

tin, Jon Finson, Charles Hamm, and Nicholas Tawa have brought to this repertoire. Thus, some of Emerson's readings seemed forced and even capricious, as when he claims that "Oh! Susanna" aims to "chronicle the conquest of time and space," or that the text to "The Little Ballad Girl" contains the "imagery of sexual defilement . . . more appropriate to Victorian pornography than to the schoolroom or parlor."

Ultimately *Doo-Dah!* neither establishes significant new facts about the composer nor provides a single coherent picture of Stephen Foster and his music. What it offers, however, is an lively account of Foster's relationships to his family, to his contemporaries, and to the world in which he lived. Emerson vividly sketches these "bright visions, long vanished" (to quote one of Foster's loveliest songs, "Come with Thy Sweet Voice Again"), showing us not only Foster's world, but also the manifold ways in which that world is reflected—and refracted—in his music. At the very least, Emerson's biography provides an impetus to renewed consideration of nineteenth-century America's most important songwriter.

Steven Saunders
Colby College

Amy Fay: America's Notable Woman of Music. By Margaret William McCarthy. Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1995. ISBN 0-89990-074-7. Pp. xviii, 197. \$35.00.

Amy Fay's *Music-Study in Germany* (1880) is one of the most enduringly popular American books of the nineteenth century. Almost from the time of its publication, it was hailed as a classic, earning the sobriquet "book of the age." A compilation of letters written to family members during her years in Germany between 1869 and 1875, it described in entertaining fashion an idyllic land where an American girl with talent and persistence could conquer the complexities of the German language and the peculiarities of German customs, hear legendary performers for a pittance, and eventually earn the right to study for a summer with Franz Liszt, all the while maintaining her sense of humor and love of life. In her inimitable prose, Fay managed to encapsulate simultaneously the ideals of the Romantic Era and the Gilded Age. More than any other writer, she solidified nineteenth-century American perceptions of Germany as the home of music and poetry.

It was the life work of Margaret McCarthy, who died in 1995, to demonstrate that Fay was much more than the quintessential American music student. Through a series of articles and a compilation of additional unpublished letters, McCarthy examined Fay's subsequent career as a teacher, writer, organizer, and lecture-recitalist, offering insightful perspectives on the significance of her career. This book completes that work by presenting a full-length biographical account of the life and career of Amy Fay.

The preface outlines McCarthy's ambitious plan for assessing the life of this prominent female musician. Her goal is to go beyond mere biographical narrative to examine the feminist issues raised by her life and attitudes. In the author's words, "Since Amy Fay's life gives credence to much present-day thinking about women's lives, it seems natural to tell her story within the

framework of twentieth-century methodology concerning women and their experiences" (xiv). Such a statement raises questions about potential conflicts inherent in attributing twentieth-century values and attitudes to nineteenth-century persons. Thankfully, McCarthy is careful to employ twentieth-century methodology without losing perspective on the time in which Fay lived. In fact the approach works particularly well for Fay, whose unconventional life was strongly affected by her sister Melusina Fay Peirce, an influential turn-of-the-century feminist. In particular, McCarthy brings out three recurring themes in Fay's life: the importance of affiliations, her involvement with musical clubs, and her lifelong struggle with performance anxiety. Feminist thinking on these three issues is woven into every stage of the narrative, shedding light on the choices she made and her resulting successes and failures.

McCarthy's observations on performance anxiety are particularly intriguing. She places Fay's vulnerability to "nerves" in the context of the writings of Jean Baker Miller, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Jean Strouse, pointing out that "at pivotal moments inviting professional advancement she seemed to 'choose' illness" (35). McCarthy cites the work of Miller and Smith-Rosenberg, describing "nerves" as a typical defense mechanism used by some nineteenth-century women to cope with the stress of reconciling rigid Victorian expectations with their own personal needs and ambitions. The author astutely hypothesizes that the root cause of Fay's problem was the death in 1870 of her piano teacher Carl Tausig and in 1871 of her former suitor Benjamin Mills Peirce. The loss of these two important affiliations at a crucial stage in her personal and pianistic development signaled the start of a lifelong struggle with performance anxiety, which repeatedly kept her from playing her best under the pressure of important occasions.

The book does a fine job of delineating Fay's personality. McCarthy quotes letters and family documents that show the pianist in her unguarded moments, when the ebullient girl of the Berlin and Weimar letters betrays doubts and petty jealousies. Among the most illuminating passages of the book are those dealing with Fay's relationship with her sister Rose, who married the famous conductor Theodore Thomas. McCarthy argues convincingly that this marriage upstaged Amy: "Prior to that marriage, Amy was the family musician; now she had to concede that role to Theodore Thomas" (108). The resulting sibling rivalry is explored in a way that allows the reader to see not only how Fay felt about the situation but how others perceived it.

A useful adjunct to the book is the reprinting of twelve articles written by Fay at various stages of her career. These run the gamut from her suggestions on piano technique to her ideas on women in music. Those without access to the original periodicals will appreciate the availability of these reprints. Appendix Thirteen outlines the publication history of *Music-Study in Germany*, a feature that will help sort out the more than two dozen reprints and translations of this popular book.

There are two quibbling complaints to be made about this otherwise excellent contribution to nineteenth-century American music history. The first is the practice of quoting the author's previous writings on the subject. This often leads to confusion, as there are many quotations from Fay's letters that are identified only by a reference to the page number in *More Letters of Amy*

Fay: The American Years, 1879–1916. The reader is left in the dark as to the date (and sometimes the recipient) of the letter, with no recourse but to look up the citation in the previous book. The second regards the errors that occur far too often in the book. Many of them are minor typographical glitches that could have been caught with more careful proofreading. On the other hand, there are errors of fact and interpretation that vary in degree from relatively minor to seriously misleading. Examples of the former category include the concert program on page 58 listing Beethoven's "Sonata, op. 27, no. 5" and the mention on page 76 of a Chicago pianist by the name of Charles (actually Emil) Liebling. Somewhat more misleading is the discussion on page 50 of Fay's concert debut in Frankfurt. The author fails to clarify that the city in which Fay performed was the small town of Frankfurt an der Oder rather than the cosmopolitan center of Frankfurt am Main. Finally, pages 102–6 describe at great length Fay's last encounter with her former teacher Liszt without noting that in the Liszt circle it was reported that the two had an argument and parted for the last time on unfriendly terms (Lina Ramann, *Lisztiana* [Mainz: Schott, 1983], 300).

Despite these problems, the book is valuable for bringing to light a great deal of biographical detail and for examining Fay's life from the perspective of recent feminist thought. It provides a fitting tribute not only to a beloved American musician, but also to a scholar whose warm personality and contributions to American music endeared her to many members of the Sonneck Society.

E. Douglas Bomberger
University of Hawai'i

Interpreting Popular Music. By David Brackett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-521-47337. \$54.95. Pp. xiv, 260.

I interpret the main aim of this book as an attempt to bridge the gap between our understanding of music as sound and our understanding of music as social "text" in a "context." Brackett himself writes in the preface:

I remain convinced that the sounds of music . . . are important. However, their "importance" fluctuates continually depending on the human context in which they are embedded. . . . While I do not propose an overarching method for the interpretation of popular music, the concern here with the way in which specific texts arise from (and contribute to) specific contexts to create different modalities of interpretation could, in principle, be applied to a broad range of musics, popular or otherwise. (xii)

Target readership for this important area of enquiry consists of "both students of music and those interested in music as part of a web of broader cultural activity" (xii), this suggesting, not untruthfully, that students of music are currently seldom expected to be interested in music as part of anything else and, erroneously, that music students will never be obliged to do so. Thankfully, Brackett's book goes a little way toward contradicting such a pessimistic outlook on music studies.

The book is divided into five main chapters, the first dealing with basic concepts, theory and method, the other four zooming in on four particular "pieces" of popular music: 1) a comparison of Billie Holiday's and Bing Cros-