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»Thou Shalt Learn These Things«

American Musicians' Education and Dual Consciousness in the Early 20th Century¹

Thinking about music in the United States in the early 20th century brings to mind a melting pot of Sousa marches, ragtime, blues, Tin Pan Alley tunes, operetta and other genres enjoyed today as in their own time. Nevertheless, despite claims to the contrary, this music's popularity failed to impede the growth and success of the Western art tradition on American soil. One reason for this failure was education. From the late 19th century, a rise in private teaching, music schools, college music departments and independent conservatories brought a huge increase in classical music study and participation tempered only by the Depression of the 1930s.² Further, the most successful of the era's new conservatories, Eastman, Curtis and Juilliard, drew on American economic prosperity to establish themselves on the sure footing they enjoy today. Although the education these schools offered can ultimately be traced to the German tradition and the Leipzig Conservatory in particular, its American development responded to beliefs about the explicitly American musical environment.³ The oldest of the three, Juilliard, founded in 1905 as the Institute of Musical Art and by the 1920s located on the vibrant West Side of Manhattan's Harlem, shows this response at work: a German aesthetic basis and organizational framework were linked to American social, educational, and even political goals.⁴ These goals affected the institution from the top down: Under the resolute leadership of an immigrant director, governance and teaching practices presented as essential to educational quality handed students a musical identity marked by cosmopolitanism, hegemony, and clearly bounded standards of the artistically legitimate.

1 I thank Jane Gottlieb, Vice President for Library and Information Resources, and Jeni Dahmus, Archivist, both at the Juilliard School, for their help in identifying sources for this study.

2 On college music departments and conservatories in the USA, see J. Lawrence Erb, »The College Conservatory of Music«, in: *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association* 7 (1912), p. 60–69, here: p. 60–61. Erb notes that the few colleges lacking curricular music study were either in the Northeast or open only to men. On the conservatory as superior to the private teacher, see Edward Dickinson (of Oberlin), »The Uses of a Conservatory of Music«, in: *Music*, August 1895, p. 366–373.

3 On Leipzig's influence in the USA, Douglas Bomberger concludes, »The conservatism that characterized cultivated music in America for many years must certainly be recognized as a by-product of the tremendous number of students who attended the Leipzig Conservatory. This aspect of Leipzig's influence is just as important, if not more so, than the actual skills that the students learned.« E. Douglas Bomberger, *The German Musical Training of American Students, 1850–1900*, PhD Diss. University of Maryland 1991, chapter 2, here: p. 81. See also Leonard M. Phillips Jr., *The Leipzig Conservatory. 1843–1881*, PhD Diss. Indiana University 1979, p. 225–234.

4 The Juilliard School of Music was chartered in 1926; with the establishment of the dance and drama divisions on more equal footing with music, the words »of Music« were dropped in 1969. See Andrea Olmstead, *Juilliard. A History*, Urbana 1999, p. 88 and p. 317, note 20.

Highly respected as an educator and choral conductor, Breslau-born Frank Damrosch (1859–1937) founded singing classes and the People's Choral Union,⁵ supervised public school music in New York and Denver, and conducted the Oratorio Society of New York. Thus the founder of what is now a great training academy for musical virtuosos was steeped in musical idealism, amateur participation, and education for everyone. He promoted all with missionary zeal.

Damrosch aimed to establish an explicitly American conservatory. Writing for the Music Teachers National Association, he expressed the hope that the United States might offer »a richer soil, a more generous climate, more bracing air, and warmer life-giving sun« for music and music education than had Europe.⁶ He asserted that the depth of Europe's musical life obviated the need to educate a broad populace, most of whose members would inherit their culture from childhood. His American school, by contrast, would train professionals and serious amateurs alike. Moreover, it would train any and all: from its inception, the institute was »open to students of both sexes, irrespective of creed, color, or race.«⁷ In so doing, it would transcend the »commercial instincts« Damrosch saw as underlying most music schools to produce musicians – especially educators – who would teach Americans to demand quality and broad musical culture.⁸

Damrosch set out the school's purpose in its prospectus of 1904: »To advance the art of music by providing for students the highest class of musical instruction in all its branches – practical, theoretical, aesthetic; to encourage endeavor, reward excellence, and generally to promote knowledge and appreciation of the art in the community.«⁹ With this vision and mission came considerable power. The institute's bylaws gave Damrosch authority over all policies, including hiring and assignments of faculty and staff, institutional governance, admission of students, curriculum, and financial outlays.¹⁰ He considered this governance structure essential to fulfilling his (now the institute's) goal of educating the whole musician, by force if necessary.¹¹ Speaking retrospectively, he asserted that private teachers were rarely willing to extend their teaching beyond performance.¹² Thus most students »have had music lessons but not a musical education.«¹³

To that end, the institute offered (nervously, according to Damrosch) a »plan of compulsory prescribed courses of study.«¹⁴ Damrosch chose each student's teacher and evaluated

5 On four generations of this accomplished family, see Frank Martin, *The Damrosch Dynasty. America's First Family of Music*, Boston 1983.

6 Frank Damrosch, »The American Conservatory, Its Aims and Possibilities«, in: *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association* 1 (1906), p. 13–20, here: p. 13.

7 *Prospectus of the Institute of Musical Art of the City of New York*, New York [1904], p. 13.

8 Damrosch, »The American Conservatory«, p. 15.

9 *Prospectus*, p. 5.

10 *By-laws of the Institute of Musical Art of the City of New York*, adopted March 22, 1905, article 7, given in full in Frank Damrosch, *Institute of Musical Art 1905–1926*, [New York] 1936, p. 17–24, here: p. 20.

11 *Institute of Musical Art* [catalogue], 1906–1907, p. 4.

12 Damrosch, *Institute of Musical Art*, p. 32.

13 Damrosch, address to the graduates, June 3, 1915, in: *Institute of Musical Art. Lectures, Recitals, and General Occasions, October 12, 1914–June 4, 1915* (typescript, Juilliard School Archives), vol. 16J, p. 90.

14 Damrosch, *Institute of Musical Art*, p. 48.

new students for deficiencies and exemptions. Class attendance was closely monitored, and students who failed to »maintain the requirements of the Institute, as to achievement, effort and earnestness of purpose« were subject to dismissal.¹⁵ Unlike the private teacher, Damrosch argued, who depends on the student's satisfaction for income, the institute would »be in a position to say, ›Thou shalt learn these things.«¹⁶

While a thorough examination of »these things« is beyond the scope of this essay, one may note two key links between the institute's educational offerings and Damrosch's mission: the ways in which course materials circumscribed a repertoire worthy of study and the clear beliefs expressed in them about how musical judgments had been and should be made. Circumscribing a canon was a central project of the institute's music history courses. In 1914, two faculty members, Thomas Tapper (1864–1958) and Percy Goetschius (1853–1943), published the institute's textbook, *Essentials in Music History*.¹⁷ In the authors' view, the source of »true music« is twofold. First, it adheres closely to traditional Western contrapuntal and especially harmonic practice, to be understood as »nature's law« (255). Schubert, for example, was said to have »rested his whole musical faith upon the basic law of ›tonic dominant« (260). Thus neither he, nor Beethoven, nor Brahms was »revolutionary« (255, 301), a term of opprobrium in their judgement. The second premise is the superiority of instrumental music, said to reach aesthetic heights by fulfilling music's expressive potential without hindrance from words or mimetic devices. Their chief object of praise in this regard is of course Beethoven. Through the application of the laws of harmony and structure, »He gave tangible form to the visions of a truly noble soul – a powerful and intense language for the utterance of the most sublime thoughts and emotions of which the human heart and mind are capable« (257).

The textbook had yet another purpose: to link art music to historical and cultural roots. In this respect, the authors' thinking was consistent with topics offered in the institute's lectures. Henry Krehbiel (1854–1923), a distinguished New York critic known for writings on the music of African Americans, offered lectures on »musician-critic-public«, music in Scandinavia, American folk music and worship music. Tapper's lectures treated »the history of culture and of education«, »the correlation of music with history and art«, music as »a municipal investment«, music in public schools, and »conserving the music energy of the community.« Waldo Pratt taught a term on music in America with a class each on Edward MacDowell, Arthur Foote and Amy Beach.¹⁸ Such topics presented »music as a culture study,« as one of Tapper's titles put it, to emphasize its social importance and create a model the institute's graduates could use in seeking their own places in musical life.

This model offered no place for so-called modern music, which Tapper and Goetschius saw as lacking natural musical expression and cultural embeddedness, and blamed for

15 *Institute of Musical Art* [catalogue], 1906–1907, p. 4–5.

16 Damrosch, opening address, October 31, 1905, quoted in: Damrosch, *Institute of Musical Art*, p. 53.

17 New York 1917. On Tapper, see obituary, *New York Times*, February 25, 1958, p. 27. American-born Goetschius, a prolific writer of theory textbooks, studied at Leipzig, then studied and taught at Stuttgart. See Arthur Shepherd, »Papa« Goetschius in Retrospect«, in: *Musical Quarterly* 30 (1944), p. 307–318.

18 *Institute of Musical Art. Lectures, Recitals, and General Occasions* (typescript Juilliard School Archives), vol. 1, p. 21–22; *Institute of Musical Art* [catalogue], 1907–1908, p. 19; 1908–1909, p. 19; 1910–1911, p. 19.

its apparent critique of the standing tradition. The authors faulted harmonies in which »chords are placed abruptly side by side between which no relation whatever can be traced.« Thus, they asserted, »not only the classic standard but all standards seem swept aside, and on some modern pages it is difficult to discriminate between misjudgments and misprints« (316).¹⁹ The institute's anemic composition program was consistent with this attitude. Beginning in 1910, students could earn certificates in »practical theory« (later called »practical composition«). In 1925, Damrosch hired conservative Rubin Goldmark (1872–1936) to head the theory and composition program and in the same year hired neo-classical composer Bernard Wagenaar (1894–1971).²⁰ As John Erskine (1879–1951), a later administrator who held a doctorate in literature, put it, »Musical composition [...] was taught by the repetition of set exercises rather than by the composition of anything that by the pupils or their teachers could be considered musical creation.«²¹ Indeed, the catalogue's theory-composition syllabi listed the standard classic-romantic forms for students to master and required a symphonic overture as the capstone project. By 1930, rather than list a composition faculty, it listed 13 teachers together as faculty in »theory and composition, ear-training and keyboard harmony.«²²

In fact, modernism was irrelevant to Damrosch's program of putting down American musical roots, which put a premium on training an army of musical missionaries as teachers with a common, simple goal: »Music in America must ultimately permeate the entire social fabric.«²³ A popular two-year program led to a certificate for public school music supervision; music study for classroom teachers and a summer course were also offered.²⁴ With state teacher certification becoming more often required for employment, by 1924 students could earn New York certificates by completing a three-year institute curriculum and two courses at Teachers College, Columbia University.²⁵ They could also earn a B. S. degree with two years at the institute and two more at Teachers College. Thus the first students to earn degrees, rather than diplomas or certificates, through Juilliard were music teachers.²⁶

Given the institute's focus on teaching, the choice of its own instructors was of paramount concern. Damrosch sought, and by his own account found, a superior studio faculty

19 In 1934, Goetschius (by then retired) called perception of the »decrees of nature« »sane [and] normal.« See Goetschius, *The Structure of Music*, Westport and Connecticut 1970, p. 68.

20 According to Aaron Copland, Goldmark taught theory from the textbook of Ernst Friedrich Richter of Leipzig, denigrated modernism, and considered the sonata form the *sine qua non* of composition. See Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland 1900 through 1942*, New York 1984, p. 27–28, p. 35. Wagenaar, less conservative and more prolific than Goldmark, taught at Juilliard until 1968. See David Ewen, *American Composers. A Biographical Dictionary*, New York 1982, p. 696–697.

21 Quoted without date in: Olmstead, *Juilliard*, p. 111–112.

22 *Institute of Musical Art* [catalogue], 1930–1931, p. 7.

23 *Institute of Musical Art of the City of New York. Department of Instruction in Public School Music* [catalogue], 1906–1907, [p. 4].

24 *Ibid.*, [pp. 3, 9, 10].

25 *Department of Instruction in Public School Music* [catalogue], 1924–1925, [p. 9].

26 *Ibid.*, [p. 4–5]. On certification, see »Report of the National Research Council of Music Education«, in: *Journal of Proceedings of the Music Supervisors National Conference* (1929), p. 18–30; reprinted as *Research Council Bulletin* no. 11.

compatible with the principles he had set out. He described his relationship with the faculty as harmonious and familial.²⁷ He also expected teachers to work for sub-market salaries and claimed later that they gladly did so: »There was very little talk of salaries in those days. Everybody was glad to take part in this movement and was willing to accept what I was able to offer.«²⁸ Exact salary and employment conditions in the early years are not clear from evidence. It is apparent, however, that faculty members were paid for teaching by the hour.²⁹ In the United States today, they would be called adjuncts.

The institute's tight financial position put it at a disadvantage relative to entrepreneurial schools and institutions such as wealthy Curtis in Philadelphia, which offered free education to the talented. Damrosch had repeatedly insisted on a noticeably non-profit financial basis. The endowment from philanthropist James Loeb, on which the institute had opened, was 500,000 and trustees guaranteed sufficient additional income to free it from short-term money woes.³⁰ Damrosch also solicited gifts earmarked for student support; in its first year, the school had 42 students on full or partial scholarships. All were put on probation, required to »constantly prove their right to these privileges in order to continue to hold them.«³¹ Freed of the need to cater to student income, Damrosch could use a core of dedicated students to set a high tone, a group of young people willing – eager, as he saw it – to accept the institute's admonition: »You are absolutely in our hands and you must come here with confidence that we will seek to do whatever is best for you.«³² Scholarships also allowed Damrosch to open the school with the non-discrimination clause. If the institute was to bring all to the wonders of music, it needed to accept students who could further that end. This goal and these means were central to Damrosch's creed.

Damrosch's high tone and idealist vision never wavered from its first articulation to his death. Writing repeatedly for *The Baton*, a monthly publication with articles by institute faculty and students, he expounded at length on music as a calling to artistic betterment and service to humanity: »The true artist reaps a spiritual reward far more satisfactory than any material one can ever be, for, as he observes those who come under his influence respond to the beauty and nobility of his work, as he experiences the thrill of their spiritual growth, he feels that his life is not in vain and that his work is lifting human souls to a higher plane.«³³

While he expected this attitude of the student, Damrosch also saw it as essential for American society: with the »spirit of the missionary«³⁴ (as he put it), the musician was

27 Damrosch, *Institute of Musical Art*, p. 56.

28 Damrosch, *Institute of Musical Art*, p. 33. Damrosch argued that he needed to charge a tuition lower than the cost of private lessons to lure students into his more comprehensive educational program (*ibid.*, p. 4).

29 For examples of hourly rates from the Depression era, see Olmstead, *Juilliard*, p. 115. Olmstead quotes Richard Franko Goldman's 1970 comment that music school faculty members are »among the biggest philanthropists in the musical world« and notes that even in the 1990s, salaries were not commensurate with those at universities (*ibid.*, p. 255–256, p. 283).

30 *Institute of Musical Art* [catalogue], 1906–1907, p. 10.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

32 Damrosch, opening address, October 31, 1905, quoted in Damrosch, *Institute of Musical Art*, p. 55.

33 Damrosch, »The Vocation of Music I«, in: *The Baton* 2/4 (1923), p. 11.

34 Damrosch, »The Vocation of Music II«, in: *The Baton* 2/5 (1923), p. 7–8, here: p. 7.

to create American citizens dedicated to self-improvement and the most »noble« planes of art.³⁵ Making America »musical in the truest sense« meant that »assuring >justice to all and malice toward none«, we will find the poet and the musician who will find the right words and the right time to voice the feelings of a united and homogeneous, truly American citizenship.«³⁶

Damrosch had no doubts about his chosen path. He also knew he faced obstacles (indeed, one suspects that they spurred him on). By the 20s, however, the obstacles were not only philosophical but practical as well. Long run on a shoestring, his institute faced formidable competition in New York from the Juilliard Musical Foundation, which controlled an endowment in the millions. The education offered by the Juilliard Graduate School, opened, like Curtis, in 1924, was in an important way contrary to the institute's. Offering lessons only, it aimed to polish and launch musicians already well prepared into important performance careers.³⁷

The Juilliard professional ethos plagued Damrosch for the rest of his career (he retired as institute dean under an umbrella Juilliard School of Music in 1933). The loss as his influence waned was undoubtedly the vision of an integrated musician's education. As paternalistic as his governance was, at least he articulated grounds on which it was based, clearly and patiently, over his time at the institute. By the 1930s, however, this vision was rapidly becoming anachronistic. Modernism, the growth of popular music genres, and the mass media were hard (one might argue irresponsible) to ignore in assessing musical life. That fact, along with the political and economic changes in Europe and the Americas, made Damrosch's ideal of a clearly-bounded, noble classical tradition, based on deep (if invented) cultural roots, increasingly implausible. Yet as the institute and Juilliard slowly merged (the institute was eliminated by name in 1946), the merged legacy in pedagogy and governance was a moot point, for both schools gravitated to top-down decision making for faculty and student alike, leaving a shell of the institute's former self: a self-perpetuating educational and governance structure that hindered the acknowledgment and implementation of change.

Idealizing Western art music at the Institute of Musical Art meant internalizing the means by which it was organized, promulgated, and taught. The synergy among the repertoire, course content, and governance created an environment reinforced as natural (in no need of critique), necessary (essential to the institute's musical mission to American society), and open to the ownership of all. As Damrosch saw it, this synergy would be the source of American musical uniqueness, vigor, and pride.

Here, then, lies the relevance of the idea of double consciousness in both historical and metaphorical terms. The term originates with historian, educator, and activist W. E. B. DuBois' landmark critique of American race relations, *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in

35 »Noble« was Damrosch's favorite adjective in the *The Baton* articles. At the time he wrote them, he would not have known of a future adversary, Juilliard Musical Foundation executive secretary, Eugene Noble. On Damrosch and Noble, see Olmstead, *Juilliard*, p. 75 and p. 94.

36 Damrosch, »The Development of Musical Culture in the United States II«, in: *The Baton* 3/3 (1923), p. 12–13, here: p. 13.

37 Olmstead, *Juilliard*, p. 72.

Chicago in 1903, two years before the opening of Damrosch's institute. DuBois asserted that African Americans live psychologically as members of their own community and in relation to the more powerful white majority society. Of necessity, he argued, they have »a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others«³⁸. The Institute of Musical Art fostered in its musicians a consciousness – and an identity – at least as complex. Not expected to identify personally as anything other than American, students were nevertheless expected to identify with, even be devoted to, the universalizing of a historical, European-based set of aesthetic norms. And indeed, placing ideology rather than ethnicity at the center of identity opened the way for students of color willing to make the commitment to Damrosch's American musical homogeneity.³⁹ Ironically perhaps, the institute's musicians were also expected by implication to look at much of their own country's musical culture exactly as DuBois asserted: as that of an inferior Other. Probably many of them did so – others did not. Regardless of students' individual attitudes, however, Damrosch's unified and bounded educational structure suppressed their ability to acknowledge the musical life beyond its borders.

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All-American Concerts in Germany

The F. X. Arens Tour of 1891/1892

On 1st April 1891, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* printed the following brief announcement:

Ein Concert von eigenartigem Interesse wird am 6. April im »Concerthaus« Berlin stattfinden. Unter Vorsitz des daselbst beglaubigten amerikanischen Gesandten Herrn W. W. Phelps und unter Mitwirkung hervorragender Solisten und der Meyer'-schen Capelle wird der Deutsch-Amerikaner Mr. Arens größere Werke seiner Landsleute: Van der Stucken, Beck, Bird, Foote, Boese [Boise] dirigiren. Ein ähnliches Concert wird Mr. Arens in Dresden im Gewerbehause veranstalten. Da die junge amerikanische Componisten-Generation in Deutschland noch fast ganz unbekannt ist, so sieht man in Fachkreisen genanntem Concert mit dem größten Interesse entgegen.¹

38 William Edward Burghardt DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chicago 1903, p. 5.

39 The first African-American to graduate from the institute was pianist Helen Elise Smith in 1907 (Olmstead, *Juilliard*, p. 38). Another early graduate of color was Nicholas George Ballanta of Sierra Leone (1894–1962), who received a certificate in composition in 1924 and became a music researcher in Africa and the American South. I thank Corey Finn for bringing Ballanta's career to my attention.