such new departures were largely self-indulgent. Academic composers adopted the trappings of socially active rock and popular musicians. Commercial success implied artistic failure; academics caught up in the counterculture were more or less obliged to adopt an egocentric, self-absorbed posture. The 1970s were times of more clear-cut economic and social depression. It is not impossible for radical art to be fuelled by poverty and cultural neglect; art which has as its main aim the challenging of accepted conventions might even be thought likely to thrive during periods when the social fabric that has helped to foster those conventions is seen to be operating poorly. Nevertheless, there was a strong tendency for composers to attempt to reach a wider audience.³²

The evolving international style of the postwar years largely supplanted the prewar efforts to define “national” idioms. However, not all nationalist styles were abandoned after the war. Referential music need not be nationalist and in the postwar period composers made reference to a wide range of musical sources: commercial, popular, ethnic, even

historical. References to jazz increased, perhaps because the bebop revolution and the collapse of the big bands brought jazz closer to concert music than to popular music. There were also “third stream” composers such as Gunther Schuller who intermingled improvisation and jazz inflections with international techniques. Other forms of popular music began to enter concert music in the 1960s, and with the maturity of rock in the 1960s appeared a new generation of populists who represented a kind of postmodern nationalism.³³ Composers also began making increased reference to Western historical styles. Historical reference became increasingly pertinent after the war, when the proliferation of recordings had the effect of making all music “contemporary” and thus subject to re-use. Globalists and historicists brought about a significant increase in the use of reference as a compositional device, even though nationalism declined.

In the past 20 years, music in the Americas, like American culture as a whole, has been searching restlessly for a balance that will enable it to survive past the second millennium. The boom years of the later 1980s do not have a direct parallel earlier in the century. A culture enlivened by new money and new technology is hardly less resistant to radical art than an impoverished culture that cannot afford it. Some new products of the “cultivated” tradition during this period have had an impact on a large public.³⁴ Such a balance will require integration: musical entities, like social and environmental entities, can no longer stand apart.³⁵ “Pluralism” is an apt description of current compositional uncertainties and of the fragmentation of audiences for music of many kinds as well as the “crossover” phenomenon that joins styles and aesthetics in unlikely combinations. Much composition of the early 1990s is preoccupied with the search for roots. There is considerable interest in re-establishing the source of developmental discourse in ways that reinterpret it for our own time.³⁶ The erosion of boundaries between “classical” and “popular,” which divide the music discussed here from the music listened to by the majority of world citizens has proved to have limitations.³⁷

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¹ Machliss, p. 429

² Machliss, p. 432

³ Machliss, p. 329

⁴ Machliss, p. 352

⁵ Machliss, p. 374

⁶ Machliss, pp. 375-76.

⁷ Machliss, p. 376

⁸ Grove online

⁹ Grove online

¹⁰ Grove online

¹¹ Carl-sandburg.com

¹² Machliss, p. 550

¹³ Carl-sandburg.com

¹⁴ "Sandburg, Carl," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2004*

¹⁵ Carl-sandburg.com

¹⁶ uncp.edu

¹⁷ "Sandburg, Carl" *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2004*

¹⁸ *Opera News*, Aug. 2004; 69, 2, p. 40

¹⁹ socialsciencesweb.com

²⁰ Perone, p. 3

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- ²¹ Lukas Foss: *Prairie* liner notes
²² Perone, p. 27
²³ Perone, p. 29
²⁴ Perone, p. 27
²⁵ Perone, p. 27
²⁶ *Prairie* sound recording liner notes
²⁷ Potter, p. 359
²⁸ Potter, p. 349
²⁹ Brooks, p. 309
³⁰ Brooks, pp. 312-13
³¹ Potter, p. 351
³² Potter, p. 351
³³ Brooks, pp. 322-323
³⁴ Potter, p. 351-352
³⁵ Brooks, p. 344
³⁶ Potter, p. 382
³⁷ Potter, p. 384