



# The Cowboy Song as Art Song

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Among the iconic figures that emerged from the American West, the cowboy proved as irresistible as he was durable. And no wonder—with stories by Ned Buntline, Bret Harte, and others that began appearing during the 1870s, increasing numbers of readers found themselves drawn to adventures set in that vast region.

In 1882, Buffalo Bill Cody presented the first of what became a 30-year run of variously named “Wild West Shows,” adding the excitement of a circus-like atmosphere to an already alluring image and culture. Western films, with or without singing cowboys and the phenomenon of country and Western music promoted the growth and capitalized on the popularity of Western culture. Portrayed as an indomitable, solitary figure, the pre-modern cowboy of fiction combined the wisdom of Solomon, the strength of Samson, the virtue of Sir Galahad, and the valor of Roland. During the era of the “singing cowboy” one might add that he also had a bit of Orpheus’s talent, as well.

The reality, of course, differs. To begin with, there is the name “cowboy,” a word that ranch hands rarely used. As historian Guy Logsdon points out, they referred to themselves as “punchers, cowpunchers, cowhands, cowpokes, buckaroos, wranglers, vaqueros, waddies, cowmen, and other less sophisticated, but colorful, sobriquets.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, cowboys were more ethnically diverse than they often have been portrayed in movies, books, magazines, on television, and through other sources. In *Cowboys of the Americas*, Richard W. Stratta estimates that during the peak period of the trail drives from Texas to the North (1860s-1880s), only about two-thirds of the cowboys involved were white. Nearly all of the rest were Mexican, Mexican American, or African American.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the epic clashes that entertained readers and audiences for generations were far removed from the actual daily routine of the typical cowboy’s life, which included long hours of tedious labor, boredom, paltry pay, crippling injuries and fatalities resulting from work or hostilities with others, and exposure to life-threatening extremes of weather. Despite this, the American cowboy has enjoyed mythic status for generations. His songs remain so firmly embedded in our folk traditions that most of us not only remember fragments of at least a few of them but find that they have the power to take us back to a time during our childhood when we aspired to membership in the fraternity of cowboys.

In spite of the cowboy’s popularity and the enduring appeal of his songs, few twentieth-century composers in the classical tradition transformed the music that cowboys sang into “art” songs. (According to *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 4th edition, an “art song” may be defined as a “song intended for the concert repertory, as distinct from a folk or popular song.”<sup>3</sup>) This is important because in the early twentieth century, when nationalism in music was a very popular topic of conversation, cowboy songs would have been a logical repertoire from which to draw in creating identifiably American music.

The discussion about nationalism in music may be traced back at least as far as the mid-nineteenth century, when composers and critics in this country staked out positions concerning whether and how to compose “nationalistic” works. Bohemian composer Antonín Dvořák inserted himself in the debate when, during his residency in this country (1892-1895), he wrote, “A while ago I suggested that inspiration for truly national music might be derived from the negro melodies or Indian chants.”<sup>4</sup> He added that our composers should draw inspiration from the songs that appeal more strongly to Americans than any others, those melodies that “could stop him on the street if he were in a strange land and make the home feeling well up within him.”<sup>5</sup> That sentiment aligned nicely with the aesthetics of some other composers, as well. Henry F. B. Gilbert and Harry T. Burleigh were drawn to the music of African Americans while Arthur Farwell, Charles Wakefield Cadman, and Charles S. Skilton embraced the music of certain American Indians. Predictably, other composers disagreed. Edward MacDowell, for example, argued that whatever nationalistic elements one hears in folk music are extraneous and, if removed, leave a melody that could just as well be Chinese as Scottish.<sup>6</sup>

Whether or not most classical composers of the early to mid-twentieth century were inclined to nationalism, formal settings of cowboy settings were a rarity. Except for the tune “Charlie Rutlage,” composer Charles Ives’s lone work of that type, the prominent “American Five” (Ives, Carl Ruggles, Wallingford Riegger, John Becker, and Henry Cowell) neither wrote nor arranged any cowboy songs.

Ultimately, as Charles Hamm points out, what many classical composers of the time period came to consider as distinctively American music was not essentially folk music, but music by immigrant urban Jewish composers, with names like Irving Berlin and George Gershwin and Aaron Copland, drawing on black, Jewish, Irish, and Italian styles, accepted both at home and abroad as the most distinctive American music of its time.<sup>7</sup>

Of the eight classical composers I found who arranged or created cowboy art songs, the most prolific among them—Oscar J. Fox and David W. Guion—not only came from and lived in Texas but also associated with cowboys. In fact, Guion was a prize-winning participant in rodeos in Colorado and in Wyoming.<sup>8</sup> Their combined output totals more than 30 pieces, or about 75 percent of the songs I found, with most having been composed from the mid-1920s to early 1930s. Their interest in this genre perhaps was less an act of nationalistic fervor than it was a way of adapting the music with which they felt a particular affinity to the expressive medium in which they were so highly trained. The remaining composers,

with the exception of Arthur Farwell, had neither proximity to nor contact with the historical cowboy. They and their songs (in chronological order of publication) are:

- Arthur Farwell “The Lone Prairee” (1905)
- Charles Ives “Charlie Rutlage” (1921)
- Seth Bingham “Five Cowboy Songs” (1930)
- Jack Beeson “Cowboy Song” (1979)
- Libby Larsen “Cowboy Songs” (1979)
- André Previn “Sally Chisum remembers Billy the Kid” (1994)<sup>9</sup>

When viewed against the panorama of early twentieth-century American classical composers and their works, or, for that matter, American composers of pop, jazz, ragtime, or other popular genres of this time period, this group is quite small, indeed.<sup>10</sup> Before suggesting reasons for so little interest among professional American composers of that era for cowboy music, it is helpful to survey the collections of cowboy poetry and songs that were published during the opening decades of the twentieth century because those were, in most instances, where composers turned to find texts and tunes. One may then consider the art songs, with an emphasis on those by Fox and Guion. Finally, we can try and gain a better understanding of why so many classical composers of the early twentieth century remained indifferent to the music of the cowboy, a figure who otherwise has such a dominant presence in American culture.

The early twentieth-century composer who wanted to create an art song based on the cowboy faced a formidable challenge, most notably finding published examples of his poetry and songs. With his popular image not fully developed until the great cattle drives from the mid-1860s to the 1880s, the cowboy remained a relatively unnoticed figure in popular poetry until around 1900. With the exception of William L. Chittenden’s *Ranch Verses* (1893), which was published by G.P. Putnam’s Sons, cowboy poetry typically appeared in local newspapers and magazines read not by musicians living on the East Coast, but by ranchers in the West.<sup>11</sup>

Publications containing cowboy songs began appearing by the late 1800s, but John Lomax’s *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910), whose 112 texts included 18 tunes, was the first that included both lyrics and music.<sup>12</sup> His was the collection used most frequently by the composers cited in this study. Charles J. Finger—of particular interest because David Guion, as a child, studied piano under him—contributed two volumes. Finger’s *Sailor Chanties and Cowboy Songs* (1923) included 21 song texts, while *Frontier Ballads* (1927) included eight (five with melodies) among chanties and other work songs.<sup>13</sup> Margaret Larkin’s *Singing Cowboy: A Book of Western Songs* (1931) sometimes is cited as the first collection in which a tune accompanied every text.<sup>14</sup> At least two other collections

predate hers by a few years. Ina Sires's *Songs of the Open Range* (1928) and John White and George Shackley's *The Lonesome Cowboy: Songs of the Plains and Hills* (1929) include simple piano accompaniments for each song.<sup>15</sup> Those two collections are especially noteworthy because they (along with some of Fox's settings) were used by Aaron Copland while composing *Billy the Kid*.<sup>16</sup>

Fox and Guion stand apart from the other composers in this genre for several reasons—both were Texans, both had personal experience with cowboys, and both composed numerous rather than just one or two settings of cowboy songs. They also provide a convenient entry point to this survey, because some of their settings of texts raise the question: “What is an art song?” As described earlier, an art song is one that is intended for the concert stage. Harry T. Burleigh's arrangements of spirituals and John Jacob Niles's arrangements of Appalachian folk songs have a respected place in the recital hall and in the art song repertoire. Using their arrangements as a precedent, a similarly broad view of cowboy songs would be that if the setting is appropriate for the recital hall, then it is an art song.

Oscar J. Fox (1879-1961), born on a ranch in Burnet County, Texas, followed the path taken by many American composers of his generation. After years of study in this country, he went overseas (Switzerland, 1896-1899) for further training, followed by two more years of study in New York City. He returned to Texas, settling in San Antonio in 1902.<sup>17</sup> Of his more than 50 songs, he identified nine as cowboy songs and three as “desperado” songs.<sup>18</sup>

According to annotations in the scores, only two of Fox's cowboy songs (“Come All Ye Jolly Cowboys” and “Texas Cowboy's Last Song”) did not come from John Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. Fox drew attention to his role as transmitter rather than creator by preceding his name in the score with the phrase “arranged by” or “arranged and composed by.” He typically relies on the same primary chords used in most Western folk music rather than incorporating the more intricate harmonies that attracted more exploratory composers of his generation. His melodies may undergo slight modification from what is found in Lomax, with the pianist's right hand frequently doubling the voice.

The most unadorned of Fox's settings are “Jesse James,” with its hymn-like texture, and “Old Paint,” which has a waltz-like accompaniment. Other songs, while maintaining his preference for basic chords and a close relation between the voice and the treble in the piano, reveal more freedom and ingenuity. In “Greer County,” for example, as the voice sings

Hurrah for Greer County! The land of the free,  
The land of the bedbug, Grasshopper and flea;

the pianist plays the opening phrase of “The Star Spangled Banner.” Later, when we hear

Goodbye to Greer County where blizzards arise,  
the wind never ceases, but always remains,<sup>19</sup>

more embellished chords and rapidly ascending whole-tone scales heighten the effect of the words. His setting of “Whoopie ti yi yo” is similarly inventive and effective. In a moderate tempo, the lowest note is repeated continuously while above it the right hand plays a repeating figure that first appears in the introduction and then continues through the remainder of the song, while the voice sings a variant of the tune given in Lomax. In this and in his other arrangements, Fox embraces a simplicity and directness that enhances rather than limits the appeal of his songs. While that may result in part from a desire to minimize the technical difficulties that they presented to performers—the accompaniments present few challenges to pianists and the voice part is usually doubled in the accompaniment—the arrangements nevertheless can be very moving.<sup>20</sup>

David W. Guion (1892-1981), largely self-taught as a composer, studied piano as a child before traveling to Vienna for further instruction under Leopold Godowsky from 1912-1914. Although now thought of primarily as an arranger of the music of African Americans and cowboys, Guion found success in New York City in the early 1930s as a nationally broadcast radio-show host and composer.<sup>21</sup> As with Fox, some of Guion's settings, such as “All Day on the Prairie” and “Carry Me Home to the Lone Prairie,” are notable for their directness, which works particularly well in “O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie.” In this song Guion enriches the texture through the use of drone-like and repeating figures in the accompaniment and in the third verse where the text turns to

the wild cayotes (sic) will howl o'er me,  
In a narrow grave just six by three,  
Oh bury me not on the lone prairie.<sup>22</sup>

In this tune, the first four notes of the Westminster chime sound over and over, an allusion to the inevitable passing of time.

By contrast, Guion imbues the song “McCaffie's Confession” with a greater sense of freedom. A solitary introductory minor chord is followed by the unaccompanied voice singing the first verse.<sup>23</sup> That melody, repeated throughout the song, is constructed from a five-note scale that conveys an archaic quality. The second verse, in which McCaffie confesses that he “often broke the Sabbath day,” employs a hymn-like, four-part harmonization. Accidentals and discords are reserved until the

end of the verse in which McCaffie tells us that he murdered his wife. The bleakness of the rest of the song is anticipated by prominent discords in the two-measure interlude that follows. A tolling, repeated low bass note accompanies McCaffie's final words, as do dissonances that underscore the grimness of what led to his regrettable demise.

The three songs with texts by Marie Lussi ("Prairie Night Song," "Ride, Cowboy, Ride!" and "The Song of the Whip") differ from the others in that their grandiosity of style, with leaping, full-voice chords, bring to mind not so much the imagery of the West as they do the more effusive, perhaps even exaggerated, style of operetta.

None of the remaining composers had the close contact with cowboys that Fox and Guion did, so it is not surprising that their contributions to the repertoire were smaller. Arthur Farwell (1872-1952), whose arrangement of "The Lone Prairee" (1905) is the earliest of the published songs, is remembered primarily for his interest in and arrangements of American Indian music and as an innovative music publisher.

Charles Ives (1874-1954), the New Englander whose works celebrate that region and range from charming simplicity to bewildering complexity, composed just one cowboy song, "Charlie Rutlage." The poem, which he found in Lomax's collection of cowboy songs, is based on D. J. O'Malley's "A Cowboy's Death."<sup>24</sup>

Composer and organist Seth Bingham (1882-1972), who taught at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary and was the organist at New York's Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, is, like Ives, an unlikely composer of cowboy songs.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, in 1930 the H. W. Gray Company published his *Five Cowboy Songs*. Each comes from songs found in Lomax's first edition of *Cowboy Songs*, although three of them ("Days of Forty-Nine," "Root Hog or Die," and "Fuller and Warren") do not describe the cowboy experience. The two that do, "The Dying Cowboy" and "Dogie Song," show Bingham's resourcefulness.

Jack Beeson's (1921-2010) "Cowboy Song" is a setting of Charles Causley's poem of the same name, a poem whose images reveal if not Causley's Cornish heritage, then at least his reluctance to embrace the culture and language of the American West. His words and phrases, for example, bring to mind the English gentleman rather than the Western cowboy: "apple blossom snow," "zithering zephyrs," "teasy bees," "marmalade moon," "boulder eiderdown," "home by tea," "where run the seven geese round," and "I trawl the turning sky."<sup>26</sup>

Minnesotan Libby Larsen's (b. 1950) *Cowboy Songs*, composed for a friend while in graduate school, is an attractive and popular cycle in which she set three poems: Belle Starr's "Bucking Bronco," Robert Creeley's "Sufi Sam Christian"

(retitled "Lift Me into Heaven Slowly" by Larsen), and the anonymous "Billy the Kid." Each setting is as different as the poem that it portrays.

The most recent composition, André Previn's (b. 1929) "Sallie Chisum remembers Billy the Kid," was commissioned by Barbara Bonney because, as she relates:

(A)llegedly I'm related to Billy the Kid. I was told as a child, "Billy Bonney was Billy the Kid and he came from the same area that your father grew up in." I have a picture of Billy the Kid, and he looks so much like my father that it's terrifying.<sup>27</sup>

"Sally Chisum remembers Billy the Kid" is a substantial work that is two to three times longer than the other songs that have been described. Previn set the text as a through-composed, or continuous, cycle made up of seven sections, with the conclusion recalling the opening.

Unlike painters, photographers, filmmakers, writers, and composers and performers of popular music, most composers in the classical tradition seemed indifferent to the myths, grandeur, and culture (real or imagined) of the American West. Even to composers with nationalist proclivities, the cowboy song proved largely unappealing. Among the reasons that may have contributed to their indifference, four stand out: the cultural incompatibility of the cosmopolitan Eastern composer with the relatively isolated Western cowhand, the poetry, the music, and the mythic resonance of the cowboy himself.

The cultural divide is as obvious as it is easily imagined. Many aspiring young American composers in the early decades of the twentieth century, following years of study in this country, traveled to Europe to be steeped in that culture and undergo further training. They dreamed of creating major works that not only would be performed but also would earn them critical acclaim—symphonies, concertos, chamber music, opera, and possibly even art songs in the style of Brahms or Debussy. Setting poetry about horses and cattle drives or desperadoes held as little appeal to most of these composers as it did to their imagined audiences.

Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, widely regarded as the first literary Western, serves to make the point. In it Wister uses the difference between "Eastern" and "Western" cultures to create tension between Mary Stark "Molly" Wood's family in Vermont and the "Virginian." Molly, who fled the stifling atmosphere of Bennington (and the suitor she was supposed to marry), becomes the first schoolteacher in an emerging community on the Wyoming frontier. There, she slowly comes to understand, love, and marry the Virginian, a progression that horrifies not only her family but also her entire community. Wister writes,

“[I]n a very few days [after Molly’s return to Bennington for a visit], gossip had it that Molly was engaged to a gambler, a gold miner, an escaped stage robber, and a Mexican bandit; while Mrs. Flynt feared she had married a Mormon.”<sup>28</sup>

Turning from fiction to biography, David Guion’s fading prominence offers a different perspective, one in which a composer may be put at a disadvantage by associations with the West. He hosted nationally broadcast radio programs in the early 1930s while living in New York City and enjoyed such celebrity that there was a “David Guion Week” in Texas and a commission from the Houston Symphony in 1950. Yet Heidi Ann Cohenour Gordon lists “the typecasting that came with being known as a composer of cowboy songs” as one of the reasons why he has failed to retain his once-prominent position among American composers.<sup>29</sup>

Marie Lussi, several of whose poems were set to music by Guion, exploits the cultural divide from yet another perspective in *Cowboy Love Song*, her novel about the challenges faced by the young Westerner who aspires to travel east.<sup>30</sup> Protagonist Larry Grant is a talented, home-grown, small-town Texas cowboy who dreams of studying voice in New York and having a career as a professional singer. But Grant earns the respect of his friends and community in Texas only when, after practicing riding and roping in secret for two years, he manages to win the local rodeo—and the \$10,000 prize that makes it possible for him and his mother to travel to New York, so he can develop his career as a singer. As if to confirm the preceding points, the two composers who were the most prolific, or the most compatible with the genre—Fox and Guion—were the ones who grew up not in the East but among cowboys, developing a kinship with their culture.

The second reason that so many early twentieth-century composers had little, if any, interest in cowboy music may be because of the nature of the poetry found in so many cowboy songs. With its reliance on rhyme, meter, transparency, and immediacy, cowboy poetry, at least until recent decades, at times seemed invisible to the gatekeepers of the Modernist canon. There are, of course, exceptions. As Lawrence Levine points out in *High Brow/Low Brow*, nineteenth-century Americans were far better versed in Shakespeare than we are today.<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising, then, to find a parallel between Allen McCandless’s “The Cowboy’s Soliloquy” and Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Shakespeare’s Duke Senior, banished to the Forest of Arden, praises his life there:

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.<sup>32</sup>

In the third verse of his poem, McCandless paraphrases Shakespeare:

My ceiling the sky, my carpet the grass,  
My music the lowing of herds as they pass;  
My books are the brooks, my sermons the stones,  
My parson’s a wolf on a pulpit of bones.<sup>33</sup>

In general, however, cowboy poetry is noted more for its simplicity than its complexity, more for its decisive action than its nuanced gesture. Consequently, the cowboy poet portrays the obvious so we are not left probing the layers of allusion and symbolism so prized by metropolitan Modernists. Consequently, it is not surprising that many composers of art songs find more of interest in the poetry of William Blake and James Agee than they do in D.J. O’Malley and Baxter Black, in the culture of Europe or in the exoticism of the Middle and Far East than they do in the American West. Moreover, given their remoteness from the cowboy experience, one cannot help but wonder under what circumstances composers ever encounter cowboy poetry: probably not in their academic, professional, and social environments.

The third reason that most prominent composers of the early to mid-twentieth century were not interested in the songs of the cowboy may be found in cowboy music itself. Music historian Bill C. Malone asserts that “[t]he cowboy contributed nothing to American music.”<sup>34</sup> At first glance that seems outrageous, but upon further reflection it makes sense: unlike the novelty of ragtime’s syncopated rhythms and blues’ altered scale degrees and 12-bar form, one will not find similarly distinctive elements common to cowboy music that distinguish it from traditional folk music.

Aaron Copland, for example, wrote the following about composing the ballet score for *Billy the Kid*:

I have never been particularly impressed with the musical beauties of the cowboy song as such. The words are usually delightful and the manner of singing needs no praise from me. But neither the words nor the delivery are of much use in a purely orchestral ballet score, so I was left with the tunes themselves, which I repeat, are often less than exciting.<sup>35</sup>

Given the paucity of classical works based upon the folkloric elements of cowboy song, subsequent generations of art composers would seem to have agreed with Copland’s assessment.

Finally, despite its risks and hardships, the cowboy’s life was, for most, a life of choice. The admittedly fanciful images that

the general public had of the cowboy's daily life—settling an argument with fisticuffs, dispensing justice with a pistol or hangman's noose, and living a life close to the earth—are more likely to draw patronizing smiles than inspire the imagination of a composer, even though that distorted image bears little resemblance to the lives that most cowboys lived. Unlike American Indians who faced genocide and forced resettlement on reservations, and African Americans emerging from slavery into Jim Crow, the cowboys of American myth stood on the side of the conquerors. Consequently, unless a composer lived in a culture sympathetic to the cowboys—as did Fox and Guion—he or she would likely be unmoved by poetry reflecting experiences so alien to his or her own.

It is unlikely that many readers of Western novelists Zane Grey or Louis L'Amour or fans of movie cowboy stars Gene Autry or John Wayne will ever hear Andre Previn's "Sallie Chisum remembers Billy the Kid" or any of the other songs that are the focus of this study. And yet through different means of artistic expression—painting, photography, sculpture, film, and music—the seemingly mutually exclusive tastes of dissimilar audiences are satisfied, drawn to that storied time in our nation's history. Though few in number, cowboy songs that were transformed into art songs provide one of the trails to our collective national heritage—the American cowboy. ★

## Alphabetical list of the composers and their songs

Jack Beeson	Cowboy Song	1978		Carry Me Home to the Lone Prairie	1937
Seth Bingham	Five Cowboy Songs	1930		The Cowboy's Dream	1933
	Days of Forty-Nine			Cowboy's Meditation	1929
	Root Hog or Die			Home on the Range	1930
	The Dying Cowboy			Little Joe, the Wrangler	1933
	Fuller and Warren			McCaffie's Confession	1930
	Dogie Song			My Cowboy Love-Song	1936
Arthur Farwell	The Lone Prairee	1905		O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie	1931
Oscar J. Fox	Come All Ye Jolly Cowboys	1927		Ol' Paint	1933
	Cowboy's Lament	1923		Pinto	1948
	Greer County	1925		Ride, Cowboy, Ride!	1934
	A Home on the Range	1925		Roll Along, Little Dogies	1947
	Jesse James	1928		Roy Bean	1930
	The Old Chisholm Trail	1924		Song of the Whip	1942
	Old Paint	1927		Texas Cowboy's Meditation	1929
	Prairie Night Song	1937		When the Work's all Done this Fall	1931
	A Prisoner for Life	1928	Charles Ives	Charlie Rutlage	1920/21
	Rounded Up in Glory	1923	Libby Larsen	Cowboy Songs	1979
	Sam Bass	1928		Bucking Bronco	
	Texas Cowboy's Last Song	1927		Lift Me into Heaven Slowly	
	Whoopie ti yi yo	1927		Billy the Kid	
David W. Guion	All Day on the Prairie	1930	André Previn	Sally Chisum remembers Billy the Kid	1994
	The Bold Vaquero	1920			

## Notes

- 1 Guy Logsdon, *The Whorehouse Bells Were Ringing and Other Songs Cowboys Sing*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), xi.
- 2 Richard W. Stratta, *Cowboys of the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 168. More specifically, Stratta argues that 63 percent of these cowboys were white, 25 percent were black, and 12 percent were Mexican or Mexican American.
- 3 *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 4th edition, ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).
- 4 Antonín Dvořák, "Music in America," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (Feb., 1895): 432.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Edward MacDowell, "Folk Song and its Relation to Nationalism in Music," in *Critical and Historical Essays. Lectures delivered at Columbia University by Edward MacDowell*, ed. W.J. Baltzell (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, 1912), 146-147. MacDowell asserted in his lecture that: "This being the case, perhaps my statement that the vital principle of folk music in its best state has nothing in common with nationalism (considered in the usual sense of the word), will be better understood. And this will be the proof that nationalism, so-called, is merely an extraneous thing that has no part in pure art. For if we take any melody, even of the most pronounced national type, and merely eliminate the characteristic turns, affectations, or mannerisms, the theme becomes simply music, and retains no touch of nationality. We may even go further; for if we retain the characteristic mannerisms of dress, we may harmonize a folk song in such a manner that it will belie its origin; and by means of this powerful factor (an essentially modern invention) we may even transform a Scotch song, with all its "snap" and character, into a Chinese song, or give it an Arabian flavour. This, to be sure, is possible only to a limited degree; enough, however, to prove to us the power of harmony; and harmony, as I have said, has no part in folk song."
- 7 Charles Hamm, "Dvořák, Nationalism, Myth, and Racism," in *Rethinking Dvořák*, ed. David R. Beveridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 280.
- 8 Eugene Rowley, *David Guion, "Cowboy Composer" (Prairie Echoes, Piano Music of David Guion (1892-1981))*, Eugene Rowley, pianist; CD recording on Premier Recordings, PRC1024, booklet) 5.
- 9 A list of the names and dates of all of the songs is included at the end of this article.
- 10 I looked only for art songs and did not consider choral and instrumental works. Further, I looked only at the titles of art songs and, in so doing, may have passed over a cowboy text because the title did not suggest an obvious connection.
- 11 William Lawrence Chittenden, *Ranch Verses* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893).
- 12 John A. Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1910). Noteworthy collections that appeared without tunes include Clark Stanley's *The Life and Adventures of the American Cow Boy* (1897); N. Howard "Jack" Thorp's *Songs of the Cowboys* (1908); and Charles Siringo's *The Song Companion of a Lone Star Cowboy* (1919), a slim volume of 14 songs. Siringo's autobiographical *A Texas Cowboy* (1885) is a classic account of life on the range.
- 13 Charles J. Finger, *Sailor Chanties and Cowboy Songs* (Gerard, KN: Haldeman-Julius Co., 1923); *Frontier Ballads Heard and Gathered by Charles J. Finger* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Page & Company, 1927).
- 14 Margaret Larkin, *Singing Cowboy: A Book of Western Songs* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1931).
- 15 John White and George Shackley, *The Lonesome Cowboy Songs of the Plains and Hills* (New York: George T. Worth & Co.); John White and George Shackley, *The Lonesome Cowboy Songs of the Plains and Hills* (New York: George T. Worth & Co.).
- 16 Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 320.
- 17 Carl Weaver, *Oscar J. Fox and His Heritage (The Junior Historian, 1963)*, <http://www.kenfuchs42.net/kfww/Oscar%20J.%20Fox%20and%20His%20Heritage.pdf>
- 18 The desperado songs are "Sam Bass," "Jesse James," and "A Prisoner for Life."
- 19 Oscar J. Fox, *Greer County (A Frontier Ballad)* (New York: Carl Fischer Inc., 1925).
- 20 For more on Fox's life and career, see S.W. Pease, "Oscar Julius Fox," *Handbook of Texas Music*, 2nd edition, ed. Laurie E. Jasinski (Denton, Texas: Texas State Historical Association, 202) 222-223.
- 21 For more on Guion's life and career, see James Dick, "David Wendel Guion," *Handbook of Texas Music*, 2nd edition, ed. Laurie E. Jasinski, 258-259.
- 22 David W. Guion, *O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie (The Dying Cowboy)* (New York: Carl Fischer Inc., 1931).
- 23 In addition to unaccompanied singing, Guion occasionally employs special vocal effects, asking the singer to speak (two of the verses in "When the Work's all Done this Fall" and a phrase in "McCaffie's Confession"), whistle (the postlude in "All Day on the Prairie"), and use falsetto and shout phrases ("The Bold Vaquero"). According to Heidi Ann Cohenour Gordon, Guion claimed—erroneously—that "The Bold Vaquero" was the first cowboy song to be set as an art song. Heidi Ann Cohenour Gordon, "The Songs of David W. Guion" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2008), 11.
- 24 "A Cowboy's Death," which quickly gained popularity, first appeared in the July 11, 1891, issue of *Stock Grower's Journal*, a Miles City, Montana weekly.
- 25 *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, s.v. Bingham, Seth.
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