THE USE OF JAZZ IN OPERA

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Jennifer Ottervik, B.A., M.S.L.S.

Denton, Texas

December, 1995
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Methods of incorporating jazz in opera range from using simple blue notes and fox-trot rhythms, to utilizing jazz instruments, to employing elaborate passages of improvisation. Current definitions of “jazz opera” do not consider variations in the genre, which, because of their evolving nature and the varied background of their composers, are diverse. This study attempts to collectively discuss these third-stream works.

Jazz rhythms and harmonies first appeared in the 1920s in the works of Gershwin, Harling, Krenek, and Freeman. In 1966, Gunther Schuller was the first composer to use improvisation in an opera, which has become the primary distinguishing factor. There has since been a tremendous interest in this genre by such jazz musicians as Dave Burrell, Anthony Davis, Duke Ellington, Max Roach, Anthony Braxton, George Gruntz, and Jon Faddis.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Almost from its very beginnings in the early years of this century, composers have attempted to use the elements of jazz in opera. However, seldom have these attempts been artistically successful. In exploring these various attempts and their relative successes or failures, it is necessary first to answer a number of questions that arise, in order that the works incorporating these elements may be evaluated on their own terms, as well as in relation to each other. The first and most fundamental question to be answered concerns what "jazz opera" is. This term continues to be answered by composers and journalists alike with little explanation or defining of what the phrase actually means or without much regard to its implications. The New Grove Dictionary of Opera offers the following critique of "jazz opera":

Jazz and opera are generally viewed as separate traditions, too diverse in cultural origin to come together successfully. Yet throughout the 20th century both traditions have borrowed from each other, and have spawned a number of cross-breeds, which often find no home in either camp and end up on Broadway. In most cases musicians have tended to incorporate gestures rather than develop common ground.¹

There are several problems with this point of view. First, it is not correct to view the two genres as so diverse that they cannot come together successfully. George

Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*, and Anthony Davis's *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* have proven that the two genres can coexist successfully. In addition, I do not believe that the composers intend to have their works find a home in either camp, but rather, they hope to appeal to listeners who appreciate both styles of music. A third problem with this definition is that, despite the *New Grove* assertion, none of the works which will be described here have ended up on Broadway. And finally, the *New Grove*’s statement that composers have incorporated "gestures" implies that only those works in the Western-art tradition have been considered. While this implication may have been true for compositions created in the 1920s and 1930s, works written in the 1960s and since have been created by both classical and jazz musicians, and the techniques have been virtually the same. Instead of attempting to fit these works into either existing genre (jazz or classical), they fall more accurately under the category of Third Stream compositions, a movement that is discussed more fully below.

The term "jazz opera" implies that these works are by Americans only. Although any definition should acknowledge that the embracing of jazz, a purely American art form, grounds the following works in the American tradition, these compositions have not been created solely by American composers. Whether or not the work is created by an American, the inclusion of jazz arises in the following manner:

Americanism finds expression in our native music, not through the conscious efforts of our composers, by any device, . . . but when a talented musician gives his imagination a free rein and allows it to interpret from within himself the accustomed phase of thought and emotional life which has germinated from the
spiritual, intellectual and physical environment in which he has been nurtured.\(^2\)

What makes these works jazz operas? Because there are different reasons for or methods of incorporating jazz, a blanket term of "jazz opera" may not be entirely appropriate. For example, some works use simple jazz techniques such as foxtrot rhythms or the flatted third or seventh degrees of a scale. Other works use jazz sounds or rhythms only as recurring character motives or for a particular scene. Still others are written entirely in the jazz genre and hence allow for improvisation on the part of the performers. Therefore, if the term "jazz opera" is to be used, it must incorporate the understanding that the label encompasses many different compositional methods and this fact must be made clear in any definition.

Although these seemingly diverse works may differ in their use of jazz, they do possess the four following common characteristics: (1) the text is, for the most part, sung; (2) the blues scale tones, i.e. b3 and b7, are frequently used; (3) jazz instruments (saxophone, piano, and percussion, including trap sets, conga drums, xylophones, vibraphones, marimba, etc.) are called for in the score; and, (4) jazz rhythms are used extensively, i.e., eighth-notes played as swinging eighths, accents on the second and fourth beat of the measure, etc.

Improvisation is a fifth characteristic but only for works composed after 1966, the first opera to require improvisation in the score being Gunther Schuller's *The Visitation* (1966). Improvisation is important because it uniquely distinguishes the majority of these

works from traditional operas. Improvisation serves to enhance and supplement the notated music, thereby providing opportunity for a different presentation at each performance. It also provides an additional means of expression beyond the notated music. On the other hand, the use of improvisation together with the prescriptive notation found in traditional opera scores poses problems. For example, many orchestral musicians and conservatory trained singers are not trained in the art of improvising.

This raises a question which surrounds many of these works. Are they in fact operas? The response to this question involves addressing both the libretti and the style and technique of singing. Operatic singing technique requires the following: (1) deep breathing, synchronizing breath and vocal attack while supporting the diaphragm; (2) erect posture for quality tone production; (3) an open throat accompanied by a flexible, dropped jaw; (4) an even tessitura; (5) great resonance and volume; (6) smooth and precise agility; (7) and, music school, pedagogical, or conservatory training. Other techniques include vibrato (speed dependent upon interpretation and often upon school of training, i.e., the rapid French vibrato versus the slower German style) and coloratura.

Conversely, few jazz singers are classically-trained. Although vibrato is a common technique, it is used much more infrequently in jazz singing. Techniques used in jazz singing include scatting, note-bending, the portamento, and tempo rubato. The jazz singer is freer to interact more directly with the accompanying instrument(s), as improvising is a crucial function of the soloist. Volume is usually dependent upon a microphone. Posture

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and a dropped jaw are not prerequisites for jazz singing.

The biggest difference between the two styles of singing is the training of the vocalist. This presents a unique problem for the creators of works employing vocal improvisation. Often, the classically-trained singer feels inhibited. And although jazz singers may be able to improvise, projection is a difficulty.

What, then, of the training and background of the composers? Did the composers study other operas before attempting to create their own? The training and backgrounds of the composers are as varied as the works themselves. If the composer received some kind of formal training, they also were familiar with the opera genre, to some extent.

Are the composers mostly black because the operas employ African-American based music? Fifty percent of the works discussed here were composed by African-Americans, particularly those since 1970. Of the following nine black composers, the last six produced their works after 1975: Scott Joplin, Harry Lawrence Freeman, James P. Johnson, Duke Ellington, Dave Burrell, Warren Pinckney, Anthony Davis, Anthony Braxton, and Max Roach. The other half of the composers are white, the first six having had their operas produced before 1960: George Gershwin, W. Frank Harling, Ernst Krenek, Hamilton Forrest, Marc Blitzstein, Todd Matshikiza, Gunther Schuller, and George Gruntz.

Other questions arise concerning the works themselves. What is the genesis and subject matter of the works? What led to their creation? What about their musical setting makes them operas as opposed to musicals? And where can examples of the music be found? The subject matter of the librettos is as diverse as the music. Therefore, one of
the main purposes of this paper is to provide historical information and plot summaries of each one. As the works studied here have never been discussed collectively, the bibliography provides information on conducting further research. Many of the scores are lost or unpublished, making recordings all the more scarce. Much of the research material was gathered directly from the composers or the librettists or the theater or group that produced the work. Several of the works studied here are not true operas, but they are discussed because of the composer's attempt at working in the genre.

What is the reception history of these works and what are the prospects for works of a similar nature? Why are so few of these works successful? With the exception of Jonny spielt auf, Porgy and Bess, Regina, and X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X, all four composed by established, reputable composers, the majority of these works have been largely unsuccessful. This is due to a variety of reasons. First, the reconciliation of two previously distinct genres is difficult for the patrons of either group, each already consisting of a small minority of the population. Second, often the financial support necessary for effective advertising, promotion, and production is unavailable to these experimental works, as they are now perceived, inhibiting several works from being staged. Third, although the music may be well received, the majority of the librettos are undramatic, thus not effective in this dramatic art form. Nevertheless, the future is promising for this evolving art form.

But how can these two separate genres coexist? This debate has been going on

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4According to the National Endowment for the Arts, 11% of the American population attends jazz concerts annually, while only 3% go to the opera, cited in Cindy Hall and Julie Stacey, USA Today, 26 July 1994, p.1.
ever since the earliest appearances of this combination between 1919 and 1929.

Instrumental compositions such as Igor Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* (1918) and his *Piano Rag Music* (1919), Darius Milhaud's *Le bouef sur le toit* (1919), Paul Hindemith's *Suite for piano* (1922), and Aaron Copland's *Music for the Theater* (1925), Maurice Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (1925), George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and *An American in Paris* (1928), and Kurt Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) reflect the international infatuation with jazz.

Because of the American obsession with creating a great American opera, the 1920s saw a proliferation of operas using jazz, such as *Blue Monday* (1922) of George Gershwin and *A Light for St. Agnes* (1925) and *Deep River* (1926) of Frank Harling. These operas were unsuccessful largely because of the social position of jazz during this period. Considered by many to be the music of brothels, it was thought to have no place in the concert hall. Yet, in 1927, the use of jazz in Western European art music (hereafter called classical music) was legitimized in the eyes of opera goers when esteemed classical composer Ernst Krenek created *Jonny spielt auf* (1927), followed by George Gershwin's magnum opus, *Porgy and Bess* (1935).

During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, jazz was developing and gaining wider popularity and acceptance with the advent of swing, be-bop, and cool jazz. The social position of jazz had improved so greatly by the time of the avant-garde free-jazz movement of the late 1950s and 1960s, that the fusion of jazz and classical music proved

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5 Although *Jonny spielt auf* is usually cited as the first opera to use jazz, Gershwin used jazz elements in his *Blue Monday* (1922).
to be an innovative, fertile, creative area in which to work. Gunther Schuller's opera *The Visitation* (1966) was one such opera that came out of this new period of experimentation. This opera is also particularly important because it is the first opera to use jazz improvisation.

Foreseeing the possibilities of a jazz-classical fusion in 1957, Gunther Schuller coined a new phrase and created a new movement, Third Stream. Schuller wrote:

...to what extent this third stream can assert itself in the future is a matter of conjecture, but at mid-century the interacting influence of jazz and classical music in the hands of some composers can no longer be denied its place in contemporary musical life.6

The term "Third Stream" has been applied by the press and scholars to designate the works of composers such as Anthony Davis and Anthony Braxton. Because most of the operas to be discussed here also fuse jazz and classical music, then they, too, on a lesser level, should be considered Third Stream.

Since the 1970s there has been an ever-expanding growth in experimentation between the jazz and classical idioms, including opera. The late 1970s and 1980s were particularly interesting in the evolution of jazz and opera because instead of the classical composer incorporating jazz elements, now the jazz musician was incorporating classical elements. These works include Duke Ellington's *Queenie Pie* (1974, 1986), Dave Burrell's *Windward Passages*, Max Roach's setting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1987), and the landmark work by Anthony Davis, *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1986).

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Presently, the most important opera of the 1990s is *Lulu Noire* by Jon Faddis and Lee Breuer (1995). The genre of jazz opera continues to develop and evolve.

In conclusion, one finds in seeking the origins of this new genre that while the discussion of combining jazz and classical music did not begin until the 1920s, experimentation with the two styles occurred as early as 1898 in Will Marion Cook's *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk* and in 1904 with his *In Dahomey*. Cook called these two works "ragtime operas," yet the press reported that there could be no such thing as ragtime opera. This minor controversy laid the ground for two works composed just after the turn of the century: Frederic Delius's *Koanga* and Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*.

German-born Frederic Delius (1862-1934) was influenced by African and Creole music while living in Florida, where he had been sent by his family to rid him of his dreams of becoming a composer of music. His turn-of-the-century grand opera *Koanga* is based on a libretto about slavery in eighteenth-century Louisiana and incorporates spirituals, blues, and Creole themes. This opera has never been performed in the United States; thus, it is very unlikely that Joplin heard or was influenced by Delius's opera.

Joplin's *Treemonisha* is similar to Delius's *Koanga* only in its depiction of southern blacks. Scott Joplin (1868-1917) studied at the George R. Smith College for Negroes in Missouri and began publishing his piano rags sometime after 1896. As Andrew Stiller points out, ragtime—an amalgamation of various rhythmically simple European forms such as the quadrille and the march—had been an improvising genre. However, Joplin's ragtime

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style did not employ improvisation and thus, neither did _Treemonisha_. Joplin wanted to legitimize ragtime and elevate its status to that afforded classical music.  

_Treemonisha_ was not Scott Joplin's first attempt at opera. His one-act _Guest of Honor_ (1903) was taken on the road after an initial performance in April of 1903 in St. Louis. Joplin scholar Edward A. Berlin speculates that the story was about Booker T. Washington, who was referred to, in the newspaper, as the "guest of honor" when he was invited to the White House for dinner with President Roosevelt. The Scott Joplin Ragtime Opera Company, consisting of thirty-two people, was scheduled to tour several Midwestern cities, such as Springfield, Illinois, Webb City, Missouri, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Beatrice, Nebraska, between August 30 and October 12, 1903. However, Berlin reports that no reviews or advertisements appeared after September 3, which is not significant since minor productions were not usually reviewed. The unpublished music has since disappeared.

Joplin completed the libretto and the music for _Treemonisha_ in 1910 and published the piano-vocal score at his own expense in 1911. The opera was not orchestrated or performed until 1915, although that performance took place with only Joplin at the piano and the singers.

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*Edward A. Berlin, in his _King of Ragtime_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), states that one of Joplin's teachers, Alfred Ernst, played Wagner for him. Because he created the music, libretto, and staging for _Guest of Honor_, Joplin may have been modeling himself after Wagner.

*Although, on March 27, 1906, the Copyright Office filed the claim, the score was never received. Berlin also states that two individuals have claimed to own portions of the score, but these people have never produced these excerpts.
In three acts, the action of *Treemonisha* takes place on an Arkansas plantation near the Red River in 1884. The slaves have been free for several decades. Monisha (mezzo-soprano) and Ned (bass) find a baby under a tree (hence the name Treemonisha) and raise her as their own. Overcoming the ignorance and superstition attributed to her people, Treemonisha (soprano) learns to read and write, and is eventually declared their leader.

Musically *Treemonisha* is a number opera, which is to say it comprises twenty-five independent pieces (twenty-seven, according to some sources). The music employs Joplin's familiar ragtime syncopation relatively infrequently with the exception of "Aunt Dinah has Blowed de Horn," "A Real Slow Drag," and "Ring Shout." The score is fully notated and sung in the operatic style. The rhythm of the even eighth notes is to be *Treemonisha* performed as written, since "swing" was not popularized until the 1930s. Thus, is a traditional operetta that uses simple jazz rhythms.

Joplin received a posthumous Pulitzer prize for *Treemonisha* in 1974, which no doubt inspired its first full production on May 23, 1975, by the Houston Grand Opera in Houston's Hermann Park.\(^{11}\) The show was then taken to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Since Joplin's original orchestration is lost, Gunther Schuller was responsible for the Houston production, basing his orchestration on a typical orchestral ensemble of Joplin's period—small string, woodwind, and brass sections and a rhythm section including banjo.

\(^{11}\)A semi-professional revival took place in Atlanta on January 28, 1972, orchestrated by T.J. Anderson (1928-), a black American composer who taught at Tennessee State University, Morehouse College, Tufts University, and Indiana University.
CHAPTER 2

The 1920s: THE FIRST APPEARANCES OF JAZZ IN OPERA

During the 1920s the search for an indigenous American opera became an obsession, as evidenced by the proliferation of newspaper and periodical articles which erupted during this decade. The lack of American operas was attributed to the European conductors, singers, and directors who held posts at American opera houses. In her 1980 dissertation, "The Art Music of the United States During the 1920s: A Study of the Major Issues in Contemporary Periodical Sources," Mary Herron DuPree claimed that

the discussion of jazz and its relationship to art music began slowly in the periodicals in 1921, and by 1924 was intense. . . . There seem to be three major reasons why jazz was bound up with the consideration of art music. First, several composers with established reputations were so obviously using jazz vocabulary in their music. Second, jazz had been identified by some as the most characteristic American folk music, and it had been a traditional wisdom that American folk music, once either discovered or established, would be the source of an American art music. . . . Finally, there was a handful of highly visible concerts which were intended to introduce jazz as 'serious music' to musically educated audiences.¹

In order to show the relationship of jazz and classical music, Paul Whiteman gave a concert on February 12, 1924, at New York's Aeolian Hall. Selections included several Irving Berlin songs, Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*, Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," and George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, the last composed especially for the occasion. This concert spawned a great deal of discussion in the press on the future of American opera.

DuPree stated that the first jazz-inspired American composition was John Alden Carpenter's ballet *Krazy Kat*, which premiered in 1921. This work generated considerable debate over the appropriateness of jazz in classical music:

The overwhelming consensus was that jazz, being primarily a by-product of dance, was susceptible to effective use in a ballet score, while it was almost universally considered to be inadequate to the dramatic demands of opera.²

A member of the board of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Otto Kahn, invited composers to submit a jazz opera in 1925. Reporter Henrietta Malkiel offered the invitation in Musical America and interviewed several composers, including George Gershwin and Deems Taylor, about the possibilities of fusing jazz and classical idioms. Taylor stated that "jazz could not serve as the sole musical basis of an opera."³

However, a number of operas were produced in the 1920s which were mainly unsuccessful, the reasons for this being that often the essence of jazz was lost in a stockpile of cliché techniques, such as muting, infrequent blue notes or a glissando.

Although *Porgy and Bess* (1935) proved immensely successful because of Gershwin's own popular style, which provided a foundation for the entire opera demonstrating a mature idiomatic jazz harmonic vocabulary, he first introduced this style in his one-act opera, *Blue Monday* (1922).

George Gershwin's *Blue Monday* (1922)

George Gershwin (1898-1937) may or may not have known the operas of Delius

²Ibid., 66.

³Ibid., 116.
or Joplin when he composed the one-act opera, *Blue Monday*, for the annual Broadway revue *George White’s Scandals* of 1922. Gershwin and lyricist Buddy De Sylva had discussed with producer George White the possibility of creating an opera for a black audience in 1920 or 1921. Because White had suggested using performers in blackface, Gershwin decided not to write anything for the 1922 *Scandals*. Then, five nights before the opening he and De Sylva changed their minds and wrote the opera, now called *135th Street*. The violent story, set in a Harlem café, caused the work to close after opening night.

The story is about Vi and Joe. Vi, Joe's girlfriend, becomes enraged with jealousy when she finds out he is secretly planning on seeing another woman. She shoots him only to learn that it was his mother he was going to see. Joe dies in Vi's arms as she begs his forgiveness. One reviewer suggested that it was

the most dismal, stupid, and incredible blackface sketch that has ever been perpetrated. In it a dusky soprano finally killed her gambling man. She should have shot all her associates the moment they appeared and then turned the pistol on herself.4

However, another reviewer believed that there was more to the opera:

Here at last is a genuinely human plot of American life, set to music in the American vein, using jazz at only the right moments, the Blues, and above all, a new and free ragtime recitative [see Appendix A]. In it we see the first gleam of a new American musical art.5

In the midst of mostly negative reviews, George White pulled it from the revue.
after this one performance. It was not heard again until a concert performance, under the
title *135th Street*, at Carnegie Hall by Paul Whiteman, newly orchestrated by Ferde Grofe
in 1925. There was another performance by Paul Whiteman at Carnegie Hall in 1936 but
neither of these two performances was successful. Excerpts were performed in the
Warner Brothers film *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945).

W. Frank Harling’s *A Light for St. Agnes* (1925) and *Deep River* (1926)

W. Frank Harling (1887-1958), born in England but raised in America, was
primarily a composer of songs, cantatas, and choral music. His one-act lyric tragedy, *A
Light for St. Agnes*, lasted just over an hour. The libretto was by Minnie Maddern Fiske
from her play by the same name. It seemed that jazz was a good style of music for
American opera. However,

The successful amalgamation of the seemingly disparate forms of jazz and opera
posed a problem, though . . . . The composer made it clear that the use of jazz was
an intrinsic necessity: the setting of the story was Louisiana, and the heroine was a
young woman who was transformed from a 'jazz existence' to a spiritual life.  

After *A Light for St. Agnes* had its premiere by the Chicago Civic Opera Company
on December 26, 1925, Edward Ellsworth Hipsher reported that

much discussion and concern as to the legitimacy of jazz in grand opera were
dissipated when a hearing disclosed that saxophones, banjo, xylophone, humming,
jazz rhythms and jazz effects had been introduced into the more colorful parts of
the score, not as musical ends, but as mediums toward realism and dramatic
characterization. It is an American jazz opera, by the same means as 'Der
Rosenkavalier' is a Viennese waltz opera—by its rhythms.

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253.
However, Hipsher also reported that the opera was a failure because the drama was not expressed through song, although Harling received the American Opera Society's David Bispham Memorial Medal for this work. The singer who played one of the three principal characters fell ill after opening night, hindering all other performances. Several subsequent performances were given in Paris (1929), New York (1929), and Atlantic City, New Jersey (1931). To my knowledge, it has never been performed again.

Harling subtitled his next opera, *Deep River* (1926), "a native opera with jazz."

The opera, with libretto by Laurence Stallings, which had its premiere on September 18, 1926, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was later afforded sixteen performances at the Schubert Theater in Philadelphia beginning on September 24, 1926. The show also spent two weeks in New York on Broadway during October, 1926. It included an all-black cast. Although largely unsuccessful, *Deep River* represented a shift in America from the "lighthearted and comic black revues toward a more dramatic treatment of Negro themes." The star, Rose McClendon, would later portray Serena in the first staging of DuBose Heyward's play, *Porgy*.

Set in Louisiana, in 1830s New Orleans, *Deep River* (see Appendix B) evoked the familiar criticism of jazz's limitations, this time from George Jean Nathan: "Jazz is a too cheap and shallow musical medium to evoke, convey and further any save cheap and shallow emotions." On the other hand, Hipsher states that *Deep River*

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8 Hipsher reports the date as September 21.


caused a great deal of discussion as to whether opera in America was to merge into a new form. However, while recognizing its many merits, still a work in which two of the three acts are carried forward through the medium of spoken conversation which incidental, though very appropriate and highly artistic songs, certainly could not qualify as 'grand' opera according to accepted standards.\textsuperscript{11}

Ernst Krenek's \textit{Jonny spielt auf} (1927)

While the obsessive search for an indigenous opera was taking place in America, an opera crisis and rebirth was also taking place in central Europe. Susan Cook, in her dissertation, \textit{Opera for a New Republic}, discusses the \textit{Opernkrise} which followed World War I. A result of the opera crisis was the \textit{Zeitoper} (opera of the times) in which composers dealt with socio-political issues. One such opera was Ernst Krenek's \textit{Jonny spielt auf}, which legitimized, in the minds of opera-goers, the use of jazz in opera, since Krenek had already established a credible reputation as a serious classical composer.

Ernst Krenek (1900-1991) became acquainted with jazz through his friendship with Artur Schnabel, whom he met in 1921.\textsuperscript{12} Krenek's second opera (set to his own text), \textit{Der Sprung über den Schatten}, op. 71, was finished in 1923 and had its premiere in June, 1924, at the Frankfurt Opera House. Jazz techniques such as the blues scale (occasional employment of the flatted third), syncopation, and xylophone and banjo are used in a tonal basis as part of the vocabulary which was available and interesting to European

\textsuperscript{11}Hipsher, \textit{American Opera and Its Composers}, 254.

\textsuperscript{12}According to John L. Stewart, Schnabel "liked to keep up with everything new, and by way of phonographs records [the first jazz recording was available in the United States in 1917 from the Original Dixieland Jazz Band] he brought back from concert tours in the United States he introduced Krenek to music by Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Vincent Youmans, all of which passed for jazz among Europeans unacquainted with the real thing." (John L. Stewart, \textit{Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music} [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991], 31).
composers.

The three-act comic opera tells the story of a shy poet overcoming his inhibitions with the help of a psychologist. Krenek himself calls the libretto sophomoric. Regardless, it is the first European opera to use, or parody, jazz: "... the harmonic language was of such discordance that it alienated the modern public it was aimed at."\(^{11}\) The opera was performed again in 1928 and then not until 1989.

Jazz had found its way into eastern Europe after World War I (1914-1918), but it was during the war that jazz found its way into France due to the presence of American troops there. The French infatuation with jazz was still strong in 1924 when, after the production of *Der Sprung über den Schatten* and the dissolution of his marriage, Krenek spent two weeks in Paris.

The effect of the city was stunning. It was, he wrote to [his friend, violinist Paul] Bekker, as if he had journeyed "to another planet." ... Now he found it "unerhört!!!"—unprecedented, scandalous, exorbitant. Truly, visitors to Paris in the mid-twenties found a magical city, one seething with energy, ideas, colors, sounds, fads, triumphs, and trumpery.\(^{14}\)

Krenek began his opera *Jonny spielt auf*, op. 45, early in 1925 at the age of twenty-two, working on the libretto and the music sporadically. His progress was propelled forward after hearing a concert in Frankfurt just a few months later. This concert, in May of 1925, included Duke Ellington's *Chocolate Kiddies Revue*\(^{15}\) and


\(^{15}\)Duke himself and Gunther Schuller, in *Early Jazz: Its Roots*, claim that Duke composed the music for *Chocolate Kiddies*. James Lincoln Collier, in his *Duke Ellington*, claims that he did not. The show did not play in America but went to Germany in 1925 with the Sam Wooding band, where it was billed as a Negro
"jazzed up versions of ... selections from Verdi's *Il Trovatore* and Gounod's *Faust,*" as well as some original compositions.¹⁶

*Jonny spielt auf* had its premiere in February of 1927 in Leipzig and nearly a year later, on New Year's Eve, 1927, *Jonny* was performed at the Vienna Staatsoper. Traditionally, *Die Fledermaus* was given on New Year's Eve. Krenek himself wondered "what the conservative Viennese, who mistrusted modernism and disapproved of jazz, satirical revues, experimental stage sets, and sexual freedom, would make of this ostentatiously modern work, which glamorized such goings on."¹⁷

*Jonny* departs from operatic convention in its lack of a tragic hero. Jonny, the jazzman protagonist, defeats Max the opera composer, therefore producing a happy ending as the underdog jazzman triumphs over the constrictive classical man. Krenek, in his *Horizons Circled,* wrote:

[Max] was seen as representing the typical mental attitudes of the ponderous, inhibited Central European intellectual. In opposition to him I placed Jonny, the American jazz fiddler, a child of nature, totally free on inhibitions, acting on impulse at the spur of the moment. Obviously the invention of this antithesis was inspired by my first contact with the Western world and my experiences of the very evident contrast of mentalities and life-styles between East and West.¹⁸

The score calls for the use of banjos, saxophones, and piano in addition to traditional instrumentation (see Appendix C). *Jonny* also employs a blues and tango Operetta.

¹⁶Susan Cook, "Opera During the Weimar Republic: The 'Zeitopern' of Ernst Krenek, Kurt Weill, and Paul Hindemith" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1985), 61.


section, heretofore unheard in opera, thus allowing Krenek to explore the possibilities of
dance as a dramatic and theatrical tool. Jonny was first presented at the Metropolitan
Opera in New York by Otto Kahn in January of 1929 to unfavorable reviews.

Krenek's use of jazz was nothing more than an intended effect from which he
would later detach himself. In 1974 he wrote the following:

[Jonny] created a tremendous sensation for reasons that I found entirely wrong, a
fact that irritated me a great deal. It was labeled a 'jazz opera,' which I felt to be a
misnomer, for whatever jazz there occurs is brought in to characterize the
professional sphere of the protagonist, Jonny, leader of an American combo. The
music attached to the other characters, which to me were at least as important, is
conceived in that early romantic idiom I had chosen as my model, occasionally
touched up with dissonant spices and Italianizing Pucciniesque vocal exuberance.
The label of 'jazz opera' could, if at all, be affixed much rather to a later work that I
wrote in this period, Leben des Orest.19 Here the jazz flavor permeated one clearly
defined sector of the stage action, to create a sort of colloquial musical language, a
musical lingua franca of our time. In later years it has been held against these
pieces that the jazz displayed in them was really no jazz at all, or at best a very
poor, primitive specimen. This is true enough and hardly worth pointing out.
What I brought into play was not a replica of the real thing, which I might not even
have done if I had known the real thing. But I tried to project the reflection of the
image of jazz which I had formed in my mind on the basis of my very scanty
knowledge of it, just as I projected in this opera an idealistic wish-dream of
America, in the vein of similar pictures drawn by the early romanticists.20

Harry Lawrence Freeman's The Flapper (1929)

In 1929, while Krenek was completing Leben des Oreste, Harry Lawrence
Freeman (1869-1954) was putting the finishing touches on *The Flapper*. Not much is known about Freeman's work, which was billed as a jazz grand opera in four acts and set in the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York. His *American Romance* (1927) has also been called a jazz opera, although both of these scores are lost and are therefore unavailable for further study. Freeman is also credited with establishing the Negro Opera Company in 1920 and the Freeman School of Grand Opera in 1923.
CHAPTER 3

THE 1930s AND 1940s: AN AMERICAN OPERA

The 1930's answer to the 1920s American opera search was *Porgy and Bess* (1935). In addition, other changes were taking place which were realized in the operas employing jazz of the 1930s and 1940s. For example, the advent of swing in the 1930s was seen in the rhythms used by Hamilton Forrest in his opera, *Camille*. In 1938, James P. Johnson became the first jazz composer to work in the opera genre. During the late 1940s another opera, *Regina*, by Marc Blitzstein, attained success, although not of the same magnitude as *Porgy and Bess*. *Regina* is still performed today, which makes it only the third American opera, in addition to *Treemonisha* and *Porgy and Bess*, to maintain its popularity.

Hamilton Forrest's *Camille* (1930)

Although very early into its evolution, swing rhythms were first used in opera by Hamilton Forrest (1901-1963) in his *Camille* (1930), which had its premiere by the Chicago Civic Opera House on December 10, 1930. Forrest echoed the sentiment of other American composers of the 1920s and 1930s when he said, "It [jazz] is our American type of music. If we write music in America with feeling for our present culture then we must write some jazz music."

Curiously, Forrest was not thinking of

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1 Hamilton Forrest, quoted in "Mary Garden Appears as a Modern Camille," *New York Times*, 10
present American culture when he set the libretto in French at the request of soprano Mary Garden. When Hamilton Forrest approached Mary Garden with the idea of doing an opera, she insisted that French was the only appropriate language for *Camille*, perhaps because of the French origin of the story, so the original English libretto was translated for her. Forrest was planning a trip to France anyway, and so while in Paris, he worked on setting the French language with Maurice Ravel. When the score was completed, Forrest took the completed score to Garden who promised to be his Marguerite.

Set in 1930s Paris, *Camille* is based upon Alexandre Dumas's novel, *La Dame aux Camélias*, as is Verdi's *La Traviata*. The orchestration calls for 118 instruments, including two pianos and six saxophones. The new swing rhythms—swinging triplets, frequent time signature changes, and polyrhythms—were more of a "modern imposition rather than an absolute necessity to the story line." In her 1987 D.M.A. dissertation "Hamilton Forrest's *Camille*: A Study through Production," Jeanine Frances Wagner stated that some swing sections were "incessant pounding[s]."

Wagner reports that the Chicago premiere was a major event because of the anticipatory speculation concerning the collaboration. The first reviews were unanimous in their praise of Mary Garden as Marguerite, yet few mentioned Forrest. One reviewer, Felix Borowski, wrote,

Only in the scene of the second act when the champagne party takes place in Camille's apartment and jazz is introduced, does the composer contrive to make his

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\(^2\)Wagner, "Hamilton Forrest's *Camille*," 15.
music reflect the situation set forth on the stage. . . . Instead, the music wanders on and on in the shadowy fashion characteristic of 'Pelléas et Mélisande.' Debussy is seemingly Mr. Forrest's model in regard to style.3

Although the premiere was well attended, the five performances which followed were not. The opera's failure was due to the criticism the opera received because of its French libretto and the poor interpretation of the jazz rhythms by the classically-oriented performers, including the singers. One reviewer wrote the following: "Adjusting to an unfamiliar compositional technique was difficult enough without having to decipher the textual meaning as well."4 Wagner reports that the reviews in the social columns indicated the displeasure of the audience. However, there are other reasons for its failure. Verdi's La Traviata was heard by the same company the preceding night, with the distinguished tenor, Charles Hackett, singing the lead in both operas.

After the meager number of performances in Chicago, Camille slipped into obscurity. Mary Garden had the following comment on her collaboration on the work:

I just wanted to give an American a chance, and I wanted an American 'grand opera!' It interested me greatly to do it, but it didn't interest the public at all. . . . I still don't think it was a total loss. But that was the end of Camille. There's absolutely nothing else to say about it.5

George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess (1935)

Five years after Hamilton Forrest's unsuccessful opera, Camille, George Gershwin (1898-1937) created a work that has not only stood the test of time but is the only

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5Mary Garden quoted in Ibid.
American work to become part of the repertoire of the Metropolitan Opera. *Porgy*, the novel by DuBose Heyward upon which the opera is based, thus became a monumental event for the future of jazz and opera.

*Porgy* was published in September of 1925 to great acclaim by blacks and whites alike. The critic for Charleston's black newspaper appreciated Heyward's "intuitiveness and honesty." Film producer Cecil B. DeMille bought the screen rights for a motion picture starring Paul Robeson, but the project was abandoned because it was felt that the movie would not be popular in the South. Both Heyward and his wife, Dorothy (a writer herself), were upset about this. DuBose, who became involved with new projects, did not know that Dorothy was secretly writing a screenplay for *Porgy*.

During the summer of 1926, George Gershwin began reading *Porgy*. Enthusiastic about its musical possibilities, he immediately wrote to DuBose Heyward with the idea of collaborating on an opera. At this point, Dorothy had to reveal that she had been working on a screenplay for *Porgy*, a fact that greatly pleased Gershwin, since he knew that it would be much easier to work with the dramatization than with the novel. However, Gershwin, whose immense popularity after having produced the Concerto in F, *Song of the Flame*, and *Tip-Toes*, required his attendance at many social functions, would be unable to commit his time to the project for several years. Therefore, the Heywards continued to seek interest in *Porgy* as a play and to work diligently together to complete the screenplay. Dorothy changed the ending of the novel so that Bess goes to New York with Sportin' Life, not to Savannah, and instead of Porgy's sitting by and accepting this turn of events, he goes after her.
The screenplay, now called *Catfish Row* but later changed to *Porgy* to relate it to the novel, was accepted by New York's Theater Guild on Broadway, which had been looking for an American play. One problem was that the Heywards insisted that the cast consist of black actors, which meant enlisting a new ensemble of actors. Although the Heywards objected to white actors in blackface, they would later sell the rights to Al Jolson for a talking picture version, thinking that the novelty of talkies would dissipate and no harm would be done to *Porgy*. But, the planned moving picture never materialized.

Rouben Mamoulian, an Armenian-Russian director who came to America to help organize the American Opera Company in New York, was brought in to direct *Porgy* at the Theater Guild. The cast, enlisted in Harlem, consisted of Rose McClendon, Frank Wilson, Evelyn Ellis, and Percy Vervaine.

When the play opened on Broadway on October 10, 1927, the reviews were excellent from all sides, including the following statement by James Weldon Johnson from the NAACP: "[the play] loomed high above every Negro drama that had ever been produced . . . it carried conviction through its sincere simplicity."  

Meanwhile, George Gershwin, having seen the play, was still hoping eventually to turn it into an opera. He was, however, busy working in 1929 on his current project, *The Dybbuk*. At the time he offered the following comment on opera:

I am frankly not interested in the traditions of opera. I am a man without

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traditions as concerns music. . . . When I think of a grand opera of my own, I simply cannot think in terms of Wagner or Verdi. I want, in turn, to be myself. 8

Finally in 1932 Gershwin contacted DuBose with renewed interest in collaborating on an opera. After many meetings and conversations, the contracts between Heyward, Gershwin, and the Theater Guild were signed on October 17, 1933.9

As DuBose worked on the libretto, Gershwin worked on the music as he found time, beginning with the songs and spirituals—"Summertime" was the first song he wrote.10 They worked together by mail. Gershwin asked Heyward to send the lyrics with dots and dashes in order to know what rhythm Heyward wanted. Ira Gershwin became an important player, as he would help George work with DuBose's lyrics. Gershwin wanted to work directly with Heyward but he could not go to Charleston because of previous commitments in New York. So, in April of 1934, Heyward went to New York for two weeks and worked with the Gershwin brothers.11

In June of 1934, George Gershwin traveled to Folly Island, ten miles from Charleston. He rented a cottage as did Heyward, nearby. Gershwin composed in the mornings and worked on the libretto with Heyward in the afternoons.12 Gershwin worked excitedly as he discovered the sounds of the Gullah people. They returned to their

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8Alpert, The Life and Times of Porgy and Bess, 70.
9Ibid., 76. [Alpert says 1935 but it has to be 1933].
10Ibid., 79.
11Ibid., 88.
respective homes after five intensive weeks. Toward the end of 1934 Rouben Mamoulian was chosen as the director of the opera and casting began, a matter made much easier than with the play because of the Gershwin name now attached to the production.

*Porgy and Bess* had its out-of-town premiere at the Colonial Theater in Boston on September 30, 1935. After many cuts and excellent reviews, *Porgy and Bess* opened for 124 performances at the Alvin Theater in New York on October 10, 1935, with Todd Duncan as Porgy, Anne Brown as Bess, Ruby Elzy as Serena, and John W. Bubbles (whose real name was John William Sublett) as Sportin' Life. Cab Calloway claimed that Sportin' Life was modeled after his shows at the Cotton Club, which Gershwin often attended.  

The debate over whether *Porgy and Bess* was to be considered a musical or an opera in the jazz idiom was reflected in the makeup of the New York opening night audience, which included opera singers Lily Pons and Kirsten Flagstad, bandleaders Paul Whiteman and Fred Waring, composer Virgil Thomson, and classical musicians Fritz Kreisler and Jascha Heifetz. The reviews following the opening night in New York reflect the same confusion, a debate that continues even today. Olin Downes, music critic for the *New York Times*, wrote the following:

[The opera], which vastly entertained last night's audience, has much to commend it from the musical standpoint, even if the work does not utilize all the resources of the operatic composer, or pierce very often to the depths of the simple and pathetic drama.  

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13Ibid., 98.

Brooks Atkinson, theater critic for the *New York Times*, wrote the following:

> Whether or not Mr. Gershwin's score measures up to its intentions as American folk opera lies in Mr. Downes's bailiwick. But to the ears of a theater critic Mr. Gershwin's music gives a personal voice to Porgy's loneliness. . . .  

Virgil Thomson described it as "crooked folklore and half-way opera," although both Thomson and Olin Downes gave very favorable reviews following a 1942 run in New York. For the most part, however, the audience adored the work, and *Porgy and Bess* remains today the first major milestone in the evolution of this new American art form that fuses jazz, blues, spirituals, and opera. Although Otto Kahn, former chairman of the board, president, director, and finally patron of the Metropolitan Opera, offered to bring *Porgy* to the Metropolitan stage, Gershwin preferred to gamble on a long run on Broadway.  

It would take fifty years for *Porgy and Bess* to cross over from Broadway to the Metropolitan Opera, which first presented it in 1985.

**James P. Johnson's *De Organizer* (1938)**

James P. Johnson (1894-1955) received his musical training primarily in New York public schools. He began his professional career as a jazz pianist in 1912, playing for nightclubs and parties. Largely influenced by Eubie Blake, he made his recording debut in

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1921, went on to accompany, among others, jazz singers Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters, scored several musicals, pioneered the stride-piano style, and became a teacher of Fats Waller. 18

Johnson based his "blues opera," The Organizer (1938), on a libretto by Langston Hughes. Johnson was the one to contact Hughes with the idea of an opera sometime in 1937. Although Hughes was interested, nothing came of Johnson's proposition until 1938, when Johnson contracted with Theodore Brown to create an opera based on Brown's play, Natural Man. Langston Hughes turned the play into blank verse and Johnson set it to music. 19

Johnson's biographer, Scott E. Brown, writes that several copies of Hughes's libretto exist but only one piece from Johnson's score is extant: "Hungry Blues," recorded in 1939 but not published until 1962. Brown further states that

If the numbers are as well written as 'Hungry Blues' . . . then the entire work might well represent Johnson's greatest 'serious' achievement. 20

The action of The Organizer takes place on a Southern plantation. Hungry, hard-working sharecroppers wait in hopes of an organizer to help them institute a union. Once the organizer (baritone) arrives, a rally ensues against the plantation owner. The strength in unity provides hope and confidence to the workers, thereby reflecting Hughes's ideas about social reform.


20Ibid., 220.
Brown reports that the opera had its premiere at Carnegie Hall in June of 1940, yet no reviews were to be found for this performance. Bernard Peterson, in his *Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers*, reports that it was produced by New York's Harlem Suitcase Theater in 1939. The unpublished scripts are held in the James Weldon Johnson Collection at Yale University and the Schomburg Collection at the New York Public Library.

Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* (1946-49)

Marc Blitzstein's (1905-1964) eighth opera, *Regina*, is based upon Lillian Hellman's play *The Little Foxes*. After three years of work, the music and libretto, also by Blitzstein, were completed in 1949 and first produced on Broadway at the 42nd Street Theater in October, 1949 but only ran for a few weeks. The opera was revised and had its premiere by the City Center Opera Company on April 2, 1953 to rave reviews:

There was electricity on the stage and in the pit, and there was electricity in the audience. With this achievement, the Center's opera company not only did itself proud, but, even more important, restored a notable American lyric work to the stage. . . . Perhaps the most significant revision is in the orchestration. If one's memory of the first version is correct, the orchestra was not nearly so effective. Mr. Blitzstein has stripped it clean of unnecessary baggage. It is now transparent, economical and immensely dramatic. . . . Regarded as a whole, 'Regina' is one of the best opera any American has written.

Set in Alabama in 1900, the music draws upon blues and Dixieland jazz. The story is about ugly schemes designed to increase the financial situation of the Hubbard family—

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Regina and her two brothers, Ben and Oscar. Her share depends upon the signature of her ill husband (Horace), who refuses. The Hubbards also plot to marry Regina's daughter, Alexandra, to her cousin, Oscar's son, Leo, so that the money will stay in the family. In the meantime, Leo steals bonds from Regina's husband, easily accomplished because he works at the bank which Horace owns. Regina watches as Horace has a heart attack, doing nothing. After Horace's death, she blackmauls her brothers into giving her the largest share of the monies and is, in the end, left all alone.
CHAPTER 4

1950 TO 1979: THE USE OF JAZZ IMPROVISATION IN OPERA

Gunther Schuller was the first composer to use jazz improvisation in his opera, *The Visitation*. Cannonball and Nat Adderley's *Big Man*, Dave Burrell's *Windward Passages*, and Warren Pinckney's *Scenes from the Duplex* follow Schuller's work as the earliest works to employ improvisation, as well as being the second and third attempts by jazz musicians at working in the opera genre since James P. Johnson's *De Organizer* (1938). All of the works studied from this point forward require improvisation. However, a South African opera composed in 1959 was less avant-garde.

Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong* (1959)

In 1957, a team of South Africans was assembled to tell the story of the South African fighter, Dlmini—Harry Bloom to write the story, Pat Williams to write the lyrics, and Todd Matshikiza to write the music. The result was *King Kong: A Jazz Opera*, a book which is actually a libretto, published in 1961. Although not written by an American or based on an American story, it nevertheless relies upon the American jazz tradition. *King Kong* contains a variety of musical elements, such as blues, chants, choral numbers, and operatic solos.

The forward to *King Kong* makes an important contribution with its discussion of the use of the term "jazz opera." Bloom explains that in South Africa musicians would
tour the many townships playing at weddings, dances, political rallies, and funerals. Not many of these musicians could read music, but they played by ear and improvised instead.

Describing the phenomenon, Bloom writes

They blended the music of the city—[American] jazz heard on gramophone records, radio hit tunes, film music—into the older fabric of tribal rhythms and work songs, to make a music of their own. In time, this music came to be known as 'Township Jazz.'

Black musicians of that time were severely restricted by the national policy of apartheid. Pass laws prohibited traveling between townships at night, there was no publicity, and the musicians received low pay. That these were the same musicians who performed King Kong partly accounts for the work's relative obscurity.

King Kong's author, Harry Bloom, was a lawyer who had never ventured into theater. His goal was to create a work that would express the drama of life in the townships surrounding Johannesburg, as well as the music of the township people.

[I] began turning over the idea of producing a full-scale musical, the first of its kind in Africa, that would express not just the music, but the drama, colour and effervescence, as well as the poignancy and sadness, that made the peculiar flavour of township life.

Bloom also intended for the "jazz opera" to provide a performance opportunity for otherwise unrecognized musicians. Todd Matshikiza was a razor salesman who worked the townships when not touring as a pianist for the popular singing group, the Manhattan Brothers. He must have composed only the piano music, because Stanley Glasser, a Cambridge graduate in music, scored and also directed the final production. Pat Williams,


\[2\] Ibid, 11.
who wrote the poetry for the songs, was a Johannesburg journalist. It was her first attempt as a lyricist.

*King Kong* is based upon the true story of the African boxer Ezekiel Dlmini. The authorities would not permit him to fight overseas as another African fighter, Jake Tule, had earlier been allowed to do. Tule had killed his white opponent in England and returned home a hero of the African people. To avoid a possible repetition of these events, Dlmini was not permitted to travel abroad, and as a result he eventually became an alcoholic, killed his girlfriend in a jealous rage, went to jail, and drowned while in jail at the age of thirty-two. The matter of Dlmini's death has always been questioned by the South African people.

Unusual performance problems associated with *King Kong* presented a series of difficulties. For example, cast members were arrested on their way to rehearsals, because they were traveling between townships without passes, and because all the restaurants near the old warehouse where rehearsals took place were closed to blacks, food had to be shipped in for seventy people daily.

The work was first performed in February of 1959 in Johannesburg, and was sold out for the next six months. King Kong was portrayed by Nathan Mdledle and his girlfriend, Joyce, was portrayed by Miriam Makeba, who later sang with Harry Belafonte and became famous in her own right. She married African-American civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael. *King Kong* was her first show.

The director was able to integrate the audience and get around the apartheid laws by booking the show on the campus of the University of Witwatersrand, which both
blacks and whites attended. The show toured the theaters without color restrictions, but it was never permitted to leave the country. However, an individual named Jack Hilton secured the overseas rights and presented King Kong on February 23, 1961 at the Princes Theater in London to the following review:

This all-African jazz musical makes an immediate impact as a piece of naive but vital indigenous art; and our final impressions are as favourable as our first. We come to realize in the course of the evening that it is a show to which strict standards of professional slickness cannot be applied. Stemming from an amateurish impulse and retaining most of its original character, King Kong must be taken on its own terms; and it is then very enjoyable.³

Gunther Schuller's The Visitation (1966)

Back in the United States the most important voice in the promotion and legitimization of the fusion of our two previously distinct genres was speaking out. Gunther Schuller's (1925-) involvement in the New York jazz scene between 1945 and 1959, coupled with his classical background, was beginning to manifest itself in a new sound—the Third Stream⁴—in such compositions as 12 x 11 (1955), Abstraction (written for alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman, 1955), Transformation (1957), Concertino for Jazz Quartet and Orchestra (1959), Conversations for Jazz Quartet (1959), Variations on a Theme of John Lewis (1960), and Variants on a Theme of Thelonius Monk (1960). He defines "Third Stream" as

the result of two tributaries—one from the stream of classical music and one from the other stream, jazz—that have recently flowed out toward each other in the


⁴Schuller not only coined the term "Third Stream" but also founded the Third Stream Jazz department at Boston's New England Conservatory of Music in 1972.
space between the two main streams undisturbed, or mostly so. The two main streams are left undivided.³

In a 1959 New York Times article, "And Perhaps the Twain Shall Meet," Gunther Schuller explored the possibilities of combining jazz and classical music. He discussed the confusion surrounding the classification of the resultant new sounds. This confusion arises from the fact that these very broad terms--"jazz" and "classical" music--each encompass so many different connotations that it is difficult to come to an understanding of what Schuller calls the new "hybrid." He pointed out that even within the two genres, there are distinct factions and much debate about what constitutes each of them. Thus it is apparent that the fusing of these two areas can only cause more controversy among their respective audiences, scholars, and performers. However, what this "hybrid" makes possible is the creation and expansion of a new and purely American art form:

To a small ardent core of jazz purists, the idea of planned compositional framework in a jazz context is considered an intrusion upon the sacred precincts of improvisation. On the other hand, for the average 'classical' purist, the inclusion of jazz elements constitutes a desecration and cheapening of the musical heritage left us by the 'masters,' and at best elicits a benign shrug of indifference.⁶

Schuller's eventual interest in composing an opera may have begun with his commission from Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) for an orchestral composition comprising narrator, jazz quintet, and orchestra, co-written with jazz author and critic Nat Hentoff. This commission, Journey into Jazz (1962), tells the story of a "legit" trumpet

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In 1965, Schuller traveled to Europe where he met American Rolf Liebermann, resident Director of the Hamburg State Opera. This meeting resulted in a commission for *The Visitation (Die Heimsuchung)*, which was first performed in Hamburg on October 12, 1966. He had originally intended to use Ralph Ellison's book *Invisible Man* as a source for his libretto but could not gain the rights to do so. He then turned to Kafka's *The Trial*, but ended up creating an original libretto himself based on Kafka's book. Schuller's biographer, Norbert Carnovale, suggested that "unfortunately, this was probably an error in judgment on Schuller's part, because it is the libretto which has received, rightly or wrongly, the harshest criticism."

*The Visitation* is the fictional story of Carter Jones (McHenry Boatwright), a black student who is eventually killed just for being black. Before his murder he sets out in search of answers as to why he has been persecuted just because he is black. His encounters include a love-making session with his next door neighbor, Miss Hampton; a visit to public officials at the courthouse; a stop at a roadside club, which provides the most extensive opportunity for the inclusion of jazz (see Appendix D); and, a visit to the local deacon. The plot combines sadism, attempted rape, seduction, malfeasance of office, drunkenness, as well as encounters with, in effect, the "Ku Klux Klan, "dirty movies," and

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*A performance of Journey into Jazz may be found on video tape: Bernstein's Young People's Concerts' series, Sony Classical, 1993 (originally broadcasted on March 11, 1964).

"Uncle Toms." With the exception of the last three, it could be Rigoletto. Although basically serial, the work includes blues, gospel, jazz riffs, improvisation, and sound effects with, as Monachino points out, only one "quasi aria" in the third act--"the only deference to this aspect of operatic tradition." 10

The fusion of Kafka's Nazi Germany and Southern black/white racial problems is a strange combination which was nevertheless well received in Germany:

Schuller's score is starkly modern, laced with traditional and atonal improvisations by a septet of jazz musicians who share the pit with the full orchestra. . . . Flushed with success, Hamburg State Opera Director Rolf Liebermann described The Visitation as "the best opera since Wozzeck." 11

On the other hand, the opera opened to unfavorable reviews at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on June 28, 1967. Harold Schonberg reported

When it was over...most of the audience sat on its hands. Of those that did respond, half cheered. The other half booed. . . . The entire opera has a feeling of amateurism. Mr. Schuller has had some success with short pieces; but, on the basis of The Visitation, he is a long way from tackling a large-scale, serious subject. 12

In San Francisco, in January of 1968, however, its performances received quite a different review:

Gunther Schuller's The Visitation has its faults, but it is far and away the finest American opera ever produced by a major American company, and its presentation by the San Francisco Opera raised the entire level of the musical theater in the


10Ibid.


United States.¹³

Julian "Cannonball" and Nat Adderley's *Big Man* (1974)

Originally entitled *Shout Up a Morning*, alto saxophonist Cannonball (1928-1975) and trumpeter Nat Adderley (1931-) termed this work, which is more of a musical play, a "folk opera," much in the spirit of *Porgy and Bess*.¹⁴ It is briefly discussed here because of their attempt at utilizing the opera genre.

Based on the legendary railroad worker John Henry, *Big Man* premiered, in concert version, at Carnegie Hall in July, 1976. In 1985, the show played for three weeks at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.¹⁵ *Big Man* lyricist Diane Lampert (Peter Farrow was responsible for the libretto) originally asked Duke Ellington to compose the score but was reportedly dissatisfied with the music, eventually approaching Cannonball Adderley.

The score does include improvisational passages, requiring a jazz big band. The primary soloists were the Adderley brothers. Mr. Adderley reported that the music and lyrics were well received. The criticism focused mainly on the ridiculous set. There is little chance of this work ever being performed again because Nat Adderley feels that the score needs improvement, being "disturbed" with the dialect of the libretto. Because Cannonball passed away in 1975, legalities prohibit Nat Adderley from revising the score.

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¹⁴According to Nat Adderley during a telephone conversation on May 26, 1995.

¹⁵Nat Adderley also reported that *Big Man* once played during the Newport Jazz Festival, date unknown.
Although no score is available, a recording was released in 1975 with the voices of Joe Williams and Robert Guillaume (of television's Benson).

Dave Burrell's *Windward Passages* (1979)

A jazz musician who was influenced by Schuller's Third Stream and Avant-Garde movements was Dave Burrell (1940-). Greatly influenced by his classically trained mother, Burrell saw the possibilities of creating a dramatic work built upon a jazz foundation.

Educated at the University of Hawaii and the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Burrell has taught at Queens College of the City University of New York, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in England, the Strasbourg Conservatory in France, New York University, and the University of Pennsylvania. He is the recipient of numerous grants, commissions, and awards, including "Best Jazz Record of the Year" from the Philadelphia Music Foundation for his *Daybreak* on Gazell Records in 1990. He is the composer of several soundtracks for films and documentaries and has given national and international tours as a pianist with such performers as Archie Shepp, David Murray, Hank Mobley, Anthony Braxton, Sonny Fortune, Curtis Fuller, Woodie Shaw, Ron Carter, Jimmy Garrison, Elvin Jones, Sam Woodyard, and "Philly Joe" Jones.

Critics have received Burrell's compositions and performances very well. Francis Davis of *Cadence* wrote:

Burrell's knowledge of the piano and of its jazz literature is nearly encyclopedic. His modern single-line ragtime pieces, like 'AM Rag' and 'Punaluu Peter' trace the lineage of players like Monk back far beyond the Harlem stride pianists.
Roger Riggins of *Coda* said:

Burrell is very flowing, almost romantic with his dissonances. There is a grace and a passion in his playing... he is delving deeper into operatic forms, very much akin to Scott Joplin.

Robert Palmer of the *New York Times* wrote:

Dave Burrell's... unaccompanied recital of new compositions... astonished with his range of expression and emotional depth. His sound was admirable, fat, his articulation was incisive.  

His style is truly unique, influenced by Jelly Roll Morton, blues, gospel, Duke Ellington, and Thelonius Monk.

Burrell completed his three-act opera, *Windward Passages*, in 1979. His wife, Monika Larsson, a Swedish poet who has equally impressive credentials, educated at Eddevalla H. A. L., Sweden, Academie de Paris, Sorbonne, France, and Gothenburg University, Sweden, wrote the libretto. While Burrell was teaching at the University of Gothenburg, he worked on refining the score with the student orchestra. One act of the work was performed by the Gothenburg University concert band in 1984.

*Windward Passages* concerns a black family, the Washingtons, who leave Harlem for Hawaii just after World War II in order to find a better life. Neither of the parents can find work. However, their lives are enriched by the cultural and ethnic diversity in which they live. Their son, Clay, is an aspiring pianist who comes of age at about the same time as Hawaii gains statehood. Statehood affects their home as land developers want to turn the valley into high-priced housing. A Texas land developer buys their land and evicts the

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Previous Davis, Riggins, and Palmer quotations received in press packet received from Dave Burrell.
people living on it. The Washingtons and the other residents refuse to leave. Clay’s Japanese girlfriend is killed during this confrontation. Eventually, all the residents are forced to give up their property and leave the valley.

Although Windward Passages has never been staged in its entirety, excerpts of the work have been performed by such esteemed singers as mezzo-soprano Hilda Harris of the Metropolitan Opera at places such as the Oakland Auditorium, Oakland, California, and the Teatro Dell’Opera in Rome, Italy. Harris is also one of the principal singers on Anthony Davis’s recording of X on the Gramophone label.

The entire cast consists of classically trained voices: a soprano, a mezzo-soprano, three tenors, two baritones, and a bass-baritone, in addition to a twenty-one-piece orchestra, dancers, and chorus. Jazz instruments are used: soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones, one synthesizer/vibraphone, one trap drum set, one conga drum, three contrabass violins, and one steel drum. Instrumental performers improvise as do the singers. Depending upon the amount of improvisation, the opera is timed at 2 ½ to 3 ½ hours in length.

The opera, as previously stated, has never been produced. During my visit with Burrell and Larsson on June 10, 1995, they expressed a serious intent to continue to promote and work on Windward Passages in the hope of finding the resources and backing necessary to have the opera staged as they envision it. Burrell has recorded excerpts from the opera as solo piano pieces. A review in the 1993 Penguin Guide to Jazz says:

Burrell’s best record, Windward Passages . . . [is] an autobiographical account of a
young musician growing up, as Burrell had done, in Hawaii and suffering all the dispossession that haunts non-white Americans. He combines bop, rag, stride, blues and free elements with complete ease and is a figure of unacknowledged importance.

Warren Pinckney's *Scenes from the Duplex* (1979)

Warren Pinckney earned a Ph.D. in composition from Princeton University in 1983 for his dissertation and original opera, “Some Properties of Nonfunctional Chord Progressions in the Modern Jazz Opera *Scenes from the Duplex,*” although the score for the opera was completed in 1979. In the introduction to his dissertation, he related how he grew up loving and playing jazz. While in graduate school he took a course called Advanced Contemporary Analysis of Opera, studying such works as *Tristan und Isolde,* *Salome,* and *Wozzeck.* It was during this class that he discovered *Porgy and Bess* and Gunther Schuller’s *The Visitation,* the latter of which employs improvisation. He has said he was amazed to discover that these classical works used jazz:

This was a big discovery. I began thinking that if Gershwin and Schuller could get away with using jazz in opera then perhaps I should give it a try . . . . In order to bring my jazz approach in line with my teacher’s musical values I experimented with transforming jazz-type seventh chords to hide the jazz sound.17

Pinckney, in discussing his approach to composing music and writing the text for his opera, *Scenes from the Duplex,* based upon a play by Ed Bullins, stated that after several different approaches he found that the traditional recitative-aria structure worked best for him. Although familiar with Schuller’s *The Visitation* and Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess,* he wrote that he did not want his opera to be like either of them: “I incorporated

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musical devices key to modern jazz, such as, the twelve bar blues progression, improvisation, trading fours, call and response pattern, to name a few.\textsuperscript{18} He concluded his introduction by saying:

\ldots I had a dim notion that a jazz opera ought to in some way fuse two musics--jazz and the European concert music tradition. However, \ldots I discovered that a \textit{coexistence} of the music of one culture (jazz), with the genre of another (opera) would work best, and this is the sense in which I now use the term jazz opera.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Scenes from the Duplex} is the story of Velma (mezzo-soprano) and her husband, O.D. (bass). Velma feels neglected and seeks comfort in the arms of O.D.'s friend, Steve (tenor). After one evening with Steve, Velma returns home to find O.D. getting ready to go out, yet again. She begs him to spend the evening in with her, but he refuses. She blocks the door, trying to keep him from leaving. During their argument, O.D. kills Velma, who is carrying Steve's child. The score, in six scenes, calls for flute, clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, trumpet, drum set, marimba, vibraphone, cello, and acoustic bass (see Appendix E).

Pinckney's \textit{Scenes from the Duplex} has never been performed. In fact, the opera is the last serious composition that this professor of African-American Studies at the University of California at Davis has written. During an e-mail conversation with him on May 23, 1995, he stated that by the late 1970s he had "difficulties putting the notion of African-American musical culture together with 'art' music, especially opera," feeling that most African-Americans are uninterested in opera, thereby abandoning the hopes of

\textsuperscript{18}Tbid., xiv.

\textsuperscript{19}Tbid., xv.
appealing to either blacks or whites. Furthermore, he stated that "possibly referring to an opera as a jazz opera makes it more difficult for the work and the composer to achieve 'legitimacy' in the concert music world." 20

20 E-mail conversation with Warren Pinckney, May 23, 1995.
CHAPTER 5

1980 TO THE PRESENT: A "JAZZ OPERA" EXPLOSION

The Third Stream operas which have been created in the 1980s and the 1990s show not only the growing public's interest in the jazz opera genre, but also the importance, relevance, and quality that is found in them. This interest on the part of composers continues to increase. More ventures into this type of composition have taken place during the past twenty years than from 1900 to 1980 combined. Many of these recent works have been by lesser-known composers (see Appendix G). Unlike the years between 1922 and 1973, during which most of the works were composed by white composers (Gershwin, Harling, Krenek, Forrest, Blitzstein, Matshikiza, and Schuller), the years from 1974 to the present are represented primarily by works of African-Americans grounded in the jazz tradition (the Adderleys, Burrell, Pinckney, Davis, Ellington, Braxton, and Faddis), with the exception of George Gruntz.

Anthony Davis's X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X (1984-6)

A pianist whose music combines avant-garde jazz, neo-classicism, and funk, Davis (1951-) composed X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X, with two other family members: his cousin, Thulani, who wrote the libretto (her first), and his brother, Christopher, author of the story. When Christopher began writing the story in 1983, he envisioned X as a musical. Anthony transformed it into an opera, feeling that this was the appropriate
medium for X's story, after which Christopher Davis stated, "Basically, in opera, music provides the narrative. I thought it was a natural form to tell the story. You get a sense of scale, of someone who led mass movements, and of a lot of time."^1

While studying at Yale University, Davis was particularly fond of Wagner, Strauss, Mozart, Weill, and Janacek. He does not like to be labeled as a jazz composer. In fact, he included a clause in his contract prohibiting the use of the term "jazz opera" in publicity.  

Elaborating, he has written:

Calling something jazz is a way of dismissing the work, of saying it's not serious. As a black musician, you find that people try to keep you in the ghetto. With 'X,' I was trying to throw down the gauntlet on those categories. I think racism has deafened people to what the real American classical music is. Much of what makes it American is the African component. If you don't have that you just have the European tradition.^3

Writer Francis Davis (no relation) wrote that even though the score calls for improvisation among a small group of soloists, the singing is not in the jazz style.

According to Anthony Davis:

the idea of it being a poem freed us in many ways. It liberated us to think of metaphors and rhetoric, to see the ties among the political movements in our history. Some of our producers were disturbed that people wouldn't get a lot of the references. A key to us was to assume a lot. If you don't know who Garvey is, you're going to have to look it up. We've made the assumption that people have to know black history.^4

Davis continues:

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^3Quoted in Richard Herzfelder, "X Brings African Element to American Opera," Tallahassee Democrat, 5 October 1986, [n.p.].

the really propulsive element is the rhythm, to build the tension. Davis has also used devices from the 14th and 15th centuries, such as hocketing, in which several vocal or instrumental units share a melody, but emphasize different elements of it.5

X also uses a great deal of thematic repetition (see Appendix F), a compositional device that, according to Joseph Kerman, "forces the listener to relate one movement in the opera to another."6 Such a dramatic technique was not possible until continuous opera appeared during the nineteenth century. Davis's use of thematic repetition lies somewhere between the short, repetitious leitmotifs of Wagner and the longer, lyric repetitions of Verdi. Like Wagner, Davis's themes are flexible, can change rhythmically or harmonically to suit the drama, and are often associated with an idea. They can also recur many times throughout the opera, whereas some themes are presented in their entirety, less often, and do not represent a person or idea to the audience, but rather Verdi's use of thematic repetition by building rhythmic tension.

The opera traces Malcolm X's story from the age of five, in Lansing, Michigan, in 1931: the death of his father, a preacher who supports Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement, at the hands of the Klan; his ill-spent time on the streets resulting in imprisonment, where he first encounters the Muslim movement; preaching the word of Elijah Muhammad and black nationalism; making a pilgrimage to Mecca where he discovers universal brotherhood; and finally his martyrdom. It is in Mecca that Malcolm finds himself praying with men of all races, discovering that he no longer can preach

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5 Ibid.

6 Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (Berkeley: University of California Press), 131.
separatism. When he returns, his new beliefs widen the gap between his own faction and
the Elijah Muhammad faction, eventually leading to his murder.

Portions of X were first presented by the American Music Theater Festival at the
Trocadero Theater in Philadelphia on July 2-3, 1984. All of Act I, in its staged version,
and two scenes from Act II in concert version were given. The cast consisted of twenty-
one singers, all of whom remained on stage most of the time, two dancers, and a ten-piece
orchestra called Episteme. Unlike the traditional alteration of recitatives and arias, which
serve for the unfolding of the drama, X freely intermingles choral scenes, orchestral
interludes, and solos. The baritone, Peter Lightfoot, a 1992 Luciano Pavarotti
International Voice Competition finalist, sang the title role, alternating with James Tyeska.
Avery Brooks portrayed Street. So commanding was Brooks that he took over the role of Malcolm in the 1985 performance. Other members of the opening cast included
Priscilla Baskerville, Ruby Hinds, and Paul Spencer Adkins.

X was again presented by AMTF on October 16, 1985, at the Walnut Street
Theater in Philadelphia. The performing forces consisted of a thirty-five piece orchestra
and a thirty-two cast members. Francis Davis, in a Philadelphia Inquirer review of the
1985 performance, stated that the reason the opera is so good is the fact-based story. He
felt that while the strength of Davis's music alone would carry this work, its strong libretto
and story make it all the more powerful. He compared Davis's musical style to the
minimalist style of Philip Glass and Steve Reich, stating that his music is even more
"rhythmically insistent." He wrote:

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7Brooks also portrayed Hawk on the television series Spenser for Hire.
the 'minimalist' score and the larger-than-life story with a twentieth-century icon at the center is bound to invite comparisons of X to Glass's Satyagraha and Einstein on the Beach. But Davis's voicings are sleeker and more cosmopolitan than Glass', and a comparison to the work of Duke Ellington or Charles Mingus might be more in order. Davis's score does echo Glass and Reich, but it also echoes Ellington, Mingus, John Coltrane, and the ballads from Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story and Stephen Sondheim's Sweeney Todd.8

Another reviewer, Michael Caruso of Philadelphia's Main Line Times, took a less enthusiastic tone:

... long sketches of the libretto... are boring in the extreme. Not surprisingly, Davis's music during these stretches is rather dull, too. Davis's musical style isn't varied enough to warrant more than three hours of playing time, particularly since nearly 30 minutes of the libretto does little or nothing for either plot development or characterization. For example, the seemingly endless scene in Mecca could have been accomplished in no more than two minutes.9

After the Trocadero and AMTF performances and extensive revisions, X had its formal premiere at the New York City Opera on September 28, 1986, with the aforementioned group Episteme and the City Opera Orchestra. All of the primary characters played double roles. Ben Holt played Malcolm Little, Malcolm X, and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, Thomas Young portrayed Street and Elijah Muhammad, Priscilla Baskerville portrayed Malcolm's mother and later his wife, as well as a political figure in Act II, the Queen Mother.

Francis Davis pointed out that "the difference between a first full-length production and a grand premiere is apparently cultural politics: the City Opera has greater clout than the American Music Theater Festival."10 There were 2,800 attendees at the...
New York State Theater, including soprano Beverly Sills, jazz pianist Cecil Taylor, and Betty Shabazz, Malcolm's widow. Journalist Richard Herzfelder reported that after traditional funding was depleted, Sills stepped in to help find other aid. Financial contributors included the New York Amsterdam News, The Black United Fund of New York, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Essence Communications, the Ford Foundation, Francis Goelet, Local 375 of the Civil Service Technical Guild, the National Endowment for the Arts, Nzingha Society, the One Hundred Black Men, Westinghouse Electric Corporation, and Xerox Corporation. Despite the spartan staging the cost of the three performances was estimated at approximately $250,000.

Donal Henahan, in his day-after review of the New York City Opera production, stated that $X$ is approached as

incantatory theater: every musical idea is stated over and over, as is every staging idea. Mr. Davis' score is an amalgam of contemporary atonality, repetitive chant and what sounded to these untutored ears like modern jazz. Except for the jazzy outbreaks... vocalism generally alternates in style between monotonous chanting and the kind of spiky, keyless line that no human voice outside contemporary opera has been known to sing. Not for the first time at the City Opera, a libretto's English words were projected in supertitles.

In Michael Kimmelman's review of the City Opera performance he stated that, after the revisions, the opera was sung almost throughout, although he continued,

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one wishes all of it were [sung], for several of the remaining spoken sections, especially Malcolm's public speeches in the final act, strike a preachy tone uncharacteristic of the rest of the work. . . . A few sections have been added to the opera, including an aria for Elijah and a riot scene in the last act that looks a bit too much like a dance sequence from *West Side Story*. . . . The singers must follow simple but jagged vocal lines that tend not only to sound too similar to one another, but also can lapse into what might be called stock modernist dissonance.  

Francis Davis discussed the future of $X$ in relation to the diversity of the potential attendees:

The resolute modernism of his score is unlikely to appeal to opera-goers who have accepted Berg, Schoenberg, and Debussy only grudgingly . . . Jazz fans and blacks might shy away because of the air of privilege and foppish refinement surrounding opera. Other companies might view $X$ as nothing more than an equal-opportunity write-off, despite the imprimatur of the City Opera. Anthony Davis has reported that one prestigious West Coast company invited him to stage his opera in inner-city playgrounds this summer (his response was to ask if they would expect Philip Glass to mount a portable *Einstein on the Beach* outdoors), and Thulani Davis has said that many supporters of classical music have asked her why the composer can't do the opera with just his band and a small choir. I'm not sure the world is ready for a full-blooded black opera. . . . Like *Sweeney Todd*, $X$ persuades one that if all art aspires to music, then all music should aspire to opera.  

Continuing along the same line Penelope Bass Cope wrote "whether a primarily white opera audience will ever see beyond the myth of Malcolm X to feel comfortable with the opera's overriding theme of redemption remains to be seen."  

Peter Goodman's review raised some questions about the performance problems associated with $X$:

Can opera, that fading European art form, embrace Malcolm X's peculiarly

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American story of suffering and struggle? Can a standard orchestra blend with a band of improvisers? Can an opera repertory company present, to an overwhelmingly white audience, a work that creators consider 'an opportunity to throw down the gauntlet, to take on a serious political subject'?  

Duke Ellington's *Queenie Pie* (1986)

Duke Ellington (1899-1974) had several works brought to the stage. One of these, *Beggar's Holiday* (1947), based upon John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, was largely unsuccessful and ran for only one month. Roughly twenty-five years later, Ellington began work on music and words for *Queenie Pie*, which he termed a "street opera."

Ellington had discussed the possibilities of creating an opera with Edward Morrow in an interview appearing in *New Theatre* in December of 1935. In this same article Ellington was asked for his thoughts on *Porgy and Bess*. One of Ellington's criticisms was that Gershwin did not use the "Negro musical idiom," saying that "it was not the music of Catfish Row," but rather his own popular style.  

When Morrow asked Ellington if he would ever write an opera, Ellington said

No. I have to make a living and so I have to have an audience. I do not believe people honestly like, much less understand, things like *Porgy and Bess*. The critics and some of the people who are supposed to know have told them they should like the stuff. . . . Furthermore, an opera would not express the kind of things I have in mind.  

Mark Tucker reports that Ellington changed his mind several years after the *New Theatre* piece in an article entitled "Duke is Living for the Day When He Can Write an

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18The authenticity of this interview was questioned by Irving Mills in a response to the article. Mills's response can be found in Mark Tucker, *The Ellington Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press), 114-118.

19Ibid., 116.
Opera" that appeared in *Down Beat* in July, 1936. Another article appeared in *Down Beat* in October, 1938 entitled "Ellington Completed Negro Opera at Bedside," however, the piece to which this last article was referring, *Boola*, was never produced as an opera. Tucker says it was probably never finished.

James Lincoln Collier claims that part of *Boola* became a symphonic poem entitled, *Black, Brown and Beige*, which was performed by the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the first Carnegie Hall Concert in 1943. In a preview of this performance, Howard Taubman of the *New York Times* wrote that Ellington had taken some of the music from his unproduced *Boola* and created *Black, Brown and Beige*.\(^{20}\) The program notes for the Carnegie Hall Concert, by Irving Kolodin, stated that *Boola* had been on Ellington's mind since 1932, four years before the *New Theatre* article. In several analytical articles on *Black, Brown and Beige* in *Composer*, 1974-1975, Brian Priestly and Alan Cohen stated that Ellington's famous piece "Ko-Ko" was an excerpt from *Boola*'s incomplete score.

An Ellington opera that did make it to the stage is *Queenie Pie*, although it was not finished at the time of Ellington's death in 1974. The work is not mentioned by Ellington scholar Mark Tucker or James Lincoln Collier, but it is discussed by Derek Jewell in his *Duke: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (1977). Jewell wrote that in 1963 Norman Granz was interested in making a film of Ellington's life. Granz supposedly had a script of *Queenie Pie*, which he said had been written for Ella Fitzgerald. Just before his death, while in the hospital, Ellington again worked on *Queenie Pie*, which Jewell stated that the Public Broadcasting System originally commissioned the work for WNET in

\(^{20}\text{Ibid., 160.}\)
Boston in 1970, an "opera program [that] . . . was to be an hour-long television production, with Ellington as narrator." In 1972, Channel 13 (WNET) in New York commissioned him to complete work on the opera.

Director Maurice Peress reports that Ellington had had the story for this "number" opera in mind for a very long time, perhaps since 1962. Completion and staging of the work were postponed for many years because of copyright conflicts between Ellington's son, Mercer, and Duke's companion during the last few years of his life, Betty McGettigan, who was responsible for some of the lyrics and possibly some of the music. It would take about twelve years for these issues to be resolved and for Queenie Pie to be brought to the stage, an event which finally occurred in 1986. According to McGettigan "the last thing Duke asked me to do was to make sure it got produced, and now that's been done."\(^2\)

The libretto was completed by George C. Wolfe, lyrics were added by George David Weiss, dancing was incorporated, and Maurice Peress and Barrie Lee Hall, Jr. completed the music. Mercer Ellington oversaw the entire production\(^3\) with production notes and some twenty original or adapted numbers left by his father which aided in the completion of the opera.\(^4\)

\(^{21}\) Robert Palmer, "Ellington's 'Pie' is ready to cook," *Chicago Tribune* 18 September 1986, sec. 5, p. 9 (G).


\(^{24}\) Robert Palmer, "Ellington's 'Pie' is Ready to Cook," 9 (G).
The American Music Theater Festival\textsuperscript{25} showcased \textit{Queenie Pie} at the University of Pennsylvania's Zellerbach Theater in Philadelphia from September 18 to October 5, 1986. The reviews following the Philadelphia performance were unanimously favorable regarding the music. The cast received a standing ovation, after which the musicians continued to play well after the final curtain call. The story line, on the other hand, was less favorably received; one reviewer wrote that it "suffers from an almost terminal silliness."\textsuperscript{26} The same reviewer, stating that the show would never be successful in its present form, suggested cutting the two-hour production back to the originally intended one-hour length and perhaps recording the music without voices, which would no longer qualify it as an opera. One serious problem with this suggestion would have been the omission of such unanimously well received pieces as "Creole Love Call" (a pre-existing Ellington song inserted by musical director Maurice Peress) and "A Blues for Two Women."\textsuperscript{27}

A major performance problem in the Philadelphia production was the use of microphones, which often caused unbalanced sound. The singers were forced to remain near the front of the stage where the microphones were located.

\textsuperscript{25}The American Music Theater Festival, in Philadelphia, is known for bringing experimental works to the stage. This organization is to be lauded for staging works which it knows will not have the financial success of more traditional works. These workshops allow for performance and other problems to be worked out so the works can be refined, offering them the greatest opportunity for success.

\textsuperscript{26}Clark Groome, "Much to Overlook, Much to Enjoy in 'Queenie Pie,'" \textit{Chestnut Hill Local}, 25 September 1986, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{27}Collier relates that in 1927 one of Ellington's musicians, saxophonist Rudy Jackson, brought him an adaptation of a King Oliver tune called "Camp Meeting Blues." Ellington reworked the adaptation into his own song and called it "Creole Love Call." Oliver sued but lost the case. Ellington, feeling he had been double-crossed, replaced Jackson with Barney Bigard. James Lincoln Collier, \textit{Duke Ellington} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 81.
Queenie Pie received a series of performances by the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater in Washington, D.C., from October 18 through November 8, 1986, the first performance having been postponed ten days from the projected opening date of October 8. The reviews following the Washington performance were similar to those in Philadelphia concerning the story line and the music:

The Duke is still the King, and the crowning evidence can be found in Ellington's final work, the eclectic, electric [Queenie Pie] . . . Common sense and logic don't impede the escapist silliness of Duke Ellington's unfinished "street opera," which brims with swinging singing, energetic dancing, splashes of hot color—and even hotter jazz. 21

The story of the opera is as follows: Queenie Pie, played by Teresa Burrell, has won the Harlem beauty contest for twelve years straight. However, this year she is threatened by a young rival from New Orleans named Miss Café O'Lay (Patty Holley). Queenie, in order to maintain her status, goes in search of the Nucli tree, found only on a mythical, exotic island. This tree will provide her with eternal youth. During an dream sequence on the island in the second act, Queenie Pie finally comes to terms with growing older and returns to Harlem where she wins the contest yet again. Ellington's story of an aging beauty queen threatened by a young rival is likened by McLellan to "rock challenging . . . jazz [as] he looked ahead only a short distance to the end of his career and his life." 29

Queenie Pie mixes several vocal styles: operatic, scat, ballads, vocalise, and blues.


However, it is the orchestral music that carries this work. Karen Monson says:

The music of Duke Ellington and the current Duke Ellington Orchestra make it happen. Ellington fans and scholars will notice familiar numbers, somewhat revised, sometimes even more effective than the original. Opera traditionalists will glimpse the Marschallin of *Der Rosenkavalier* in Queenie Pie's monologue when she sings her soliloquy at her mirrored dressing table. They'll think of Gilbert and Sullivan when Queenie Pie ends up on her tropical island ("The Belle of the ball has become the belle of the bush"), and maybe spot remnants of Wagner's Rhine Maidens (updated with some sounds of the Supremes) in Queenie's associate hairdressers.\(^{30}\)

*Queenie Pie* remains unpublished and has never been recorded in its entirety.

Apparently the problems associated with its initial performances have never been addressed.


Louis Armstrong, Maxine Sullivan, the Benny Goodman Sextet, and others teamed up, in 1939 in New York, to stage *Swingin' the Dream*, a Jimmy Van Heusen adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The show played for 13 performances at Radio City Music Hall.

In 1987, another variation of this same work was composed by drummer Max Roach (1925-). Written for the San Diego Repertory Theater, the opera opened at the Lyceum Theater in Horton Plaza on August 19, 1987. Roach says:

Actually, jazz and Shakespeare go together quite well. Shakespeare has a lot of long monologues that you can deal with like John Coltrane of Miles Davis solos: Within the basic story line, there's ample opportunity to improvise [the musical lines] . . . The actors have the kind of improvisational freedom that jazz musicians

\(^{30}\)Monson, "Opera: The Duke's 'Queenie Pie,'" p. 32.
have. They're able to take a theme . . . [and] create something entirely new.\textsuperscript{31}

In the same article Roach made an important point about improvising and opera:

With this production . . . the actors have the kind of improvisational freedom that jazz musicians have. They're able to take a theme, or a monologue, and within that theme or monologue create something entirely new.\textsuperscript{32}

Roach composed the music for \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream} as he went along in order to give the actors/singers the same improvisational liberties as the musicians. The entire instrumental ensemble consisted of only four people who played keyboard, reeds, percussion, and bass. The cast consisted of fourteen people. Roach himself did not take part in the performance. Rather, Will Parson, founder of the Center for New Music at the University of Iowa, played percussion.

The work has not been performed since and is not published.

Anthony Braxton's \textit{Trillium} (1988- [in progress])

Anthony Braxton (1945-) is a major figure of the Third Stream movement. Not only a composer, he also plays the saxophone and clarinet, among other instruments. In 1966, after studying at the Chicago School of Music and Roosevelt University, he joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in Chicago, a group which included Ornette Coleman, John Cage, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. The years between 1969 and 1974 were spent in Europe, where he was in great demand as a performer.

\textit{Trillium} (also known as Composition 120) will comprise thirty-six interchangeable


\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.
acts in a series of twelve three-act operas. Excerpts were performed by the Creative
Music Orchestra at the London Jazz Festival in May of 1994, although, as of 1988, only
two acts have been completed. The operas are intended to express Braxton's
philosophical and mystical beliefs as found in his 1,600+ pages of Tri-Axium writings.\textsuperscript{33}

George Gruntz's \textit{Cosmopolitan Greetings} (1988)

Born in Basel, Switzerland, Gruntz (1932-) had established himself as a jazz
musician and composer following several first prizes and the Zürich Jazz festival in 1954,
1955, and 1957. During the 1960s and 1970s, he accompanied American jazz artists
during their European tours.

In addition to working with jazz and opera, Gruntz has experimented with jazz and
classical music in several instrumental compositions such as \textit{Perambulation I and II},
\textit{Concerto Sequenzes}, and \textit{Thundermove for Large Symphony Orchestra}. After becoming
the first non-British recipient of the British Council on the Arts award for composition,
Rolf Liebermann of the Paris State Opera commissioned Gruntz's first opera, \textit{Money}.\textsuperscript{34}

With libretto by outspoken playwright African-American Amiri Baraka (also
known as Leroi Jones), \textit{Money} was only a third completed when it was heard in a
workshop version at the off-Broadway theater, La Mama, as part of the KOOL Jazz
Festival in 1982. Gruntz reported that money problems were the main reason why the

\textsuperscript{33}These writings are currently unpublished. For a discussion of these writings see Graham Lock, \textit{Forces in Motion} (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988).

\textsuperscript{34}While resident director of the Hamburg State Opera, Liebermann commissioned Gunther Schuller's \textit{The Visitation}. 
work was not staged in Paris. The entire opera was to consist of eleven scenes, eighty performers, lasting four hours. *Money* employs recitative but the songs cannot be considered arias. The reviews of *Money* were good regarding the music, but the libretto, based on the lives of a black singer and a black saxophonist (the story of jazz drummer, Max Roach and jazz singer, Abbey Lincoln), was called embarrassing:

[Baraka's] dialogue . . . is amateurish and strained the actors' interpretive powers. For a poet, Baraka seems astonishingly insensitive to the possibilities of language.

Gruntz also composed two oratorios, *The Holy Grail of Jazz and Joy* (1985) and *Napoleon and Basel* (1988), before working on *Cosmopolitan Greetings* with librettist Allen Ginsberg.

This opera, which is more of a multi-media show, was again commissioned by Rolf Liebermann (commissioner of *The Visitation*). *Cosmopolitan Greetings* had its premiere on June 12, 1988 by the Hamburg State Opera. It is the story of the life of jazz and blues singer Bessie Smith. In addition to four singers, the work consists of three dancer-mimes, a string orchestra, and the Big Band of the North German Radio. One reviewer wrote:

... Mostly this three-hour show works very well indeed, and a spiffy Hamburg first-night audience gave . . . a whistling, stamping ovation . . . The climax is a really hilarious opera parody, with everyone dressed in full traditional costume and gradually crowding into one quadrant of the stage, with characters from nearly every famous opera blasting away in a huge free-jazz poutpourri topped . . . by Carmen, trumpeting the joys of freedom.

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The most recent "jazz opera" to come to the stage is Jon Faddis's (1953-) Lulu Noire, with libretto by Lee Breuer. Yet another American Music Theater Foundation production, the concert premiere was given on June 11 and 12, 1993 and again on June 9, 1995 as part of the Mellon Bank Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Jazz Festival. The 1993 performance was held at the Barclay Hotel in Philadelphia, which seats about 250. The 1995 performance, originally scheduled for the Philadelphia Convention Center, which seats 600, was changed to the 1993 location when AMTF was unable to find funding for publicity. AMTF requested that the space be donated and came up with a $3,000 advertising budget from outside sources. It is clear that the main difficulty in getting works produced is not always funding. Often, the problem is finding appropriate stages, performers, or advertising. Many innovative and experimental works might never get staged without the assistance of an organization such as AMTF devoted to coordinating all of the different elements required for production.

Lulu Noire is derived from Frank Wedekind's play, Lulu, upon which the Alban Berg opera is also based. Jazz singer Jon Hendricks performed the introductory number. The ensemble consisted of flute/saxophone, trumpet, trombone, piano, trap set, and bass, with one number being performed by jazz bassist Milt Hinton and composer/trumpeter Jon Faddis, not only directing but occasionally playing trumpet as well. The trombonist, Art Barron, doubled on didjeridu (a hollow, wooden, straight, natural trumpet, usually 1 to 1.5 meters in length, of Australian aboriginal origin), which was the highlight of the evening. The vocal cast consisted of two women (Stephanie Rice and Vivian Cherry) and three men
(Alan Harris, Kevin Mahogany, and Phillip Manuel).

The Philadelphia Inquirer's music critic, Lesley Valdes, wrote:

Faddis has composed a wonderfully integrated piece of music theater . . . . One of the work's most profound moments is a muted trio for the men; Manuel's theatrical abilities cannot be overestimated. So accomplished in Mahogany that the bass' jousting with trombonist Art Barron made you wonder which was the trombone, which the singer . . . . The music is so compelling it takes a while before you realize Lulu Noire isn't as dark as its source material. Jazz is celebratory even when it despairs . . . . Faddis's trumpet was the evening's tenor primo: piercing and splicing chromatic tones. 38

As was the case with X, Lulu Noire was funded by several grants from the William Penn Foundation, Philip Morris Companies, Inc., and the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation.

The work was commissioned by Mabou Mines with partial funding from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Of the twenty-one works discussed above, eleven scores are not published:

Harling’s *A Light for St. Agnes* (1925), Harry Lawrence Freeman’s *American Romance* (1927) and *The Flapper* (1929), James P. Johnson’s *De Organizer* (1938), Cannonball and Nat Adderley’s *Big Man* (1974), Dave Burrell’s *Windward Passages* (1979), Duke Ellington’s *Queenie Pie* (1986), Max Roach’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1987), Anthony Braxton’s *Trillium* (1988-), George Gruntz’s *Cosmopolitan Greetings* (1988), and Jon Faddis’s *Lulu Noire* (1993-95)—nine of these scores by eight of the ten African-American composers. Anthony Davis’s scores of *X* is published by G. Schirmer and Warren Pinckney’s score of *Scenes from the Duplex* is available in his dissertation from Princeton University. Seven of the eight white composers’ scores are published, the exception being George Gruntz, as stated above. Of the nine composers whose works are not published, eight of them, with the exception of Frank Harling, are jazz composers.

This is perhaps a more significant statistic than the racial statistic.

The works previously discussed are historically important precisely because of their relatively smaller number. This genre should never be discussed solely as if it is an African-American art form. As stated in the introduction, the racial composition of the composers is divided fairly evenly. This is a particular strength of this art form.

Aside from the problematic issues surrounding the existing works, the future is
promising. This is precisely why it is necessary to present these works together, albeit sometimes in very brief detail. In several cases, neither recordings nor scores were available so it may be that some works included here should not have been. This is a primary problem with haphazardly using a blanket term for dissimilar works—it leaves a researcher with nebulous information.

Although the works discussed in the preceding chapters are very diverse, they share several common traits, in addition to the characteristics outlined in Chapter One. One of these common traits is the positive reception of the music. This proves that the new sound which results from the coexistence of jazz and classical music is meritorious and exciting, particularly in the operas of the 1980s and 1990s. The libretto, however, has received the harshest criticism and based upon the conventional definition of opera, these works are largely undramatic and often boring on stage.

Another common trait is the difficulty in finding funding for production regardless of decade. An impetus for the creation and production of these works must be financial backing. Heretofore, jazz has not been allotted the same institutional support as the classical idioms:

Jazz composers do not enjoy the benefit of well-established institutional support systems, as do their classical and theatrical counterparts. They must apply for funding as individuals, which effectively rules out the possibility of raising a quarter of a million dollars for a single project. Major new operas are rare enough, but large-scale works of any kind by black composers associated with jazz are practically non-existent, because so few black jazz composers have been given the necessary carte blanche.¹

As opera is so very expensive to produce, it has been reserved mainly for the upper class.

This is a key factor in the appeal and success of many of these works. Because the composers are largely unknown to the normal opera-going public and/or the works are largely political, a comparably low turn-out is practically guaranteed.

The term “jazz opera,” as found in the New Grove Dictionary of Opera, should be redefined to encompass all of the variations which constitute this diverse genre. The debate over the viability of the use of jazz in opera should no longer be such an issue. The quality of the overall composition is what should be examined. It seems imperative that future works require jazz improvisation so that they may stand apart from those works which merely rely on simple jazz techniques such as the infrequent blue note or fox-trot rhythm. Improvisation will also continue to distinguish these works from traditional operas.

A unique requirement of the more recent operas is the necessity of a strong, trained performing group able to handle what is necessary to perform both “classical” music and jazz improvisation by having some training in each field. It is vital that the musicians can interpret the improvisational nature of these types of works.

These works may not be true operas, but rather musicals. This distinction may not be so important to date because the genre is still new and seeking definition. This issue will become more important and better defended as more of these works are composed and the basis on which to critique them becomes clearer.

Future composers, who would label their works as “jazz operas,” would be well-advised to be aware of the operatic genre, as well as the previous attempts at the fusion of the two genres. This will inhibit the random use of the term “jazz opera” so that some
standard conventions may evolve. Whether the composer's background is stronger in jazz or Western art music, to be trained in both areas allows the composer to produce a more impressionable and serious work.

A great deal of further research is possible. The unpublished scores should be pursued either for study or publication. Interviews with living composers would provide more insight into their background, training, and intended goals. Detailed harmonic analysis would provide more information about the techniques used and the degree of reliance on the jazz genre.

Finally, experimentation with these third-stream operas will continue to increase which will place greater demands on the singers and instrumentalists who perform these works. The challenge lies before future composers, librettists, and performers to continue to produce operas which rely on a purely American art form--jazz.
APPENDIX A

GEORGE GERSHWIN'S *BLUE MONDAY* (1922)

S. (Soprano)

I must admit al-tho I don't like Sun-day, I have a fit when I go thru blue Mon-day. Mon-day's the one day that my dice stops sweeping lose; they just re-fuse! That's when my cares are al-ways bigger! Ills cares are al-ways bigger.
SAM sweeps

I got the blue Monday blues.

Monday's the day your lovin' ma-ma shakes you.

Monday's the day the undertaker takes you.

Monday's the day that the wise guys choose to sit and
that's how I figure.

No use to work; snooze.

MIKE

His cares are always bigger.

SAM

I got the blue Monday.

SWEETPEA

I got the blue Monday blues.

SWEETPEA goes to piano

MIKE

SWEETPEA

SAM

Hello, Sweet Pea.

Hello, boss.

Hello, Sam.

How are you?
APPENDIX B

W. FRANK HARLING'S *DEEP RIVER* (1926)

Soft In De Moonlight
Banjo Song:

Lyric by
LAURENCE STALLINGS

Music by
FRANK HARLING

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APPENDIX C

ERNST KRENEK'S JONNY SPIELT AUF (1927)


**Shimmy (schulles Gramophone- Tempo)**

[Musiknoten und Text fortgesetzt]
APPENDIX D

GUNther SCHullER'S THE VISITATION (1966)
(The Band starts to fade.)

Slow Curtain

Verhang fällt allmählich
SCENE II

The Preacher / Der Geistliche

Curtain up.

Interior of a church: a simple wooden structure, pane and plate. It is a grim, grey, rainy day; pitter of rain on the roof; light daylight coming through the bare windows. On a main pillar, a high, narrow pulpit with a narrow, winding staircase. A colored minister is adjusting a lamp on the pulpit lectern.

C.J. enters quietly; shakes out his wet raincoat; walks toward the pulpit. The minister seems not to notice him.

Vorhang auf


C.J. tritt ein, auf, Schildet einem Regen der Gegenstand aus, gelang in der Kanzel. Der Geistliche scheint ihn nicht zu sehen.
APPENDIX E

WARREN PINCKNEY'S SCENES FROM THE DUPLEX (1979)
APPENDIX F

ANTHONY DAVIS'S X: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MALCOLM X (1984-86)
APPENDIX G

“JAZZ OPERAS” BY LESSER-KNOWN COMPOSERS
"JAZZ OPERAS" BY LESSER-KNOWN COMPOSERS

**Bernie Cash's *Prez* (1985)**

**Libretto:** Playwright Alan Plater

**Instrumentation:** Saxophones, trumpet, guitar, drums, piano, bass

**Duration:** Forty minutes

**Premiere:** Hull's Spring Street Theatre in London on April 16, 1985.

**Synopsis:** The tragic story of tenor saxophonist Lester Young and Billie Holiday, set in 1944.

**Notes:** Crescendo International reports that Young's solos from "Lady Be Good," "Shoe Shine Boy," "Back in Your Own Backyard," and "Lester Leaps In" have been transcribed as arias for the four singers. The work was well-received with the only criticism being that at forty minutes it was rather short. Includes a great deal of improvisation.

**Michael Fauss's *Sweet, Sweet Auburn* (1987)**

**Libretto:** Bonnie Pike

**Instrumentation:** Unknown

**Duration:** Unknown

**Premiere:** April 22, 1987 at the Midtown Theater in Atlanta.

**Synopsis:** Inspired by Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the story is transplanted to Atlanta, between the 1930s and the 1950s.
**Bob Brookmeyer's God in Wuppertal** (in progress as of 1989)

**Libretto:** In German by Gerold Theobalt, based on a book by Liza Kriswaldt.

**Instrumentation:** Full orchestra, small jazz ensemble, fifteen Voices, and a children's choir.

**Duration:** Unknown

**Premiere:** Work in progress

**Notes:** Commissioned by the Wuppertaler Buhnen in Wuppertal, West Germany. Brookmeyer is on the composition faculty at the Manhattan School of Music, as well as being a valve trombonist.

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**Leroy Jenkins's Mother of Three Sons** (1990)

**Libretto:** Ann T. Greene

**Instrumentation:** For solo voices (SMzATTTBarB- Bar), mixed chorus and orchestra.

**Duration:** Ninety minutes

**Premiere:** Munich Biennale, May 1990. New York premiere took place on October 19 followed by a performance with the Houston Grand Opera on June 25.

**Synopsis:** The story of a woman who gives birth to three boys with a tragic ending.

**Notes:** Commissioned by Hans Werner Henze. Jenkins does his own improvising. The holograph (140 leaves) is held by the New York Public Library.
Noa Ain's trio (1994)

**Libretto:** Unknown

**Instrumentation:** Three voices and four instruments (guitar, bass, piano, and violin)

**Duration:** One hour-long act

**Premiere:** Staged by AMTF at the Philadelphia College of Art on July 2-8, 1994.

**Synopsis:** The relationships of four generations of women.

Gina Leishman's Burning Dreams (1994)

**Libretto:** Scenes and lyrics by Julie Herbert and Octavio Solis, loosely based on Calderon de la Barca's *Life is a Dream* (1635).

**Instrumentation:** Six performers and seven musicians--accordion, piccolo, tenor sax, cello, glass harmonica (water-filled glasses), and charango, one always improvising.

**Premiere:** San Diego Repertory Theater on February 16, 1994, at the Lyceum Stage, Horton Plaza.

**Synopsis:** In eighteen dreams, sung in alternating English and Spanish. Story is of Anselmo (bass) whose wife, Leone, dies while giving birth to twins. A grief-stricken Anselmo attempts to murder the first twin (Rosaura). The second twin (Segismundo), remains in the womb, forever haunting Rosaura.

**Notes:** The National Endowment for the Arts's fourth largest grant for new musicals and operas. Although some reviews criticize the repetitious action and the too metaphoric libretto, the overall impression of *Burning Dreams* was largely positive.
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