

FREDERIC RZEWSKI'S *NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS*:
LOOKING BACK TO THE RADICAL POLITICS OF 1930S AMERICA

By

Monica Alice Hershberger

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Musicology

2011

ABSTRACT

FREDERIC RZEWSKI'S *NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS*: LOOKING BACK TO THE RADICAL POLITICS OF 1930S AMERICA

By

Monica Alice Hershberger

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, musicologists have gradually accepted music and the Cold War as a viable subfield within the discipline, and over the past decade, a Cold War musicology has taken root. This thesis contributes to this still burgeoning field by contextualizing Frederic Rzewski's *North American Ballads* within the United States domestic realm during the latter half of the Cold War. Written in a virtuosic, neo-romantic vein, the *North American Ballads* are solo-piano arrangements of American labor songs, three of which date back to the 1930s. During the early Cold War, Rzewski's distinctly tonal idiom, as well as his pro-labor agenda, would have been untenable in the United States, but by the 1970s, as tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union eased temporarily, the politics governing musical style and content became less rigid.

Drawing on the work of several scholars including Danielle Fosler-Lussier and Peter J. Schmelz, I demonstrate how Rzewski may be situated within the "return to tonality" movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I argue that Cold War détente facilitated Rzewski's return in the *Ballads*, for as fear of nuclear annihilation receded, domestic concerns came more sharply into focus. Moreover, Rzewski's nostalgic arrangements, although prompted by his leftist leanings, resonated beyond the political, appealing during an era when nostalgia was a common escape for Americans weary of the Cold War.

Copyright by
MONICA ALICE HERSHBERGER
2011

Dedicated to my grandparents
John and Alice Hershberger
and
Yost and Eunice Smith

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people: Kevin Bartig, Carol A. Hess, and Leigh VanHandel, my thesis committee members; Robert Satterlee, Associate Professor of Piano at Bowling Green State University (Ohio), who introduced me to Rzewski's music during my undergraduate study; and my friends and family, especially my parents, James and Susan Hershberger, my sister and brother-in-law, Margaret and Stefan Kilyanek, and my fiancé, Dan Tramte.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1	
HIGH MODERNISM TO NEO-ROMANTICISM: MAPPING THE PATH TO THE <i>NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS</i>	
Introduction.....	8
Education.....	9
New Directions: Musica Elettronica Viva.....	12
Back to the Concert Hall.....	16
Realism and Piano Music of the Mid 1970s.....	20
Conclusion.....	26
CHAPTER 2	
<i>NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS</i>	
Introduction.....	27
Harlan County, Kentucky.....	29
“Dreadful Memories”.....	31
“Which Side Are You On?”.....	37
“Down by the Riverside”.....	43
“Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues”.....	50
Conclusion.....	56
CHAPTER 3	
LOOKING BACK TO THE 1930S	
Introduction.....	58
The Composers’ Collective and Mass Songs of the 1930s.....	59
Acceptance of Folk Music	66
Conclusion.....	69
CONCLUSION.....	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	75

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Trio for Trumpet, Flute, and Pianoforte, mm. 1-5.....	10
Figure 2. <i>Study I</i> , Part A.....	12
Figure 3. <i>Les Moutons de Panurge</i>	17
Figure 4. <i>Coming Together</i> , mm. 1-7.....	19
Figure 5. <i>The People United Will Never Be Defeated!</i> , mm. 1-16.....	22
Figure 6. <i>Four Pieces for Piano, I</i> , m. 1.....	25
Figure 7. <i>Four Pieces for Piano, IV</i> , mm. 13-14.....	25
Figure 8. “Dreadful Memories,” mm. 1-8.....	34
Figure 9. “Dreadful Memories,” mm. 35-40.....	35
Figure 10. “Dreadful Memories,” mm. 80-85.....	36
Figure 11. “Which Side Are You On?,” mm. 26-32.....	39
Figure 12. “Which Side Are You On?,” mm. 131-138.....	40
Figure 13. “Down by the Riverside,” mm. 1-10.....	45
Figure 14. “Down by the Riverside,” mm. 19-23.....	46
Figure 15. “Down by the Riverside,” mm. 37-45.....	47
Figure 16. “Down by the Riverside,” mm. 67-72.....	48
Figure 17. “Down by the Riverside,” mm. 88-90.....	48
Figure 18. “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,” mm. 1-4.....	53
Figure 19. “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,” mm. 136-141.....	56
Figure 20. “Into the Streets May First!,” mm. 1-9.....	63
Figure 21. “The Scottsboro Boys Shall Not Die”.....	64

Figure 22. “Apolitical Intellectuals,” mm. 9-16.....	65
------------------------------------------------------	----

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, audiences and critics have associated American composer Frederic Rzewski (born 13 April 1938 Westfield, Massachusetts) with politically motivated folk-song based compositions, particularly *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (1975). On 17 January 1980, for example, *New York Times* critic John Rockwell summed up Rzewski's style in the following statement:

Mr. Rzewski's most recent style has been almost neo-romantic—sets of variations on simple, assertive tunes. Those tunes have a leftist political caste and reflect Mr. Rzewski's long-standing concern for the relationship between art and politics.¹

Rockwell and other critics situated Rzewski's *The People United*, as well as piano works such as *Four Pieces for Piano* (1977) and *North American Ballads* (1978-79), within the “romantic revival” and “return to tonality” movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.² Whereas several scholars have examined the musical-political significance of *The People United*, few have seriously considered the *North American Ballads*.³ The *Ballads* have

¹ John Rockwell, “Avant-Garde: Rzewski,” *New York Times*, 17 January 1980, p. C23.

² John Rockwell, “The Romantic Revival and the Dilemma of the Political Composer: Frederic Rzewski” in *All American Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 87-89. Rockwell compares Rzewski with George Rochberg, identifying Rochberg as the leading proponent of the “romantic revival.”

³ On *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* see Laura Melton, “Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*: An Analysis and Historical Perspective,” D.M.A. doc. (Rice University, 1998); Robert W. Wason, “Tonality and Atonality in Frederic Rzewski's Variations on “The People United Will Never Be Defeated!,”” *Perspectives of New Music* 26, no. 1 (1988): 108-143. Other scholars who address Rzewski, giving priority to *The People United*. include Richard J. Koloda, “The Piano Music (Post 1974) of Frederic Rzewski,” Ph.D. diss. (Cleveland State University, 1996); Howard Pollack, “A New Age and A New Left: David Behrman and Frederic Rzewski” in *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliott Carter to Frederic Rzewski* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), 370-396; John Rockwell, “The Romantic Revival and the Dilemma of the Political Composer: Frederic Rzewski,” 84-95. On the *North American Ballads* see Larry Bell and Andrea Olmstead,

been dwarfed by the sheer length and dazzling virtuosity of *The People United*, as well as the irony of that work's premiere (part of the U.S. bicentennial celebration in Washington D.C.). Yet the *Ballads*, both as a musical achievement and cultural-political statement, merit more than casual attention. In this thesis I work to remedy the *Ballads*'s neglect by scholars, arguing that they are a compelling expression of nostalgia that recalled the leftist promise of 1930s America at the height of the Cold War.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent end of the Cold War, scholars sensed the time was right for reevaluation and analysis of Cold War culture.⁴ Musicology turned to this topic of inquiry relatively late. It was only in 2009, for example, that the *Journal of Musicology* dedicated two issues to music and the Cold War which for the first time clearly defined the methodological basis of the subfield. In his introduction, musicologist Peter J. Schmelz suggested that the re-emergence of tonality during the 1960s and 1970s might be understood as "a new stage" in the Cold War rather than purely "postmodern" aesthetics.⁵ Prior to this stage, Cold War aesthetic politics compelled American composers to write abstract atonal music, as musical style

"Musica Reservata in Frederic Rzewski's "North American Ballads," *The Musical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (1986): 449-457.

⁴ For example, see Martin Brody, "Music for the Masses": Milton Babbitt's Cold War Music Theory," *Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (1993): 161-192.

⁵ Peter J. Schmelz, "Introduction: Music and the Cold War," *Journal of Musicology* 26, no. 1 (2009): 11. On music and the Cold War see also Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After: Directions Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Alex Ross, "Brave New World: The Cold War and the Avant-Garde of the Fifties" in *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 386-446; Anne C. Shreffler, "Ideologies of Serialism: Stravinsky's *Threni* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom" in *Music and Aesthetics of Modernity* ed. Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 217-245; Shreffler, "Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus, Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History" *Journal of Musicology* 20, no. 4 (2003): 498-525; Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* Vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

was closely linked to Cold War politics. For composers in the West, atonality symbolized artistic freedom, whereas tonality (and its suggestion of Socialist Realism) evoked constrictive Soviet aesthetic policy.⁶ To illustrate the stark change in atmosphere by the mid 1960s, Schmelz highlights Danielle Fosler-Lussier's analysis of George Rochberg's return to tonality. Fosler-Lussier argues that although Rochberg's aesthetic shift is generally attributed to his son's tragic death in 1964, it was perhaps also influenced by Cold War politics and issues raised by the political left.⁷ She points out that Rochberg's desire for stylistic wholeness "suggests an intriguing connection between the rise of postmodernity and the loosening of cold war social strictures that arrived with the political détente of the 1960s."⁸ Similarly, Mark Berry asserts that in Rochberg's Third String Quartet (1972), the composer creates "a sense of diversity that precludes any understanding of the piece as being unified by any one comprehensive compositional style."⁹ Thus, Rochberg's Quartet demonstrates how the neatly demarcated musical categories of the 1950s were beginning to dissolve.

In discussing Rochberg's 1970 essay "Humanism vs. Science," Fosler-Lussier proposes that the composer conflated musical modernism of the 1950s and early 1960s with nuclear fear and the post-War obsession with progress and technology.

Accordingly, he revived tonality and the music of past (briefly referencing Beethoven,

⁶ Schmelz, "Introduction," 8. Schmelz points out that the East vs. West, tonality vs. atonality is a gross oversimplification, yet it held much weight for composers of the time and to some extent continues today.

⁷ Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided: Bartok's Legacy in Cold War Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 160.

⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁹ Mark Berry, "Music, Postmodernism, and George Rochberg's Third String Quartet" in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* ed. Judith Irene Lochhead and Joseph Henry Auner (New York: Routledge, 2002), 242.

Mahler, and Bartók), in hopes of regaining contact with a world not traumatized by the nuclear arms race and the specter of a war of total annihilation.¹⁰ Fosler-Lussier's theory of "regaining contact" proves fruitful as a model for understanding Rzewski's *North American Ballads*, because similar to Rochberg's Third String Quartet, the *Ballads* yearn for a previous era.

Rochberg declared that with his Third Quartet he was "turning away from what I consider the cultural pathology of my own time toward what can only be called a *possibility* that music can be renewed by regaining contact with the tradition and means of the past."¹¹ Prior to the Quartet's premiere, Rochberg was one of America's staunchest serialist composers who boasted an avant-gardist pedigree that had secured him a coveted professorship at the University of Pennsylvania.¹² Thus, his later stylistic about-face was all the more unexpected. So too was Rzewski's. His preoccupation with neo-romantic piano music during the 1970s sharply contrasted his work in the late 1960s, which followed in the footsteps of John Cage and other experimentalists.

Whereas Rochberg revived the music of the past hoping it would re-emerge as a spiritual force, I argue that in the *North American Ballads*, political, even revolutionary goals motivated Rzewski's backward gaze. Rzewski arranges labor songs associated with movements admired by American Communists and their followers during the 1930s.

¹⁰ Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided*, 161.

¹¹ George Rochberg, "On the Third String Quartet," in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music: Expanded Edition*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 407.

¹² Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, 532-533. Rochberg's Quartet sparked much debate; see Jay Reise, "Rochberg the Progressive," *Perspectives of New Music* 19, no. 1/2 (1980-1981): 395-407; Steven D. Block, "George Rochberg: Progressive or Master Forger," *Perspectives of New Music* 21, no. 1/2 (1982-1983): 407-409.

Through these arrangements, the *Ballads* look back to an era unstained by the atrocities of Second-World-War authoritarianism. Moreover, the work calls for a new labor movement. Rzewski reminds the weary public of the 1970s of the music and ideological convictions of hopeful New York City radicals—folk singers such as Aunt Molly Jackson and cultural spokespersons Michael Gold and Charles Seeger—who believed that music could be used as “a weapon in the class struggle.” In light of the abstract forays into high modernism that Rzewski eventually deemed politically insignificant, he now sought a latter-day “music of the people.”

Throughout the 1980s, critics often purposely downplayed or ignored the political implications of Rzewski’s compositions. For example, in 1983, John Rockwell offhandedly compared Rzewski’s piano music to leftist expressions by American composers during the 1930s. Rockwell argued that Rzewski, living in self-imposed exile in Rome and viewing his country through European (and Marxist) eyes, wanted to revive that 1930s musical tradition.¹³ Much like the New York Composers’ Collective of that era, which took directives from the Soviet Union and German composers such as Hanns Eisler, Rzewski looked outside the United States for inspiration. He admired the Italian Communist Party’s efforts to win over sectors of the middle class through the use of mass culture.¹⁴ Rockwell, however, excoriated Rzewski’s politicized “return to romanticism,” calling political music anachronistic, particularly in the United States. Rockwell claimed that the United States “rarely fostered explicitly political composers,” “innocently” suggesting that people are “just happier” in capitalist democracies, citing “the successive

¹³ Rockwell, “The Romantic Revival,” 92.

¹⁴ Walter Zimmermann, *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (Vancouver: Aesthetic Research Center Publications, 1976), 303-304.

waves of immigrants into this country” who “for all their initial squalor, became relatively content soon enough, especially when they remembered the privations they had left behind.”¹⁵ Rockwell further complained that:

Rzewski “returns to romanticism” because his audience has never much developed past romanticism in its musical tastes, and he is trying to slip them a political pill in the sugar coating of a musical style they will find palatable.¹⁶

After denouncing Rzewski’s so-called political art, calling it “patronizing,” “condescending,” and “foolish,” Rockwell turned briefly (and complacently) to the *North American Ballads*.

When he [Rzewski] relaxes and simply lets himself be led by his musical materials (even when the choice of those materials may have been politically inspired), he can write music that is genuinely gripping from a purely esthetic standpoint, as in the *Four North American Ballads*, with their stirring evocations of American folk song.¹⁷

Larry Bell and Andrea Olmstead have also overlooked politics in the *Ballads*, arguing that it is “a mistake to ascribe too much [political] significance to quotation of folk songs in Rzewski’s music.”¹⁸

Rockwell, Bell, and Olmstead—all writing during the Reagan Administration, a government notoriously unfriendly to labor movements—likely downplayed the political in Rzewski’s labor-song arrangements on purpose. Furthermore, prior to the “new” musicology movement of the 1980s and 1990s, musicologists and critics were allergic to extra-musical motivations, particularly political ones.¹⁹ However, the interaction

¹⁵ Rockwell, “The Romantic Revival,” 90-91.

¹⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹⁷ Ibid., 94.

¹⁸ Bell and Olmstead, “Musica Reservata,” 451.

¹⁹ Joseph Kerman’s *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) is often regarded as a harbinger to the new musicology.

between music and politics in Rzewski's *Ballads* begs for recognition because it is precisely this interaction that makes the work such an incisive cultural product of its time. During the 1970s, political and social unrest continued to overshadow life in the United States, and Rzewski, who by 1978 was firmly established through *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* as a "political composer," sought to make yet another political statement through the use of folk song, this time dedicated, however, to his native county.

The following thesis places the *North American Ballads* in a political context, exploring political implications in three broad sections. In Chapter 1, I examine Rzewski's compositional development, beginning with his student days at Harvard during the 1950s and reconstructing the path that led to the accessible and politically engaged piano music of the 1970s. In Chapter 2, I analyze each of the *North American Ballads*, coupling my theoretical analysis with the relevant social history of each folk song. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate that while the *Ballads* explicitly recall the music and leftist ideologies of the 1930s, Rzewski's entire range of activities throughout the 1970s also mirrors those of composers in the 1930s. For example, Rzewski's eventual acceptance of folk music by 1975 is similar to the conclusion that American musicologist Charles Seeger (1886-1979) reached by 1939. Finally, to conclude, I propose the *North American Ballads* as a promising solution to the "political" composer's new nationalist dilemma.

CHAPTER 1

HIGH MODERNISM TO NEO-ROMANTICISM: MAPPING THE PATH TO THE *NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS*

Introduction

Rzewski's *North American Ballads* are the product of a twenty-year evolution from dispassionate post-War modernism to politically engaged realism of wide appeal. This chapter seeks to identify the larger aesthetic trends that shaped the musical-political aesthetic of the *Ballads*. To some extent, Rzewski's music has always been political, but whereas his music of the 1950s and 1960s contained merely latent Marxist notions, his work of the 1970s openly championed leftist agendas. An Ivy-league educated composer in the midst of the Cold War, Rzewski initially embraced serialism and indeterminacy. During the 1960s, however, inspired by the radical shifts in societal structure, he became involved in free collective improvisation, viewing it as a vehicle to free society. By the 1970s, in step with composers such as Rochberg, William Bolcom, and David Del Tredici, Rzewski reconciled himself to more traditional means, writing distinctly tonal piano music in familiar, traditional forms.

In an interview with German composer Walter Zimmermann in 1975, Rzewski referred to his newfound style of the 1970s as "realism." For Rzewski, musical realism requires "some kind of consciousness of the active relationship between music and the rest of the world."²⁰ Moreover, realism relies on "a conscious employment of techniques which are designed to establish communication, rather than to alienate an audience."²¹

²⁰ Zimmermann, *Desert Plants*, 305; John Rockwell, "The Romantic Revival," 89. Rockwell has pointed out how close Rzewski's concept of "realism" is to Soviet "socialist realism," although Rzewski avoids that specific term.

²¹ Zimmermann, *Desert Plants*, 306.

Rzewski argued that realism did not preclude avant-garde techniques and experimentation, although, commenting on the insularity of the post-War avant-garde, he conceded that engaging with familiar styles enhances communication.²² Both *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* and *North American Ballads* manifest Rzewski's realism, yet understanding the development and ideological underpinning of that concept is a necessary prelude to my analysis of the *Ballads*.

Education

Like most composers of his generation, Rzewski began his career in the academy, acquiring the tools to follow in the path of post-War modernism. To be sure, his primary teachers were the decidedly non-avant-garde Randall Thompson and Walter Piston, yet Rzewski also had significant contact with Claudio Spies, who kindled Rzewski's interest in the Second Viennese School.²³ Rzewski then expanded his exploration of serialism to include the work of Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen. The thesis he submitted for his Bachelor's degree at Harvard in 1958, for example, details the philosophical significance of serialism from Schoenberg through Stockhausen.²⁴ His writing also reveals the influence of typical post-War Marxist rhetoric by associating tonality with bourgeois order.²⁵ Rzewski's own compositions, such as the Trio for Trumpet, Flute, and Pianoforte, composed and dedicated to Spies in 1956, ventured into

²² Ibid., 306.

²³ Pollack, "A New Age and A New Left," 371.

²⁴ Ibid. 371.

²⁵ Ibid., 379.

atonal, though not strictly serial, territory. In particular, the Trio's sparse textures and economical gestures call to mind the style of Webern (Figure 1).²⁶

Figure 1(Trio for Trumpet, Flute, and Pianoforte, mm. 1-5)²⁷



The late 1950s and early 1960s were a time of intense development for Rzewski, a period in which he met a number of major figures in the post-War experimental music scene. In 1956, at the hub of high modernist activity—the Darmstadt Summer Institute—he met experimental composer Christian Wolff.²⁸ Wolff, who became a close friend and

²⁶ See Allen Forte, *The Atonal Music of Anton Webern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Bryan R. Simms, ed., *Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern: A Companion to the Second Viennese School* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999).

²⁷ Frederic Rzewski, *Trio for Trumpet, Flute, and Pianoforte* (1956). Composer's autograph available in PDF through Werner Icking Music Archive (accessed 13 January 2011) <<http://icking-music-archive.org/scores/rzewski/TRIO-tpt-fl-pf.pdf>>

²⁸ See Amy C. Beal, "Negotiating Cultural Allies: American Music at Darmstadt, 1946-1956," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 1 (2000): 105-139.

mentor, introduced Rzewski to the music of John Cage and others in Cage's circle.²⁹ By the time he began his master's degree at Princeton in 1958, where his primary teachers included Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt, Rzewski's avant-garde orientation was confirmed. In 1960, he received a Fulbright Fellowship, leaving the United States to study in Florence with the Italian serialist, Luigi Dallapiccola. Rzewski's 1961 *Study I* for solo piano demonstrates his assimilation of experimental practices, as his detailed instructions allow the performer freedom within certain parameters (Figure 2). For example, Rzewski explains:

The piece has three parts... Give the music a form; for example, first play part A very slowly (allowing up to 20 seconds between each note), then part B at a moderate tempo; then repeat part A very fast, then part C with odd-numbered sections fast and even ones slow, then repeat part A at a moderate tempo, then repeat part B slowly, etc.

You may go on as long as you like and the parts may be repeated as many times as you like, but the piece must be stopped as soon as you find you are not concentrating.³⁰

²⁹ Amy C. Beal, "“Music is a Universal Human Right”: Musica Elettronica Viva” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 101; Pollack, “A New Age and A New Left,” 371.

³⁰ Rzewski, *Study I* (1961). Composer's autograph available in PDF through Werner Icking Music Archive (accessed 13 January 2011) <<http://icking-music-archive.org/scores/rzewski/STUDY-1.pdf>>

Figure 2 (*Study I, Part A*)³¹



New Directions: Musica Elettronica Viva

Rzewski spent the 1960s in Europe, continually refashioning his place within the avant-garde community. Despite the energy he directed at composition, his reputation during the early part of the decade hinged not on his compositions but on his renown as a formidable pianist specializing in contemporary repertoire. His interpretations of works by Cage, Henri Pousseur, Stockhausen, and Wolff rivaled those of pianist David Tudor.³² By the mid 1960s, as the hegemony of academic serialism began to crumble, Rzewski began to integrate his talents as a composer and performer. In 1966, he cofounded the improvisatory live-electronic ensemble, Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV) with fellow

³¹ Ibid.

³² Beal, "Music is a Universal Human Right," 101; Pollack, "A New Age and A New Left," 372.

experimentalists Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum. MEV was similar to a number of ensembles which developed during this time such as ONCE (founded in 1961), AMM (founded in 1965), and the Scratch Orchestra (founded in 1969).³³

Clearly indebted to John Cage and the American experimental tradition, MEV sought to become *the* radical American group in Rome, improvising predominantly with “junk” (plates, olive oil cans, and miscellaneous wood and metal objects) and makeshift live electronics (a portable synthesizer made from electronic organ parts, contact microphones, and a homemade PA system).³⁴ Its members repudiated the elitism attached to the postwar avant-garde and attempted to break down traditional musical hierarchies of the Western music tradition.³⁵ In this respect, MEV was particularly in sync with the goals of Cornelius Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra, a group of composers, musicians, and non-musicians, all of whom were committed to dissolving the divide not

³³ The ONCE Festival was founded in Ann Arbor by University of Michigan composer Robert Ashley. Although not initially conceived as a collective improvisation ensemble like MEV, the ONCE Group (which toured the United States) often engaged in collective improvisation with social and political underpinnings. See Ralf Dietrich, “ONCE and the Sixties” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 169-186. AMM was a collective improvisation group founded by ex-jazz musicians Keith Rowe, Lou Gare, and Eddie Prevost. The Scratch Orchestra was founded by Cornelius Cardew, Michael Parsons, and Howard Skempton with the intention of calling musicians and non-musicians to political and social action through group improvisation. See Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Second Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 110-138.

³⁴ Beal, “Music is a Universal Human Right,” 106; See also Michael Broyles, “Postwar Experimentalism: John Cage” in *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 176-204; Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).

³⁵ Beal, “Music is a Universal Human Right,” 101.

only between performance and composition, but between professionals and amateurs.³⁶

Although MEV's founding members were all Ivy-League educated composers, later members introduced far more varied pedigrees. According to Alvin Curran, music was "a universal human right" and "the property of no one individual or author."³⁷ Rzewski, too, believed that MEV ought to induce people to make music everywhere and through any means, advocating strongly for full audience participation.³⁸

MEV's collectively-conceived composition *Soundpool* (1969) demonstrates this desire for total audience involvement. At performances of the work, audience members were invited to "bring a sound and throw it into the pool."³⁹ Prior to the performance, MEV distributed concert programs outlining the rudimentary techniques of improvisation:

...If somebody is playing something you don't like, stop what you are doing and listen to him for awhile, then try playing with him. If somebody seems to be playing too loudly, try to find another location in the room where you can hear better...

Listen for the strongest, most prominent sounds in the total mass. If you wish to influence the music towards *order* (unity), play together with (simultaneously with) these sounds. If you wish to create *disorder* (variety) play in the *spaces in between* these sounds...⁴⁰

³⁶ Griffiths, *Modern Music and After*, 186. Rzewski and Cardew were good friends, and their musical/political aspirations often overlapped. Rzewski also performed and recorded some of Cardew's piano music, such as the *Thälmann Variations* (1974) and *We Sing for the Future* (1981).

³⁷ Alvin Curran, "From the Bottom of the Soundpool" (accessed 14 January 2011) <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/soundpool.html>>

³⁸ Beal, "Music is a Universal Human Right," 99.

³⁹ Curran, "From the Bottom of the Soundpool."

⁴⁰ Program for *Sound Pool* quoted in Rzewski, "Prose Music" in *Dictionary of Contemporary Music*, ed. John Vinton (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974), 595.

Curran claimed that through *Soundpool*, “hundreds and modestly speaking, a few thousand people” played with MEV.⁴¹ He described *Soundpool* stagings as occasions where “masses of people” could be “themselves in the protective and self-evolving community of improvised collective music.”⁴²

Michael Nyman points out that a major difference between MEV and other collective improvisation groups such as AMM was that MEV was a social group.⁴³ As such, MEV members attempted to function as a collective by freeing themselves of individual and elitist desires they felt had been instilled by their academic training.⁴⁴ Moreover, MEV sought to free its audience from the relegated status of listener, welcoming them into the performance action. Accordingly, MEV and Rzewski in particular viewed collective improvisation with an increasingly politicized lens, equating artistic freedom with political freedom. Looking back on his involvement with the group Rzewski wrote:

In the 1960s, in radical circles of the “free music” movement, *freedom* was an ethical and political, as well as an aesthetic, concept. Free music was not merely a fashion of the times, and not merely a form of entertainment. It was also felt to be connected with the many political movements that at that time set out to change the world—in this case, to free the world from the tyranny of outdated traditional forms.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Curran, “Making Music with People You have Never Seen Before and Will Likely Never See Again” (accessed 14 January 2011)
<<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/music%20with%20people.html>>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 128.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 128. Nyman claims that personal differences were eventually the cause of MEV’s disbanding, suggesting that members of MEV were not able to completely suppress their own intentions and desires for the sake of the collective.

⁴⁵ Rzewski, “Little Bangs: A Nihilist Theory of Improvisation” in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 268.

Rzewski even seemed to apply a Marxist reading to collective improvisation, arguing that “the musician takes on a new function: he is no longer the mythical star, elevated to a sham glory and authority, but rather an unseen worker, using his skill to help others less prepared than he to experience the miracle.”⁴⁶

By 1969, however, Rzewski and his colleagues began to question the efficacy of MEV’s spectacles. This change appears to have been connected to a sudden shift in their audiences’ willingness to engage with their work. Steve Lacy, a member of MEV, pointed out that public engagement began to involve more sabotage than active participation.⁴⁷ For example, as Cornelius Cardew recalled, at a concert in England MEV dodged hotdogs and coke tins hurled by the audience.⁴⁸

Back to the Concert Hall

That same year, although still active in MEV, Rzewski wrote his first concert-hall success, *Les Moutons de Panurge* (The Sheep of Panurge, a phrase implying a person who blindly follows the lead of another). Composed “for any number of musicians playing melody instruments and any number of non-musicians playing anything,” *Les Moutons* demonstrates an affinity with MEV’s attempts to break down barriers and facilitate the experience of social phenomena through music. Yet *Les Moutons* actually includes a printed score with detailed instructions, making Rzewski’s approach far more conventional, and perhaps even more binding, than the experiments of MEV. The score consists of a single melodic line with numbers 1-65 indicated above each note (Figure 3). Rzewski instructs the musicians to

⁴⁶ Quoted in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 130.

⁴⁷ Beal, “Music is a Universal Human Right,” 113.

⁴⁸ Cornelius Cardew, “A Note on Frederic Rzewski,” *Musical Times* 117 (1976): 32.

Read from left to right. Playing the notes as follows: 1, 1-2, 1-2-3, 1-2-3-4, etc. When you have reached note 65, play the whole melody once again and then begin subtracting notes from the beginning: 2-65, 3-65, 4-65...62-63-64-65, 63-64-65-, 64-65, 65. Hold the last note until everybody has reached it, then begin an improvisation; using any instruments.⁴⁹

Figure 3 (*Les Moutons des Panurge*)



Rzewski invites the non-musicians to make any sound, but preferably loud, at the pulse of an eighth note. Even with the most conscientious performers, it is impossible for the ensemble to stay together, as Christian Asplund has noted.⁵⁰ However, this is precisely Rzewski's objective, for he asks that the ensemble "stay together as long as you can, but if you get lost, stay lost. Do not try to find your way back into the fold."⁵¹

Thus, Rzewski encourages professional musicians to resist the pull of their training, rebelling against the sacred principles upholding musical accuracy and control.

Rzewski's desire to free performers from the constraints of musical tradition with its social and political underpinnings calls to mind the assertions made by one of the composer's contemporaries, the French economic theorist Jacques Attali. In 1977, Attali argued that "listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and

⁴⁹ Rzewski, *Les Moutons de Panurge* (Tokyo: Zen-On Music Company, Ltd., 1980).

⁵⁰ Christian Asplund, "Frederic Rzewski and Spontaneous Political Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 33, no. 1/2 (1995): 424.

⁵¹ Rzewski, *Les Moutons de Panurge*.

control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political.”⁵² Rzewski’s *Les Moutons* may be heard as a stubborn protest against the controlling forces ingrained in the Western art music tradition: concern for the tastes of the elite, the divide between performer and audience, and an obsession with accuracy and perfection, all of which Rzewski believed contributed to a highly stratified society.⁵³

Shortly after composing *Les Moutons de Panurge*, Rzewski decided to make the political content of his music more explicit, a change that coincided with his temporary return to the United States in 1970. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, many Americans regarded their government with increasing wariness. The anti-Vietnam movement reached its height as the public learned of atrocities such as the My Lai Massacre (1968) and the secret bombing of neutral Cambodia (1969). Historian John Lewis Gaddis points out that through clandestine operations, Americans became frustrated as “the gap between what *appeared* to be happening and what was *actually* happening” outside the United States grew wider.⁵⁴ Domestic affairs were also in a state of disrepair as demonstrated by events such as Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in 1968 and the Kent State University shootings in 1970. Perhaps because of this highly volatile atmosphere, Rzewski believed his voice and anti-imperialist message might finally be heard.

Confirming Rzewski’s new, explicitly political orientation were *Coming Together* (1971) and *Attica* (1972), yet both works continued in the same quasi-minimalist style as

⁵² Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, translated by Brain Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 6.

⁵³ Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 130-131.

⁵⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 174.

Les Moutons de Panurge. Scored for speaker and variable ensemble, *Coming Together* and *Attica* protest the brutality used to suppress a riot at the Attica Correctional Institute in September 1971. The Attica riots were largely a result of racial discrimination, severely deteriorated standards of living, and outright abuses within the American prison system.⁵⁵ Rzewski declared that the Attica incident was an “atrociousness that demanded of every responsible person that had any power to cry out, that he cry out.”⁵⁶ *Coming Together* includes eight sentences from a letter written by Sam Melville, a left-wing activist incarcerated in Attica for political crimes and one of the 43 people killed during the uprising.⁵⁷ Rzewski divides each of Melville’s sentences into seven segments, placing each segment above a measure of the music, a single bass line.

Figure 4 (*Coming Together*, mm. 1-7)



⁵⁵ L. Thomas Winfree, “Attica” in *Encyclopedia of American Prisons*, Marilyn D. McShane and Franklin P. Williams, ed. (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 71-73.

⁵⁶ Walter Zimmermann, *Desert Plants*, 310.

⁵⁷ Asplund, “Frederic Rzewski,” 419.

Coming Together can be performed by one musician both speaking the text and playing the bass line. Ideally, however, one person recites the text with a small ensemble accompanying. Rzewski allows for some improvisation, but unlike *Les Moutons de Panurge*, insists that the musicians not lose their place. *Attica* is similar in construction to *Coming Together* but includes just one line of text: “Attica is in front of me,” presented using an additive procedure: Attica, Attica is, Attica is in, etc. This statement was inmate Richard X. Clark’s sardonic response when asked, upon being released from prison in February of 1972, how it felt to put Attica behind him.⁵⁸ *Coming Together* and *Attica* are reminiscent of early American minimalism as exemplified by Steve Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966).⁵⁹ Rzewski soon turned away from this exclusively minimalist approach, although traces continued to crop up in later compositions.

Realism and Piano Music of the Mid 1970s

Throughout the 1970s, Rzewski’s musical-political engagement was tied to prominent political and social concerns. For example, in 1975, a serious political event caused Rzewski to rethink the nature of political music, prompting the composer’s most famous piece of protest *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* After Chileans elected socialist Salvador Allende as their president in 1970, the United States, fearing the spread of Soviet influence in the Western hemisphere, worked to undermine

⁵⁸ Ibid., 422.

⁵⁹ Pollack, “A New Age and A New Left,” 381. Pollack briefly compares *Coming Together* with *Come Out*. See also Sumanth Gopinath, “The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich’s *Come Out*” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 121-144.

Allende's government.⁶⁰ President Nixon assigned a special task force of the CIA to put economic pressure on the country, depose Allende, and help to establish a new, non-socialist government. The CIA helped Chilean General Augusto Pinochet stage a coup d'état on September 11, 1973 after which Chile was ruled by a military junta until 1990.⁶¹ Pinochet's coup and the brutal tactics of his military regime incited outrage throughout the world, inspiring numerous protests outside Chile.

In 1973, prior to Pinochet's takeover, Chilean protest artist, Sergio Ortega, who often penned political anthems in support of Allende, wrote the song "El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido (The People United Will Never Be Defeated)," protesting the growing-right wing movement in the country.⁶² His song became *the* leftist chant of solidarity, and it was this tune that Rzewski chose as the theme for his epic set of thirty-six variations for solo piano, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (1975). Rzewski's *The People United* starkly contrasts the minimalistic *Coming Together* and *Attica*; indeed, Rzewski's largely tonal bravura variations seem closer to the nineteenth-century virtuoso tradition than anything in the twentieth century. Howard Pollack points out that Ortega's tune has much in common, both melodically and harmonically, to Paganini's famous Caprice, no. 24, perhaps clarifying Rzewski's debt to composers such as Liszt, Brahms, and Rachmaninov, all of whom wrote variations on Paganini's theme.⁶³

⁶⁰ Samuel Chavkin, *The Murder of Chile* (New York: Everest House Publishers, 1982), 47.

⁶¹ Lois Hecht Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2007), 27.

⁶² David Miller, "Ortega, Sergio," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (accessed 15 January 2011)
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51762>>

⁶³ Pollack, "A New Age and A New Left," 385.

Figure 5 (*The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, mm. 1-16)

Thema
♩ = 106 With determination

Original Authors: Sergio Ortega / Eduardo Carrasco
This variations by: Frederic Rzewski

¡El Pueblo unido ja- más se ra ven-ci-do! The people united will
ne-ver be de-feated!

softer, legato

Rzewski's message of political solidarity remains at the forefront in *The People United*. Pianist Ursula Oppens commissioned the piece for a performance at the Kennedy Center celebrating the American Bicentennial. Premiered just two years after Pinochet's takeover, Rzewski's setting provided a bold commentary on the precepts of American freedom and respect for democracy. In 1975, Rzewski remarked that the earlier pieces *Coming Together* and *Attica* were not particularly clear political statements except in terms of their extra-musical associations.⁶⁴ By writing engaging and celebratory variations on the anthem commemorating Allende's regime, however, Rzewski ensured that his compositional approach in *The People United* elucidated his political program.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Zimmermann, *Desert Plants*, 310.

⁶⁵ In *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Rzewski also quotes Hanns Eisler's "Solidarity Song" and the well-known Italian labor song *Bandiera Rosa*, again clearly maximizing his leftist agenda.

The People United was initially intended as a partner to Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*.⁶⁶ Oppens apparently abandoned the plan, never learning the Beethoven; however, this programming, coupled with Rzewski's architectural mastery of theme and variation form, has tempted comparisons with the *Diabelli Variations*, as well as Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.⁶⁷ Christian Wolff describes Rzewski's meticulous organization:

The variations are grouped in six sets of six. The sixth variation of a set, itself in six parts, consists of a summing up of the previous five variations of the set, with a final sixth part of new or transitional material....Finally the sixth set of variations (31 through 36) becomes a gathering together of elements of all the preceding thirty variations.⁶⁸

Rzewski's writing brings together a wide variety of compositional influences, from Bach, Beethoven, and Liszt to Copland, Cage, and Glass. This approach is somewhat similar to other collage or polystylistic compositions of the time.⁶⁹ Yet each of the six "sets" tend toward some general characteristic, as Pollack has noted.⁷⁰ For example, the first six variations remain close to the theme, proudly reiterating its message.⁷¹ Robert Wason describes the fifth set as confrontational.⁷² The final, sixth set of variations offer resolution, although Pollack argues that they remain somewhat inconclusive, the reprise

⁶⁶ Matthew Gurewitsch, "Maverick With a Message of Solidarity," *New York Times*, 27 April 2008 (accessed 15 January 2011) <
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/arts/music/27gure.html>>

⁶⁷ Pollack, "A New Age and A New Left," 383.

⁶⁸ Christian Wolff, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, liner notes, Vanguard, VSD 71248.

⁶⁹ Composers who have engaged in polystylism include Peter Maxwell Davies, George Rochberg, and Alfred Schnittke.

⁷⁰ Pollack, "A New Age and A New Left," 384.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁷² Wason, "Tonality and Atonality in Frederic Rzewski's Variations," 30.

of the main theme suggesting an unending struggle.⁷³ Rzewski later argued that “the unification of people is a long story,” a possible rationale for the work’s “unfinished” conclusion.⁷⁴

The People United Will Never Be Defeated! marked Rzewski’s return to composition for the piano. It also inaugurated a series of works with varying degrees of experimental elements all united by explicit or implicit political programs. The *Four Pieces* (1977), for example, are perhaps more experimental and less overtly political than *The People United*. In the *Four Pieces*, Rzewski’s main preoccupation seems to be exploration of the piano’s sound potential. In the opening measure of the fourth piece, Rzewski writes a massive crescendo, beginning at the top of the keyboard and moving all the way down the instrument. Rzewski writes that “the notes should be “stroked” rather than struck, as if one were exciting a large gong: the object being to make the entire instrument speak, throughout its spectrum.”⁷⁵

Yet the *Four Pieces* are not merely an experiment in sound; the work may also have a subtle political program. The main theme, disappearing and reappearing throughout all four pieces, sometimes fragmented and sometimes in full, is based on a folk song from the Andes.⁷⁶ Music critic Leighton Kerner referred to the theme as a

⁷³ Pollack, “A New Age and A New Left,” 385.

⁷⁴ Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski: Piano Works, 1975-1999*, liner notes, Nonesuch, CD 79632-3.

⁷⁵ Rzewski, *Four Pieces for Piano* (ZEN-ON Music Co., 1981), 31.

⁷⁶ Emanuele Arciuli, *Four Pieces and Phrygian Gates*, liner notes, Stradivarius STR 33735.

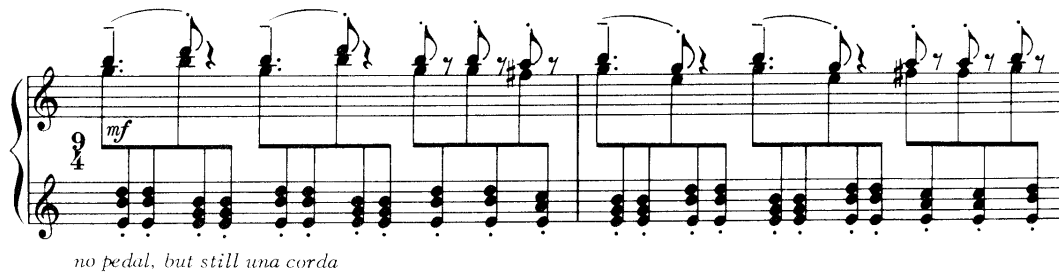
“phantom anthem.”⁷⁷ The first piece opens with a “dreamlike” statement of the so-called “phantom anthem” (Figure 6).

Figure 6 (*Four Pieces for Piano, I, m. 1*)



In the fourth piece, Rzewski transforms the melody, which appears in an energetic hocket rhythm from mm. 13-20 (Figure 7).

Figure 7 (*Four Pieces for Piano, IV, mm. 13-14*)



Here Rzewski evokes the sound of Andean flutes, first in the distance, then closer and increasing in intensity as the pianist shifts from *una corda* to *tres corde*.⁷⁸ In light of Rzewski’s prior concerns regarding Chilean politics, his decision to quote repeatedly an Andean folk tune may signal continued support for the leftist cause in Chile.

⁷⁷ Leighton Kerner, “Composers Defiant Will Never Be Refuted,” *Village Voice*, 22 January 1979, p. 65.

⁷⁸ Personal communication with Ursula Oppens during a piano lesson, Las Vegas Music Festival, Piano Institute, 2006.

Conclusion

In 1978, however, Rzewski shifted back to domestic concerns. When pianist Paul Jacobs requested a set of pieces “American in flavor,” Rzewski’s answer was the *North American Ballads*.⁷⁹ The *Ballads*, unlike the *Four Pieces*, continue where *The People United* left off, relying heavily on Rzewski’s concept of musical realism and patent political engagement. The *Ballads* make known Rzewski’s position regarding the state of American labor. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the United States was plagued by labor unrest; unions suffered across numerous industries, and many believed organized labor had begun an irreparable decline.⁸⁰ In the *North American Ballads*, Rzewski arranges three songs associated with the leftist labor movement of the 1930s, as well as a labor song of sorts from the nineteenth century. Several of these songs had become popular again on picket lines and protests during the 1970s; thus, Rzewski’s four arrangements enable him to make a heartfelt statement supporting diverse American laborers of the past, present, and future.

The *North American Ballads* mark the culmination of the first half of Rzewski’s career. One of the last of his neo-romantic folk-song arrangements, the *Ballads* demonstrate Rzewski’s long trajectory of stylistic evolution heavily influenced by politics of the times. In the following chapter, I analyze each of the *Ballads* in detail, calling attention to both musical and historical considerations.

⁷⁹ Bell and Olmstead, “Musica Reservata,” 451.

⁸⁰ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 213.

CHAPTER 2

NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS

Introduction

Rzewski's use of American folk song in the *North American Ballads*, similar to his adaptation of Chilean folk song in *The People United*, prompts examination of his treatment of borrowed materials. Musical borrowing has always been of interest to musicologists, as evinced by numerous studies which consider instances of borrowing throughout history.⁸¹ During the early twentieth century, American composers such as Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and William Schuman often borrowed to give music a national flavor and to evoke the past, as J. Peter Burkholder has noted.⁸² American composers were particularly interested in folk song, and arrangements and elaborate settings of folk songs flourished during this time.⁸³ During the latter half of the century, musical borrowing, particularly from tonal music, stemmed from more radical aesthetic politics. For example, composers such as Berio, Rochberg, and Stockhausen rebelled

⁸¹ For examples, see R.L. Huestis, "Contrafacta, Parodies, and Instrumental Arrangements from the Ars Nova," Ph.D. diss. (University of California Los Angeles, 1973); Richard Taruskin, "Antoine Busnoys and the 'L'homme armé' Tradition," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39, no. 2 (1986): 255-293; Christopher Alan Reynolds, "The Counterpoint of Allusion in Fifteenth-Century Masses," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 45, no. 2 (1992): 228-260; Paul Brainard, "Bach's Parody Procedure and the St. Matthew Passion," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 22, no. 2 (1969): 241-260; Henry F. Gilbert, "Folk-Music in Art-Music—A Discussion and a Theory," *Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1917): 577-601; R. Larry Todd, "On Quotation in Schumann's Music" in *Schumann and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 80-112; Richard Taruskin, "Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33, no. 3 (1980): 501-543; Robert Walser, "Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity," *Popular Music* 11, no. 3 (1992): 263-308.

⁸² See J. Peter Burkholder, "Borrowing," *New Grove Online* <accessed 6 September 2010>.

⁸³ Ibid.

against post-War modernist dictums, adopting a style of conspicuous collage quotation and insisting that the music of the past could indeed interact with the music of the present.⁸⁴

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given his propensity for ever-changing post-War trends, Rzewski's approach to musical borrowing has more in common with borrowing during the first half of the twentieth century. Rzewski's *Ballads* are folk-song arrangements rather than pastiches of tonal or folk fragments. Furthermore, Rzewski sought to make an explicit political statement, whereas Berio and Rochberg were merely concerned with political aesthetics. Thus, the *Ballads* parallel the political and nationalist agendas of the early twentieth-century borrowing tradition. Those agendas themselves were a continuation of the heightened nationalism of the nineteenth century, and consequently, Rzewski's *Ballads* might be considered an extension of the *ballade* genre. Indeed, James Parakilas has shown how throughout the twentieth century, different varieties of the *ballade* continued to develop.⁸⁵ Orchestral and piano *ballades* diversified, for example, moving away from the narrative tradition popularized by Chopin.⁸⁶ Rzewski's *Ballads* can be understood as one in this new variety, as Rzewski broaches a new repertory of political folk songs including "Dreadful Memories," "Which Side Are You On?," "Down by the Riverside," and "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ David Metzger, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 108-111.

⁸⁵ See James Parakilas, *Ballads Without Words: Chopin and the Tradition of the Instrumental Ballade* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

In this chapter I analyze each ballad, highlighting Rzewski's treatment of folk materials and demonstrating how Rzewski's political and social awareness during the late 1970s informed his compositional decisions. My observations serve to firmly situate the *Ballads* within the context of domestic (quasi-nationalist) concerns in the United States during the latter half of the Cold War.

Harlan County, Kentucky

A series of strikes in the coal mines of Harlan County, Kentucky during the early 1930s inspired "Dreadful Memories" and "Which Side Are You On?" Harlan County attracted much attention from left-wing radicals, particularly communists, throughout the 1930s. When the United Mine Workers Union (UMW) failed to unionize Harlan's coal mines during the first phase of the 1931-32 strike, the National Miners Union (NMU), affiliated with the American Communist Party and New York City's left-wing scene, jumped to the cause. Many communist intellectuals idealized the labor struggle in Harlan County, viewing it as a promising Marxist experiment and a persuasive example of capitalism's failings. Essayist Edmund Wilson, a contributor to *New Masses*, argued:

It used to be the custom in colleges to take the students of sociological courses on tours of the insane asylums and jails. It is a pity that they can't be taken on excursions to Pineville, Kentucky. Not that they would find anything there that they wouldn't be able to find in almost any other American industrial community; but they would see the basic antagonisms involved in the industrial system in their most acute and naked form.⁸⁸

Malcolm Cowley, an assistant editor for the *New Republic*, referred to the controversy in Harlan County as a

⁸⁸ Edmund Wilson, "Class War Exhibits," *New Masses*, April 1932, p. 7.

battle in which everyone must take his stand; there is no compromise. Whatever is black to one class is white to the other; whoever brings relief to the miners is an enemy of the operators.⁸⁹

Harlan County lacked a sizable, disinterested middle class, that is, any large group without a vested interest in the coal industry, as labor historian John Hevener has noted.⁹⁰ Thus, a glaring divide between the working and upper classes prevailed. Furthermore, Harlan's coal firms had achieved total control over the working-class mining population. Miners lived in company-owned housing and were paid not in cash but in scrip redeemable only in company-owned stores.⁹¹ As Hevener argues, Harlan's coal firms did not merely run businesses in Harlan; they ran the county itself.⁹² When miners went on strike in February of 1931, they sought union representation to alleviate the firms' absolute economic, political, and social power.⁹³

The strike of 1931-32 earned Harlan County the nickname "Bloody Harlan," but unfortunately, this moniker does not refer to a temporary stain. Since the 1930s, Harlan County has continued to struggle with labor disputes and vehement anti-union sentiment. By 1939, the UMW had managed to situate itself in Harlan County but fought to stay

⁸⁹ Malcolm Cowley, "Kentucky Coal Town," *New Republic*, 2 March 1932, pp. 67-68.

⁹⁰ John Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?: The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931-39* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 22. On Harlan County during the 1930s, see also Harry M. Caudill, *Theirs Be The Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1983); William D. Forester, *Harlan County: The Turbulent Thirties* (Harlan: William D. Forester, 1986); John Ed Pearce, *Divide and Dissent: Kentucky Politics, 1930-1963* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987); Paul F. Taylor, *Bloody Harlan: The United Mine Workers of America in Harlan County, Kentucky, 1931-1941* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990).

⁹¹ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*, 5-9.

⁹² Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 22.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

alive throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁴ By 1973, only two UMW mines remained in Harlan. Then, in 1973-74, a strike at the Brookside Mine in Harlan achieved UMW representation, a glimmer of hope.⁹⁵ However, by 1978, the year Rzewski began composing the *Ballads*, a three-month long strike had crippled the UMW in Harlan yet again.⁹⁶

“Dreadful Memories”

Rzewski dedicated “Dreadful Memories” to Aunt Molly Jackson, the singer most associated with the folk song.⁹⁷ Aunt Molly, who called herself a wife and daughter of the Kentucky coal mines, was born in 1880 and during the late 1920s and early 1930s, became one of the most prominent of the Harlan County balladeers.⁹⁸ She moved to New York City in 1931, where she was an important cultural figure in the American Communist Party, symbolizing the plight of the working class.⁹⁹ A tireless union

⁹⁴ Lynda Ann Ewen, *Which Side Are You On?: The Brookside Mine Strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, 1973-1974* (Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1979), 20-21.

⁹⁵ On Harlan County during the 1970s, see Barbara Kopple, *Harlan County, U.S.A.* DVD (New York: First Run Features, 1976); Daniel H. Pollitt, “Hard Times in Harlan County,” *Journal of Current Social Issues* 11, no. 6 (1974); Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Bryan Woolley, *We Be Here When the Morning Comes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975).

⁹⁶ Hevener, *Which Side Are You On*, 184. Hevener points out that although the 1978 agreement did substantially increase wages, medical and retirement benefits were less than desirable.

⁹⁷ Both Aunt Molly and her half sister, Sarah Ogan Gunning claimed to have written “Dreadful Memories.” However, Rzewski’s dedication clearly indicates that he sought to honor Aunt Molly.

⁹⁸ Timothy P. Lynch, *Strike Songs of the Depression* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 52.

⁹⁹ Shelly Romalis, *Pistol Packin’ Mama: Aunt Molly Jackson and the Politics of Folksong* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 112. Romalis has argued that Aunt Molly was valued more as a symbol than as an artist; many people really didn’t like the

advocate, Aunt Molly fashioned songs to rally support for union representation throughout the coal mines of Eastern Kentucky, Southeast Ohio, and Pennsylvania. In less situation-specific songs, Aunt Molly simply lamented the painful reality of poverty. She wrote “Dreadful Memories,” set to the tune of J.B.F Wright’s gospel hymn “Precious Memories,” around 1935. Two decades later, she described the song’s origins to John Greenway:

Thirty-seven babies died in my arms in the last three months of 1931. Their little stomach busted open; they was mortified inside. Oh, what an awful way for a baby to die. Not a thing to give our babies to eat but the strong soup from soup beans, and that took the lining from their little stomachs, so that they bled inside and mortified, and died.¹⁰⁰

Aunt Molly felt haunted by what she had seen; indeed, her lyrics, informed by her experiences as a nurse and midwife, paint a heartbreaking picture:

Dreadful memories! How they linger;
How they pain my precious soul.
Little children, sick and hungry,
Sick and hungry, weak and cold.

Little children, cold and hungry,
Without any food at all to eat.
They had no clothes to put on their bodies;
They had no shoes to put on their feet.

REFRAIN: Dreadful memories! How they linger;
How they fill my heart with pain.
Oh, how hard I’ve tried to forget them
But I find it all in vain.¹⁰¹

harsh, nasal quality of her voice, but they liked the idea that she was singing “people’s” music. Later in life, especially during the 1950s, Aunt Molly denied any connection to the American Communist Party, but Romalis asserts that she was in fact quite active within the New York communist circle.

¹⁰⁰ John Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 274.

¹⁰¹ Lyrics to “Dreadful Memories” taken from Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest*, 274.

“Dreadful Memories” becomes all the more powerful when we take into account its resonances with Wright’s “Precious Memories,” which reflects nostalgically on lingering images of childhood:

Precious memories, unseen angels,
Sent from somewhere to my soul;
How they linger, ever near me,
And the sacred past unfold.

CHORUS: Precious memories, how they linger,
How they ever flood my soul;
In the stillness of the midnight,
Precious, sacred scenes unfold.

Precious father, loving mother,
Fly across the lonely years;
And old homescenes of my childhood,
In fond memory appears.¹⁰²

Thus, Aunt Molly’s contafactum evokes a painful nostalgia. Through parody, her song echoes the familial topics of Wright’s song, yet Aunt Molly’s memories are painful, rather than precious; she is haunted by them, rather than comforted. This discrepancy between source material and parody only exacerbates her powerlessness to overcome the dread—to forget—the flip side of Wright’s idealized picture.

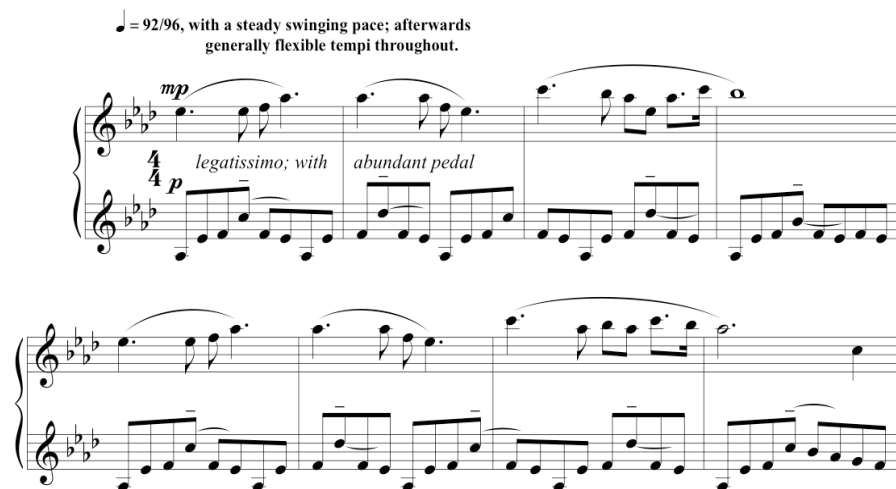
Lonely, painful nostalgia colors Rzewski’s “Dreadful Memories” as well, serving as a plea to overcome the failures of the past and improve the future. Here, one of Rzewski’s remarks apropos quotation in *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* is relevant. He explained its presence by noting that “parallels to present threats exist in the

¹⁰² Lyrics taken from J.B.F. Wright, *Precious Memories* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music & Printing Co., 1996).

past” and “it is important to learn from them.”¹⁰³ A similar entreaty informs “Dreadful Memories.”

Rzewski opens in A-flat major with a complete statement of Aunt Molly’s song. In the first eight measures, the pentatonic melody appears in single notes in the right hand, while the left hand accompanies with a steady and repetitive eighth-note pattern (Figure 8).

Figure 8 (“Dreadful Memories,” mm. 1-8)



In m. 9, the melody is transferred to the left hand, with the right hand taking over the accompaniment. The melody returns to the right hand in m. 17; now, however, the right hand plays chords, and the melody line is heard in the inner voice, suggesting the spontaneous vocal harmonization of hymn-singing. Throughout the opening, Rzewski stays firmly in A flat and gives Aunt Molly’s plaintive tune priority. By fully stating it at the outset, Rzewski effectively declares he is honoring both her and her struggle.

In the next section (mm. 25-34), marked “a little slower, hesitantly,” Rzewski plays with Aunt Molly’s material more freely, simultaneously emphasizing the keys of

¹⁰³ Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski*, liner notes.

A-flat major and A major. Fragments of the tune pass back and forth in polytonal uncertainty. Suddenly Rzewski is no longer merely transcribing Aunt Molly's tune. Rather, he asserts his voice as a twentieth-century composer. Mm. 35-40 are cheery and playful (Figure 9). Rzewski marks "a Little faster than Tempo I" and writes staccato sixteenth notes alternating between the hands. The half step figures prominently in this section, and several strategically placed rests in measures 35 and 36 create a light-hearted, almost comical character.

Figure 9 ("Dreadful Memories," mm. 35-40)



Rzewski uses this section and the energy he generates to effect a transition into the next section, mm. 41-51, a brilliant, yet fierce and determined display of pianism, reminiscent of Chopin or Liszt. Two themes that stand out in Aunt Molly's lyrics to "Dreadful Memories" are hopeless and outraged parents and starving innocent children. In the carefree staccato passage of mm. 35-40, listeners may hear childlike innocence, followed by an angry parental outburst in mm. 41-51. In m. 45, fragments of the folk melody

appear while virtuosic sixteenth-note runs pass back and forth, measure by measure, between the hands, building to the climax of the piece in m. 52.

In m. 61, a brief fragment of Stephen Foster's nostalgic "Swanee River" appears but melts away quickly as if imaginary. It is unclear if this ephemeral allusion is intentional or accidental; thus, "Swanee River" sounds like a muddled dream, a lost possibility of hope or comfort. "Dreadful Memories" ends with a quiet peroration at m. 77, marked "Something like a Lullaby." A variant on the tune occurs in the right hand in m. 78, and as the right hand tapers off, the left hand begins a repetitive accompaniment faintly resembling the opening of the piece. Rzewski repeats this E-flat major pattern four times, but on the fourth does not resolve the penultimate note (F4) down to the expected E-flat. Instead, the final chord, an augmented triad, is held, ultimately fading into silence (Figure 10).

Figure 10 ("Dreadful Memories," mm. 80-85)



Rzewski's eerie and inconclusive ending thus corresponds to Aunt Molly's final refrain:

Dreadful memories! How they haunt me
As the lonely moments fly.
Oh, how them little babies suffered!

I saw them starve to death and die.¹⁰⁴

Parodies of nostalgia run like a thread through both Aunt Molly's song and Rzewski's arrangement. By choosing the cozy, wholesome hymn "Precious Memories" as her model, Aunt Molly engages with yearning for yesterday. Rzewski's arrangement, with the fleeting reference to "Swanee River," also a song about a distant past, reaffirms this parody. Aunt Molly felt that she had been robbed of any pleasant memories to cherish or idealize. By memorializing her struggle, Rzewski quietly urges Americans to confront this sad reality.

"Which Side Are You On?"

"Which Side Are You On?" by Florence Reece, is one of the most enduring songs from Harlan County and perhaps the entire depression era. Florence Reece was the wife of Sam Reece, a Harlan miner who joined the National Miners Union during the early 1930s. Union miners were often harassed, and after repeated violent searches of their home by local sheriff John Henry Blair and his deputies, Florence Reece apparently ripped a sheet off her calendar and wrote her interpretation of the Harlan County struggle, which she set to the tune of "Lay the Lily Low."¹⁰⁵ Timothy P. Lynch points out that Reece's song is distinctive because it addresses the split between the miners, those for the

¹⁰⁴ Lyrics taken from Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest*, 274.

¹⁰⁵ R. Serge Denisoff, *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 24; Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, x. Waldemar Hille, ed. *The People's Song Book* (New York: Boni and Gaer Inc., 1948), 92. Hille credits the words to "Which Side Are You On?" to Reece, while the music is identified merely as an "old hymn tune." According to A. L. Lloyd, although "Lay the Lily Low" is usually said to be an old Baptist hymn, it may have evolved from the British ballad "Jack Munro," in which "Lay the Lily Low" appears as a refrain. *Labor Notes* November 2007, "Which Side Are You On?" (accessed 15 November 2010) <<http://www.labornotes.org>> See also Josephine McGill, "Old Ballad Burthens," *The Musical Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1918): 299.

union and those against it.¹⁰⁶ So many of the songs from Harlan, especially those sung by Aunt Molly, focus on the class division between coal operators and miners, but Reece's "Which Side Are You On?" exhorts vacillating miners to join the union and take responsibility for their futures:

Come all of you good workers,
Good news to you I'll tell
Of how the good old union
Has come in here to dwell.

CHORUS: Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there;
You'll either be a union man
Or a thug for J.H. Blair.

CHORUS

Oh, workers, can you stand it?
Oh, tell me how you can.
Will you be a lousy scab
Or will you be a man?

CHORUS

Don't scab for the bosses,
Don't listen to their lies.
Us poor folks haven't got a chance
Unless we organize.¹⁰⁷

Rzewski's arrangement of "Which Side Are You On?" opens with fragments of the preexisting tune rather than a complete statement. Beginning in m. 2, moreover, Rzewski emphasizes just one fragment: the opening to the tune's refrain which corresponds to the fundamental question posed by the text—"Which side are you on?" Rzewski changes keys and registers so frequently that one might imagine a chorus of

¹⁰⁶ Lynch, *Strike Songs*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ Lyrics to "Which Side Are You On?" taken from Hille, *The People's Song Book*, 92.

angry picketers demanding an answer. By juxtaposing polytonal fragments of the question, however, Rzewski also depicts the ambivalence often felt by those involved in a labor dispute, uncertain of the degree to which they can stand up for their rights without penalty.

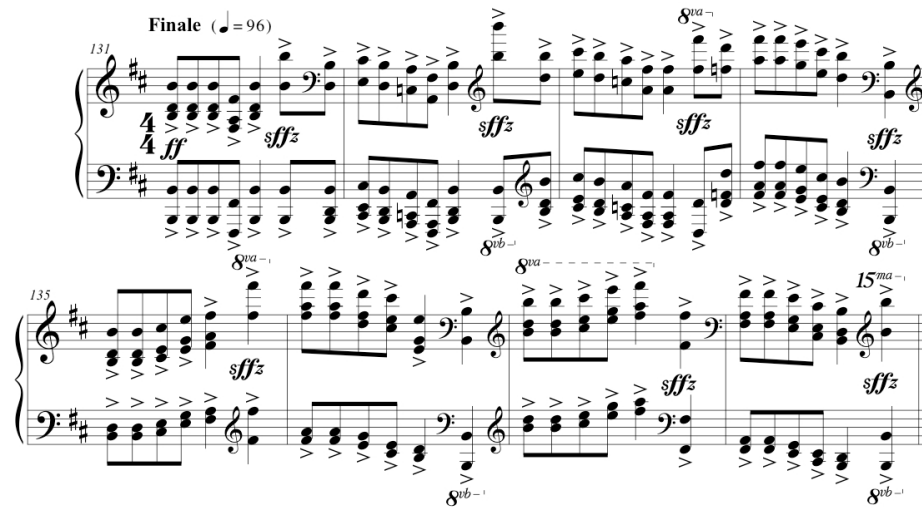
The first complete statement of the nearly pentatonic tune occurs in mm. 26-32 (Figure 11). Marked *piano* and “very freely, espressivo,” Rzewski’s arrangement is a sweet, meditative suggestion; paradoxically, it fails to conjure up the militant call to arms its author, Reece advocated. The right hand begins with the tune in B minor in m. 26, but almost immediately, an inner voice (also carrying the tune) staggers in E minor. The left hand accompanies with an independent (following its own regular slur pattern), meandering quarter-note line. As the right hand wavers between B and E minor, two distinct “sides” nonetheless assert themselves.

Figure 11 (“Which Side Are You On?” mm. 26-32)



After this non-exhortatory imitative passage, the listener does not hear the tune presented in its entirety again until the very end of the piece (mm. 131-138), at which point Rzewski pounds out the verse and refrain in fiery, determined octaves (Figure 12).

Figure 12 (“Which Side Are You On?” mm. 131-138)



Prior to this final, climatic statement, “Which Side Are You On?” is fragmented, even forgotten. In mm. 96-126, Rzewski falls into a repetitive, rhythmically driving pattern, predominantly in C mixolydian and reminiscent of the American minimalist tradition.¹⁰⁸ Each measure is repeated, and a slow crescendo begins in m. 111. In the same measure, the right hand begins doubling the left hand’s sixteenth notes. This long and near intolerable swell then explodes with the final, complete statement of the theme. Thus, without quoting the tune, Rzewski mirrors its message. Listeners may imagine the emotional toll accumulated during a labor strike, as its participants endure months of picketing, negotiations, and uncertainty. Rzewski’s final eight measures emerge from the interminable minimalistic groove full of triumph and resolve, like the final applause to a speech at a union gathering.

Over the course of this movement, Rzewski’s strategy approximates what J. Peter Burkholder labels a “cumulative setting,” in which a theme is presented in its

¹⁰⁸ On minimalist music see Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

completeness only near the end of a movement or work, as in the third movement of Ives's Second Violin Sonata ("The Revival").¹⁰⁹ Prior to the complete statement, motives deriving from the theme may be developed, fragmented, and altered.¹¹⁰ As noted, the first full statement of the theme (mm. 26-32) doesn't really sound like Reece's song. Rzewski evokes only a faint echo of the tune, after which the tune partially disappears. When we hear the final complete statement, vigorously proclaimed with the fighting spirit of Reece's message, we experience the power of the cumulative. Furthermore, Rzewski was familiar with Barbara Kopple's Academy Award winning documentary *Harlan County, U.S.A.* (1976), in which Florence Reece, then in her seventies, sang "Which Side Are You On?" to rally support during the 1973-74 Brookside Strike.¹¹¹ A "cumulative" interpretation of Rzewski's setting enhances Rzewski's political program and celebrates Reece's lifelong commitment to social justice for miners.

Rzewski indicates that an optional improvisation may be played just before the final statement of the tune. However free the improvisation, he gives detailed instructions:

1. Improvisation should begin as a sudden radical change, with no "transition." That is, there should be no ambiguity about where the written music ends and where the improvisation begins. The manner in which this sense of a leap to a different kind of order is evoked is left to the interpreter. A few simple limitations, however, apply:
2. Begin by alluding in some way to the tonality of B minor. This may be brief. End with a rather long section in C-mixolydian.

¹⁰⁹ J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 4, 200.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹¹ Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski*, liner notes. Rzewski credits Reece as being ninety years old in 1973; however, according to Reece's obituary in the New York Times in August 1986, Reece died at age 86.

3. Improvisation may use techniques employed in written music (polytonal transpositions of theme, etc.) or not; but in any case should represent a different “side” of the same form (many different tonalities in the first part, one tonality in the second).
4. Improvisation, if played, should last at least as long as the preceding written music.
5. If no improvisation is played, pass immediately to the finale.¹¹²

Rzewski’s requirements, his desire for “a sudden radical change,” “no transition,” and “a different kind of order,” depict an assortment of Marxist images popular at the time.

Although it is not clear exactly how carefully Rzewski studied Marxism, a political interpretation of the improvisation instructions might be achieved by considering the “Communist Manifesto.”¹¹³ In this document, Marx and Engels acknowledged the importance of trade unions, explaining the ways in which resistance in the industrial workplace, although only occasionally successful, was an important part of the long-range goal of “the ever-expanding union of the workers.”¹¹⁴ According to Rzewski’s instructions, improvisation represents the new, unshackled, communistic order. The improvisation may also symbolize the struggle, revolt, or riot against the old order. Yet the final goal is greater unity, not struggle; this greater unity is achieved in the final (cumulative) statement of “Which Side Are You On?,” which emerges from the improvisation or new order.

¹¹² Frederic Rzewski, *Squares, North American Ballads* (Tokyo: Zen-On Music Co., 1982), 43.

¹¹³ Rzewski is not available for interview at this time. Since the author could not ask Rzewski about the extent to which Marxism influenced his work, she has chosen one of the most widely read of Marx and Engel’s documents to shed light on the political rhetoric of Rzewski’s improvisation instructions.

¹¹⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Communist Manifesto” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 166.

“Down by the Riverside”

The third ballad, “Down by the Riverside,” is the oldest song used in Rzewski’s set. Although it is impossible to date this song precisely, it stretches back to the nineteenth century. Shane White and Graham White have traced versions of it to plantations in both Texas and Mississippi.¹¹⁵ Carl Sandburg included a version of “Down by the Riverside” under the title “Ain’ Go’N’ To Study War No Mo’” in his 1927 collection, *The American Songbag*.¹¹⁶ Sandburg explained that as a work song-spiritual, it was sung to pass the time during the workday:

Verse I’m go’n’ to lay down my sword and shield,
 I’m go’n’ to lay down my sword and shield,
 Down by de ribber-side, down by de ribber-side
 I’m go’n’ to lay down my sword and shield.

Refrain: I ain’ go’n study war no mo’, I ain’ go’n’ study war no mo’,
 I ain’ go’n study war no mo’, I ain’ go’n’ study war no mo’¹¹⁷

The reference to war was not meant literally. John Greenway points out that African-American spirituals were often full of carefully concealed protest statements; many incorporated biblical phrases that helped to convey double meanings, understood only by an initiated audience.¹¹⁸ Thus, in “Down by the Riverside” the phrases “lay down my sword and shield” and “study war no more” are likely biblical allusions:

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation

¹¹⁵ Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 61-62.

¹¹⁶ Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1927), 480-481.

¹¹⁷ Lyrics taken from Sandburg, *The American Songbag*, 480.

¹¹⁸ Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest*, 75.

will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2: 4)¹¹⁹

He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Micah 4:3)¹²⁰

In the context of a work song, the phrase “lay down my sword and shield” translated to “lay down my hoe or plow,” while “study war no more” might have meant “work for this overseer no more.”

As in “Dreadful Memories,” Rzewski begins his arrangement of “Down by the Riverside” with a complete statement of the anonymous folk song (Figure 13). The melody appears, in sixths, in the right hand, while the left hand outlines D major with a repeating, gently rolling Boogie-woogie bass line. In m. 9, Rzewski gradually begins to fill out the right-hand open sixths, adding one inner voice in m. 9 and another in m. 10. In m. 14, he expands the sixth to an octave. Thus, even as early as mm. 14-15, the listener hears a sense of climax or arrival. Throughout this eighteen-measure section, Rzewski, recalling the same approach used in “Dreadful Memories,” stays firmly in his opening key (D major), emphasizing the clarity of the folk melody.

¹¹⁹ Isaiah 2:4 (New International Version, 2011).

¹²⁰ Micah 4:3 (NIV, 2011).

Figure 13 (“Down by the Riverside,” mm. 1-10)

The prevalence of sixths and hymn-like atmosphere of the opening is also significant, as Rzewski claimed that he used Bach’s Chorale Preludes as a model for the *Ballads*.¹²¹ During the early 1970s, Rzewski had become friendly with folk singer Pete Seeger and had asked him for advice on forming a song-writer’s collective. Rzewski explained: “Pete knew all about it...because his father had organized a similar group in the thirties.”¹²² Pete encouraged Rzewski to look back to Bach and follow his example. Rzewski argues that the *Ballads*:

make use of traditional songs in a way similar to Bach’s use of Lutheran hymns in his chorale preludes for organ. Nearly everything is derived somehow from the basic tune. In each piece I built up contrapuntal textures in a similar way, using classical techniques like augmentation, diminution, transposition, and compression, always keeping the profile of the tune on some level.¹²³

¹²¹ Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski*, liner notes.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

Moreover, Rzewski asserts that his chosen folk ballads function like Lutheran chorales, acting “like a kind of tonal “cement” in a musical composition, permitting wide-ranging improvisation without losing a sense of where “home” is.”¹²⁴ After clearly establishing “home” in his setting of “Down by the Riverside,” Rzewski then begins to experiment, chipping away at the “tonal cement.”

In m. 19, Rzewski abandons D major and fragments the “Down by the Riverside” tune, relying heavily on the opening motive. Throughout mm. 19-32, we continue to hear fragments of the tune in various keys (Figure 14). Howard Pollack has likened this section, particularly mm. 19-21, to the polytonal juxtapositions of tune fragments pioneered by Charles Ives.¹²⁵

Figure 14 (“Down by the Riverside,” mm. 19-23)



In m. 37, we lose the tune and enjoy a few moments of reflection in E-flat major. On the anacrusis to m. 43, the opening melodic motive, in E-flat major, sneaks in quietly in the bass line, and on the second half of beat three of the same measure, the right hand issues

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Pollack, “A New Age and A New Left,” 388-389.

a crashing completion of the phrase in D-flat major (Figure 15). Neither the tune, nor the memory of it, will be suppressed.

Figure 15 (“Down by the Riverside,” mm. 37-45)

Rzewski indicates an optional improvisation in m. 62. After a brief, four-measure interlude, the final statement of the “Down by the Riverside” theme unfolds in a loose passacaglia (Figure 16). Mm. 67-82 are repeated; the first time the tenor line, carrying the tune in single notes, is omitted, and the right hand, playing an embellished version of the tune frolics delicately in the upper register. The section is to begin *ppp* and crescendo to *mf* by the repeat. The repeat opens *mf* and crescendos to *fff*. The tenor line is restored, so the listener hears the tune, sturdy and unadorned, underneath the right-hand embellishment.

Figure 16 (“Down by the Riverside,” mm. 67-72)



The slow crescendo, from *ppp* to *fff*, with the left hand plodding along determinedly, is particularly effective. Here again, the listener understands that something about the tune is profound and unforgettable. Reasserted firmly back in D major, after pages of fragmentation and tonal instability, the tune and the memories associated with it, can not be silenced. “Down by the Riverside” ends with an eight-measure coda. The final measure, as in “Dreadful Memories,” is uncertain, with an unresolved leading tone in the right hand (Figure 17).

Figure 17 (“Down by the Riverside,” mm. 88-90)



“Down by the Riverside,” unlike the other three *North American Ballads*, was well-known during the 1970s and remains easily recognizable today. It was especially

popular as an anti-Vietnam War anthem during the 1970s, and in fact Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. referenced the song on several occasions. Speaking out against the war in Vietnam on 31 March 1968 in his last Sunday morning sermon, Dr. King declared:

There comes a time when one must take the position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right. I believe today that there is a need for all people of good will to come with a massive act of conscience and say in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “We ain’t goin’ study war no more.”¹²⁶

Given the familiarity of the tune and its associations, Rzewski’s stubborn reiterations are meaningful. To be sure, he began arranging “Down by the Riverside” in February of 1979, by which time the war had been over for almost four years. Yet the aftermath of Vietnam was depressing, even traumatic for many Americans. Thus, like “Dreadful Memories,” “Down by the Riverside” is thoroughly haunted, unable to escape the mistakes of the past.

As the oldest song in the set, “Down by the Riverside” sheds light on labor’s long history of opposition. The song serves as an interlude connecting two diverse twentieth-century labor industries, namely the coal fields of Appalachia and, as discussed below in relation to the fourth ballad, the textile mills of the Carolinas. In addition, the interlude celebrates non-industrial laborers such as Civil Rights workers and Vietnam protesters who may also constitute a part of the American working class. Rzewski argued that the

¹²⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution” (Passion Sunday Sermon, National Cathedral (Episcopal) in Washington, D.C., 31 March 1968) in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, James Melville Washington, ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986), 276-277.

tunes quoted in the *Ballads* express “universal archetypes,” perhaps suggesting that he viewed the many struggles of the working classes as a single, unified struggle.¹²⁷

“Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues”

The final ballad in Rzewski’s set, “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,” describes the bleak life of a mill worker in Winnsboro, South Carolina. Also a parody, the song is set to the tune of the “Alcoholic Blues,” a Prohibition-era song by Tin Pan Ally veterans

Albert von Tilzer and Edward Laska:

I’ve got the blues, I’ve got the blues
I’ve got the alcoholic blues.
No more beer my heart to cheer;
Good-bye whisky, you made me frisky.
So long high-ball, so long gin.
Oh, tell me when you comin’ back agin?¹²⁸

“Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” is an anomaly, for whereas many folk songs eventually become popular songs, the reverse rarely occurs. The author of the “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” is, as far as I can tell, unknown, but the song was first recorded by Bill Wolff in 1939.¹²⁹ Huddie Leadbetter, better-known as Leadbelly, the African-American singer discovered by John and Alan Lomax in a Texas prison, also performed it throughout the 1930s and 1940s.¹³⁰ In 1992, Pete Seeger recorded “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” for his album *American Industrial Ballads*.

Labor disputes within the textile industry, like those in the coalfields, drew communist support. The American Communist Party was most present in the textile

¹²⁷ Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski*, liner notes.

¹²⁸ “Alcoholic Blues” lyrics taken from Peter C. Muir, *Long Lost Blues: Popular Blues in America, 1850-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 45.

¹²⁹ Bell and Olmstead, “Musica Reservata,” 455.

¹³⁰ Leadbelly recorded “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” in 1948, released in 1994 on *Lead Belly’s Last Sessions*, Smithsonian/Folkways, CD 40068/71.

industry before 1930. In 1929, the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU), a communist union like the National Miners Union, attempted to organize workers at the Loray Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina. This was the first significant contact northern communists had with the rural working class and with folk material as a form of propaganda.¹³¹ The Loray strike was also the only time the NTWU attempted to mobilize textile workers in the South.¹³² During the General Textile Strike of 1934, a nation-wide strike arguably felt most strongly in the Carolinas, the Communist Party remained interested and sympathetic, but the United Textile Workers Union (UTW) worked hard to keep communist agitators at bay.¹³³ To gain widespread support for the strike, Francis Gorman, vice president of the UTW, continually stressed the conservative nature of the organization.¹³⁴ He vociferously begged local law enforcement to protect the striking workers, both from attacks by their employers and “the insidious and disruptive forces of communism.”¹³⁵ Once the General Textile Strike had ended, the few communists still

¹³¹ Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 19-20.

¹³² John A. Salmond, *The General Textile Strike of 1934: From Maine to Alabama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 21-22.

¹³³ On the General Textile Strike see Cletus E. Daniel, *Call of Misfortune: An Interpretive History of Textile Unionism in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Janet Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands 1910-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Barry E. Truchil, *Capital-Labor Relations in the U.S. Textile Industry* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988).

¹³⁴ Salmond, *The General Textile Strike of 1934*, 45.

¹³⁵ Louis Stark, “Peace Moves Fail in Textile Strike,” *New York Times*, 2 September 1934, p. 10.

present in the South urged workers, albeit unsuccessfully, not to give up the strike effort.¹³⁶

“Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” was almost certainly a product of the 1934 General Strike. The lyrics may reflect opposition to the hated “stretch-out,” a major grievance during the 1934 Strike which drastically increased the number of looms per operative and paid workers not by the hour but by a piece rate, thus restricting all breaks, even to go to the bathroom, and turning the mill into a nervous frenzy.¹³⁷ In “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” the singer laments:

Old man Sargent, sitting at the desk,
The damned old fool won’t give us no rest.
He’d take the nickels off a dead man’s eyes
To buy a Coca-Cola and an Eskimo Pie.

CHORUS: I got the blues, I got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues;
Lordy, Lordy, spoolin’s hard;
You know and I know, I don’t have to tell,
You work for Tom Watson, got to work like hell.
I got the blues, I got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues.

When I die, don’t bury me at all,
Just hang me up on the spool room wall;
Place a knotter in my hand,
So I can spool in the Promised Land.¹³⁸

Whereas Rzewski’s “Which Side Are You On?” merely resembles a cumulative setting, his “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” is, in the strictest sense of the definition,

¹³⁶ Salmond, *The General Textile Strike of 1934*, 75-79. Although the UTW claimed victory in the 1934 strike, it can hardly be described as such. The strike ended as workers were starved into going back to work, and the agreement made in October of 1934 did very little to solve the strikers’ major grievances.

¹³⁷ Irons, *Testing the New Deal*, 22-23.

¹³⁸ “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” lyrics taken from Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest*, 144.

cumulative, with the complete statement of the tune reserved until close to the very end (mm. 136-146). “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” also stands apart from the preceding three ballads in its reliance on mimesis. Indicating “expressionless, machinelike,” Rzewski begins in 12/4 time in the low registers of the piano, crafting a flat, monotonous sound that recalls the steady whirring of the cotton gin (Figure 18). The right and left hand play sixteenth notes in alternation, the right hand on G-flat, the left hand on F. In m. 2, Rzewski opens out to a fifth, with the right hand playing all the black notes spanning a fifth, the left hand playing all the white notes. In m. 3, Rzewski returns to single notes and in m. 4, moves out to octaves. Again, the right hand sticks to all the black notes within the span of an octave and the left hand to all the white notes.

Figure 18 (“Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,” mm. 1-4)

♩ = 88 / 92 **Expressionless, machinelike**
marcato, non legato, con grande precisione ritmica, e con intensità costante

(black notes only)

(white notes only)

Throughout the first four pages of the piece, scarcely a trace of melody is present. In m. 9, clusters, played with the right hand upper arm, begin appearing on top of the thumping of the gin. Yet these clusters do not sound melodic. In fact Rzewski writes:

If the pitches of the upper (arm) clusters are given precisely, they are not necessarily to be so precisely executed, and still less are they to be clearly heard: they are intended rather as a subtle coloration of the underlying drone.¹³⁹

Larry Bell and Andrea Olmstead have suggested that Rzewski's indication of black notes versus white notes might be an allusion to the segregated facilities common in the South during the 1950s.¹⁴⁰ This interpretation is plausible as mill workers in the South were predominantly white, and after desegregation, many feared that African-Americans would snatch their jobs.¹⁴¹ However, it seems more likely that Rzewski, trying to imitate the sound of a machine, incorporated the alternations of white and black notes to limit any sense of melody or tonality, perhaps alluding to a loss of humanity.

Rzewski continues in his machine-like manner until the listener, approximating the state of the hapless mill worker, is practically hypnotized by the monotony. Finally, in m. 51, the right hand begins playing a melody, and snatches of "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" occur intermittently (especially by m. 67) but soon disappear. Rzewski maintains the inexorable rhythmic drive established throughout the opening section in the left hand, making it difficult for the ear to really enjoy the right-hand melody.

In 1938, a field worker for the Federal Writers' Project visited a mill village near Wake Forest, North Carolina and discovered Mary Branch's poem "Textile Life."¹⁴² The

¹³⁹ Rzewski, *Squares, North American Ballads*, 52.

¹⁴⁰ Bell and Olmstead, "Musica Reservata," 455.

¹⁴¹ See Terry Boswell, *Racial Competition and Class Solidarity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

¹⁴² American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940, "Description of a Mill Village" (accessed 14 November 2010)
<<http://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/query/r?ammem/wpa:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28wpa228012009%29%29>>

first three stanzas describe the fast-paced, depressing impossibility of textile work and aptly complement the harsh monotony of Rzewski's setting:

The life of a textile worker
is trouble and worry and fears.
We can never get through what we are expected to do
If we work at it ninety nine years.

There are lots and scores of people
Don't seem to understand
That when God made man, he made him out of sand
And he only gave him two hands.

With these two hands he said labor,
And that we are willing to do.
But he gave us six days to do our work,
And not try to do it all in two.¹⁴³

In 2002, Rzewski lamented that factory conditions in the South had not improved substantially, claiming "still today non-union workers are making jeans in conditions similar to these in the same North Carolina factories."¹⁴⁴

In m. 86, a gentle, improvisatory blues takes over, offering listener and pianist much needed relief. Throughout this quiet reverie, any hint of the borrowed tune is notably absent until a brief allusion in the right hand at the end of m. 104. In m. 108 the sound of the cotton gin returns, but in m. 113, in the right hand, we hear the verse from "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues." As soon as the refrain begins, however, the tune dissipates and only fragments can be detected as the pianist crashes about. Then, in m. 136, Rzewski begins the tune again, this time stating it in its entirety in the key of F major (Figure 19). The left hand accompanies with a steady stream of sixteenth-notes,

¹⁴³ Mary Branch, "Textile Life" (accessed 14 November 2010)
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/poems/docs/textile_trans.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ Frederic Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski*, liner notes.

helping to maintain the forward momentum. The piece ends with a brief conclusion of the sound of the cotton gin fading into the distance.

Figure 19 (“Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,” mm. 136-141)



Conclusion

Although performers often present the *North American Ballads* separately, the above reading reinforces Rzewski’s vision of them as a coherent whole, held together both musically and programmatically. The first two arrangements, on folk songs from Harlan County, are inextricably linked. The inconclusive augmented triad at the end of “Dreadful Memories” resolves with the F4 (to imply a B-flat major chord) in the opening of “Which Side Are You On?” Furthermore, the deplorable conditions lamented in Aunt Molly’s song demand the resolve and commitment conveyed in Florence Reece’s call to action. “Down by the Riverside” might be understood as an interlude, connecting the labor struggles of the more-distant past with those of the present. The biblical references and idyllic scenes depicted therein also symbolize hope and the prospect of a peaceful

future. Like “Dreadful Memories,” “Down by the Riverside” ends with a question, leaving the audience hanging. “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,” with its gallows humor, provides a grim working-class response, and the thumping of the cotton gin suggests a continued, unending struggle. Of *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, Rzewski claimed “the unification of people is a long story and nothing worth winning is acquired without effort.”¹⁴⁵ His *North American Ballads* offer similar convictions on the plight of the American working class.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

LOOKING BACK TO THE 1930S

Introduction

If the *North American Ballads* explicitly recall the musical-political fervor of the 1930s, we can, not surprisingly, see a much broader implicit bridge to that decade in the entire range of Rzewski's 1970s musical activities. For Rzewski, nostalgia colored the 1970s, and although Rzewski's distinct leftist bent certainly fueled his longing, sociologist Fred Davis argues that nostalgia characterized the decade for many Americans. Davis suggests that this retreat into the past was a direct consequence of the mass identity crisis of the 1960s, explaining:

If one can speak of a *collective* identity crisis, a period of radical discontinuity in a people's sense of who and what they are, the late sixties and early seventies in America come as close to that condition as can be imagined...Nostalgia became, in short, the means for holding onto and reaffirming identities which had been badly bruised by the turmoil of the times.¹⁴⁶

The nostalgia of the 1970s was primarily a yearning for the seeming perfection of the 1950s; however, people also idealized the 1930s, as Davis and J. Ronald Oakley have shown.¹⁴⁷ For example, in Stud's Terkel's *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, several people almost wistfully recalled the 1930s as a meaningful time when families and communities pulled together.¹⁴⁸ One of Terkel's interviewees, Dawn, a child during the Depression, lamented that life no longer seemed as significant:

¹⁴⁶ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 106-107.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 107-110; J. Ronald Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Dembner Books, 1986), 428.

¹⁴⁸ See Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

Everything [during the 1930s] was important. If one man died, it was like a headline. Life was more important, it seemed to me...Now we hear traffic tolls, we hear Vietnam...life is just so, it's not precious now.¹⁴⁹

As we have seen, the 1930s were particularly attractive to Rzewski during the 1970s, as they were the heyday of communist activity in the United States.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) had been keen on using music as “a weapon in the class struggle,” an idea that appealed to Rzewski as an alternative to modernism’s supposed hermeticism. The early musical endeavors of the CPUSA were, however, overwhelmingly intellectual; eventually it was this isolated intellectualism (as well as the onset of World War II) that led 1930s composers to folk music, a path Rzewski also followed in his own decade. In this chapter I argue that the pursuits of composers during the 1930s, particularly those active within the New York Composers’ Collective, were congruent to Rzewski’s ambitions during the 1970s. I call attention to similarities between the Marxist rhetoric of Charles Seeger’s “On Proletarian Music” and Rzewski’s essay, the “Parma Manifesto,” and finally, I suggest similarities between both Seeger and Rzewski’s gradual acceptance of folk music as revolutionary “people’s” music.

The Composers’ Collective and Mass Songs of the 1930s

Prior to the 1930s, the Communist Party garnered little support in the United States, but in the wake of the 1929 Stock Market Crash and the ensuing economic

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 100-101.

¹⁵⁰ See Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). See also Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960); *The Roots of American Communism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1955); Philip Jacob Jaffe, *The Rise and Fall of American Communism* (New York: Horizon Press, 1975).

depression, interest in radical politics surged. Barbara Zuck points out the reciprocal relationship between American communism and the arts: the group's doctrine fascinated many American artists and intellectuals, and throughout the decade, the arts played an increasingly important propagandistic role in the Party.¹⁵¹ In 1932, Charles Seeger, Henry Cowell, and Jacob Schaefer founded the New York Composers' Collective, affiliated with the Pierre Degeyter Club, the official musical organization of the Party.¹⁵² One of the Collective's main objectives was to teach composers to write revolutionary mass songs for workers to sing.¹⁵³ Although there was little consensus among Collective composers regarding the specifics of American mass songs, many composers followed the examples set by Soviet and European revolutionaries.¹⁵⁴ They favored syllabic text settings and homophonic, hymn-like textures; giving primacy to the text and its message was of the utmost importance.¹⁵⁵ Yet American composers confronted a dearth of appropriate revolutionary texts in English.¹⁵⁶ Translations of Russian and German texts were often awkward and the overly technical political jargon inelegant and esoteric. Some composers in the Collective also struggled to reconcile their training and artistic

¹⁵¹ Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 104.

¹⁵² Ibid., 116. On the Composers' Collective see also David K. Dunaway, "Charles Seeger and Carl Sands: The Composers' Collective Years," *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 2 (1980): 159-168; Carol J. Oja, "Composer with a Conscience: Elie Siegmeister in Profile," *American Music* 6, no. 2 (1988): 158-180; Oja, "Marc Blitzstein's 'The Cradle Will Rock' and Mass-Song Style of the 1930s," *The Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1989): 445-475.

¹⁵³ Oja, "Composer with a Conscience," 166.

¹⁵⁴ Richard A. Reuss with JoAnne C. Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2000), 46-47.

¹⁵⁵ Oja, "Marc Blitzstein's 'The Cradle Will Rock,'" 450.

¹⁵⁶ Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism*, 117-118; Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 42.

ability with less-than-sophisticated listeners and performers. Furthermore, although the Collective was tangentially associated with the CPUSA, not all of its members were in fact communists or entirely sympathetic to communist agendas.

The main goals of the Collective's shared agenda were captured by Charles Seeger in his 1934 essay "On Proletarian Music."¹⁵⁷ Seeger outlined his recipe for music for the masses: a combination of proletarian (revolutionary) content and the forward-looking techniques of contemporary art music.¹⁵⁸ Thus, Seeger's goal, and by extension that of the entire Collective, was "to marry left-wing political ideals to an uncompromising musical modernism."¹⁵⁹ Seeger acknowledged that establishing a proletarian repertoire would be a gradual process, but he argued that it could be and was being done especially, he thought, by members of the Collective. He concluded his article, as if taking a cue directly from Nikolai Bukharin, chairman of the Communist International from 1926-1929:

Art, then, is always and inevitably a social function. It has social significance. It is a social force. It is propaganda: explicit, positive; implied, negative. The better the art, the better propaganda it makes: the better the propaganda, the better art it is.¹⁶⁰

Yet despite Seeger's lofty ideas, many of the songs written by the Composers' Collective did not speak to the working class, and even fewer were suited for workers to

¹⁵⁷ The Collective's "shared agenda" should be taken with a grain of salt, as Seeger represented the most radical side of the organization.

¹⁵⁸ Charles Seeger, "On Proletarian Music," *Modern Music* XI/3 (1939): 124-125.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30.

¹⁶⁰ Seeger, "On Proletarian Music," 126. Bukharin helped usher in the Communist "Third Period," a movement in which all aspects of life had to be politicized to speed up the final overthrow of the capitalist system.

actually sing.¹⁶¹ Seeger seemed to recognize this, at least to some extent. For example, in 1935, Aaron Copland's song "Into the Streets May First!" won a song-writing competition sponsored by the American Marxist magazine *New Masses*.¹⁶² Several prominent American composers had taken part in the competition, each setting Alfred Hayes's poem "Into the Streets May First!" to music. "Into the Streets," which urged Americans to reclaim their country from the bourgeois, had been published in *New Masses* a year earlier. Although Seeger and other Collective composers thought Copland's setting exceptional from a compositional standpoint, they hesitated to champion it as a song of the people.¹⁶³ In fact, even Copland apparently questioned the song's utility. "Into the Streets" complied with many of the Collective's mass-song "requirements," but it also included a number of technical challenges such as surprising modulations and large leaps in the vocal line.¹⁶⁴ The song demanded accomplished singers, and Seeger pointed out that it was unlikely to be sung spontaneously, such as on the picket line.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 43.

¹⁶² Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism*, 133. Copland's "Into the Streets May First" was later published in the *Workers Song Book*, No. 2 (1935).

¹⁶³ Ibid., 133.

¹⁶⁴ Crist, *Music for the Common Man*, 29.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 29-31.

Figure 20 (“Into the Streets May First!” mm. 1-9)¹⁶⁶
Note the sudden modulation in m. 4

Words by
Alfred Hayes

Music by
Aaron Copland
(1934)

Vigorously- March Tempo ♩ = 132

VOICE

PIANO

f marcato (loud)

In - to the streets May First! In - to the roar -
- ing Square! Shake the mid - town tow - ers! Crash the
down - town air! Come with a storm of ban - ners,

Other mass songs written by Collective composers, however, were more widely successful. L.E. Swift’s (Elie Siegmeister) “The Scottsboro Boys Shall Not Die,” published in the *Workers Song Book, No. 1* (1934), was popular among workers’ groups and choruses.¹⁶⁷ Carol J. Oja points out that “The Scottsboro Boys” was written in a slightly more conservative vein than Copland’s “Into the Streets.”¹⁶⁸ Moreover, a rousing, minor-mode march, “The Scottsboro Boys” was catchy and infectious and better suited to the possibility of being sung on the picket line.

¹⁶⁶ Aaron Copland, “Into the Streets May First!” in *Workers Song Book, No. 2* (New York: Workers Music League, 1935), 6-7.

¹⁶⁷ Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism*, 127. L.E. Swift was Siegmeister’s pseudonym in the Composers’ Collective.

¹⁶⁸ Oja, “Composer with a Conscience,” 168.

Figure 21 (“The Scottsboro Boys Shall Not Die”)¹⁶⁹

Allegro e ben marcato (*Lively and well accented*) M.M. ♩ = 156

1. Workers, far-mers, Ne-gro and white, the lyn-ching how-ses we must fight.
2. By mass ac-tion we will de-fend our own class bro-thers to the end.

Close your fists and raise them high, La-bor De-fense is our bat-tle cry.
Death to lyn-chers we do-clare, frame-ups and lies to bits will tear. The

REFRAIN Scotts-bo-ro boys shall not die, the Scotts-bo-ro boys shall not die.
*) Scotts-bo-ro boys shall not die, Scotts-bo-ro boys shall not die.

War-rers led by I. L. D. will set them free, set them free, set them free.
M. Loco Workers led by I. L. D. will set them free, set them free. The set them free.

*) If desired, the small notes may be sung as a second part by the chorus.
**) I. L. D. stands for International Labor Defense.

During the early 1970s, Rzewski experimented with the mass-song genre, participating in a songwriter’s collective in New York which he later compared to the 1930s Composers’ Collective.¹⁷⁰ In 1974, he wrote “Apolitical Intellectuals,” a setting of a poem by Guatemalan revolutionary Otto Rene Castillo (1936-1967). Castillo fled Guatemala after the 1954 CIA-sponsored coup that overthrew the democratically elected Arbenz government; he returned in 1964, becoming active in the Guatemalan Workers Party and later joining one of the armed guerilla movements based in the Zacapa

¹⁶⁹ L.E. Swift, “The Scottsboro Boys Shall Not Die” in *Workers Song Book* (New York: Workers Music League, 1934), 5.

¹⁷⁰ Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski* liner notes.

Mountains before his capture and subsequent execution.¹⁷¹ Castillo's poem predicts the shaming of Guatemala's elite when the nation's workers finally rise up to demand an explanation for their suffering. Rzewski's setting of the poem, for piano and voice, follows the outline of many 1930s mass-songs. Similar to Copland's "Into the Streets," Rzewski's crisp rhythmic figures propel the text, intensifying its scathing prophecy, and the largely homophonic texture provides added support to the vocal line (Figure 22).

Figure 22 ("Apolitical Intellectuals," mm. 9-16)¹⁷²



Yet the highly chromatic vocal line and prevalence of tri-tone leaps would not have appealed to popular tastes during the 1970s, nor would they have suited the abilities of an amateur singer. The intended performer and audience of Rzewski's "Apolitical

¹⁷¹ Marxism and Art Archive, "Otto Rene Castillo" (accessed 10 February 2011) <<http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/castillo/index.htm>>

¹⁷² Rzewski, "Apolitical Intellectuals." Composer's autograph available in PDF through Werner Icking Music Archive (accessed 28 February 2011) <<http://icking-music-archive.org/scores/rzewski/Apolitical.pdf>>

Intellectuals” is even more ambiguous than it was in Copland’s “Into the Streets.”

Indeed, when Walter Zimmerman mentioned the song in his 1975 interview with

Rzewski, Rzewski responded: “Where do you know THAT from?”¹⁷³

Acceptance of Folk Music

By 1935 and the onset of the Popular Front, an era in which the CPUSA tried to appeal as a broad-based American movement rather than a spinoff of the Soviet model, Michael Gold, editor of *New Masses*, columnist for the *Daily Worker*, and cultural spokesperson for the Party, had given up on the Composers’ Collective and was championing folk music as the music of the people and of the revolution. Yet members of the Collective refused to capitulate to folk music. Hanns Eisler, who exerted a great deal of influence on the organization, complained that folk music wore “a badge of servitude,” and Seeger referred to folk songs as “dead relics.”¹⁷⁴ By 1936, the Composers’ Collective quietly dissolved, having lost its influence as both its radical political stance and commitment to musical modernism became untenable.

By 1939, Seeger, following in the spirit of the times, publically made an about face. Complaining that too few academic composers were willing to acknowledge the music of their county, he embraced folk music, arguing

Plainly, if we are to compose for more than an infinitesimal fraction of the American people, we must write in an idiom not too remote from the one most of them already possess— their own musical vernacular.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Zimmermann, *Desert Plants*, 305.

¹⁷⁴ David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 40. On Eisler see Sally Bick, “Hanns Eisler in Hollywood and behind the Iron Curtain,” *Acta Musicologica* 75 (2003): 65-84; Joy H. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁷⁵ Charles Seeger, “Grass Roots for American Composers,” *Modern Music* XVI/3 (1939): 148.

Thus, Seeger, one of folk music's most outspoken critics, became one of its most dedicated advocates. He encouraged American composers to go out and experience the music of "the folk," and later, after one had absorbed the folk traditions, to incorporate them into a new, distinctly American style of composition.¹⁷⁶ Particularly on the eve of World War II, folk music was celebrated because it was accessible and nationalistic rather than overly intellectual and international.¹⁷⁷

Rzewski underwent a similar pattern in the 1970s, gradually accepting folk music as a viable means to motivate the masses. In 1968, busy performing with Musica Elettronica Viva, Rzewski had written his "Parma Manifesto," a short document confessing his ongoing fear regarding the state of humanity. Rzewski called attention to the "100,000,000 human beings murdered by other human beings" throughout the past sixty years and explained that he felt compelled to create, both in order to feel self-aware and to communicate imminent danger to others.¹⁷⁸ The *Leonardo Music Journal*, which often publishes composers' texts in raw, unedited format, published Rzewski's "Manifesto" in 1999. Despite radically different historical contexts and disparity in terms of Marxist background, several similarities between Seeger's "On Proletarian Music" and Rzewski's "Manifesto" merit discussion. Both Rzewski and Seeger addressed the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 147-148.

¹⁷⁷ Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics*, 60-61; Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 76. Denisoff argues that American Communists' eventual rejection of European-style propaganda songs in favor of American folk music was a simply a shift from one esoteric form to another. Americans did not necessarily find folk music relevant or accessible. For example, industrial factory workers failed to identify with rural folk music any better than they had with mass songs. See also Carol A. Hess, "Competing Utopias? Musical Ideologies in the 1930s and Two Spanish Civil War Films," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2, no. 3 (2008): 319-354.

¹⁷⁸ Rzewski, "Parma Manifesto," *Leonardo Music Journal* 9 (1999): 78.

awareness of the proletariat, albeit in very different ways. Seeger depended heavily on explicit Marxist rhetoric, whereas Rzewski was guided by a much less rigid modernist approach and in fact never employed the term “proletariat.” Seeger claimed:

The proletariat has a clear realization of the content it wishes to have in the music it hears and in the music it will make for itself. It is a content expressing, and contributing to the success of, its struggle—a revolutionary content. But it has lacked, so far, a musical technic for the expression of this content.¹⁷⁹

Seeger believed the proletariat aware but in need of technical guidance. Rzewski, on the other hand, believed people were asleep; he worried that people were “content to relapse into a state of slumbering semi-awareness in the interim periods of tranquility.”¹⁸⁰ He believed musicians, particularly musicians improvising spontaneously, could wake up “the people.”

Although Seeger and Rzewski disagreed on the awareness of the people (and perhaps with good reason given that Seeger was writing on the eve of World War II and Rzewski during the bleary aftermath), both reached a similar conclusion, boldly rejecting the music of the past. Seeger claimed most of the music of the bourgeois (that is, past and present art music) was unsuitable, because it was irrelevant to the working classes and lacking in revolutionary content.¹⁸¹ Similarly, Rzewski argued that people’s music needed to be “free to move in the present without burdening itself with the dead weight of the past.”¹⁸² Yet Seeger and Rzewski had different ideas about what rejecting the music of the past entailed. Rzewski advocated group improvisation, “creation out of nothing,” whereas Seeger favored modernist musical techniques coupled with revolutionary

¹⁷⁹ Seeger, “On Proletarian Music,” 124.

¹⁸⁰ Rzewski, “Parma Manifesto,” 77.

¹⁸¹ Seeger, “On Proletarian Music,” 123.

¹⁸² Rzewski, “Parma Manifesto,” 78.

(Marxist) content. Seeger, more like a true Marxist, was willing to build on the traditions of the past, but Rzewski hoped to abandon it altogether. In both cases, however, music that had been tainted by the bourgeois was deemed unacceptable.

Both Seeger and Rzewski were willing to reconcile with the past, particularly with past traditions of the folk, after they identified communication, rather than the spouting or enacting of ideology, as a primary purpose for composition. Even in 1935, Seeger had grudgingly acknowledged that the music of the Composers' Collective did not speak to the masses. Mass songs were unfamiliar and to some extent unwelcome as the working classes did have musical traditions of their own. Likewise, by 1969, MEV's improvisations had proven equally opaque to the ordinary listener. Instead of inspiring the masses to political action, Rzewski and MEV were alienating them, as evinced by the hot dog throwing incident in England.¹⁸³ If Rzewski desired to make a persuasive political statement, he needed to compose in a style that people were willing to listen to and perhaps even enjoy. Thus, after Seeger and Rzewski identified the communicative power of familiar musical styles, both modified their musical radicalism, conceding that music of the past could indeed function as music of the people.

Conclusion

The introduction of this thesis discussed at length John Rockwell's snide comparison between leftist music of the 1930s and Rzewski's music of the 1970s. However flawed his reasoning, particularly his outright dismissal of political music in the "happy" United States, Rockwell's conclusions nevertheless bear some truth. Clearly much of Rzewski's music and general development throughout the decade can be traced

¹⁸³ Cardew, "A Note on Frederic Rzewski," 32.

to a yearning for the 1930s. Moreover, Rzewski's nostalgia, although displaced and explicitly political, was not alien to the decade.

In 1975, Rzewski expressed concerns about the possible rise of fascism in the United States, discussing the matter in his interview with Walter Zimmermann. To be sure, Rzewski was somewhat vague on this point. But when Zimmerman compared the present atmosphere in America to that in Germany prior to World War II, Rzewski conceded that a certain fascist atmosphere might well exist and that it presented very real dangers.¹⁸⁴ In light of this conversation, we may additionally interpret Rzewski's references to 1930s leftism in the *Ballads* as parallel fear, of fascism, in his own time. During the 1930s communist fight against fascism, Earl Browder, General Secretary of the CPUSA, popularized the slogan "Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism."¹⁸⁵ Perhaps Rzewski's *North American Ballads* look back to this notion, pleading for the understanding that passionate protest is not un-American but rather, quintessentially American.

¹⁸⁴ Zimmermann, *Desert Plants*, 319.

¹⁸⁵ James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 104.

CONCLUSION

Rzewski's nostalgia for the leftist promise of 1930s America prompted his labor-song arrangements, the *North American Ballads*. These politically nostalgic pieces illuminate the complex relationship between music and politics during the Cold War, particularly during the 1970s. For example, the re-emergence of tonality in the late 1960s and early 1970s can be understood as a new stage in the Cold War, a byproduct of détente, the temporary loosening of social strictures pitting East against West. Just as the spiritual nostalgia of George Rochberg's Third String Quartet fits within the new stage, I have argued here that the politically induced nostalgia of the *Ballads* encourages similar contextualization. Both Rzewski's neo-romantic writing and overt leftist sympathies would have been untenable during the early Cold War, but by the late 1970s, although certainly still controversial, his yearning appeals found an audience.

The nostalgic strains of the *Ballads* echoed the sentiments felt by many Americans. As the Cold War dragged on, Americans looked to the past, hoping to recapture a lost sense of identity and promise for the future. Rzewski hoped to fulfill that promise by abetting a major political change, yet for many listeners, the *Ballads* resonated (and continue to resonate) not because of their political persuasion, but because they paint a poignant and distinctively American portrait.

As James Parakilas has noted, Rzewski did not face the same nationalist dilemma as nineteenth-century composers such as Chopin and Grieg.¹⁸⁶ Nineteenth-century European audiences were often indifferent to the national repertoires of "peripheral" countries such as Poland and Norway, yet twentieth-century audiences throughout the

¹⁸⁶ Parakilas, *Ballads Without Words*, 276.

world embraced American folk music.¹⁸⁷ The *North American Ballads*, however, introduce a new nationalist dilemma: how can a composer both celebrate and critique his country through music? Throughout the 1970s, Rzewski, refusing to even live in the United States, criticized American involvement in foreign affairs. He was particularly vocal in his protests against the CIA's role in Chilean politics, asserting his position musically through *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* In comparison to *The People United*, the *North American Ballads* are almost contradictory because although Rzewski protests the U.S. industrial-capitalist system, he simultaneously commemorates American culture with heartfelt sincerity, an acute contrast.

Since the *North American Ballads*, Rzewski has continued to market himself as a “political” composer, yet the piano music of the 1970s remains distinctive when compared to his later compositions. With the exception of *Mayn Yingele* (1988), Rzewski has eschewed virtuosic excursions on politically informed folk tunes.¹⁸⁸ Works from the 1980s such as *The Price of Oil* (1980), *To the Earth* (1985), and *The Triumph of Death* (1987-88) deal with political, social, and environmental issues but in a somewhat more experimental vein. *To the Earth*, for example, requires a speaking percussionist playing four flower pots with knitting needles. During the 1990s, Rzewski temporarily abandoned overtly political composition, concentrating on more abstract, absolute forms as demonstrated by his *Sonata* (1991), *Fantasia* (1999), and *Pocket Symphony* (1999-2000). However, by the early twenty-first century and onset of the “War on Terror,”

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 276. Parakilas points out that “Down by the Riverside” was popular both in the United States and abroad.

¹⁸⁸ This is not to suggest that Rzewski has stopped using preexisting tunes; however, in compositions after the *North American Ballads*, Rzewski has mainly incorporated brief quotation rather than total borrowing.

Rzewski had returned to musical-political activism. Works such as *Bring Them Home!* (2004), *No More War* (2005), and *The Fall of the Empire* (2007) all protested the actions of the Bush Administration.

That Rzewski never returned to the musical “realism” of the 1970s is significant, further supporting the *North American Ballads* as inextricably linked to the political climate of the latter half of the Cold War. Due to negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) in 1969 and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABMT) in 1972, fear of an all-out nuclear war receded momentarily.¹⁸⁹ Rzewski’s labor-song arrangements demonstrate the shift in American focus, as international tensions subsided and domestic concerns caught the spotlight. Thus, the *North American Ballads* challenge our tendency to oversimplify the Cold War as a mere conflict of East versus West. Domestic battles were as much a part of the cultural landscape of the Cold War as the “war” itself.

¹⁸⁹ After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, relations deteriorated yet again between the United States and Soviet Union.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adlington, Robert ed. *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Arciuli, Emanuele. *Four pieces and Phrygian Gates*. Liner notes, Stradivarius, STR 33735.
- Asplund, Christian. "Frederic Rzewski and Spontaneous Political Music." *Perspectives of New Music* 33, no. 1/2 (1995): 418-441.
- Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
- Beal, Amy C. "Negotiating Cultural Allies: American Music at Darmstadt, 1946-1956." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 1 (2000): 105-139.
- Bell, Larry and Andrea Olmstead. "Musica Reservata in Frederic Rzewski's "North American Ballads." *The Musical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (1986): 449-457.
- Block, Steven D. "George Rochberg: Progressive or Master Forger." *Perspectives of New Music* 21, no. 1/2 (1982-1983): 407-409.
- Boswell, Terry. *Racial Competition and Class Solidarity*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.
- Branch, Mary. "Textile Life." (Accessed 14 November 2010)
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/poems/docs/textile_trans.pdf>
- Brody, Martin. "Music for the Masses": Milton Babbitt's Cold War Music Theory." *Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (1993): 161-192.
- Broyles, Michael. *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Burkholder, J. Peter. "Borrowing." *New Grove Online* (Accessed 6 September 2010).
- . *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Cameron, Catherine M. *Dialectics in the Arts: The Rise of Experimentalism in American Music*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1996.
- Cardew, Cornelius. "A Note on Frederic Rzewski." *Musical Times* 117 (1976): 32.

- Caudill, Harry M. *Theirs Be the Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983.
- Chavkin, Samuel. *The Murder of Chile*. New York: Everest House Publishers, 1982.
- Cowley, Malcolm. "Kentucky Coal Town." *New Republic*. 2 March 1932, pp. 67-68.
- Crist, Elizabeth B. *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Curran, Alvin. "From the Bottom of the Soundpool." (Accessed 14 January 2011) <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/soundpool.html>>
- "Making Music with People You have Never Seen Before and Will Likely Never See Again." (Accessed 14 January 2011) <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/music%20with%20people.html>>
- Daniel, Cletus E. *Call of Misfortune: An Interpretive History of Textile Unionism in the United States*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: The Free Press, 1979.
- Denisoff, R. Serge. *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971.
- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London and New York: Verso, 1997.
- Draper, Theodore. *American Communism and Soviet Russia*. New York: Viking Press, 1960.
- The Roots of American Communism*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003.
- Dunaway, David K. "Charles Seeger and Carl Sands: The Composers' Collective Years." *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 2 (1980): 159-168.
- How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.
- Ewen, Lynda Ann. *Which Side are You On?: The Brookside Mine Strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, 1973-1974*. Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1979.
- Fink, Robert. *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

- Forester, William D. *Harlan County: The Turbulent Thirties*. Harlan: William D. Forester, 1986.
- Fosler-Lussier, Danielle. *Music Divided: Bartok's Legacy in Cold War Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2006.
- Gioia, Ted. *Work Songs*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Green, Archie. *Only a Miner: Studies in Recorded Coal-Mining Songs*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Greenway, John. *American Folksongs of Protest*. New York: Octagon Books, 1970.
- Griffiths, Paul. *Modern Music and After: Directions Since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Gurewitsch, Matthew. "Maverick With a Message of Solidarity." *New York Times*. 27 April 2008. (Accessed 15 January 2011)
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/arts/music/27gure.html>>
- Hartz, Louis. *The Liberal Tradition in America*. New York: Harcourt Books, 1955.
- Hevener, John W. *Which Side Are You On?: The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931-39*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978.
- Irons, Janet. *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Jaffe, Philip Jacob. *The Rise and Fall of American Communism*. New York: Horizon Press, 1975.
- Kerner, Leighton. "Composers Defiant Will Never Be Refuted." *Village Voice*. 22 January 1979, p. 65.
- King, Martin Luther. "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," Passion Sunday Sermon, National Cathedral (Episcopal) in Washington, D.C., 31 March 1968 in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melville Washington. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986, 268-278.
- Klehr, Harvey. *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.
- Koloda, Richard J. "The Piano Music (Post 1974) of Frederic Rzewski," Ph.D. diss. Cleveland State University, 1996.

- Kopple, Barbara. *Harlan County, U.S.A.* DVD. New York: First Run Features, 1976.
- Lichtenstein, Nelson. *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Lochhead, Judith Irene and Joseph Henry Auner, ed. *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Lynch, Timothy P. *Strike Songs of the Depression*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. "The Communist Manifesto" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994, 157-186.
- McGill, Josephine. "Old Ballad Burthens." *The Musical Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1918): 293-306.
- Melton, Laura. "Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*: An Analysis and Historical Perspective." D.M.A. doc. Rice University, 1998.
- Metzer, David. *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Miller, David. "Ortega, Sergio." *New Grove Online* (Accessed 15 January 2011).
- Muir, Peter C. *Long Lost Blues: Popular Blues in America, 1850-1920*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010.
- Nelson, Cary and Lawrence Grossberg ed. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Nyman, Michael. *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Oakley, J. Ronald. *God's Country: American in the Fifties*. New York: Dembner Books, 1986.
- Oja, Carol J. "Composer with a Conscience: Elie Siegmeister in Profile." *American Music* 6, no. 2 (1988): 158-180.
- "Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock" and Mass-Song Style of the 1930s." *The Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1989): 445-475.
- Oppenheim, Lois Hecht. *Politics in Chile*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2007.

Parakilas, James. *Ballads Without Words: Chopin and the Tradition of the Instrumental Ballade*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 1992.

Pearce, John Ed. *Divide and Dissent: Kentucky Politics, 1930-1963*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987.

Pollack, Howard. *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliott Carter to Frederic Rzewski*. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992.

Pollitt, Daniel H. "Hard Times in Harlan County." *Journal of Current Social Issues* 11, no. 6 (1974).

Portelli, Alessandro. *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Reise, Jay. "Rochberg the Progressive." *Perspectives of New Music* 19, no. 1/2 (1980-1981): 395-407.

Reuss, Richard A. with Joanne C. Reuss. *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2000.

Rochberg, George. "On the Third String Quartet," in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music: Expanded Edition*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998, 403-407.

——— *The Aesthetics of Survival: A Composer's View of Twentieth-Century Music*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Rockwell, John. *All American Music*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.

Romalis, Shelly. *Pistol Packin' Mama: Aunt Molly Jackson and the Politics of Folksong*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Ross, Alex. *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. New York: Picador, 2007.

Ryan, James G. *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997.

Rzewski, Frederic. "Little Bangs: A Nihilist Theory of Improvisation" in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner. New York: Continuum, 2004, 266-271.

——— "Parma Manifesto." *Leonardo Music Journal* 9 (1999): 77-78.

——— *Rzewski Plays Rzewski: Piano Works, 1975-1999*. Liner notes, Nonesuch 79623-2.

Salmond, John A. *The General Textile Strike of 1934: From Maine to Alabama*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

Sandburg, Carl. *The American Songbag*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1927.

Schmelz, Peter. "Introduction: Music in the Cold War." *Journal of Musicology* 26, no. 1 (2009): 3-16.

Seeger, Charles. "On Proletarian Music." *Modern Music* XI/3 (1939): 121-127.

———"Grass Roots for American Composers." *Modern Music* XVII/3 (1939): 143-149.

Shreffler, Anne C. "Ideologies of Serialism: Stravinsky's *Threni* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom" in *Music and Aesthetics of Modernity* ed. Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, 217-245.

———"Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus, Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History." *Journal of Musicology* 20, no. 4 (2003): 498-525.

Shultis, Christopher. *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998.

Simon, Bryant. *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands 1910-1948*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Stark, Louis. "Peace Moves Fail in Textile Strike." *New York Times*. 2 September 1934, p. 10.

Stevenson, Robert W. *The Rise and Fall of Détente: Relaxations of Tension in US-Soviet Relations 1953-84*. Houndmills: The MacMillan Press, 1985.

Taruskin, Richard. *The Oxford History of Western Music, First Edition*. Vol. 5. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Taylor, Paul F. *Bloody Harlan: The United Mine Workers of America in Harlan County, Kentucky, 1931-1941*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990.

Terkel, Studs. *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970.

Truchil, Barry E. *Capital-Labor Relations in the U.S. Textile Industry*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988.

Vinton, John ed. *Dictionary of Contemporary Music*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974.

Wason, Robert W. "Tonality and Atonality in Frederic Rzewski's Variations on "The People United Will Never Be Defeated!" *Perspectives of New Music* 26, no. 1 (1988): 108-143.

Weissman, Dick. *Which Side Are You On?: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*. New York: Continuum, 2006.

White, Shane and Graham White. *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.

Wilson, Edmund. "Class War Exhibits." *New Masses*. April 1932, p. 7.

Wilson, Janelle L. *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005.

Wolff, Christian. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Liner notes, Vanguard, VSD 71248.

Woolley, Bryan. *We Be Here When the Morning Comes*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975.

Workers Song Book. New York: Workers Music League, 1934.

Workers Song Book, No. 2. New York: Workers Music League, 1935.

Zimmermann, Walter. *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians*. Vancouver: Aesthetic Research Center Publications, 1976.

Zuck, Barbara A. *A History of Musical Americanism*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980.