Music Library Reading Room Notes


Compiled by the Music Library Staff

Mark Germer: Music Librarian
Lars Halle & Aaron Meicht: Circulation Supervisors

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A Status Report on Big Band Recordings

by Lars Halle

As of Fall semester 1998 the Music Library is happy to announce that the compact disc collection has reached (what seems to us) an astounding size in a few short years.

There is some sense of accomplishment regarding the jazz portion of the collections, having started with so little only a short time ago, because it provides a solid foundation of milestone recordings and even allows for some expansion into areas of more specialized interest. More than half the total CD collection, at present, is comprised of jazz and jazz-related American musics. The recordings cover every decade from the 1910s (the earliest compilation documents performances from 1917) to the present, and embrace a wide array of styles and ensembles. Although there are subject categories for Swing, Bop, and others, there are so many different and overlapping idioms and ensemble types encompassed under the name of jazz that it would be impossible to assign narrow subject entries for every stylistic distinction. A few broad categories can be easily defined, however, one of which is Big Band Music.

If you enter a subject search for Big Band Music in the University Libraries’ catalog, you will find over 170 entries, as of this writing. If you limit this search to identify compact discs only, you will find 150 recordings (note, you will also find analog LP vinyl discs). On this list of CDs, you will find examples from the beginning of big band recordings up to the present day. A list suggesting the variety of ensembles that we encourage students to sample would include:

Duke Ellington: *Live at Newport, 1958*

Duke Ellington: *Black, Brown, & Beige*

Benny Goodman: *Sing, Sing, Sing*

Count Basie: *The Complete Atomic Basie*

Terry Gibbs: *Dream Band*

Buddy Rich: *Big Swing Face*

Buddy Rich: *No Jive*

Louis Bellson: *Explosion*

Bob Mintzer: *Incredible Journal*

Sun Ra: *Sunrise in Different Dimensions*

Stan Kenton: *Live at the Tropicana*
Stan Kenton: *Adventures in Time*

Gil Evans: *Out of the Cool*

Rob McConnell: *Don’t Get Around Much Anymore*

Woody Herman: *The Thundering Herds, 1945-47*

Maynard Ferguson & Chris Connor: *Two’s Company*

Thad Jones/Mel Lewis with Ruth Brown: *Fine Brown Frame*

William Parker Big Band: *Sunrise in the Tone World*

Fletcher Henderson: *The Fletcher Henderson Story, A Study in Frustration*

Tommy Dorsey & Frank Sinatra: *All Time Greatest Hits*

... and two recommendations

One of my longtime favorites is the 1952 Stan Kenton recording *New Concepts of Artistry in Rhythm* (CD696). Possibly the best of all the Kenton ensembles, the band represented here features, among others, Frank Rosolino, Maynard Ferguson, Bill Russo, Lee Konitz, Bill Holman, and Conte Condoli. Playing original music and arrangements by such great arrangers as Russo, Holman, and Gerry Mulligan, the band sizzles and roars with Maynard up high and George Roberts down low. This album contains many of the classic Kenton hits, such as “23 N-82W”, “Swing House”, and “Invention for Guitar and Trumpet”. And this is the only album where you can hear each member of the band individually, skilfully pieced together in the astounding earfull of “Prologue” by Bill Russo. No big band collection would be complete without this gem, and I am glad we can recommend it.

A newer recording that promises to astound is The Carl Bley Big Band Goes to Church (CD2213), which represents the work of Bley’s third big-band project. Masterfully engineered, the recording disguises the fact that the performance was recorded in a church in Perugia in performance, Italy, until the first applause is heard midway through the first 24-minute piece. The band has an electric aggressiveness that rubs off on the listener and leaves one wishing for more. The soloists lift the ensemble even higher with their “in-your-face” personalities and unbelievable energy. This recording has quickly become one of my favorites, partly because of its rawness and originality, but also because it is obvious the musicians are loving it. The six arrangements are all written by Bley, who handles the piano-playing, and--with the exception of Carl Ruggles’ “Exaltation”--the compositions are all hers as well. Her writing sounds reminiscent of Sun Ra. The arranging, furthermore, is very skillfully molded to this particular Band. Do yourself a favor: take seventy minutes out of your schedule and check it out.
Rudin on Rudin: An Interview

by Aaron Meicht

The following are excerpts transcribed from a taped interview I conducted on the 12th of December 1997 with a long-established member of the University of the Arts faculty, Professor Andrew Rudin. He has been teaching at this institution under its various names since the late 1960s. He grew up in Texas and studied first at the University of Texas and then at the University of Pennsylvania. He had many distinguished teachers including Paul Pisk, Kent Kennan, George Rochberg, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Ralph Shapey. I asked him how he came to teach at the University of the Arts.

Right after I got out of Penn [The University of Pennsylvania], I was teaching in the public schools. One of my classmates at Penn, Robert Suderburg, who is a composer--you have some of his scores in the Music Library--was here directing the chorus, and when they needed someone to teach advanced orchestration he recommended me. So I would cut out early from one of my public-school jobs and come over here [the institution was then called the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music] and teach advanced orchestration one day a week. I was so determined to do a “bang-up job” on it that I sort of overdid it. So then they asked me if I would be interested in doing something more than that. And of course I said yes. They didn’t originally offer me a full-time job, but it immediately opened up into that. At that time our theory program taught everything chronologically. [The curriculum] was patterned after [The] Juilliard [School]'s model of teaching the theory and the literature [of a given historical period] simultaneously. And they asked me, when Joe Castaldo, the School’s director, interviewed me, “Can you teach medieval music?” This was the one area I knew absolutely nothing about. Well, I wanted the job very much, so I said, “Oh, sure, I can read the books, I can keep ahead of them.” So I took the job to teach a couple of sections of medieval music, but as it turned out, what was supposed to be two sections blossomed into four. So I taught four sections of theory and literature of medieval music. I taught it four times in a row all in the same day. So by the end of the day, the repetition of it was very educational for me. I became totally immersed in medieval music, and it was the first time I ever really looked at it--studied it. So I learned right away that one of the best ways to educate yourself is to have to teach someone else! And fairly soon they gave me two to three people to work with teaching composition. And I had never taught anyone composition, and I was scarcely wet behind the ears myself.

In 1969, the Philadelphia Musical Academy (the name by which the institution also was now known) had a centennial celebration. Professor Rudin wrote the piece Stentoria (M647 .R916S7 1969) for a concert at the Academy of Music. The work is scored for a wind and percussion
ensemble with solo piano. The ensemble consists of 44 players, all of whom have individual parts. I asked him about the first performance.

I tried to make sure that each person in the ensemble got a little solo in some parts so that everybody felt like, “Here’s my place where I have something in the piece.” And there’s one tiny little moment near the end where the tuba is playing a solo against some other low bass instruments and then on the last note of the tuba, as it’s holding, a string bass takes over the tuba part as the tuba diminuendos. It has a little solo right before the last onslaught in the piece and [in the first performance] it was played by Stanley Clarke.

Professor Rudin went on to discuss an aspect of his compositional approach:

One thing I liked about being on the faculty here was working within the very specific limitations--I continue to do that--[that is,] working with the specific instrumentation that’s “around”. I like much better to write pieces considering the actual performers rather than writing in the abstract. I’m not the kind of person who gets up in the morning and says, “I have an inspiration for a violin solo!” But, if a great violinist came and said, “I want a violin solo,” I would have ideas instantly. I like to think in terms of actual people.

The Philadelphia Composers Forum was established by a group of local composers in an effort to advance new music in the Philadelphia area. Its members developed a concert series in 1966, and some of the concerts included music by Professor Rudin. One concert in which he was included also contained new works by Vincent Persichetti and George Crumb. Rudin presented a piece for tenor saxophone and two pianos as well as the first large-scale work ever composed for Moog Synthesizer, Il Giuoco. This work would later represent the United States at the 5eme Biennale of the City of Paris.

He first became interested in the Moog Synthesizer, for which he would write his first electronic scores, when the choreographer-composer Alwin Nikolais showed him the first Moog instrument. Rudin went back to the University of Pennsylvania--where he was still enrolled as a graduate student--and initiated the purchase of a synthesizer for the department. They called Robert Moog and he came down from New York with a machine stowed in a cardboard box under the bus.

The installation at Penn’s Annenberg Center was not completed until two weeks before the concert in which Professor Rudin was to present his electronic work. I asked him about this early experimental work.

So I made my first electronic piece not having any idea really what I was doing. I just went in and improvised with the machine, and I made my first mature piece out of that kind of pressure. And I knew it when I got it done, because I had been freed from notational processes, I just had to use my ear and choose timbres and put them together; nothing was written. It was all just played in real time and the recombined and edited. And I also made
a film to go with it. I didn’t want people to have to sit in the concert hall and look at speakers. So, I made this sort of abstract film and I used a singer’s voice—that of Diane Reed—and had her improvise for me, and reprocessed the tape. I totally walked away with that concert. I still think that was the single best electronic piece I ever made.

Owing to the success of this concert Professor Rudin was approached by the then forward-looking firm Nonesuch Records, who commissioned their second in a series of large works created expressly for the long-play disc medium. By this time professor Rudin was the director of the Philadelphia Musical Academy Electronic Center. Robert Moog installed a synthesizer here and this is the instrument that Professor Rudin used to create Tragoedia. (That same Moog instrument is still here at the University of the Arts, on the second floor of the Merriam Theater Building in the MIDI studio).

Tragoedia (1967-68) is a composition in four movements that “is an examination of four basic conditions or processes of tragedy. Behind the work lurks my own curiosity as to why the tragic work of art has so long been held to be a desirable, in fact, ennobling experience, and why tragedians are inevitably accorded great respect while our comic artists must constantly have their aesthetic merits pointed out to us” (program notes from the LP by the composer).

And then the most exciting thing happened, after the record came out. I had just come out of class, and someone came up and said, “There’s a telephone call for you.” So I went inside and it was [a] call from Italy from [Federico] Fellini. And they wanted to know if they could use some of the music from Tragoedia [for the film Satyricon]. I couldn’t believe it—I thought it was a joke. Of all the directors anywhere in the world, there was no one I admired more than Fellini at that time. I thought, “This can’t be happening to me.” Then I thought, “I don’t want them to use stuff off the record, I want to get in touch with the guy to see if I can write something specifically for [the film]. I was going to Europe that summer and I did meet with someone on the music staff, not Nino Rota [the composer then working with Fellini], but one of the other people involved. And he did talk to me, but he said, “No, no, this is specifically what we want.” He [Fellini] had been inspired by Stanley Kubrick’s [film] 2001: A Space Odyssey and he wanted to use a kind of collage score. And what specifically appealed to him was that he said that this Satyricon was science-fiction but instead of “into the future” it was “into the past,” so he was reinventing antiquity like science-fiction. So the idea of an electronic work that looked at ancient culture appealed to him immediately. And so that’s the luck of the timing!

Professor Rudin’s output includes two operas completed at different times in his career. I asked him about the influences on his first opera, The Innocent (M1500 .R916I5 1971).

I was very much influenced at that time by Alwin Nikolais’ dance theater. For he was the person who made the choreography, designed the lighting, designed the costumes and made his own
scores. I was very impressed by that. He found this incredible symbiosis between these media—he didn’t even want to call it dance; he called it movement theater. And often-times you couldn’t even see the dancers, they were sometimes completely concealed inside gadgets that they were moving in, or the lighting was so complex that you couldn’t really see them as people. His whole philosophy was that human beings had mucked the place up enough and he didn’t even want to make distinctions between the sexes. He would choreograph the same for the men and women and the costumes would be the same. He just saw the people as moving and manipulating and working as one part of a larger cosmos. So I was influenced by that.

The first opera was an attempt to make a kind of experimental work that would use film and slide projection, dance, traditional operatic singing, a chorus, movement, orchestra and electronic tape. And the orchestra was kind of a conventional orchestra with a sort of stereophonic arrangement. And I realized I needed something to “hang” it on but I didn’t want to tell a story. So, I basically commented, [using] three images and a coda, [on] the nature of innocence. We had a boy choir at the school and one of my colleagues a couple years earlier had done a setting of Kafka’s Metamorphosis as an opera. He had used this boy choir there. So I had a boy choir and three male soloists. Tito Capobianco was a stage director and he was running an opera program here. [And he] decided to put it on. The libretto was really a kind of collage of texts drawn from a variety of places—I put the texts together, [and so] assembled the libretto.

Rudin’s second opera is based on the play Three Sisters (M1503 .R916T5) by Anton Chekhov. He told me about working with a writer on a libretto.

I started Three Sisters in 1975. I worked on it for almost ten years. My original notion was that I thought I could do an act per year. I thought it would take me three or four years—and then maybe another year or two to finish the score and the orchestration. And it wound up taking double that. And the great thing was having William Ashbrook [who was once a faculty member at the Academy] because I was originally trying to do the libretto myself. I realized I needed perspective—I needed somebody else. And he was so perfect because he knew every opera that ever existed and he had made translations from other people’s librettos. He had also written a couple of libretti himself. So he knew exactly the whole history of how to work with a composer. And he set up an outline. I told him exactly, “I want to do this as a duet, I want to do this as a quartet, do this as recitative.” I want it to be [akin to] numbers linked by recitatives, not separate recitatives [but rather] connected recitatives. We knocked out an outline and made a graph, and I wrote him and said, “Its doubly too long.” What do you do? You don’t want to part with any of it. And he did such a good job of condensing everything that when people have encountered it they feel like it’s all there. We didn’t condense any characters, we didn’t omit any episodes. I would tell him constantly, “No, I don’t need that, the music can tell that. Trust that I’ll put that back in with the music. Just give me the bare bones.” It was great because he
would sometimes argue with me, “No, no, you can’t part with that. We have to keep that.” I think that composers who are their own librettists are kind of like lawyers who defend themselves in court. I think it is really good to have somebody that you have confidence in that you can bounce these things off and who will argue with you about the integrity of their script. So that was an exciting working relationship.

Here are mentioned only a few of the scores and recordings by Andrew Rudin that can be consulted in the Music Library. Together they make up part of a history of the Uarts School of Music. as well as a too-little-known body of work by one of Philadelphia’s senior composers.
The Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers: A Report

by Music Library Staff

On 23 January the Music Library staff paid a visit to the Institute of Jazz Studies, now affiliated with Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. The objective of our visit was to learn about the Institute’s holdings and to look for ideas for housing, preservation and local documentation of jazz materials.

The Institute is located in the John Cotton Dana Library on Rutgers’ Newark campus. It describes itself as the world’s foremost jazz archive and research facility. Founded in 1952, it came to Rutgers in 1966 when the original owner of the materials donated them to the New Jersey State University System. The Institute publishes the Annual Review of Jazz Studies to which the Music Library has a subscription (ML3505.8 A68).

We were interested to learn about the new facility with its state-of-the-art climate control and excellent study conditions. Among the special features are several thousand research files on individual performers; oral history tapes and transcripts; over 100,000 sound and video recordings; 30,000 photographs; many complete runs of jazz periodicals from all over the world; and a small collection of historically significant musical instruments and sound equipment, other artifacts, and memorabilia. The modern public service areas include media booths for listening to and viewing the various recording formats, and an up-to-date laboratory for the transfer and preservation of older recordings.

Particularly impressive are the holdings resulting from the Institute’s oral history project, containing unique interviews with noteworthy jazz figures who were active on the East Coast jazz scene over the last sixty years, such as “Papa” Jo Jones, Count Basie, and Charles Mingus. These are available for study in transcript form while the original tapes are stored in secure conditions. Of great interest, also, are the extensive runs of periodicals that cover the jazz scene in Europe and Japan as well as North America.

The staff member who generously gave of his time, was the reference librarian, Vincent Pelote, who has overseen and developed the collections for twenty years. We would like to record here our sincere thanks for all of the time and effort Vincent spent discussing his experiences in building a comprehensive jazz research collection-- and for demonstrating the Institute’s vintage phonograph players!

We are still digesting all of the information gathered on this short trip. For one thing, it is good to have a sense of the enormous project the Institute supports in seeking out, purchasing, and cataloging vinyl LPs, 78s, and other early sound re-
cording formats, including radio transcription discs containing performances that were not originally issued commercially.

Along with the Louis Armstrong House at Queens College and the Duke Ellington Archives at the Museum of American History in Washington, this is one of three invaluable collections proximate to Philadelphia about which our School of Music students should inform themselves. After this experience the Music Library staff is much more capable of recommending the resources of the Institute of Jazz Studies constructively. We advocate visiting such archives, as no internet guide can possibly substitute for seeing, holding and listening to the rare materials found there.