

# Institute for Studies In American Music

Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York

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## Irving Berlin's Musical Theater of War

by  
Jeffrey Magee

The phrase “theater of war” has intrigued commentators throughout the twentieth century. In a chapter by that title in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell took a cue from Ezra Pound and explored the phrase through soldiers’ accounts of “being beside oneself” in battle, of doing something that took them far away from “real life”—in short, of performing a role. Theater itself, then, may be an apt forum in which to reveal and explore human thought and behavior during wartime, and few American showmen stand out so clearly for cultivating the theater of war than Irving Berlin.

The subject of Americans at war inspired Berlin across five decades. He found in war-related themes a

rich wellspring of feeling and observation that pours out in individual songs and in plots and scores for stage and screen. War and its impact mobilized Berlin’s creative energy from his 1911 hit “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” which describes a “bugle call like you never heard before, / so natural that you want to go to war,” to the postwar nostalgia that suffuses the 1954 film *White Christmas*. Yet it was not war per se that inspired Berlin, since most of his war-related songs aim to identify and articulate the everyday thoughts, feelings, and actions of ordinary people. Far from the Providence-sanctioned jingoism that has attached to the song “God Bless America” since 9/11, Berlin chiefly strove to reflect back to civilians and soldiers alike images of themselves at once heroic and human.

Berlin’s focus on the ordinary citizen, whether soldier or civilian, meshed well with the widespread American notion of World War II as the “people’s war” to be fought by and for the “common man,” an idea articulated in speeches by then Vice-President Henry Wallace and embodied in Ernie Pyle’s journalism. No wonder, then, that Berlin regarded his World War II revue *This Is the Army* as his most outstanding and rewarding achievement. Like its predecessor, Berlin’s World War I revue *Yip, Yip, Yaphank!*, *This Is the Army* was developed at the Army’s Camp Upton on Long Island. It opened on Broadway on 4 July 1942, to popular and critical acclaim, later touring the U.S., Great Britain, and, thanks to General Eisenhower’s recommendation, the war’s European and Pacific theaters. In 1943, the Warner Brothers produced a film version that became the company’s biggest grossing movie to date and second only to *Gone with the Wind* in that era.

Several features of the show made it unique: it was an army camp show that drew talent from a national search, its touring company was designated an official detachment of the U. S. Army, its actors and backstage staff were given an assortment of military ranks, and its platoon of black talent made it the only racially integrated military unit before the army was officially desegregated. Moreover, *This Is the Army, Inc.*, was set up



Irving Berlin in *This Is the Army* (1942)  
Photo courtesy of Photofest

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as a charitable corporation that donated all net earnings from ticket sales for the stage and screen versions, from sheet music sales, and from song performance royalties, to Army Emergency Relief, a service agency organized to provide short-term financial aid and other support to soldiers and their dependents. By late October 1945, when the touring company staged its final performance in Hawaii, more than two-and-a-half million troops and civilians had seen over 1,200 performances of the show. After the war, President Truman presented Berlin with the Medal for Merit for sustaining military and civilian morale during wartime and raising more than six million dollars for the relief effort.

The show has been chronicled by several of Berlin's biographers, and in a recent book by its stage manager, Alan Anderson.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite its remarkable success, the stage version tends to escape historical memory because, aside from a handful of hit songs, it disappeared after the war and did not lend itself to revival. It falls under the radar of most musical theater historians for many reasons: because of its short Broadway run, because of the absence of a surviving Broadway script, and because it was a revue unified only by its World War II theme. That is, *This Is the Army* was a variety-driven entertainment that emerged just before Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* opened in spring 1943 and launched the age of the so-called integrated musical in which dialogue, song, and dance serve to develop plot and character. Cultural historians and film historians tend to treat *This Is the Army* chiefly as a product of Hollywood, but the film overlaid a sentimental and overtly patriotic plot starring Ronald Reagan and George Murphy onto a variety show whose creator had striven to avoid maudlin sentiments, star power, and direct expressions of patriotism. For a musical theater scholar, the film's value is chiefly documentary, for its show-within-a-show motif allows it to preserve many of the songs, sketches, and staging of the original show.

The stage version, far from a distraction from the serious business of war, rather must be seen as a keystone of the war. The American military's preoccupation (Fussell has called it an "obsession"<sup>2</sup>) with morale during World War II gave rise to a multifarious entertainment system sustained by the Special Service Division. And within that system, which included what one wartime theater commentator referred to as "probably the largest single theatrical producing organization, with the exception of the Federal Theatre, that has ever existed,"<sup>3</sup> *This is the Army* holds a unique place. If,

in Studs Terkel's deliberately loaded phrase, World War II was the "good war," then *This Is the Army* was the good war's greatest show.<sup>4</sup> Its international success during World War II—spanning almost the entire period of America's engagement in the war—suggests that it offers a revealing glimpse of Berlin's values and contradictions, and by extension those of wartime America.

Nowhere are those values and contradictions more apparent than in the show's reliance on the conventions of minstrelsy. "Common man" rhetoric tended to gloss over the social reality that some men were more equal than others. The first racially integrated army unit reproduced racial images and sounds that had roots in nineteenth-century entertainment. Like many forms of cultural expression in the 1930s and 40s, including jazz performances at New York's Onyx Club and Fred Astaire's film appearances with black musicians, *This Is the Army* at once both challenged and reinforced racial stereotypes and practices.<sup>5</sup> Commentators have criticized or apologized for the use of blackface makeup in the first scene and the reliance on stereotypes in an all-black song-and-dance number, but such accounts simply point to the features that *This Is the Army* shares with many other films and stage shows of the era. The racial stereotypes represent only the most obvious minstrel conventions in a show saturated in the style and structure of post-Civil War minstrelsy that continued to flourish as Berlin entered American show business in the early twentieth century. Understanding *This Is the Army* reminds us that blackface performance and minstrelsy are not synonymous.

What did minstrelsy mean to Irving Berlin? From one perspective, the genre represents what Eric Lott, in his book *Love and Theft*, calls "people's culture," an idealized view of the minstrel show as a common denominator, an unpretentious democratic entertainment accessible to all, which helps to explain its remarkable resilience. The opposite perspective comprises what Lott calls the "cultural domination" view in which minstrelsy is seen as reflecting and reinforcing beliefs in white superiority and the oppression of African Americans. Berlin's ideology of entertainment, formed early in the twentieth century, clearly stood with the "people's culture" view and blinded him to—or caused him to underestimate—minstrelsy's power to reinforce "cultural domination."

Although minstrelsy had faded by World War II, blackface remained its most visible remnant both on Broadway and in Hollywood. Wartime Broadway, starved for young talent and fresh entertainment, was awash in nostalgia, from revivals of older musical comedies and operettas, to hybrid variety shows billed as "vaudeville revues" and featuring veteran entertainers, to "farewell" vehicles for aging stars like Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor, both of whom performed in blackface in their respective shows. Hollywood likewise continued to traffic in minstrel conventions. Berlin's 1942 film *Holiday Inn* included a scene featuring a blackfaced Bing Crosby singing in dialect in front of a band wearing raggedy pseudo-plantation garb. Moreover, the military sanctioned minstrelsy as one of several potent sources for camp-show amusement. As the Special Service Division came to realize and exploit the value of entertainment for sustaining troop and civilian morale, it published several manuals for soldiers in army camps who wanted to put on shows, including a book that included two full-length minstrel shows with music.

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## ISAM Matters

ISAM is operating on a bit of a skeleton crew this term, but we were delighted to host three speakers in our ongoing Music in Polycultural America series. In March, trombonist, composer, scholar, and bandleader **Christopher Washburne** treated us to a fascinating presentation on Latin jazz, and musician and songwriter **Peggy Seeger** shared “A Feminist View of Anglo-American Folksong” with a packed house. In April, composer **Tom Cipullo**, in an event co-sponsored by Brooklyn College’s Composer’s Forum, introduced students and faculty to his new opera, *Glory Denied*, which has since received its premiere here at Brooklyn College (see the interview with Cipullo in this issue). Many thanks to the Conservatory of Music and the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities for their continued support of this series.

Former Acting Director **Ray Allen** is on leave this term, at work on a book manuscript. He recently introduced Mike Seeger at the March 15-16 Library of Congress symposium, “How Can I Keep From Singing: A Seeger Family Tribute.” The Library’s American Folklife Center and Music Division house several important collections documenting the lives and music of Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and their children Pete, Mike and Peggy. For additional information on the symposium and the LOC Seeger holdings visit <[www.loc.gov/folklife/Seegersymposium](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/Seegersymposium)>.

Both the Institute and the Conservatory of Music are pleased to welcome **Stephanie Jensen-Moulton** this fall as a new faculty member. Stephanie is currently finishing a dissertation at the CUNY Graduate Center titled “‘Moving about in other people’s houses’: Three American Women Writing Opera in 1950s New York City,” which examines operas written by Miriam Gideon, Julia Amanda Perry, and Louise Talma between 1952 and 1960 in the context of the American 1950s. In June, Stephanie will present aspects of this work on a panel at the Orchestra of St. Luke’s festival, “Notable Women: A Celebration of Women Composers,” and at the Feminist Theory and Music 9 conference in Montreal. We look forward to her joining the musicology faculty and the ISAM community.

Research Fellow **Carl Clements**, who remains a vital presence in our Institute and whose publishing expertise can be seen throughout these pages, has managed to maintain a full slate of activities in addition to his tireless work for ISAM. On 6 May he played a *bansuri* (Indian flute) concert with Payton MacDonald on tabla at William Paterson University, and on 31 May he will be featured with Noe Dinnerstein on sitar and Anand Patole on tabla at the CUNY Graduate Center’s Elebash Hall. He’s also been pursuing another love—jazz saxophone—at gigs in the New York and Boston areas. On 9 June he heads back to India on another research trip for his dissertation “Pannalal Ghosh and the Bansuri in the Twentieth Century.”

We are sad to report the passing of two important members of the Brooklyn College community, past and present. **Stoddard Lincoln**, an expert in English music of the Restoration, taught at Brooklyn College for twenty-five years, from 1964 until his retirement in September 1989. And **Peter Crosby** was our piano technician for over thirth-five years. Our thoughts are with their families.

On a happier note, congratulations are due to Brooklyn College composition student **Milosz Jeziorski**, winner of this year’s ISAM Prize for a piece “showing imaginative cross-cultural exploration.” Jeziorski’s work, “Tango Forbidden” for tenor sax, piano and double bass, was premiered at Brooklyn College’s Composers’ Concert last December.

—JT

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# Playing Guitar, Performing Hawaiian

Who is a real Hawaiian? The question has been raised by members of the Hawaiian hip hop group, Sudden Rush, performers of *na mele paleoleo* (Hawaiian rap), who have implicitly registered cultural hybridity as a component of “authentic Hawaiian-ness” by combining the Hawaiian and English languages within an idiom of urban African American origin, and distributing it through music industry networks. My own interest is in the ways “Hawaiian-ness” is articulated through another hybrid musical form, *ki ho’alu* (slack key guitar), and how its practices and distribution networks, including the transmission of musical knowledge from master to student, complicates notions of Hawaiian cultural membership.

My thoughts are similar to those of Rona Halualani, who in her book *In the Name of Hawaiians* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002) claims that our positions as ethnic Hawaiians born and raised in California obscure, even deny, our identification as “real” Hawaiians. In addition to officially sanctioned blood quantum requirements for state recognition of Hawaiian ancestry, she lists the various ways Hawaiian identity is constructed and articulated—native-born, indigenous, Local—all of which provide little space for those in the Hawaiian diaspora a generation or more removed from living in their homeland. Our own claims to Hawaiian identity, lying outside these definitions, appear specious. The situation of diasporic Hawaiians is further complicated by a prevailing concept Halualani, Haunani-Kay Trask and others have dubbed “Hawaiian in the heart.” This idea, they argue, misinterprets the original meaning of *Aloha* (often translated simply as “love”) in order to inscribe Hawaiians as a naturally benevolent and generous people, a concept that allows anyone, regardless of ethnic or cultural background, to claim a type of “Hawaiian-ness.” According to Halualani, the term *Aloha* was used to describe various relationships between Hawaiian social classes on which their “harshly lived social hegemony [was] sanctified through religion” (25). In other words, *Aloha* articulated a political relationship between Hawaiian kings, nobility and commoners, each of whom interpreted *Aloha* somewhat differently following their rankings within the sociopolitical structure. On a simple level, *Aloha* may be seen as loyalty to the king for commoners while, for Hawaiian monarchs, it marked a sense of obligation towards his or her subjects.

I have chosen to “listen to” the ways Hawaiian identity is complicated through *ki ho’alu* not only because it is heard by contemporary audiences as an authentically Hawaiian music practice (despite roots extending to non-Hawaiian cultures) but also as it has both incorporated and displaced older, traditional Hawaiian musical practices. The transcultural threads of *ki ho’alo* are visible in the troubled weavings of Hawaiian musical aesthetics, British naval power—which allowed the importation of cattle to Hawai’i—and the Mexican vaqueros who brought the guitar to Hawai’i in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they came to teach Hawaiians better cattle husbandry techniques.

When the vaqueros returned to Mexico, many left their guitars with their Hawaiian *paniolo* (cowboy) companions. Some historians speculate

that Hawaiian *paniolos* sought to emulate the two-guitar sound of the vaqueros in the familiar fingerpicking style of *ki ho’alu*, where the thumb provides bass lines and rhythm chords on the lower pitched strings and the other fingers pick the melody or improvise fills on the two or three higher pitched strings. Others, however, argue slack key guitar style borrowed from antecedents in the Hawaiian folk tradition, especially the *mele hula* chants and their subsequent development into the Christian hymn-influenced *hula ku’i*, perhaps most famously represented by popular tune “Aloha ‘Oe.” (The common speculation that Hawaiian musicians slackened guitar strings because they didn’t know how to properly tune a guitar may be countered by noting the dominance of major tonalities in the most common open tunings used by *ki ho’alu* musicians, which is reflective of Hawaiian musical sensibilities and indicates a systematic adaptive approach.)

*Mele* is perhaps the most important cultural expression of the Hawaiians. It is the way ancient Hawaiians prayed and passed on



Gabby Pahinui

Photo courtesy of Honolulu Star-Bulletin

legends and lore, linking their prehistory with their present life. The chant, and its two main divisions, *mele oli* (chants done a cappella) and *mele hula* (chants with dance and/or music) contribute to the rhythmic basis of *ki ho’alu*, which is founded on the *ipu*, a gourd, and the *pahu*, a drum formed from hollowed-out coconut or breadfruit tree logs with sharkskin membranes for heads. Traditional rhythms are based on two- or four-beat patterns linked to specific dance steps. Typically for Hawaiian music, the accompaniment does not parallel the song melody on guitar but repeats small, related melodic fragments that are varied and improvised on within strict conventions, creating a

polyphonic texture.

In solo guitar contexts, *ki ho’alu* can achieve this same melodic overlapping. Because slack key guitar is a picked, rather than strummed, style, with a melody accompanied by a plucked bass, a musician creates a polyphonic sound not unlike ragtime or stride piano styles, with improvisation of melodic and rhythmic patterns in both the bass and treble. Syncopation is common, as are triplets and dotted eighths with sixteenths. While early solo jazz piano styles used these effects to provide rhythmic and melodic tension, *ki ho’alu* achieves a rolling, rhythmically calm sensation.

As *ki ho’alu* evolved it began to replace *mele* and *hula*. The decline of *mele* can be attributed to a decrease in native Hawaiian religious practices due to enforced proscriptions by missionaries. The divorcing of *hula* from its traditional, native associations contributed to the commodification of Hawaiian culture for non-Hawaiian consumption.<sup>1</sup> However, *ki ho’alu* was not immune to the social and political transformations affecting other Hawaiian cultural practices.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were concerted efforts by British and United States elites to discourage and even eradicate Hawaiian culture, denying the use of the Hawaiian language, religious

## Performing Hawaiian (continued)

rituals and other cultural practices, including *ki ho'alu*. Scholars such as Noenoe K. Silva and Jonathan Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio have documented how these efforts, prompted by a need for political and capital gain, simultaneously elided the political and cultural opposition of Native Hawaiians. The result was a narrative of Hawaiian cultural loss that obscured the ways Hawaiian cultural traditions managed to survive. *Ki ho'alu's* "disappearance" occurred as Hawaiian cultural producers moved their art and folkways "underground" to avoid continued harassment by colonial authorities and the zealous proscriptions of missionaries. *Ki ho'alu* survived through the careful preservation by various *ohana* (families), not as "closely guarded family secrets,"<sup>[fn?]</sup> as one slack key guitar history has claimed, but because as Hawaiian cultural suppression became official state policy, *ki ho'alu* musicians acted in politically prudent ways. As noted Hawaiian musician Keola Beamer asserts,

I'm old enough to remember when we all thought slack key would die. There were many reasons for that. One of them was that our *kupuna* (elders) had lost so much: their land, their religious system, their sense of place in the universe. The last thing they wanted to lose was their music, so tunings became very cultish and protected. The irony was that by way of holding the secrets too close, this art form was actually dying, suffocating because the information wasn't being communicated.<sup>3</sup>

Though its survival depended on secrecy during much of its history, some musicians, such as Beamer, claim that *ki ho'alu's* continuation in more recent times has been dependent on its widespread dissemination. From their perspective, *ki ho'alu* is no longer threatened by external cultural forces but, rather, is increasingly hindered by its insularity. Within a contemporary political context, Beamer, Kane and others have begun teaching *ki ho'alu* primarily to non-Hawaiian students from a diverse array of backgrounds with the belief that spreading knowledge of *ki ho'alu* is fundamental to ensuring its continued survival and creative vitality. Moreover, as *ki ho'alu* is increasingly learned through recordings rather than oral tradition, Beamer argues teaching by Hawaiian masters will ensure the retention of a certain degree of Hawaiian cultural integrity. As he notes on his website,

Because many of the beautiful old traditions in Hawai'i have been changed by outside influences, this greatly increased respect for the older slack key traditions and the sharing of tunings is helping to ensure that traditional slack key guitar will endure and be shared.<sup>4</sup>

*Ki ho'alu* as a solo guitar tradition divorced from *mele* is a relatively recent performance style and its role as an accompaniment to vocals and/or dance has been underserved by the majority of *ki ho'alu* recordings, which feature solo guitarists. In fact, Elizabeth Tatar's taxonomy of Hawaiian music in her essay "Toward a Description of Precontact Music in Hawai'i,"<sup>5</sup> lists only *mele*, *himeni*, monarchy songs, folk songs, *hapa haole* and contemporary (a term Tatar uses to describe musicians who integrate Hawaiian themes and/or musical elements with non-Hawaiian popular music, such as Sudden Rush's rap). Following Tatar's categorization, *ki ho'alu* uncomfortably overlaps *mele hula*, folk songs and contemporary, simultaneously evoking a pre-contact Hawaiian musical aesthetic and the contradictory post-contact musical stereotypes of both laconic pleasure and excitable native impulses. Additionally, *ki ho'alu* recordings circulate within the commercial networks that have rendered

Hawaiian culture in ways Trask has likened to prostitution.<sup>6</sup>

I would hesitate to claim that all non-Hawaiian participation and commercial interest in Hawaiian culture is primarily appropriative or exploitive given that, as Halualani reminds us, many diasporic Hawaiians access Hawaiian culture through those very mediations. Indeed, *ki ho'alu's* current vitality as a commercial genre as well as its acceptance as an artistic form outside of Hawai'i can be attributed, in no small part, to non-Hawaiian musician George Winston, pianist, guitarist and owner of Dancing Cat Records, a label he formed expressly to record and preserve the creative work of both himself and other *ki ho'alu* artists. Moreover, the discrepant positions *ki ho'alu* guitarists such as Winston and modern *ki ho'alu* master Charles Philip "Gabby" Pahinui occupy in relation to Hawaiian culture highlight the debates surrounding authenticity and a musical idiom viewed as part of a Hawaiian folk tradition.

Indeed, despite its transcultural roots, *ki ho'alu* is closely linked to Hawaiian culture and portrayed as an expression of native Hawaiian music aesthetics. Ironically, given *ki ho'alu* musicians' "indigenizing" of the guitar and the corresponding disturbance of clear demarcations among ethnic and cultural divisions, *ki ho'alu* continues to be rendered as the sonic representation of "vivid, warm tropical images that transcend the Islands to express universal feelings."<sup>7</sup> George Lewis, writing about Hawaiian music in the 1970s notes, "Many of the new songs also used musical forms that were associated with *native tradition* -- from the chants of early Hawaii to the song stylings of the slack-key guitarists."<sup>8</sup>

In what has become known as the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1970s, young Hawaiian musicians not only began performing older styles of Hawaiian music but also invigorated them with a number of innovations, including the merging of traditional and modern instrumentation. They often sang in the Hawaiian language, effectively making their music less attractive to tourists and challenging the dominance of *hapa haole* songs in the commercial music arena. Singing in Hawaiian was a political act, a way to combat the attempts to eradicate Hawaiian culture by British and American missionaries and political elites, whose legacy remains in the English-language dominance of the educational and legal systems.

Yet, as *ki ho'alu* became known as an instrumental guitar music, it could evade the politics of language use and entered the public imagination as the "soft, inviting sounds" of Hawai'i, allowing its performance and appreciation without knowledge of the Hawaiian language or culture. There is nothing new about this practice: a survey of popular music trends from the early twentieth century to the contemporary moment quickly reveals a history of blending ideas about Hawaiian culture, particularly its easy accessibility by non-Hawaiians, with Hawaiian sounds such as the steel lap guitar and the rolling rhythms of 'ukulele players. Clearly, *ki ho'alu* is a musical idiom that has become firmly attached to a certain type of "Hawaiian-ness" for audiences inside and outside the geographical space of the Hawaiian Islands. On one hand, well-known guitarist Bob Brozman has described his interest in the music of various Pacific Island cultures, including *ki ho'alu*, as the result of "hang[ing] around at the fringes of colonialism, where you get non-Europeans playing European instruments," that, in fact, "whenever the colonizers arrived with guitars, the colonized did very interesting things with them."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, California-born and raised Patrick Landeza credits his mother, Frances Kawaiipulou Kuakini O'Sullivan, for instilling a love of Hawaiian music in him, which eventually led to studies with Hawaiian

*continued on page 12*

# The Making of an American Opera: A Conversation with Tom Cipullo

Tom Cipullo's *Glory Denied*, a two-act opera based on Tom Philpott's biography of Jim Thompson,<sup>1</sup> a veteran of the Vietnam War who had the dubious distinction of being America's longest held prisoner of war, received its world premiere on 5 May 2007 at the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts. A presentation of the Brooklyn College Opera Theater, the production was directed by Richard Barrett and designed by David Kissel.

The story revolves around the relationship between Jim and his wife Alyce, how they cope during Jim's imprisonment, and their life after his return at the end of the war. The four singers in the opera portray younger and older versions of Jim and Alyce. Younger Alyce was performed by Melanie Curcio, Older Alyce by Gretchen Munding, Younger Jim Thompson by Jan Heinrich Kuschel, and Older Jim Thompson by Scott Roche.

The first act of the opera details Thompson's experiences during his nine-year ordeal in prison. Jim holds up to the pressures of interrogation by dreaming of the ideal home life he left behind. Alyce, initially shocked by the disappearance of her husband, eventually moves in with another man. In the second act Jim returns to discover a world completely unlike the one he left in the early '60s. Everything has changed, including his relationship with his wife and children. Jim and Alyce decide to try to mend their differences, and to the public they put on the façade of the perfect family. The pressures of the changed times are too great, however; Jim wants the life he was denied while in prison and Alyce refuses to become the subservient wife.

On 28 March 2007 composer Douglas Cohen of Brooklyn College's Conservatory of Music sat down to speak with Cipullo about his ambitious work.

**DC:** A book review<sup>2</sup> of Tom Philpott's *Glory Denied* inspired you to create this opera. What was so compelling about that review?

**TC:** I had wanted to compose an opera for a long time, but the economics of it are so impossible. Unless someone is beating down your door to do it, which certainly isn't the case in this instance, why would anyone put themselves through it? As everyone knows, there are a million operas out there by very fine composers that are not being done. There are probably two million that have been done once and will never be done again. It's an investment of so many years, and it really seems foolhardy. But there had to be just the right subject. When I found the story it seemed as if it had just been left out there for me.

I had no idea that the actual statements of these people would furnish the libretto. I just thought "there is a drama here, there

is something compelling about the story, there is something that is in my lifetime." It is contemporary, it is topical. I just didn't want to write an opera about a book from a hundred years ago I had no interest in. I wanted something that would be interesting to people alive now.

**DC:** You have talked about the fact that you wanted to make this a human drama about two ordinary people who have something extraordinary happen in their life.<sup>3</sup>

**TC:** I centered it on the family relationship because that has the most drama for me.

Jim's wife had to have a very big role, and just the irony that she supplies by being so loved yet betraying him so badly—it is a very operatic conceit.

**DC:** I'm curious about her betrayal. You say that you don't pass judgment on the characters but you do see a right and wrong in this. I think she comes out looking rather cruel in your setting. You do present her point of view, but the justifications for some of her actions are not there. In the opera it sounds like she was very cold to him. Do you see that she was wrong in this situation?

**TC:** Oh yes, she was very wrong. The author said to me that he and I see the tragedy in exactly the same light, that we seem to have the same viewpoint about Alyce, which is that what she did was very rotten. But, people do rotten things all the time. They do them to survive. During that time everyone

did something that they regretted. That is my recollection of it anyway. Everyone wished that they could go back and do that time again and not make the same mistakes when our passions were so justifiably inflamed.

**DC:** Well, they were both very young when Jim left for Vietnam.

**TC:** But I mean the whole country. The people who were hawks would go back and say, "Gee, I wish I knew at the time what I was talking about." Many of the people who were doves would go back and say, "Yea, I was right, but the way I treated certain people was wrong." Many of the people ... were against involvement but were so intolerant of our soldiers when they came home. I think a lot of people with that whole viewpoint would like to take that back.

**DC:** Could you go into a little more detail about how you perceived that time?

**TC:** To see the difference in the country from when I was a small boy in the early '60s to the time I graduated from high school in the early '70s, one only has to look at a high school yearbook.



*Glory Denied* ensemble, L to R: Gretchen Munding, Scott Roche, Jan Heinrich Kuschel, Melanie Curcio  
Photo by John Ricosolli

When this man came back from being a POW he must have felt like he was coming back to Mars because the whole country was completely different—the whole culture, the way people acted. I'm no historian but I cannot conceive of a time when there was a greater change in ten years in a culture. Whether it is drugs or permissiveness, the way people dress, it is stunning.

**DC:** One gripping thing about Jim Thompson's experience was his early capture in the War and his time in solitary confinement, but the focus of the opera is truly on the relationship between Jim and Alyce.

**TC:** I don't want to convey torture in music. There is a little bit about that in this opera but I don't want to dwell on it.

A person said something very interesting to me about the character of Jim Thompson. He could not be broken by the Vietnamese, he made it through all of that, but it was the disillusionment of his wife's betrayal that hurt him in a way that nine years of Vietnamese prisons never could. That's what really devastated him.

Thompson died a couple of years ago. He knew I was writing this opera about him. He liked the idea, he loved music. I never spoke to him, but the man who wrote the book, Tom Philpott, did. He [Thompson] liked that idea very much. Philpott is a terrific guy. I wrote to him after I read the book and told him that I would like to make this opera and he was enthusiastic about it from the first.

**DC:** Have you been in touch with Alyce?

**TC:** No. I wonder what she would think? I don't think she would be so happy.

**DC:** How universal is the story of your opera?

**TC:** I hope it is universal in the sense that anyone who has ever suffered some betrayal, anyone who has ever wrapped their entire being into believing in a person or a cause or a country or a time and had that circumstance come crashing down upon them—I think that they can identify with Colonel Thompson's struggle.

As with any historical drama, if you have lived through the time you have a certain richness of experience that makes the story more poignant. For example, I would bet that you and I, all we have to do is hear the words "Richard Nixon" and an association comes to mind for us that someone who is twenty-five years old will not have. Or if I hear the words "POW bracelet," that means nothing to a twenty-five year old but it means something very important to me. Even the word "Vietnam." So I hope it is universal but I also want to especially communicate to people who are around my age.

**DC:** You have written that the last thing you ever wanted to do in creating an opera was to fashion your own libretto, yet you have done just that drawing on the transcripts of Jim and Alyce printed in the Tom Philpott book along with completely original texts for the catalogue aria and the end of the second act. How do you feel about your libretto?

**TC:** It took me a long time. I have never confessed this, but I like it! There are some things that perhaps I could change. There are

some flaws, but there are flaws in almost everyone's libretto. When I studied with Thea Musgrave she would say that you have to write your own libretto because only you know what you need. So often I have heard really bad ones, but I do believe that she was right.

The fact that this oral history has all of these vivid statements, which I can take, helped. It is the details of the language that often make libretti fall flat. These very dramatic people have a dramatic way of speaking. When Alyce says, "I don't give a shit if you forgive me or not," that is real. It is so real to me.

As I mentioned in that *Opera Today* article, when I take these statements and put them in my own order I create my own drama by how they are juxtaposed. In this particular circumstance, with these tools I had, I am happy with this libretto.

It is funny how certain things I just found. I needed something in Act Two, Scene One, and I didn't have the right thing. Almost at the end I found that letter from young Alyce to her husband saying that today was gorgeous outside and all the snow melted except for that one place where the sun never shines. I said, "How could I have missed this before?" It is so perfect in how it encapsulates the whole situation and that became the end of that scene.

One other reason we write our own libretti is to create the ensembles. Only a composer could figure out how that works, how to put things together. I should go back and look at those correspondence between Illica and Puccini and between Hofmannsthal and Strauss and see how many times the composer would send it back and say, "No, I need something here where they can all sing together." The hardest things to write, but the most fun, are the ensembles. That is when you feel like you have done something.

**DC:** Do you want to talk a little about the staging of the opera? I found very little about the setting in the score and wondered if you have definite ideas or if you are collaborating with somebody?

**TC:** I had no ideas, and this being my first opera, it is amazing how much I did not know. As I was finishing up the first act I think I said to Richard Barrett, "Richard, I have no idea how this can be staged." He said, "Don't worry about it." I know the opera is very dramatic, but because there is no linear narrative, it jumps around and is in this time and that time, I don't have any idea how it can be staged. I trust Richard.

When the Center for Contemporary Opera presented a semi-staged reading of it, Chuck Maryan did a great job directing it. He had a very simple, yet effective, staging in three parts, because all of the action happens concurrently. There was the actual prison cell where Thompson was held, on the other side of the stage there was a kitchen table where Alyce wrote her letters to him, and in the center there was this place where they would meet, where all of the characters would come together. It worked quite well.

So the staging will be untraditional. I have always thought that it should have lots of images, whether those images are projections, how they will work, I don't know. It is certainly an opera that would lend itself to TV, because that era is filled with images. It was the first television war after all. All we have to do is see a picture of Richard Nixon. We don't even have to see his name—a

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# Bernstein in Boston

*Leonard Bernstein, Boston to Broadway*, three days of a symposium and concerts at Harvard University on 12-14 October 2006, provided a full-bodied perspective on the famed American composer-conductor and his relationship with his hometown. Although often considered a quintessential New Yorker, Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts and grew up in Boston. Many know of his lifelong ties to the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Tanglewood, but this festival showed how Bernstein's study in area schools, his membership in Boston's Jewish community, and his undergraduate days at Harvard College helped shape his future.

Certainly the luminaries present—all three of the composer's children, Jamie Bernstein, Alexander Bernstein, and Nina Bernstein Simmons, his brother Burton Bernstein, lyricist Sheldon Harnick, singer/actress Carol Lawrence, singer Marni Nixon, director/producer Harold Prince, and others—made the event more memorable, but the principal kudos go to the Harvard faculty members, offices, and students who brought off this event beautifully. The co-director was Professor Carol J. Oja who, along with Professor Kay Kaufman Shelemay, taught a seminar in spring 2006 on "Before *West Side Story*: Leonard Bernstein's Boston"; research from that class was reported at the symposium. The Harvard graduate students who took the seminar, and others, were ubiquitous during the festival. Judith Clurman, director of choral activities at Juilliard, was festival co-director in charge of two concerts given by talented Harvard students.

The opening session, moderated by Oja, presented the Bernstein family in conversation about their famous relative. Though little was said that might surprise a Bernstein specialist, it was fascinating to see interaction between four people who share Bernstein's genes. Oja's opening remarks described Bernstein's relationship with Harvard and the seminar that helped launch the festival. The four Bernsteins spoke of the conductor's sense of humor and how important laughing was and is in their family. Burton remembered when his brother first became famous in 1943-44, and they all spoke poignantly of Bernstein's last Tanglewood concert in August 1990. There were clips from the film *Leonard Bernstein: A Total Embrace*, made and introduced by Nina Bernstein Simmons, and considerable talk about their mother, Felicia Bernstein. Anecdotes illuminated Bernstein's lack of mechanical understanding, his love of word games (though Alexander reports that *West Side Story* lyricist Stephen Sondheim was better at them), Bernstein's parenting style, and memorable concerts. The children remember how much fun it was when he was home composing, and all recalled Bernstein's political activism. They described their parents's separation in 1976, and their father's love for Israel. Jamie revealed that her father keenly felt disappointment that more people did not understand his *Mass* of 1971 and Alexander provided the best quotation of the session: "Everything he ever composed he adored, and when he finished it was the best thing he had ever written, and maybe

better than anyone else had ever written." They also recalled that their father listened to all kinds of music and was offended when someone would listen to music while doing something else.

The first concert, "Bernstein's Boston," that evening, included works that the composer heard and performed in his youth, including synagogue music, Copland's *Piano Variations*, excerpts from *The Mikado*, *The Cradle Will Rock*, and *Of Thee I Sing*, Harold Shapero's Four-Hand Sonata for Piano *Sonata for Piano Four Hands*, and juvenilia by Bernstein. A highlight was an uproarious version of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* for flute, clarinet, accordion, voices, ukelele, piano, and percussion that Bernstein apparently arranged for a summer camp in 1939.

Friday's schedule presented five plenary sessions, the first two emphasizing Bernstein's Boston connections. Professor Shelemay moderated "Boston's Bernstein: Jewish Identity and Community," featuring Jewish historian Jonathan Sarna (Brandeis University), Harvard graduate student Sheryl Kaskowitz, and musicologist David Schiller (University of Georgia). Sarna described the Boston Jewish community of Bernstein's youth and music at his temple, Mishvan Tefila. Kaskowitz, drawing from her seminar research, spoke on

Bernstein's work at Brandeis in the 1950s. Schiller looked at how Bernstein reflected Judaism and temple music in his symphonies, in addition to other influences. Discussion included questions about why Bernstein did not write more for Jewish worship music, with Bernstein biographer Humphrey Burton suggesting that the composer wrote the religious music he wanted in *Mass* and elsewhere, and told how Bernstein played organ for his wedding in an Anglican church in New York, insisting that the sanctuary be closed thirty minutes for his practice.

Professor Oja moderated "Boston's Bernstein: Musical and Educational Spheres." Harvard doctoral student Ryan Raul Bañagale spoke about Bernstein and *Rhapsody in Blue*, including the 1939 arrangement that he found in the Library of Congress. Another Harvard student, Drew Massey, then described Bernstein's participation in Harvard Student Union productions, a sign of his early political activism. Musicologist Geoffrey Block (University of Puget Sound) considered in detail Bernstein's senior honor's thesis on jazz and other African American elements in concert music. Harvard graduate student Emily Abrams Ansari interviewed composer Harold Shapero and orchestrator and musical producer Sid Ramin, both of whom knew the young Bernstein. They described Bernstein as the consummate musician and a fun-loving friend, while also dropping fascinating tidbits, such as what 1930s jazz that Bernstein knew and what it was like to study and perform with him.

Musical theater director and conductor Rob Fisher, well-known for his work with the City Center *Encores!* series in New York,



*The Bernstein family 14 October 2006 at Harvard University. L to R: Jamie Bernstein, Alexander Bernstein, and Nina Bernstein Simmons*  
Photo by Eric Antoniou

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# Connections and Celebrations in African American Music

On 9-12 February 2007 the African American Art Song Alliance held a groundbreaking conference, “African American Art Song Alliance: A Time for Reflection,” at the University of California, Irvine. Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Alliance, this conference featured lectures, panel discussions, paper presentations and performances from leading interpreters of African American art music. The conference achieved a rare and important gathering of performers, scholars, teachers, and music lovers from across the United States, and gave them a treasured opportunity to immerse themselves in music with a rich history and vibrant current life in performance. Having leading performers and composers of this music there in person provided attendees first-hand experience with compositional history and performance techniques.

Organized by Dr. Darryl Taylor, Associate Professor of Music at UC Irvine, the conference brought together performance and education. With an opening reception and concert by the UC Irvine Students and faculty on Friday night (9 February), each of the following three days wove a general theme throughout the panels and performances. On Saturday, “Celebrating 30 Years: The Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers Revisited” highlighted anthologies of black art songs with a special focus on the 30th anniversary of Dr. Willis Patterson’s seminal *Art Songs by Black American Composers*, a collection first published by E. B. Marks Music Publishers in 1977. The collection was revised in 2002 into a second edition of two volumes: *Second Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers* (Willis Patterson Publishing, 2002) and *The New Negro Spiritual*. [citation] These recent publications are accompanied by CDs that have all of the songs in the two collections performed by leading interpreters, under Dr. Patterson’s direction. Saturday concerts included works performed from Patterson’s collections as well as the 1946 anthology compiled by Edgar Rogie Clark, *Negro Art Songs*, [citation] and *A New Anthology of Art Songs by African American Composers* edited by Jeanine Wagner and Margaret Simmons (Southern Illinois Press, 2004).

On Sunday, “Contemporary Music—Contemporary Issues” included a lush array of panels, with presentations highlighted by several performances, and several of the featured composers in the audience. It was an exceptionally rich experience to hear H. Leslie Adams, Adolphus Hailstork, Jacqueline Hairston, and Olly Wilson speak on panel discussions about their compositional process, relate anecdotes about commissions and performances, and then hear their music performed throughout the day. Given their wide range of works for the voice, the topic of the conference this day was opened up, just a little, from art song to include opera. The panel “African Americans in the Operatic World” included Adolphus Hailstork (whose 1999 opera *Joshua’s Boots* was commissioned by the Opera Theatre of St. Louis and the Kansas City Lyric Opera)

and former Metropolitan Opera singers Hilda Harris and George Shirley. Rounding out the day’s theme of contemporary music, Sunday evening’s concert featured Louise Toppin, a central presence today in the recording and performance of African American art song and opera, singing a “Recital of Art Songs of 21st century” which contained several world premieres.

On Monday, “African American Art Song as a Pedagogical Tool” brought together themes related to the recent availability of compiled anthologies with the training needed to perform this repertoire in the concert hall. Two panels, “Out of the Margins: Moving African American Art Song into Mainstream Repertoire” and “On Correcting Societal Misconceptions based on Racial Stereotypes,” discussed the challenges surrounding promoting this

repertoire to the general public as well as the need to teach the musical style and history of the music to produce compelling performances. The afternoon put the morning sessions into practice with a master class by George Shirley (Joseph Edgar Maddy Distinguished Professor of Music, University of Michigan).

Though it was thrilling to have so many people who compose, write, teach, and love this music in the same place for four days, the conference was much more than a gathering that preached to the proverbial “choir.” The conference also

brought into focus several themes about the current state of African American art song. First of all, it made clear that, with the current availability in anthologies and collections, ignorance of this repertoire is no excuse for its neglect. In addition to scores, there are many excellent recordings that help those who did not grow up with this music hear performances that are steeped in the stylistic and idiomatic genres of the spiritual and gospel music—two strong influences on black art song that help translate the written notation from the page to a living musical tradition. Hence, there is ample opportunity to learn and luxuriate in this rich repertoire; moreover, there are fewer reasons to push this music to the sidelines of what is considered the American musical canon.

Another energizing theme of the conference was the extent of the interracial collaboration and participation in this musical tradition. In candid discussions about helping this repertoire become better known, the question of whether or not non-black performers are “allowed” to sing these works became almost superfluous. It was not as though the conference stated an “official” position, but the evidence of so many different ethnicities and skin tones at the event made a strong statement that this is music that everyone can share. African, Caribbean, European, Latino/a, and people from the United States performed together and sat side by side on panels and in the audience. The result was a general consensus of the need for more musicians and music lovers to learn the history of this

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*Haroutune Bedelian, violin, and Gail Robinson Otura, soprano*

*Photo by Darryl Taylor*

## Irving Berlin (continued)

Since minstrelsy represents a historically male domain of entertainment, it offered both a pragmatic solution to the challenge of staging army camp shows and an ideological reinforcement of the dominant American ethos of the war years. That is, the wartime rhetoric of the “common man” and the “people’s war” dovetailed comfortably with the “people’s culture” view of minstrelsy described by Lott and wholeheartedly embraced by Berlin.

That view helps to explain why minstrelsy proved to be a strangely apt medium in the theater of war. Within and beyond its opening scene, entitled “A Military Minstrel Show,” *This Is the Army* used several minstrel conventions: (1) a large, uniformed male ensemble on risers, a remnant of the post-Civil War minstrel extravaganza, (2) rapid-fire dialogue between characters of unequal status in the manner of minstrelsy’s endman-interlocutor banter, (3) a tenor spotlighted in the role of a romantic balladeer, (4) a hefty dose of female impersonation, and (5) a balance between contemporary references and nostalgia for the past. Minstrelsy offered Berlin a broad, flexible vocabulary of theatrical and musical conventions that helped to rein in two tendencies he wanted to avoid, especially for his soldier audiences: maudlin sentiments and overt patriotism.

The first scene sets the tone with the image of 150-uniformed men in minstrel formation on risers, in front of which a motley crew of selectees enters and begins to sing the song “This Is the Army, Mister Jones.” The scene, captured on film, creates a sharp contrast between the minstrel-soldiers (whom Berlin had initially hoped to present in blackface), with their matching uniforms, straight posture, lockstep movements, and stentorian singing; and the selectees, who dress in mismatched underclothes, stumble around and slouch, and sing in weak, shallow tones. After the selectees sing the song, the minstrel-soldiers surround them and repeat the chorus, while the selectees change into uniform and march off the stage. The theme of clothes as a marker of identity recurs like a leitmotif in Berlin’s show, and ultimately, I’ll argue, provides a key to the source of his wartime entertainment aesthetic.

A minstrel show drew much of its energy and appeal from the interaction of the wise-cracking, lowly endmen and the dignified, sometimes pompous, interlocutor. In this, it embodied the form of American comedy practiced by what Constance Rourke, in a classic study of American humor, identifies as the “Yankee fable,” whose protagonists were “popular oracles,” that is, those marginalized but quick-witted figures who speak up for the common man in encounters with their cultural or economic (sometimes European) superiors.<sup>6</sup> That model fit hand-in-glove with the attitude Berlin saw among the soldiers while working on the show at Camp Upton, and it comes out in scenes whose writers fitted it to Berlin’s conception of the show.

The minstrel first part features a run of banter and boasting between the endman Dick Bernie and the interlocutor, Alan Manson, who has summoned him “front and center.” In classic endman fashion, Bernie acts as a disruptive figure who trades brisk dialogue with Manson on his left as he tries to crack the stony façade of the guard on his right, which he succeeds in doing with the line: “You heard of the March of Time? There’s his brother, Waste of Time.”<sup>7</sup> As the scene progresses, Bernie’s pace quickens and the boasts grow. In the end of the scene as filmed, he willingly surrenders to the guard for his verbal trespassing,

an act that reinforces the interlocutor’s superiority even as it gets Dick Bernie the endman’s ultimate reward: the last laugh.<sup>8</sup>

A minstrel show offered respite from manic humor in the form of a romantic balladeer, typically a tenor who starred in the minstrel first part. This, too, fit well into a wartime show, for it allowed Berlin to develop an impulse he viewed as universal to the common soldier: yearning for the girl he left behind. To satisfy this convention Berlin wrote “I’m Getting Tired So I Can Sleep,” a musical love letter in which a soldier looks forward to dreaming as the best way to reunite with his faraway loved one. The concept of the romantic ballad on the “girl I left behind” also stands behind two later numbers, including a song that became the show’s hit ballad, “I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen.” Here a soldier pines for the hostess he met at the famous army nightclub, and Berlin aims to keep overblown sentimentality in check with an image of doughnuts and coffee.

Beyond yearning for women, the men in *This Is the Army* also impersonate them. Toll has noted that female impersonation emerged in the post-Civil War era as “minstrelsy’s most important new specialty role,”<sup>9</sup> whose performers “excited more interest than any other minstrel specialist.”<sup>10</sup> Berlin’s show uses two kinds of female impersonation. One features a group of men embodying a generic stereotyped femininity, with frilly dresses, batting eye-lashes, and mincing steps. This is the minstrel type evoked in the number “Ladies of the Chorus,” which Berlin recycled from *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*. In this scene, the humor is supposed to arise from the contrast between a dainty female ideal and the ungainly, hairy masculinity it cannot conceal. Another kind of female impersonation became a minstrel art form. Earlier in the “Stage Door Canteen” sequence, fascination vies with humor as a soldier does a striking parody of a specific woman, actress Lynn Fontanne, then breaks the illusion with a masculine shout.

The minstrel first part culminates in a scene featuring a mock-wedding number called “Mandy,” a song closely connected with Berlin’s vision of an army show, and it remained a favorite that he revisited. It appeared first in *Yip, Yip, Yaphank* in 1918, again in his score for the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1919*, and *This Is the Army* in the 1940s, and once more, without blackface, in the 1954 film *White Christmas*. As late as 1967, Berlin still recalled the “Mandy” number in the *Follies* as “the high spot” of that show and “one of the thrills of my memory.”<sup>11</sup> The version for *This Is the Army* features the soldier chorus on risers, plus several performers in blackface. Five of them stand in the back encircled by a large banjo image on a backdrop and others dance in the foreground, where we see the double masquerade of white men in both drag *and* (as the film makes clear) a light shade of blackface that used to be called “high yellow.”

Racial stereotypes also surface in a number for the African American performers called “What the Well-Dressed Man in Harlem Will Wear.” As in the opening number “This Is the Army, Mister Jones,” Berlin presents the conversion from civilian to soldier as a matter of dressing up, as the Harlem “dude” sheds his “Lenox Avenue clothes” for a uniform marked by a “suntan shade of cream / Or an olive-drab color scheme.” A reference to Berlin’s earlier song “Top Hat, White Tie, and Tails” notes what the civilian has given up.

## Irving Berlin (continued)

The last line evokes an image of boxing legend Joe Louis as “Brown Bomber Joe,” and the film (but not the stage version) matches it with the appearance of Louis himself. The number begins with a contemporary musical signifier of Harlem nightlife: a phrase of scat followed by a swing-style melody and band arrangement.

Finally, like a minstrel show, *This Is the Army* combined nostalgia and contemporaneity. Minstrel nostalgia, Robert Toll has noted, points to minstrelsy’s own past, and so it is that Berlin adopts his World War I hit, “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning,” for use in the new war. This, perhaps Berlin’s single most beloved wartime song, has never been viewed in the context of minstrel conventions, yet given so many other minstrel elements in the show, it now seems impossible not to see it as a kind of minstrel number. In it, the show’s creator, dressed in a uniform from the first war, lends his raspy, impish voice to a common army gripe of the ordinary soldier. The ensuing finale jolts the audience back into the present, suggesting that the first war’s business has not yet been completed. In a number called “This Time,” the uniformed minstrels of scene 1 have now become full-fledged combat soldiers with rifles. For the film, Berlin added a verse featuring the lines “dressed up to win,” which further reinforces the sartorial keynote.

My interpretation here has emphasized ways in which *This Is the Army* derives its structure and themes from minstrelsy, partly because my research on Berlin’s shows keeps turning up evidence of how Berlin drew energy and inspiration from this distinctively American entertainment form throughout his career. It amplifies cultural histories that explore the ways in which urban immigrants flourished in the early decades of the twentieth-century by adapting and transforming minstrel elements, especially what has become the historiographically privileged generation of New York-based, Russian-Jewish immigrant entertainers such as Berlin, George Gershwin, Al Jolson, and Eddie Cantor. And it connects with historian Andrew Heinze’s study of turn-of-the-century American Jewish immigrant culture, *Adapting to Abundance*, which emphasizes the ways in which that generation of immigrant Jews, in particular, saw clothing not just as a way to win social respectability, but “as an important symbol of cultural transformation.”<sup>12</sup>

Such observations bring us dangerously close to dredging up old anti-Semitic stereotypes linking Jews and clothes, stereotypes in which Berlin himself trafficked in his early career, as in his song about a Jewish tailor who sets up shop in an Irish neighborhood: “Abie Sings an Irish Song” (1913). When analysis approaches ethnic and racial generalization, historian David Hollinger has noted, the scholar risks entering what he has termed the “booster-bigot trap,” a quandary marked by two uncritical tendencies on opposite ends of an interpretive spectrum.<sup>13</sup> The way out, according to Hollinger, lies in historical particularity, a focus on specific times, places, communities, and circumstances.

Whether or not Berlin’s emphasis on sartorial transformation in so many songs, especially in *This is the Army*, echoes the particular world-view of a Russian-Jewish American, I can no longer ignore the ways in which Berlin’s linkage of minstrelsy and the military in *This Is the Army* reflect a sensibility forged in the crucible of turn-of-the-century immigration, extending the framework in which Charles Hamm brilliantly analyzed Berlin’s early songs.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, considering the fraught nature of the issues, I am happy to report that something Berlin himself wrote makes the point more clearly than I could.

In 1956, Berlin wrote the opening scene of a show he called “This Is America,” which was only recently published in a book of his lyrics.<sup>15</sup> In the production, several “immigrant couples” strip off their old-world clothes and put on “American dress of the period” while surrounded by what Berlin’s scenario describes as “members of the minstrels as in ‘This Is the Army, Mister Jones.’” By modeling the ritualistic opening scene of “This Is America” on the opening of *This Is the Army*, Berlin makes explicit something that had been latent in his work for at least four decades since he created *Yip, Yip Yaphank*: the conflation of three seemingly unrelated phenomena—American immigrant assimilation, military induction, and minstrelsy. All three, for Berlin, require wearing clothes and playing roles that allow the immigrant, the citizen, and the performer to become assimilated into a larger community. Minstrelsy, in this view, may be seen as the medium for Berlin’s theater of war and peace, a theatrical style through which the immigrant becomes a citizen and the civilian becomes a soldier, and thus, for better or worse, through which both become more thoroughly American.

—University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

### Notes

This article is adapted from a paper presented at the “Cultural Impacts of World War II” symposium sponsored by the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard University in March 2007. It is also an excerpt from Magee’s forthcoming book on Irving Berlin and the theater, to be published by Yale University Press in their Broadway Masters series.

<sup>1</sup> Alan Anderson, *The Songwriter Goes to War: The Story of Irving Berlin’s World War II All-Army Production of This Is the Army* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Limelight, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Fussell, *Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 143.

<sup>3</sup> N.a., “The Theatre and the Armed Forces” in *Theater Arts* (March 1943): 150.

<sup>4</sup> For reflections on World War II as a “good war,” see, for example, Studs Terkel, *The Good War”: An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), and Michael C. C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), especially chapter 1 (“Mythmaking and the War”).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Patrick Burke, “Oasis of Swing: The Onyx Club, Jazz, and White Masculinity in the Early 1930s,” *American Music* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 320-46, and Todd Decker, “Where Jazz Meets the Musical: Fred Astaire’s Solo Dances with African-American Musicians (1937–1968),” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for American Music, Pittsburgh, PA, March 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (1931). I’m indebted to Larry Hamberlin for his discussion of Rourke in his forthcoming book, tentatively titled *That Operatic Rag* (New York: Oxford University Press).

<sup>7</sup> The British script of the show (in a blue folder dated 1942 in the Irving Berlin Collection, Library of Congress, Box 204, Folder 2) includes the scene between Bernie and Manson, with some dialogue that the film preserves and other dialogue that was not.

<sup>8</sup> In the British script, Bernie simply states the last line and exits. The script gives no indication that the guard leads him off.

<sup>9</sup> Toll, *Blacking Up*, 139.

<sup>10</sup> Toll, 144.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Berlin to Gus Van, of Van and Schenk, quoted in Irving Berlin, *The Complete Lyrics of Irving Berlin*, ed. by Robert Kimball and Linda Emmet (New York: Knopf, 2001), 184.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), chap. 6, “The Clothing of an American,” esp. 90 (quoted passage) and 103.

<sup>13</sup> David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), chap. 1, especially pp. 12-14.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Hamm, *Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot: The Formative Years, 1907-1914* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Berlin, *Complete Lyrics*, 464.

## Performing Hawaiian (continued)

master musicians such as Ray Kane, Sonny Chillingworth and Saichi Kawahara. Taken together, *ki ho'alu* musicians, Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian, indicate that there may be different kinds of "Hawaiian-ness" articulated in the performance and creation of a musical idiom marked "Hawaiian soul music" by the subtitle of one documentary film on *ki ho'alu*.<sup>10</sup> We hear in *ki ho'alu* the various articulations of Hawaiian cultural membership in the ways I have outlined above: the indigenization of a foreign instrument that marks Hawaiian music in an explicitly hybrid way (against the "purity" of traditional *mele*); the use of *ki ho'alu* as a "traditional" music in contrast to the mainstream popular music stylings of *hapa haole* songs during the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1970s; the rise of *ki ho'alu* masters such as Patrick Landeza who are born and raised outside of the Hawaiian Islands; the teaching of *ki ho'alu* beyond the confines of a master guitarist's *ohana* and, increasingly, to musicians like Bob Brozman who make no claims for Hawaiian identity yet find in *ki ho'alu* a resonant musical idiom.

Brozman is not the only non-Hawaiian who enjoys what he cogently expresses as "hanging out at the fringes of colonialism." But for Hawaiian musicians, their cultural legacy is not at the fringes but in the very center of colonialist desire, exploitation and displacement. And Gabby Pahinui's historic recordings of slack key guitar in the late 1940s through the 1970s, as well as contemporary guitarists such as Keola Beamer, have helped *ki ho'alu* make a remarkable return to the public sphere. As *ki ho'alu* musicians closely identified with "real Hawaiian-ness" such as Beamer, Kane, and Kaapana actively pass on their knowledge of *ki ho'alu*, the circle of "legitimate" *ki ho'alu* musicians widens, including diasporic Hawaiians who do not fit easily within current categories for "real Hawaiian" identity. This latest cohort of guitarists, sailing from the fringes of colonialism, will take *ki ho'alu* to unfamiliar places, sounding out new definitions Hawaiian identity may yet embrace and embody.

—Kevin Fellezs  
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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Haunani-Kay Trask for a trenchant critique of Hawaiian cultural exploitation in the chapter, "'Lovely Hula Hands': Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture" (*From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1999 [1993]).

<sup>2</sup> From *Blue Book: A Short History of Slack Key Guitar (Ki ho'alu)*, available on the Dancing Cat website <<http://www.dancingcat.com/skbook8-acknowledgments.php>>

<sup>3</sup> This quote is taken from Beamer's comments about the song, "Lei 'Awapuhi," in the liner notes to his recording, *Moe'Uhane Kika: Tales of the Dream Guitar* (Dancing Cat, 1995). You may also read these comments at the web address: <<http://www.dancingcat.com/notes/08022-38006-2.php>>.

<sup>4</sup> Keola Beamer, "Sending Aloha from Maui, Hawai'i." <[http://www.kbeamer.com/sk\\_history.html](http://www.kbeamer.com/sk_history.html)>

<sup>5</sup> See Trask's chapter, "'Lovely Hula Hands': Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture," in *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1999 [1993]).

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Tatar, "Toward a Description of Precontact Music in Hawai'i." *Ethnomusicology*, 25/3 (Sept 1981), 481-92.

<sup>7</sup> Liner notes to *Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Masters: Instrumental Collection* (Dancing Cat, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> George Lewis, "Storm blowing from paradise," 63, emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> Bob Brozman, interview, *Beat* 4 Apr 2001, n.p. Available online at: <[http://www.bobbrozman.com/inter\\_beat.html](http://www.bobbrozman.com/inter_beat.html)>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ki Ho'alu, That's Slack Key Guitar: Hawaiian Soul Music*, dir. Susan Friedman, VHS, Studio on the Mountain, 1995.

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## Tom Cipullo (continued)

picture of Nixon with his hands up in a V for victory sign, and we don't know whether to laugh or gag.

**DC:** Do you want to talk a little about the composition itself? I am actually a little curious, if you have no specific staging in mind: what was your idea behind the musical interludes?

**TC:** Great question, and I'm going to drop a name. I was talking to Ned Rorem on the patio at Yaddo in fact. I said to him that I was writing this opera and didn't say anything more about that. He said, "Leave lots of time for the music, leave lots of musical interludes." I thought if he said it then it must be true so I put them in. How they will work I don't know. I feel they are right musically, so if they are right musically they must be right stage-wise.

**DC:** How will this work if you find there is not enough music in between? Will you add music? How adaptable are you?

**TC:** I can't add anything more. After five years it is what it is. I have been working on it for so long that if I go back to it I'm afraid I will lose myself. And when would we know? Probably not until the last couple of weeks. Everyone is asking me, "after the premiere are you ready to go back and do rewrites?"

**DC:** And are you?

**TC:** I don't even want to think about it. It's like saying, "If you recover from this fatal illness are you willing to go back and get sick again?" If I must, I must, but I don't want to think about it.

**DC:** So normally when you compose you don't often revise?

**TC:** Oh no, I revise, but I revise a lot before the performance. I am so slow. To just write a song, I might rewrite it over six times before I let anybody do it. With this opera I have been doing it for years, and it has had several incarnations from the time that City Opera did it at its Vox festival and then the Center for Contemporary Opera; it has undergone little changes already.

**DC:** To go back a little to the story, and not to be too critical: you seem to gloss over Jim Thompson's flaws in this opera. Alyce talks in the book about her suspicion of his homosexual activity before going to Vietnam and certainly it was confirmed by Alyce and Jim's second wife after the war.

**TC:** Interesting, you know if you read that really closely, his second wife didn't discuss it, but there is a quote where Alyce says the second wife called her and confirmed it. Philpott doesn't get that from the second wife, he only gets it again from Alyce.

**DC:** But also Jim's character as it comes out of his service record. Once he made a decision he wouldn't rethink it. Certainly in his relationship with his wife he was the dominant person, he was the 'right' person. The relationship was on his terms.

**TC:** That whole generation, it was always on the man's terms.

**DC:** How it worked out in real life was not always as cut and dried as Jim's interpretation or realization of that ideal.

**TC:** It is true, I did not make him a very negative character, but I had tremendous respect for him. I thought he had been stepped on enough and I didn't want to step on him too. I feel like I knew him—I guess because I knew so many people like him who had a tough time adapting. You are right, but he is, after all, a victim.

**DC:** The book review came to you just before 9/11, with the aftermath accelerating events here in the United States leading to the war in Iraq. Even though the current situation was not part of your original idea, has this turn of events in any way influenced you in your approach to this topic?

**TC:** I don't think so. I came across this in August 2001 and I was convinced I would do it immediately. Then I had such tunnel vision that I don't think I even made the connection. Military... now we are at war again... I just didn't make that connection.

**DC:** Not even Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo? None of that?

**TC:** It's another example; I was just so blind to it. Once people pointed it out to me that we were at war again, of course, yes.

There is a big difference between now and the '60s, because the sacrifices of war are now relegated to the small minority and their families. It seems like 80 percent of America just goes on with their lives and almost doesn't notice it. That's part of the criticism, isn't it? When Representative Rangel talks about bringing back the draft so that the whole nation will share the sacrifice that these people are making? In the '60s everyone was afraid of being drafted, but now a relatively small number of servicemen and their families bear the brunt of the war. The sacrifice is not so deeply ingrained into the culture.

**DC:** Can you say a word or two about the arias?

**TC:** I had written a lot of the opera, and [singer and teacher] Paul Sperry said something very interesting to me. He said, "You know, operas take on a life by their ability to be performed in excerpts." If you don't have something that is excerptable, that is to say arias, it is much more difficult for them to enter the repertoire. So the first act has a number of ensembles and some pretty tunes, but the second act has five real arias that people can take out and do, and hopefully will leave humming to their friends. That is something that I want to pass on to all of the other opera composers of the world.

**DC:** Do you want to talk a little bit about your approach for writing for voice?

**TC:** I sing everything that I write. There is nothing wrong with showing off what a beautiful voice can do. If you are going to write an opera and deprive yourself of overt emotion, you are cheating yourself. If you are not going to have lyricism, there is no point in writing an opera.

When I first started I did the dumbest thing, I made it for two bari-tenors. I don't know why. I changed it to a high baritone and an outright tenor. I like that quality of a bari-tenor but what I was thinking I do not know. It is so hard to find people who can do that voice. Changing one part up to a tenor helped a lot.

## Tom Cipullo (continued)

It is very easy to drown out voices so I try not to cover them. I try to put them in a place where they will be heard. My model might be Strauss, because at any moment the vocal lines are just so beautiful, they show off what people can do. Sometimes it is just about, “I’m going to give you a chance to show how great your voice is.”

It is my dream that people will walk out of that theater, and they may not even notice me, but they will all walk out and say, “Did you hear those four voices? What exquisite voices those people had!”

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tom Philpott, *Glory Denied: The Saga of Jim Thompson, America’s Longest-Held Prisoner of War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> David Murray, review of *Glory Denied* by Tom Philpott, *New York Times*, September 2, 2001, Books in Brief: Nonfiction, nytimes.com.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Cipullo, “*Glory Denied*, the Genesis of an Opera,” typescript supplied by the author. Published in *Opera Today* (Spring 2006), the newsletter of the Center for Contemporary Opera, www.conopera.org.

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## Bernstein (continued)

presented a master class for Harvard student singers. An excellent session for performers, the audience enjoyed learning how Fisher develops song interpretations.

Fisher then joined moderator Judith Tick (Northeastern University), lyricist Sheldon Harnick, and music professor David Schiff (Reed College) for consideration of “Ongoing Resonances of the Bernstein Shows.” Harnick described his early Broadway career in the 1950s and commented on Bernstein’s musicals, praising how “fearless” he was as a creator and how he could objectively look at his work, even on an opening night. Fisher spoke about presenting *Wonderful Town* in the *Encore!* series and how Bernstein’s musicals have aged well, perhaps because his music was more sophisticated than the Broadway standard of the time. David Schiff spoke about Bernstein’s script for the 1956 *Omnibus* television show on musical theater.

That evening, Marie Carter and Craig Urquhart, Vice Presidents of the Leonard Bernstein Office, introduced intriguing video clips from Bernstein’s output in “Leonard Bernstein: Teaching and Television.” For the late-night crowd, soprano Marni Nixon spoke before a presentation of the film *West Side Story*.

On Saturday, attendees had to choose between several rich sessions. In the first time block, Damian Woetzel rehearsed dancers from the Boston Ballet in Bernstein’s *Fancy Free*, and Professors Oja and Shelemay led a session in which four more Harvard students presented their research from the seminar. Later, Lynn Garafola moderated “Dancing the Story: Bernstein and his Choreographers” with participation by Deborah Jowitt, Grover Dale, Kathleen Marshall, Donald Saddler, and Damian Woetzel. The session opposite was “Working with Bernstein,” where moderator Richard Ortner led a discussion with biographer and film producer Humphrey Burton, Jack Gottlieb (a composer and Bernstein’s former assistant), and conductor John Mauceri. Burton described Bernstein’s perfectionism when they made films together; though

there were difficult moments, they always remained friends. Mauceri recalled working with Bernstein at Tanglewood and the complicated histories of *Candide* and *A Quiet Place*.

In a much-anticipated event, musicologists Ralph Locke (Eastman School of Music) and Elizabeth Wells (Mount Allison University) moderated “Revisiting the Original *West Side Story* on Stage and Film” with singer/actresses Carol Lawrence and Marni Nixon, producer Harold Prince, and orchestrator Sid Ramin. Lawrence shared many of the anecdotes that have appeared in print, especially the importance of Bernstein’s charm and patience as the cast worked with the uncompromising Jerome Robbins. Nixon recalled her work as a dubber of songs in Hollywood productions, including those for Natalie Wood in the *West Side Story* film. Prince commented on the show’s Broadway history and noted that Cheryl Crawford, the first producer, tried very hard to raise production funds for *West Side Story*, countering what one often reads. Sid Ramin spoke about working with Bernstein on orchestrating the show, including how actively involved the composer was in the process.

In the superb concert that evening, “Celebrating Bernstein, the guest performer was soprano Nicole Cabell, who sang memorably “Kaddish 2” from the *Symphony No. 3* and the song cycle *I Hate Music*. The Harvard students acquitted themselves as well as music majors would have at many of the nation’s leading music schools. Judith Clurman led a sensitive performance of *Chichester Psalms*, and the second half presented a “Bernstein Songbook” with selections from all of the shows accompanied by a small orchestra, each introduced by either Jamie Bernstein Thomas or Humphrey Burton.

There were two related exhibitions: a collection of materials related to Bernstein in Boston curated by students and shown in two Harvard libraries, and a group of photographs from the last five years of Bernstein’s life shown at Eliot House, where Bernstein lived at Harvard. That was also the site of the final reception, the last event in a stirring and sumptuous weekend.

—Paul R. Laird  
University of Kansas

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## African American Art Song (continued)

music and for singers and pianists to perform it with a strong feel for appropriate performance practice.

The conference also highlighted the number of educational materials available to the general public. The African American Art Song Alliance website [<http://www.darryltaylor.com/alliance/>], for example, is a valuable resource for studying the repertory. After arriving at the home page, you immediately hear music (recordings of black art song that are identified by title and name of the composer) as you navigate your way through the site. Once you have the information from the recording, you can look it up in the several databases on the site (Composers, Performers/Scholars, Discography, as well as a Gallery with nearly 70 photos). Additional information includes “African American Performers and Composers—A Chronology,” prepared by Dr. Hanson L. Caldwell, culled from her *African American Music - A Chronology, 1619-1995* (Ikoro Communications, 1996).

## African American Art Song (continued)

Luckily, for those who missed the conference, it is possible to view a few special moments at YouTube [<http://www.youtube.com/user/ArtSongAlliance>], which includes clips from two performances: Ann Sears accompanying Monique Holms in Florence Price's "Night" and Anthony McGlaun singing John Work Jr.'s "Dusk at Sea." Also on the YouTube site is a clip of African American composer Robert Owens as he coaches a German student at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich in January 2007.

In another extraordinary celebration of African American Music, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania held its fifth Harry T. Burleigh Legacy Weekend during 22-24 February 2007. Edinboro is only a few miles from Erie, Pennsylvania, where Harry T. Burleigh was born and recently re-interred, so it is the ideal institutional host for a Burleigh conference. Over several years, five Burleigh festivals have explored several formats, including the usual scholarly conference model. However, conference director and faculty member Dr. Jean Snyder and the Music Department of Edinboro have mostly chosen to encourage interchange among the university, the Edinboro and nearby Erie communities, and visiting scholars. The result is a remarkable array of activities and an atmosphere of genuine excitement.

American music scholars may be familiar with the earlier Harry T. Burleigh Legacy Weekend at Edinboro University that resulted in a special Harry T. Burleigh issue of *Black Music Research Journal* [citation], guest edited by Dr. Snyder. This year's event began with an appearance by African American composer Dr. Nkeiru Okoye in theory classes and her meeting with individual composition students. Edinboro's budding scholars were very appreciative of the special opportunity to work one-on-one with a contemporary composer, and they were thrilled with the Composer's Forum in which Nkeiru shared her current work in progress, an opera based on the writings of Harriet Tubman. Dr. Ann Sears lectured on Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* and Kern and Hammerstein's *Show Boat* in several classes, addressing musical, historical, and political aspects of both works. Representing the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Pennsylvania Underground Railroad History Project, Karen James delivered the keynote address, "Promises of Freedom: Hamilton Waters and Abolition," relating new information she has uncovered about the activist black abolitionist community in Erie, Pennsylvania, and Northwest Pennsylvania, including Harry T. Burleigh's grandfather Hamilton Waters and his father, Henry Thacker Burley. The Friday evening event moved the conference into the community, with a Community Choral Festival at Shiloh Baptist Church in Erie, featuring the Shiloh Baptist Church Choirs, Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday choir, and the Rev. Charles Kennedy, Jr., current president of the Harry T. Burleigh Society. Many conference attendees remembered a previous Burleigh conference presentation of Rev. Kennedy's extraordinary one-man play about Harry T. Burleigh's life, based on his imaginative research into Burleigh and Pennsylvania

history.

The 2007 Harry T. Burleigh Legacy Weekend concluded with a thrilling recital by soprano Dr. Louis Toppin, brilliantly accompanied by Joseph Joubert, current music director for the Broadway musical *The Color Purple*. A significant part of the program included premieres of new music by Julius Williams, Dwight Andrews, Roland Carter, Janice Mitchell Misurell, and Nkeiru Okoye. The recital ended with a deeply moving song cycle, *Aspects of Bill*, commemorating the life and work of the late tenor William A. Brown. Brown was a remarkable singer who promoted American and African American music during his career, along with the traditional European and American art song, oratorio, and operatic canon. Nearly every important African American composer of the later twentieth century considered him a colleague, an ally, and an ideal interpreter of African American music and culture, and many wrote works specifically for him. Having grown up in a time and place when he could absorb many strands of African American music, Brown brought the inflections of jazz and the black church into his interpretation of texts and music, thereby dissolving the lines



Nkeiru Okoye and Joseph Joubert  
Photo by Jean Snyder

of demarcation between vernacular and cultivated traditions of singing. Brown, Toppin, and Joubert had often performed together often over the years, and after Brown's untimely death, the soprano commissioned many African American composers to write movements of a song cycle that would capture Brown's unusual personality, philosophy of life, and life-long commitment to music. To date, the cycle includes songs by T. J. Anderson, Leroy Jenkins, Donal Fox, Alvin Singleton, Olly Wilson, William Banfield, and songs by other composers are in progress. Brown had appeared at the Harry T. Burleigh

Legacy events in 2003 and 2004, so this recital and the performance of *Aspects of Bill* was a most appropriate memorial to his career.

A profoundly touching aspect of the Burleigh events at Edinboro University has been the presence of the surviving members of the Burleigh family, including Mrs. Harry T. Burleigh II, widow of Burleigh's grandson, and her children Marie, Anne, Harry T. Burleigh III, and his wife Nina. For scholars and music lovers, the opportunity to hear Burleigh lore from such special informants is, of course, priceless.

This conference connected musicians and music lovers across distance, across generations, across genres of music and performance venues, across scholarly disciplines, across ethnicity, gender, and class. Doubtless, like the first four Harry T. Burleigh Legacy events, the ripples of this gathering will be far-reaching, and African American music scholars and the Edinboro University/Erie communities look forward to the next one. For further information, log on to the website: [www.edinboro.edu/cwis/music/Burleigh](http://www.edinboro.edu/cwis/music/Burleigh)

—Naomi André, University of Michigan, and Ann Sears,  
Wheaton College

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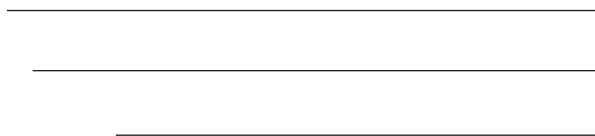
**Tom Cipullo's Glory Denied**

**Bernstein in Boston**

**African American Art Song**



*Scott Roche in Tom Cipullo's Glory Denied  
Photo by John Ricosolli*



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