

A FRENCH CONNECTION

Modernist Codes in the Musical Closet

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In 1919, in a Pennsylvania town, a nine-year-old boy summoned his courage, composed a letter, and set it out for his mother to find. The boy, then known as Sam, would grow up to be Samuel Barber, a prominent American composer and a gay man. His letter begins:

NOTICE to *Mother* and *nobody else*

Dear Mother: I have written this to tell you my worrying secret. Now don't cry when you read it because it is neither yours nor my fault. I suppose I will have to tell it now without any nonsense.

Having prepared the difficult ground, he continues:

To begin with, I was not meant to be an athlet [*sic*]. I was meant to be a composer, and will be I'm sure. I'll ask you one more thing.—Don't ask me to try to forget this unpleasant thing and go play football.—*Please*— Sometimes I've been worrying about this so much that it makes me mad (not very),

Love,

*Sam Barber II*¹

The tone and language leave little doubt but that this letter constitutes what we would call, in contemporary parlance, a coming-out statement. Sam Barber had already, precociously and secretly, come to terms with his irrefutable desire and resolved to follow it in spite of his society's expectations. The pursuit of this desire attached to a particular identity, and it was a dangerous one: as its (repeated) binary juxtaposition with athletics here makes clear, this identity was figured in opposition to conventional masculine and heterosexual positions.²

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But just what was this desire, this identity, so contrary and threatening to the prescribed norms of gender and sexuality, and so fraught with anxiety and heartache for this gifted son and (ostensibly) his mother? Was it the named object—music, and the identity of composer—that challenged the social order around this prominent upper-middle-class family? Or was it, following the semantics of the closet, the absent term—queerness—that resonated menacingly here, undenoted and thus everywhere connoted? Indeed, was it—*is* it—possible to disentangle one meaning fully from the other, musical desire from queer desire, musical identity from queer identity?

The answer to this last question, according to some recent discourse in queer music studies, is no. A seminal essay by Philip Brett, for example, constructs an extended and revealing correlation between musicality and homosexuality. Brett notes the deviant status of both roles (one privileged, the other punished), their close association in the popular imagination and queer vernacular (*musical* being insider code for “gay”), and their shared status as a putative moral threat—music’s place here being traceable back to Plato and Aristotle and their cautions about music’s effects on the citizenry and its youth. “Lurking beneath [these, Augustine’s, and Calvinist] objections against music,” Brett writes, “is the long tradition of feeling that it is different, irrational, unaccountable. . . . Nonverbal even when linked to words, physically arousing in its function as initiator of dance, and resisting attempts to endow it with, or discern in it, precise meaning, it represents that part of our culture which is constructed as feminine and therefore dangerous.” This gendered and highly charged construction of music/ality tints every musician’s identity, queer or straight: as Brett notes, “*All* musicians . . . are faggots in the parlance of the male locker room,” and hence the musical profession displays anxious, compensatory preoccupations with mastery, rigor, and competitiveness.³

Brett’s analysis illuminates perilously freighted congruities between musicality and homosexuality as perceived from without (and certain anxious reactions to these from within music). Suzanne Cusick reveals similar congruities, *pleasurably* freighted, through an intimate examination from within her own relationship with music as a lesbian, musician, and music-lover. She observes: “For some of us, it might be that the most intense way we express or enact identity through the circulation of physical pleasure is in musical activity, and that our ‘sexual identity’ might be ‘musician’ more than it is ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ or ‘straight.’ . . . If music isn’t sexuality, for most of us it is psychically right next door.”⁴ Further developing this line of speculation leads Cusick to posit an identity relation: “What if music is sex?” That is, “if sex [freed of reproductive associations] . . . is then *only* (only!) a means of negotiating power and intimacy through the circulation of pleasure,

what’s to prevent music from *being* sex, and thus an ancient, half-sanctioned form of escape from the constraints of the phallic economy?”⁵

Both music and lesbian sex, in Cusick’s figuring, allow a more diffuse channeling of pleasure than does the prevailing phallic economy, and “more varied positions than we think we’re allowed in regular life, . . . enabl[ing] us . . . to escape a system . . . of bewilderingly fixed categories, to wallow in the circulation of pleasures that are beyond danger and culturally defined desires.” Both realms afford freedom to choose and to change positions within the “power/pleasure/intimacy triad,” and consequently “no one accumulates the consolidated power we call ‘identity,’ because the pleasure of the game is living in a world free of fixed categories.”⁶

This last thought is one I’d like to appropriate for my purposes below, of considering categories of meaning and affiliation attaching to certain gay modernist composers. (It seems possible, if I read Cusick fairly, to do so in connection with these gay men’s status as musicians—thus without ascribing to them any special lesbianism beyond that mirrored, in Cusick’s account, by any true music-loving.) We might note the extent to which Cusick’s first-person narrative of musical experience, while unmistakably informed by late-twentieth-century sensibilities and critical perspectives, coincides with earlier modernist testaments to the intimate and desirous nature of musical experience, from ardent music-lovers including not only the young Sam Barber but, in the following lines, T. S. Eliot:

music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.⁷

Eliot’s cathetic representation of a consummate self-music merging describes the musical experience characteristic of many music-lovers, hearers and players alike. Cusick circles near this idea in her reference to the nonaccumulation of identity in both musical and lesbian-sexual activity, and later homes in on it: “The moments wherein I have felt most fully alive, most fully myself, have been when I have *become* the music.” We might invoke Cusick’s and Eliot’s descriptions of musical experience to address the question (paraphrasing Leo Bersani) “Who are you when you listen to or perform a piece of music?” The answer they suggest is “I am the music—no longer myself and/or more fully myself.” For in both of their accounts the supreme musical experience is a music-induced dissolution (possibly with the simultaneous intensification) of subjective identity, an experience in connection with which the phrase *musical identity* resonates at once paradoxically and polysemously.⁸

What Cusick and Eliot describe here is an experience and a perception of music as a potent, pleasure-giving solvent, capable of dispersing and thus subverting identity. It is useful to acknowledge this perception, which very likely played a central role throughout the twentieth century in many musicians' self-identification as musicians. But such acknowledgment must not be taken to imply that an involvement with music allows a musician, any more than anyone else, to escape the sociopolitical operations and impositions of identity categories (on the contrary, the musician's identification may only guarantee more, and more arcane, categories, as Ned Rorem's formulations [below] suggest). Indeed, Cusick's rhapsody on the pleasures of "living in a world free of fixed categories" underscores the extraordinariness, the anomaly, of the escape experience that music and/as lesbian sex affords, from the perspective of one who lives within the "fixed categories," musician and lesbian, that accrue to this very experience. We might similarly note that young Sam Barber's "worrying secret" circa 1919 was a problem of identity, of being a composer versus being an athlete—and not one of (say) compositional versus athletic *acts*.

Brett's and Cusick's notions of musical and/as (homo)sexual identity appeared in the last decade, but their aptness to discourses of musical modernism is readable through various historical texts. Brett's analysis of the sexual anxieties attending Anglo-American musicality is, in fact, formulated specifically in relation to the midcentury modernist composer Benjamin Britten. Proximately, a recent body of historical and critical writings evinces the precarious position of musical identity under American modernism. These include several studies of Charles Ives that, following decades of scholars' glossing over his vociferous gyno- and homophobia, at last confront his discourses and situate them in their cultural-historical context, as expressions of prevailing contemporaneous musical and gender anxieties.⁹ Catherine Parsons Smith's excavation of popular and professional musical literature from the 1910s and 1920s exposes, moreover, a preoccupation and panic, in post-World War I modernism, about the perceived emasculation and feminization of American music.¹⁰ All of this work attests to the forceful operations of identity in this period, and to the gender and sexual anxiety attending musical identity in particular, and thus provides crucial contextualization for any consideration of modernist composers, male or female, straight or queer.

My discussion up to this point sketches a general notion of musical identity as viewed variously from without—that is, from the perspective of a larger context of modern American culture. The following excursus emanates from an individual subject position marked by acutely self-conscious musical (and other) identifications, and from this inside vantage point refracts a dazzling plurality of highly particularized modern musical identities.

Harpists (of whom, like hairdressers and cooks, most are women though the best are men) are all homosexual—the males, that is. Male string players are all Jewish and all heterosexual. Male brass players, wind players, and percussionists, though not necessarily Jewish, are also all heterosexual, at least those in orchestras; among soloists the percentage wavers. Of male pianists, also mostly Jewish, half are gay. ("Gay" was not standard usage then, at least among straights.) Male organists, all gay. Of classical singers no tenors are gay, most baritones are, but few females. In jazz the reverse obtains: the women are lesbian, the men are macho—but alcoholic. Choir directors, all gay. Among composers, who until the war had been mainly Gentile and defiantly effete (Thomson, Griffes) or defiantly virile (Ives, Sessions) the ratio was fifty-fifty. The ratio remained fifty-fifty. Stravinsky's flock of Americans, which overlapped with Aaron Copland's, was straight and Jewish. Virgil [Thomson]'s was mixed. (Rumors still abound that Aaron championed mainly his gay entourage. What entourage? Leo Smit, Irving Fine, Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero? For a gay goy like me he never lifted a finger.)

This taxonomy, indeed cosmology, was first articulated in 1948 by Ned Rorem, then twenty-five, in an informal conversation with Alfred Kinsey. The conversation followed a formal interview that the young composer granted for Kinsey's now famous sex research. Some forty-six years later, in his 1994 memoir *Knowing When to Stop*, Rorem reproduces the passage, adding some postscript annotations and an explanatory introduction: "Since I knew more than Kinsey about who 'was' and who 'wasn't' among musicians, I generalized as follows. . . ."¹¹

Surely there are any number of points in this excerpt on which one might comment. One could start with the breezy, smug misogyny with which Rorem launches his list. Or with Rorem's bold brandishing of sensitive labels like *gay*, *alcoholic*, *Jew*, and *goy*; its inflection by his self-identification elsewhere with three of these, *gay*, *alcoholic*, and *goy*; and his self-avowed erotic penchant for persons under the remaining one, *Jew*.¹² One might also remark Rorem's tone, particularly his terse pronouncements in absolute terms of "all," "none," or "fifty-fifty," which underlines the need for any attuned reading here to be conversant with classic gay camp, and hence to locate itself at camp's rhetorically potent juncture of grave seriousness and transparent artifice.

Another telling aspect of Rorem's ascriptive litany is its construction as a taxonomy, and one with a specifically sexual dimension. Sexual taxonomy-making enjoyed a heyday around the mid-nineteenth century, when various categories of

human sexual type were posited, such as the masturbator, the pedophile, and the zoophile, and sexual definition became a central locus of modern meaning and power.¹³ But the taxonomic impetus later radically condensed (as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown), leaving only one classificatory lens—that focusing on the gender configuration between an individual and her or his chosen object—to determine *tout court* what would come to be known as “sexual orientation.”¹⁴ Rorem’s taxonomy of musicosexual types is thus an undertaking thoroughly modern in spirit and puts a special, musical twist on the constructions of sexologists like Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing, Hirschfeld, and Freud.

Taxonomic in form, in substance Rorem’s litany invokes nearly all of the most pervasive and powerful categories of social differentiation and hence of identity construction operative in America circa 1948—namely, gender, race-ethnicity, and sexuality, arising here in terms of male versus female, Jew versus Gentile, homo versus hetero. Rorem’s particular taxonomy emerges from the linkage of these differentiations, central and hegemonic, with a second set, arcane and largely opaque for the majority of his contemporaries: harpists versus string players, section players versus soloists, tenors versus baritones, Stravinskians versus Thomsonites. As such, it speaks from the doubly rarefied intersection of the already rarefied realms Rorem occupied, as a member of both the contemporary gay subculture and the American classical music world (this latter referred to by Thomson as “Our Island Home”).¹⁵ Hence Rorem’s deliciously droll excerpt also deserves our serious attention: his armchair-taxonomizing bespeaks a vantage point significantly and rather singularly shared by the members of his important artistic circle and was, I propose, vitally implicated in their constructions of identity, style, and musical idiom.

Of course, artistic circles are dynamic and infinitely overlapping; circles of various sizes and constituencies coexist in a given pool of contemporaries, and any such circle may be selected for the purposes-of-discussion at hand. For present purposes I’ll have frequent recourse to the one comprising Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson as principals, and their more or less junior colleagues Marc Blitzstein, David Diamond, Leonard Bernstein, and Ned Rorem. Several significant identity attributes are shared among these dramatis personae: all were/are white, male, American modernist composers active in the decades around the mid-twentieth century; all associated closely with a plurality of the others; all worked within a tonal idiom; and all were/are gay.¹⁶

Accordingly, one might argue for the inclusion of composers like Samuel Barber, John Cage, and Lou Harrison in the present group, but I view them as occupying skirting circles, as I do (for example) William Flanagan, Donald Fuller, Robert Helps, Lee Hoiby, Colin McPhee, Gian Carlo Menotti, Daniel Pinkham, and Charles

Turner. One might also argue that Copland and Thomson themselves should occupy separate circles, as indeed Rorem indicates at points in his writing (thus reproducing the dipolar archetype accruing to Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Brahms and Wagner). But ample evidence points to multiple overlappings of Copland’s and Thomson’s circles—via Rorem and Paul Bowles, for instance—and moreover to their own long-standing and mutually important collegial association. Rorem himself, amid his talk of “rival factions,” dubs Copland and Thomson the “father and mother of American music,” which suggests a closer conjunction even as it drops camp-coded clues to their respective sexual and gender styles.¹⁷

In defining a gay modernists’ circle encompassing Copland, Thomson, and the others, I emphatically make no claims for the inevitability of this particular grouping, nor for any naturalized, numinous, or essential gay musical brotherhood, aesthetics, or idiom. This gay composers’ circle is a construction—and here, at least partly a heuristic. It is not my construction, however, but one that has operated historically for more than half a century. Within the history (extending as far back as Ives, but still mostly buried) surrounding a binary opposition of “gay composer” and “straight composer” and its workings in American musical modernism, this circle of New York gay composers has been regarded as a more or less cohesive body since the 1940s (certain composers being added or subtracted in various accounts). This point is illustrated most dramatically by the conspiracy theories that centered on the group in their forties prime and charged them with operating as a secret cabal to control the serious music world from their gay Manhattan headquarters, denying access and power to straight male colleagues in America while Britten, Pears, and Tippett ran the London branch.¹⁸

Another invocation of the gay modernists’ circle attests to this grouping’s enduring epistemic vitality in present-day musical thinking and discourse: that is, Susan McClary’s 1994 statements in the *New York Times* on American modernist composers, which are poised so as to cluster the “gay” modernists together and in connection with the attributes “tonal” and “popular,” in contradistinction to modernists figured as “straight,” “atonal,” and “elitist.”¹⁹ These formulations, like those of the 1940s conspiracy theorists, are not merely descriptive but overtly evaluative. But whereas the conspiracy theorists reproduce both the straight-gay dichotomy and the status quo homophobic valuation it serves to enforce, McClary’s statements reproduce the dichotomy and radically transvalue it.

I read McClary as saying not simply that straight modernists happened to be difficult (read: complex, atonal), elitist, and unpopular, and their gay contemporaries accessible (read: simple, tonal) and popular, but rather that she infers some more significant connection, beyond random coincidence, between modernist

composers' sexual identities and their musical and ideological styles. That McClary's public articulation of such a notion is rare, perhaps unprecedented, does not mean that she invented it ex nihilo; on the contrary, her statement frankly references a cluster of attributions long circulated in more furtive and disavowed, hence quite potent, forms. We can find elements of the same cluster in Ives's fulminations against "sissy" composers and their putatively ruinous influence, and in Howard Hanson's purges of homosexuals from the Eastman School of Music, both of which exhibit a concern—or more precisely, an obsession—with classifying musicians in hetero/homosexual terms, and attach to the "homo" term the same fiercely negative valuation.²⁰

But there is another, nearly opposite, historical phenomenon evinced here, particularly in Ives's rhetoric: that of a musical discursive practice remarkable for its preoccupation with "homosexual" precisely as this does *not* attach to actual persons. When Ives remarks of Chopin, for example, that "one just naturally thinks of him with a skirt on, but one which he made himself," the simultaneous effeminizing and queering implications of the statement are unmistakable.²¹ Yet Chopin was, as Ives surely knew, a conspicuously heterosexual figure, famously associated with a female lover, George Sand (among other female love objects). Thus a literal reading, one that called into question Chopin's normative sexuality, would render Ives's remark meaningless. But in fact the remark was abundantly meaningful within the music world, where it was understood in its proper function as music criticism—as calling into question, on multiple fronts, the value of Chopin's music by invoking terms of gender and sexuality. Ives placed his remark into an established music-critical tradition in which qualities of gender and sexuality were made to *figure* qualities of musicality. Indeed, Chopin's "skirt" here is a complex and heavy garment: it weaves together scorned images of the old European cultural order, French aristocracy, and their perceived music-stylistic emblems, and presents these in the form of ultimate fear and loathing, a feminized, emasculating object.²² Within the present argument Ives's modernist rhetoric may ramify in yet another direction: for whereas in Ives we see queer sexuality encoding certain musical meanings, in Sam Barber we saw the converse, musical designations encoding sexual meanings.

We can find further illustration of the modernist musicosexual order, and of the reciprocity of musical-homosexual coding just noted, in the story of Virgil Thomson's first meeting with Ben Weber. Thomson began, "I understand that you are a serialist composer." "Yes," replied Weber. "And I understand," Thomson continued, "that you are a homosexual." "Yes," Weber again replied. "Well," sniffed Thomson, "which is it because you can't be both."²³ Among the American

serialists of his generation, which included Perle, Babbitt, and Carter, Weber was indeed the only homosexual.²⁴ With his tongue-in-cheek mandate Thomson acknowledges (at least half seriously) the centrality of musicosexual taxonomies, and shows a self-conscious awareness of their regulatory force in the music world. He thus also describes some contours of the landscape he inhabits: it contains serialist and nonserialist composers, who are, to whatever extent, heterosexuals and homosexuals, respectively.²⁵ And we should not be misled by the absolute terms in which Thomson states the correlation: when he has finished, neither category, serialist/nonserialist or heterosexual/homosexual, is indicated as the progenitor or prime determinant of meaning; indeed, they appear as mutually constituting, each figuring the other. What *is* indicated by Thomson's characteristic tone is his legendary and epigrammatic camp—a crucial point, as mainstream ignorance of camp codes has at times given rise to consequential misreadings of Thomson's words and his music.²⁶

Now, having made my bid to reconstitute this group of gay modernists, I should explain my motives in doing so: generally I hope to engage with the still-resounding question of what an artist's homosexuality might have to do with his or her work, and more specifically with the question of how these particular artists managed to achieve preeminence in the high-culture mainstream, while residing in certain stigmatized sociocultural margins. My approach to both questions involves examining constructions of the composers' personal and professional identities and of compositional idioms, within and against prevailing cultural contexts. Here I shall consider the role of the usual identity binarisms—like gender, race, and sexuality—plus a few far less usual that emerge as potentially meaningful among this group.

A primary thrust of my inquiry, in other words, is to discover the identifications and affiliations by which members of this circle "composed themselves" as artists and individuals in the context of cultural and artistic modernism. How did these gay men forge public lives, careers, and successes as artists amid the newly refined mechanisms of modern sexual classification and pervasive "homosexual panic" (in Sedgwick's sense)?²⁷ And by what means did they compose *us*? What might it mean that the long-awaited goal of a distinct "American style" in serious music was realized at last by (most famously) Copland, a Brooklyn-bred Jew, communist, and homosexual who rendered musically vivid an America of prairie cowboys and pioneer newlyweds?²⁸ Or that the quintessential boy-girl romance in modern American musical theater, *West Side Story*, was the fruit of a collaboration among the gay artists Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins, and Stephen Sondheim? And what is at stake in acknowledging such facts of gay lives, achievements, and presence so long and so fiercely silenced?

My purpose in the present essay is to open up these questions and to begin to formulate some workable approaches to them.²⁹ But, to provide at least a partial answer to the huge, indeed closet-size, question I just left resounding: surely one thing at stake in such acknowledgment is the disclosure of the central role of homosexual persons and sensibilities in a modernist musical idiom that came to define the very essence of twentieth-century American national identity—of *mainstream* America, even, in all its radical disidentification with queerness. The obvious irony here, in the fact that queer artists should have served as architects of American identity as such, is one that I shall call into question: such irony may be more apparent than real, insofar as the modern figure of the homosexual as outsider shows a marked resonance and compatibility with modern conceptualizations of artistic identity and genius—as I shall elaborate below.³⁰

Recently, I discovered several intriguing themes shared among members of the modernist circle named here—the circle of Thomson, Copland, and the rest—and began to contemplate their possible significance.³¹ I noted certain shared musical-biographical motifs in addition to the composers' homosexual identification, including foreign apprenticeship, especially in Paris; studies with Nadia Boulanger; self-alignment with things French, often in express opposition to things German; and cultivation of a tonal compositional idiom, usually pursuing clarity and economy.³² I shall argue that these motifs provide key elements of an influential definitional axis—masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, complex/simple, atonal/tonal, German/French—along which gay modernists created identities for themselves and American music, and some non-gay-identified colleagues and commentators targeted them with homophobic censure and conspiracy theories.

The elements of this axis begin most fundamentally at the modernist fixation with identity, already alluded to—with classifying subject and object in terms of race, nationality, gender, sexuality, and other individual and collective, personal and professional identity constructs. Another preoccupation, carried over into modernism from romanticism, is that of defining the identity of the artist. This concern connects readily with the covetous desire that attaches to the artist's identity and certainly, as I have discussed, to the identity of the musician. Such desire is inspired in music's devotees by its extraordinary penetrative powers, and exacerbated by cultural constructions of identity and talent that stand as potential barriers (and avenues) to one's achieving musician status.³³ Illustration of this desire can be found in the considerable energy with which musicians routinely map their own lineages within the classical music world, as when, for example, a pianist declares herself a student of a student of Liszt.

The generalized romantic-modern definition of the artist is cast in terms of the outsider, a singular individual, specifically male and specifically positioned outside society. I would point out that the modern homosexual, a figure born at the twilight of the nineteenth century, is likewise defined above all in terms of his or her positioning outside society and its norms—which outsider status here is further inflected as degenerate or pitiable, et cetera. Thus we see a congruity between the coveted identity of musician—or, in its most artistically exalted form, composer—and the ostensibly abject identity of homosexual, and hence the potential for reassignment or at least slippage between their conventionally opposing valuations. In other words, the parallels between the identities of composer and homosexual open up possibilities for a depreciation of the former, an appreciation of the latter, and even for the existence of some special correlation between the two.

We know from the reactive vitriol of figures like Ives and Hanson that the possibility of music's depreciation-by-homosexual-association did register on certain non-gay-identified parties. A less ponderable question is whether the foregoing cluster of possibilities registered, presumably with different effect, on persons themselves simultaneously occupying both homosexual and composer categories. For to confront this question would entail acknowledgment that homosexual-identified modernist composers might have found space in which to regard their sexuality, in relation to their creative-artistic identity, as a nonliability—or even as a special, inborn, and exclusive *asset*.³⁴ Hence this question is “less ponderable” because it is fraught with taboo, colliding as it does not only with the prevailing heterosexism and homophobia of American culture but with its idealized images of a caste-free democratic social structure (which would reject any such notion of inborn privilege).

It is also possible, of course, that the same implications—of homosexuality as a creative asset—registered on nongay colleagues and observers, and contributed (as jealousy) to the homophobic anxiety and hostility that attended and sometimes erupted around the gay modernists' circle. And indeed, in a related vein, one might reasonably wonder whether fulfilling the identity requirements of the modern artist was not in some ways easier for Copland, Thomson, and company than for such compatriots as Hemingway, Pollock, and other macho modernists whose attainment of outsider status exacted such a heavy, seemingly effortful toll in self-destruction.³⁵

As to whether gay modernist composers themselves might actually have conceived of their sexual and creative-artistic identities in positive relation to one another, I would point to the intriguing testimony of Lou Harrison, who recently referred to his having “early learned” that Tchaikovsky and “the divine Mr. Handel”

were gay, like the two prominent American modernist composers, Henry Cowell and Virgil Thomson, whom he identifies as his principal mentors.³⁶ We must remember that “early” in Harrison’s (b. 1917) career the official knowledge on Tchaikovsky not only assiduously ignored homoerotic possibilities, but plied heterocentric insinuations and fictions focusing on his ephemeral marriage and on his relationship with his patron Madame von Meck. And apropos Handel, the first musicological discussion to raise any question of his possible homosexuality—Gary Thomas’s 1990 presentation to the American Musicological Society—followed Harrison’s “underground” revelation at a half century’s distance, and even at that late date aroused considerable controversy in the mainstream. Here, however, I am not so concerned with the veracity or verifiability of any claims, past or present, about Handel’s homosexuality. What interests me, rather, is a kind of folkloric circulation of knowledge within a particular substratum of the serious music world, that of queer musicians.³⁷

To date, little if any light has been shed on the workings of the gay composers’ oral tradition illustrated here, or on the mechanisms by which its knowledge was gleaned and conveyed. On the latter point I shall posit two possible scenarios, in the form of questions: Did gay modernist composers reach a verdict on Handel’s sexuality contemporarily and intuitively, via posthumous gaydar readings of his music, texts, and dramas? Or did word of Handel’s social and sexual liaisons carry through generations of musicians, from his associates, lovers, and pupils, to theirs, and so on, over some 180 years down to Harrison and his circle of gay classical musicians?

As a longtime denizen of the classical music world and its queer subculture, I find both of these possibilities viable. But clearly, no matter how his notions about Tchaikovsky and Handel reached him, Harrison’s mention of them is situated precisely in a sentence that defines his own place in a musical lineage. And it is specifically a *gay* musical lineage. He begins, “My two main mentors, Henry Cowell and Virgil Thomson, were gay,” before leaping historically back (and geographically over) to retrieve Tchaikovsky and Handel.³⁸ Others, including Harrison’s own students (one of whom is among *my* former students), could undoubtedly deepen and widen the genealogy thus sketched, as in: the gay Henry Cowell taught not only the gay Lou Harrison but likewise the gay John Cage (who also studied with the straight Schoenberg).³⁹ Cage’s friend Harrison worked as an assistant to the gay Virgil Thomson, as did the gay Ned Rorem, who would years later teach (*my* former classmate) the lesbian composer Jennifer Higdon—and so on. One could go very much farther with this, and what is perhaps most remarkable is that so many musicians do. Indeed, classical musicians cultivate a keen awareness of their place

in an extensive musical family tree—and hence of their membership in certain musical communities, and of the attendant myth and lore—and they make such awareness a fundamental basis of their artistic and personal identities.

Surely this was the case with the gay modernist circle named here, who defined their place in relation to various identifications, several of which I have already touched on: aesthetic simplicity, tonality, homosexuality. One further identification, Frenchness, functioned centrally, I propose, to ground and to interlink these others—a French connection, as it were. Frenchness was othered, effeminized, and sexualized both from the vantage point of Englishness, which infused American cultural views generally, and that of Germanness, which was the basis of American serious music culture particularly. The meaning of Frenchness in modernism was further inflected by Paris’s status as the arts and culture capital of the world in the 1920s, when its cultural scene was specifically lesbian-ruled. The conventional attributions to Frenchness are inscribed in language, where it encodes the sensual, sexual, elegant, and exotic and is a particular preoccupation in gay vernacular. Indeed, within certain quarters of modern American gay subculture, signs of Frenchness have been equivalent to signs of queerness. This is illustrated variously in the classic gay novel *Dancer from the Dance*, as when one character—in camp parody of an epigrammatic style itself characteristically French—identifies the “two requirements for social success with those queens in the Hamptons: a perfect knowledge of French and a big dick.”⁴⁰

Members of the Copland-Thomson circle were generally well endowed in their knowledge of French—language and culture. Beyond this, they manifested French musical affiliations and Francophile mannerisms to differing degrees and in different registers. Copland placed Frenchness—against Germanness—at the heart of his musical identity and his accountings of his compositional approach. A notably unpretentious, unflamboyant personality, he nevertheless drew repeatedly on certain favored French idioms, particularly in his teaching and discussions of music—Boulanger’s *dépouillement* and *grande ligne* being among these.⁴¹ Thomson developed his French musical affiliations even more elaborately, across multiple dimensions, including his approach to orchestration, which he ascribed to a tradition that he anatomized and identified as French and essentially transparent, as distinguished from one identified as German and essentially dense. Thomson’s primary musical allegiance was to (the ultra-French) Satie, and his trademark verbal style accrued, in Rorem’s account, to his “sp[eaking] French in English.”⁴² Diamond identifies two French composers, Ravel and Satie, as his earliest and most significant influences.⁴³ Rorem affiliates primarily with (the ultra-French and ultraqueer) Poulenc, and exhibits musical and personal French identification to an

obsessive, all-encompassing, and often (knowingly) absurd degree. “I went to France because I was already French, not the other way around,” he writes characteristically: Rorem’s discourse is rife with such quips, “these glib—these *French*—truisms,” in which both form (concise and self-contradictory) and content indicate the selfsame concern with distilling essential Frenchness.⁴⁴

Concerning the (mainly French) expatriations of the gay modernist composers, I would point out that these are first of all readable as literalization of the outsider status they had already occupied—variously as secret, open secret, or nonsecret—at home in the States. Second, their creating self-consciously American music while living abroad might be read as emblem, precursor, or synecdoche in relation to their careers overall, as native artists defining a voice for America while, to an important extent, residing outside its sociocultural limits. In expatriating and affiliating with Frenchness specifically, these gay modernists became affiliated with its general valences—of culture, elegance, sensuality, queerness—and its art-musical valences—of blurry, effeminized other, outside and against the Austro-German masterwork mainstream.

Besides turning away from the masters, members of this circle revered a mistress, Nadia Boulanger.⁴⁵ Copland and Thomson in the early twenties were among her first American pupils, followed in the later twenties by Blitzstein; Diamond, with Copland’s urging, became a pupil in the thirties; and Rorem was affiliated with Boulanger throughout his midcentury years of expatriation in Paris. Boulanger’s Gallic orientation to the individual and his or her singular, presumably inborn nature (*la nature bête*) seems to have resonated deeply with these gay composers. In any case, affiliating with Boulanger, they linked with the Stravinskian pole of the reigning binarism, Schoenberg versus Stravinsky. And they further linked with an aesthetic orientation to directness and *dépouillement*, or stripping away, and to a tonally based idiom.

These gay composers linked, moreover, with each other, professionally and personally, and hence collectively constructed and circulated “tribal” lore and meanings, in connection with which they forged musical selves, idioms, and oeuvres. In an age obsessed with identity categories, they lived under the headings of composer, American, and homosexual, and they infused their lives, personas, and work with signs and experiences of Frenchness—which further aligned them with coded resonances understood, if rarely acknowledged, from within and without their circle: resonances linking sexual, national, and stylistic positions and thus defining signifying codes importantly operative in musical modernism.

Recognizing and unpacking these codes may clarify and complicate any number of issues in musical modernism, concerning the activities and work of

artists both gay and straight. One such issue concerns the antiromantic, antifeminine, and hypermasculine impulses of musical modernism, in connection with which Catherine Parsons Smith exhorts that we “investigate whether there was a different, more broadly defined, perhaps less hostile or more gender-inclusive form of modernism that until now has been wholly hidden from view.”⁴⁶ Might this description apply to the modernism of the gay tonalists considered here? Certainly not by standards of gender inclusivity: to my knowledge, no serious claim for this circle’s special advocacy of or involvement with women composers has been put forward. Indeed, theirs was a markedly homosocial male sphere (albeit no more so than the mainstream modernist compositional establishment, whose exclusion of women was already virtually complete).⁴⁷ And notwithstanding certain important associations with women artists—including those with Boulanger, Thomson’s with Gertrude Stein, Copland’s with Martha Graham—such expressions of misogyny as typify the period are readily located in the annals of this circle.

Smith identifies an antiwoman impetus in the modernist reaction against romantic Americanism, and one might similarly assert that the gay modernists’ antiromantic aesthetic position perpetuated the misogynist status quo.⁴⁸ But here is where we can indeed detect a kinder, gentler musical modernism, one marked by sexual difference. For the musical romanticism against which Copland, Thomson, and Rorem (in particular) positioned themselves was specifically German romanticism (whose continuation they—like Schoenberg himself—heard in the modernism of Schoenberg and his followers).⁴⁹ In locating their musical affiliations and idioms outside and against the Germanic mainstream, these gay composers were also repudiating the tradition that had been most assiduously and successfully directed toward containment and quashing of music’s effeminizing threat. This latter was effected through the great-man and masterwork ideologies of the Germanic musical tradition and, as Brett argues, through its “Teutonic abstraction” and hierarchical ordering, by which music could be appropriated for patriarchal purposes and its sensuous, irrational, feminized qualities disowned, kept at bay.⁵⁰

The sensuous, irrational, and feminized, meanwhile, were alive and well in the French tradition—at least according to its critics and, at times, even its proponents. The gay modernists, in staking their music to French ideals, reclaimed qualities of music elsewhere rejected as feminine, and opposed the patriarchal authority of canonic musical Germanness. Such opposition could include self-conscious resistance to the reigning musical ideology of abstraction, as it does when Thomson, displaying a critical acumen no less sharp than his tongue, upbraids Copland for perpetuating the conventional wisdom of analytic listening in his just-published book *What to Listen for in Music*:

Your book I read through twice and I still find it a bore. . . . Not that [it] doesn't contain a hundred wise remarks about music. But it also contains a lot of stuff that I don't believe and that I am not at all convinced you believe. Supposing you do believe that analytic listening is possible for the musical layman, it is still quite possible and not at all rare to believe the contrary. It even remains to be proved that analytic listening is possible. . . . I suspect that persons . . . do just as well to let themselves follow the emotional line of a piece, . . . which they certainly can't do very well while trying to analyze a piece tonally. . . .

I'm not trying to write your book for you. I'm just complaining that you didn't write it for yourself.⁵¹

Thomson's critique of analytic listening deftly targets authoritative establishment discourses that abstract art music by denying its bodily and affective associations and that uphold its elite cultural status by merging this denial with exclusive and perhaps even impossible terms for "correct" listening.

Thus in their code-accreted identification with Frenchness and hence its cognates (as defined above), and against the Germanic mainstream, this gay composers' circle begets an alternative form of musical modernism, more inclusive of feminized values if not of actual women. Further inquiry into the closet codes of musical modernism might also serve to elaborate on George Chauncey's historical work demonstrating an extensive gay New York subculture circa 1890–1940 and thus exploding the "myth of [gay] isolation."⁵² Unquestionably, unpacking these codes is essential to any genuine understanding or appreciation of the lives and work of this gay modernist composers' circle and their contemporaries. But it is also essential to any understanding of the mutual cross-coding of homosexuality and musicality that continues to shape our own cultural universe.

Notes

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the Atlanta meeting of the Society for Music Theory, November 1999, and to the Lesbian and Gay Studies Workshop, Musicology/Ethnomusicology League of Students, and Music of the Americas Study Group, all in the University of Michigan, January–February 2000. I am grateful to all the session and audience participants who contributed toward the shaping of the present version, and particularly to Philip Brett, Maren Klawiter, and Andrew Mead for their input and encouragement. This version of the essay has benefited immeasurably by the percipience and erudition of its editor, David Halperin, to whom I am thus both grateful and indebted. I dedicate this essay to Paul C. Boylan.

1. This letter is cited in multiple sources including the Barber biographies by Nathan Broder and Barbara B. Heyman, whose quotations differ in certain orthographic details. I follow Heyman's version here, and likewise her argument that Barber was nine (not eight) years old when he wrote the letter. Heyman's persistence, however, even at the late date of 1992, in thoroughly closeting Barber's sexuality and his lifelong partnership with fellow composer Gian Carlo Menotti inevitably casts a shadow on her book's credibility. One can only wonder, for example, about a further discrepant detail in this boyhood incident: Heyman's version has Barber leaving the finished letter on his own desk, whereas in Broder's 1954 account he leaves it "on his mother's dressing table." See Heyman, *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7; and Broder, *Samuel Barber* (New York: Schirmer, 1954), 9.
2. We might compare the remarks of the (emphatically non-gay-identified) early modernist composer Charles Ives, born in Connecticut in 1874: "As a boy [I was] partially ashamed of [my love of music]—an entirely wrong attitude, but it was strong—most boys in American country towns, I think, felt the same. . . . And there may be something in it. Hasn't music always been too much an emasculated art?" (*Memos*, ed. John Kirkpatrick [New York: Norton, 1972], 130–31).
3. Philip Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 11–12, 18.
4. Suzanne G. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight," in Brett, Wood, and Thomas, *Queering the Pitch*, 70–71. I use the hyphenated construction *music-lover* to mark a fervency and erotics beyond those typically denoted by the (unhyphenated) phrase, as when this latter is more blandly applied to symphony subscribers.
5. *Ibid.*, 78–79. Lest my abridgment of it suggest otherwise, I will attest that Cusick's culminating query is no mere rhetorical flourish but a formulation that resonates powerfully with her fellow musicians. Indeed, her first presentation of this essay, to an audience of queer and straight musicians and music scholars (at a 1991 conference in which I also participated), inspired one of the most sympathetic and cathartic audience responses to an academic paper that I have ever witnessed, and a subsequent spate of similarly interior, embodied musical inquiry by other musical thinkers.
6. *Ibid.*, 80, 73.
7. T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1943), 27.
8. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music," 77. *Musical identity* rings paradoxical insofar as the music(al) term, pace Cusick, nullifies the identity term (within the phrase's usual sense of musically defined subjectivity) and polysemous insofar as the phrase takes on also the logical-mathematical sense of *identity*, denoting a oneness with music. Also relevant here is Fred Everett Maus's astute analysis of a central function of music-critical discourse, that of counteracting music's threat of emasculating by

penetrating the (perilously passive, receptive) listening subject—of counteracting, in other words, music’s identity-dissolving effects (“Masculine Discourse in Music Theory,” *Perspectives of New Music* 31 [1993]: 264–93).

My paraphrase echoes Bersani’s question, “Who are you when you masturbate?” which is (in its ensuing elaboration) likewise concerned with interior processes of identification and thence with identity. Such concerns in Bersani are enabled by his rendering (disappointingly foreclosed, on my view) of autoeroticism as essentially alloerotic in a phantasmatic realm: he avows, “I find unimaginable a successful session . . . without fantasy,” which fantasy is conceived (as his subsequent discussion reveals) in terms involving an other. I would note that the musicoeroticism under consideration here can be seen to afford the same, more radically *homo*-sexual experience that Bersani later describes, and ascribes significant psychological and political liberatory potential to, in his reading of Gide’s *Immoralist*. That is, it “eliminates from ‘sex’ the necessity of any relation whatsoever” and so is “unaccompanied by an essentially doomed and generally anguished interrogation of the other’s desires”; hence it offers an alternative to “inter-subjectivity as we have come to prize it in Western culture, with all its intensely satisfying drama of personal anguish and unfulfilled demands, [which] is a reining in, a sequestering, of our energies.” The musicosexualist, like Bersani’s Gidean non/pederast, seeks “nothing more than to touch . . . extensions of himself,” in an experience of “gliding into an impersonal sameness” with the object, resulting radically in “self-impooverishing self-expansions [that] block the cultural discipline of identification” (i.e., of *selfhood*); but whereas such a means of erotic identity-evasion must ultimately be judged immoral in its Gidean version, where it violates (as Bersani notes) the real personhood of the other, it remains at least “half sanctioned” (as Cusick puts it) in musical experience, where the object’s (possible) animate “otherness” is merely figurative. Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 103, 122–29.

9. This historicizing and contextualizing perspective, as opposed to one regarding Ives’s utterances as personal, idiosyncratic, and/or ahistorical, is given especially in Lawrence Kramer, “Ives’s Misogyny and Post-Reconstruction America” (paper presented at the conference “Feminist Theory and Music: Toward a Common Language,” Minneapolis, June 1991); Catherine Parsons Smith, “‘A Distinguishing Virility’: Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music,” in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 94–96; and Judith Tick, “Charles Ives and Gender Ideology,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 83–106. While all of these studies examine the phobia and venom in Ives’s discourse, none addresses these as they were expressed in his actions, as in his renunciation of the composer Henry Cowell, a friend and important promoter of Ives’s music, when Cowell was imprisoned in San Quentin (1936–40) on sodomy charges.
10. Smith, “‘A Distinguishing Virility,’” 93–94.

11. Ned Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 345–46.
12. *Ibid.*, 140 (on Rorem’s attraction to Jews), 349 (on his alcoholism), and elsewhere.
13. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978); and Vernon A. Rosario, *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
14. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 8–9. The “varied and acute implications and consequences” (9) of the privileging of and obsession with homo/heterosexual definition in Anglo-American modernity and modernism are explored throughout *Epistemology of the Closet*.
15. “Our Island Home” is the title of the first chapter of Thomson’s book *The State of Music* (New York: Morrow, 1939), which begins: “Every profession is a secret society. The musical profession is more secret than most, on account of the nature of music itself. No other field of human activity is quite so hermetic, so isolated” (3).
16. Most adults of the period (as throughout American history) were heterosexually married. This included many if not most homosexuals, among whom the concept “marriage of convenience” was well known. Both Bernstein and Blitzstein were married to women, and even Thomson (in the terms of the period, a notorious *pansy*, albeit one perennially uncomfortable with his homosexuality) and Rorem (though an unabashed and exclusive bottom, and unusually accepting of his homosexuality) entertained the possibility of marrying. See Steven Watson, *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism* (New York: Random House, 1998), 195–96, on the prevalence of “queer marriages” (as Thomson called them) in high bohemian circles, and for mention of Thomson’s proposal to enter into such a union with Theodate (sister of the gay architect Philip) Johnson. For fuller treatment of this proposal—including Thomson’s surprise appearance, naked, in Johnson’s bed—see Anthony Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle* (New York: Norton, 1997), 315–16.
17. Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop*, 207. For analysis of gay discursive codes, including camp, see William L. Leap, *Word’s Out: Gay Men’s English* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Howard Pollack also finds exaggeration in Rorem’s account of the separateness of Copland’s and Thomson’s “factions” and discusses multiple instances of their significant association (*Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* [New York: Holt, 1999], 173). One such association, documented by numerous writers, was Thomson’s and (especially) Copland’s affiliation, beginning in the 1920s, with the League of Composers and its magazine, *Modern Music*. In this connection the two composers were indeed embroiled in a rivalry, but as members of the same “team”: “In the forties the ISCM [International Society for Contemporary Music, rival of the League] represented the Germanic side of a spectrum on which the League was French [though the two groups would merge in 1954]. . . . To the ISCM the writ was twelve-tonish and the junk was Coplandiana” (Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop*, 229).

18. References to such gay-conspiracy theories are, not surprisingly, vastly fewer in the daylight of published prose than in the disavowable discourse of speech acts—which persist on these themes even today. This scenario illustrates the means by which the closet (as a space of furtiveness and secrecy) is constructed around and against queer subjects, by a homophobic mainstream culture—a point that bears repeating, in view of the recent ubiquity of figures depicting the closet as a space either chosen or abandoned by a fully “agentive” queer subject. Among the few conspiracy mentions in print, see Meryle Secrest, *Leonard Bernstein: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 256–57, for some uncritically cited examples; Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth-Century Blues: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), 214, for a critical reference to Britain’s 1940s scuttlebutt; and K. Robert Schwarz, “Composers’ Closets Open for All to See,” *New York Times*, 19 June 1994, sec. 2, 24, on gay-conspiracy theories in correspondence between the straight-identified modernists Varèse and Ruggles. Surely more characteristic is the studiously vague—and thus more broadly insinuating—sort of non/mention perfected in discourses of the Cold War era. Brett flags a coyly closeted remark on “bachelor composers” in the conversation books of Stravinsky with (his amanuensis) Robert Craft (“Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet,” 19, 25 n. 27). In a critical discussion of Menotti’s *Last Savage* Stravinsky is quoted as saying, “The predatory female idea might have possibilities, though—I am thinking of Mr. Robbins’s ballet about her to the music of my String Concerto—especially to talented bachelor composers such as Britten, Henze, Tchaikovsky, and Menotti.” The word *bachelor* in any literal sense is gratuitous here; its use purely as a code word is affirmed by the fact that every artist at which (the nonbachelor) Stravinsky reportedly points his curiously asynchronous finger—all four composers and one choreographer—is a gay man (Stravinsky and Craft, *Themes and Episodes* [New York: Knopf, 1967], 100–101).

The 1940s was the prime moment for these composers as a group, not to say each of them individually; career apexes for Rorem, Bernstein, and Diamond, for example, came later.

19. Schwarz states that “the gay composers were writing the tonal, lyrical, more conservative music America wanted to hear.” He then quotes McClary as saying: “There was almost a kind of self-selection in American music. . . . The straight boys claimed the high moral ground of modernism and fled to the universities, and the queers literally took center stage in concert halls and opera houses and ballet, all of which are musics that people are more likely to respond to” (“Composers’ Closets,” 24).
20. Stories of Hanson’s purges in the Eastman School, of which he served as director from 1924 to 1964, circulated among queer (and straight) musicians for decades. Diamond’s account of Hanson’s 1930s purges appears in Schwarz’s landmark *New York Times* feature (ibid.). And Rorem refers to a 1947 conversation among his music student cohort, ruing Hanson and his then current purges (*Knowing When to Stop*, 335–36).
21. Ives, *Memos*, 135.

22. Tick’s argument is exactly this—that misogynist and homophobic utterances in Ives’s discourse figured frustration and resistance toward the established European art-musical tradition (“Charles Ives and Gender Ideology”). For a revealing study of the gender- and genre-coded language of nineteenth-century music criticism concerning Chopin and other keyboard composers, see Jeffrey Kallberg, “The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne,” *Representations* 39 (1992): 102–33.
23. This anecdote was related in a 1994 letter to the *New York Times* in response to Schwarz, “Composers’ Closets.” It is recounted in Joseph R. Dalton, liner notes for *Gay American Composers*, vol. 2, CRI CD 750, 10–11.
24. Ibid., 10. I should also note that Copland, who in his 1941 book *Our New Music* regards serialism as elitist and ineluctably Germanic (and hence passé), by 1950 had adjusted his position such that he made use of serialism in his own *Quartet for Piano and Strings* (and in three later works). Copland later attributed this turn to the realization that he could use serial technique in the service of his own self-avowedly French aesthetic. See Jennifer L. DeLapp, “Copland in the Fifties: Music and Ideology in the McCarthy Era” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997), 182–222, for a cogent exegesis of the *Quartet* that weds musical analysis to a semiotic reading of the composition as Copland “staging his own fight against the Cold War” (222). If indeed, as DeLapp argues, the *Quartet* shows Copland in 1950 resisting the hegemony of contemporary dichotomies—she cites serial/tonal, elitist/populist, and capitalist/communist—then heterosexual/homosexual must figure among the structures being resisted, as the Thomson-Weber anecdote and my definitional axis (below) would suggest.
25. Thomson’s alleged quip implies that heterosexual composers can be serialists and clearly specifies that homosexual composers can never be serialists, but omits any mention of whether heterosexuals can be nonserialists. One intended function of my qualifying “to whatever extent” is as placeholder for this unspecified meaning.
26. See, e.g., Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson, 192*, on Roger Sessions’s galling of Thomson by his humorless and aesthetically tone-deaf review of the latter’s *Sonate d’Eglise* for a 1926 issue of *Modern Music*.
27. Sedgwick refigures the formerly legalistic term *homosexual panic* to mark the modern double bind attending male homosocial bonds, which are simultaneously stigmatized and mandated for men who would claim the full entitlements of masculine privilege under patriarchy (*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], 88–89 and elsewhere; *Epistemology of the Closet*, esp. 184–88).
28. These were the central figures in *Billy the Kid* (1938) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944), respectively, both ballets on Copland scores.
29. These questions’ more thorough treatment will be the project of my book, *Composing Oneself: Gay Modernists and American Musical Identity*.
30. Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York:

Columbia University Press, 1999), reveals central linkages sustaining the notions of genius, homosexuality, and artistic creation in late-eighteenth-century and romantic literature. I am grateful to David Halperin for bringing this book to my attention.

31. Nadine Hubbs, "Opera and Classical Music," in *The St. James Press Gay and Lesbian Almanac*, ed. Neil Schlager (Detroit: St. James, 1998), 420–29, 432–34.
 32. Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979) was a Parisian pedagogue, conductor, and organist, and the most influential composition teacher of the twentieth century, especially through the American conservatory at Fontainebleau (est. 1921).
 33. For an examination of the means by which talent and musicality are constructed (while also naturalized and essentialized) see Henry Kingsbury, *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).
 34. Not only inborn but immutable according to then current views, including those of the gay composers in question. A female confidante to whom Blitzstein revealed his homosexuality "imagined a hormonal root to it, citing the work of Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, and thus forgave it as an unchangeable element in his psychology" (Eric A. Gordon, *Mark the Music: The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein* [New York: St. Martin's, 1989], 19). Copland's "belief that homosexuality was a natural and inherited phenomenon" was reportedly influenced by his reading of André Gide and Havelock Ellis (Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 234–35).
- For Rorem at least (and perhaps more broadly, in connection with a further, Protestant/Catholic binarism attaching to my axis of hetero/homo, German/French, etc.), an emphasis on one's immutable nature, *la nature bête*, either inborn or fixed early in childhood, appears as definitively French and Catholic. Such an emphasis indeed resonates with the richly connotative and often-repeated French dictum "Je suis comme je suis" (with a Gallic shrug: "I am as I am"). And the pathways along which (the Quaker-raised) Rorem might link this attitude to Catholicism (which, like Frenchness, he fetishizes) are hinted at in his statement "The Catholic priest is right: we're all pretty much 'made' by age seven" (*Knowing When to Stop*, 585).
35. Brett acknowledges potential dangers in projects of the present sort, "producing knowledge about homosexual artists of the past," dangers including "a tendency to essentialize homosexuality as a condition of creativity, . . . which at its most grotesque reflects [a subcultural] elitism" ("Britten's Dream," in Solie, *Musicology and Difference*, 260). More generally such a tendency may reflect the mutually imbricated meanings, pace Elfenbein in *Romantic Genius*, of homosexuality and creativity. In any event, I would hope that my formulation of a constructed homosexual-outsider-artist correlation will be distinguished from any essentializing homosexual-artist correlation.
 36. Dalton, liner notes, 7.
 37. See Gary C. Thomas, "'Was George Frideric Handel Gay?' On Closet Questions and Cultural Politics," in Brett, Wood, and Thomas, *Queering the Pitch*, 155–204. For the record, I find Thomas's argument sound and cogent, and subsequent work, like Ellen Harris's 1998 presentation to the Gay and Lesbian Study Group of the American Musi-

- cological Society, seems to bear it out. Cf. also Rorem's insinuations about Beethoven. Writing of his own three-time rejection by the military draft board as one who, according to his psychiatrist, "had not yet developed mature sexual impulses," Rorem counterpoints the theme of his (purportedly incorrigibly French) failure to place Beethoven "at the core of the cosmos": "When I did mature I had not learned to appreciate Beethoven more intensely, though I did learn that Beethoven himself never developed mature sexual impulses" (*Knowing When to Stop*, 173).
38. Dalton, liner notes, 7.
 39. Cowell had homosexual involvements but, like many of his contemporaries straight and gay, lived for years in heterosexual marriage (he married after his imprisonment on sodomy charges). Any of the standard classifications, homo-, hetero-, or bisexual, might be controversial with reference to Cowell. My use of the label *gay* is not intended to beg or to settle the question of which one best applies; rather, it follows Harrison's classification for the purpose of (re)constructing a lineage into which gay composers could self-consciously place themselves.
 40. Andrew Holleran, *Dancer from the Dance* (New York: Morrow, 1978), 19.
 41. Rorem cites Boulanger as the source for Copland's *dépouillement* (*Knowing When to Stop*, 282). According to Pollack, Copland's French found use in the bedroom as well. One of Copland's more significant loves, John Kennedy, recalls for Pollack "how, in bed, Copland might read Goncourt or Gide in the original French, translating into English out loud" (*Aaron Copland*, 236).
 42. Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop*, 221; Rorem similarly explains Thomson's personal manner: "I was prepared for the swishy voice . . . , but not for the patronizing friendliness and icy impatience, a mixture I later found to be native to uppercrust French females" (197). Thomson's explication of "instrumentation" is conceived in binary terms of two rival traditions, German and Franco-Russian, and defined by further binarisms including emotional power/clarity, tonal weight/brilliance, timbral composites/timbral separation (*The State of Music*, 98–99). According to his pupil Rorem, Thomson considered orchestration the only teachable craft related to the composer's art, instruction in composition itself being nonexistent, "an esthetic study best left to analytical Germans" (Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop*, 220).
 43. Victoria J. Kimberling, *David Diamond: A Bio-Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1987), 3.
 44. Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop*, 392.
 45. Their reverence for Boulanger was by no means simple or unproblematic. On various occasions "Mademoiselle" was lionized in print by Copland, Diamond, Rorem, and Bernstein. On other occasions she was patronized or even vilified by Copland, Diamond, Rorem, and Thomson, who thus gave voice to the prevailing misogyny of their times. Bernstein neither expatriated to France nor became a pupil of Boulanger, although the two did develop a warm association. Diamond recalls having urged Bernstein in 1939 (on Diamond's return from two years' expatriation) to study with Boulanger, but Bern-

stein's studies at the Curtis Institute of Music and the outbreak of war prevented it (William Westbrook Burton, *Conversations about Bernstein* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995], 16).

46. Smith, "'A Distinguishing Virility,'" 100.
47. The homosocial and homosexual tightness of the gay modernists' sphere is especially evident from recent queer-explicit biographies, including Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, and Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson*, and from Rorem's diaries and memoirs. One introspective passage from Rorem is particularly illustrative:

When JH [life partner James Holmes] asked me last night if I'd ever had a close male friend who was straight (recalling Copland and Harold Clurman), I realized that the question had never occurred to me. No, I guess not. Though in the old [student] days, when we all saw each other socially every day, many of my male friends were straight—Eugene [List], Seymour [Barab], the husbands of girlfriends.

Are you too young to understand?

With this last question, addressed directly to the reader, Rorem effectively underlines the historically specific origins of his social proclivities and sphere, suggesting that they belong to a vanished past; and indeed all this serves to introduce a large extract from his forty-eight-year-old 1946 diary, which then follows shortly (*Knowing When to Stop*, 324).

48. Smith makes this argument in relation to the era of romantic Americanism, a pre-World War I period during which "many middle-class white women emerged as composers" ("A Distinguishing Virility," 90). She also cites an earlier study showing that "the critical vogue of the 1920s that asserted the failure of romantic Americanism is in fact antifeminist" (94): Mary Herron Dupree, "The Failure of American Music: The Critical View from the 1920s," *Journal of Musicology* 2 (1983): 305–15.
49. Copland registered his objections to romanticism's persistence and prevalence over many years and in various forums, including his books *What to Listen for in Music* (1939) and *Music and Imagination* (1952). His position is discussed in DeLapp, "Copland in the Fifties," 18–22.
50. Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," 13–14.
51. Thomson's 1939 letter to Copland is excerpted in Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson*, 309–10. Both composers actively opposed the canonical "museum music" establishment, and interestingly, Thomson's own 1939 book, *The State of Music*, debunks, in tandem, analytic listening and the "Platonic authority" by which the unquestioned masterworks are sanctioned and sanctified (125–26). Thus Thomson's argument shares ground with Brett's 1994 (poststructuralist- and feminist-informed) exegesis, which likewise cites Plato and music-analytic ordering en route to remarkably similar conclusions about the mechanisms of knowledge and power in the Germanic musical tradition.
52. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic, 1994), 2–3.