

The Bulletin

of the Society for American Music

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From the President

Daniel Goldmark



Dear Colleagues,

It's fall, and for me that means the inevitable arrival of new students, colder weather, and planning for the spring conference! I'm thrilled at the prospect that many of us will hopefully be seeing each other in person at the Society's annual meeting, scheduled to take place in Minneapolis, MN from March 8-12, 2023.

The plans for the conference are currently in process, which includes the hard work of the Program Committee (led by Stephanie Stallings) and the Local Arrangements Committee (led by Alyssa Barna). Minneapolis is one of my favorite cities to visit for conferences (I attended one of my very first academic conferences there, when I was still an undergrad music major)—there is so much to do in the downtown area, in addition to all the papers and discussion that will take place at the conference itself. And as we just recently announced, we'll be celebrating honorary member Gaelynn Lea at numerous points throughout the weekend, including at her performance at the 2023 Vivian Perlis Concert. More information about all of this will be coming soon.

Other exciting changes are afoot. I am thrilled to announce that the next Editor of the *Journal of the Society for American Music* is Charles Hiroshi Garrett. Having served a variety of roles in the Society—including President (2015-2017), as well as having extensive experience as an editor (perhaps most memorably as the Editor-in-Chief of the second edition of the *Grove Dictionary of American Music*)—Charles is uniquely well-qualified to serve in this role. He has already begun shadowing the journal's current Editor-in-Chief Emily Abrams Ansari in her daily work of communicating with authors, the rest of the editorial team, and journal publisher Cambridge University Press, all of which keeps our *Journal* in the place of high esteem it has in our discipline and amongst humanities journals in general.

I'm also very, VERY pleased that the Society has a new research fellowship, the Latin American and LatinX Music Fellowship. This is culmination of the efforts of many people (including several past presidents), to whom I extend my deepest thanks for making the creation of this fellowship possible.

Speaking of changes in leadership: this is the time of year where the committee on committees (yes, it's a thing) begins looking for volunteers who would be willing to serve on a SAM committee. Last year we sent out a poll, asking people to indicate where they'd be willing to serve—and the response was excellent. I think we actually got a much wider range of folks involved in service from across the Society as a result of this organized self-nominating process. This year's poll will be

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coming soon, so if you have the time and interest to serve, please take the time to respond and I will probably be reaching out to you before long!

Finally, I want to take a moment to thank the many folks who keep everything running in the Society, with a particular spotlight on our Executive Director, Megan MacDonald, as well as Paula Bishop and Joice Gibson. Like many academic societies, much of the work at SAM only happens because of the dedication and commitment of hundreds of volunteers. Since the pandemic began, everyone's capacity to take on tasks outside of what is absolutely necessary has become much more challenged. It's for this reason that I'm all the more thankful that we have so many members who are willing to devote their time and attention to keeping the Society not only functioning, but improving and growing as well.

Journal of the Society for American Music

Volume 16, Number 3 (August 2022)

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Book Reviews

[Chen Yi](#). Leta E. Miller and J. Michele Edwards. University of Illinois Press, 2020. 264 pp. ISBN: 9780252043543. Hardcover.

Bailey Hilgren

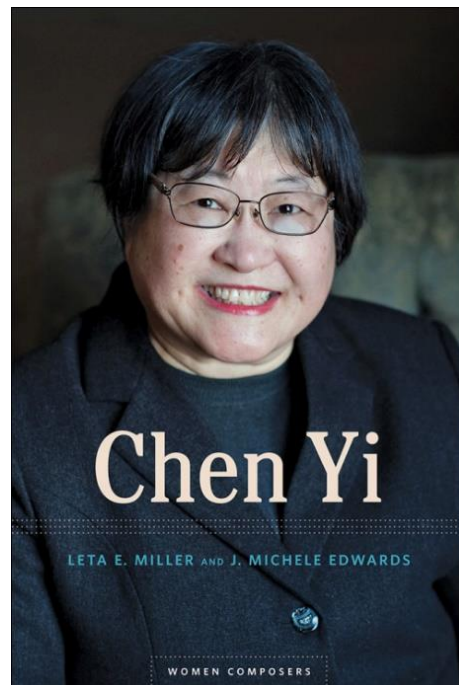
Scholarly attention to the works of Chinese American composer Chen Yi has so far not kept pace with her impact on contemporary music culture. Leta E. Miller and J. Michele Edwards's book *Chen Yi* is thus a much-needed extended study of the composer's music and provides an excellent guide for those interested in programming and engaging in further research on her work. Miller and Edwards approach themes often repeated elsewhere in research on Chen Yi, including exoticism, diaspora, and cultural fusion, the latter of which they refer to as “a consistent *idée fixe*” in much of the existing scholarship on her music (2). Instead of focusing on explicit discussions of these themes throughout the book, however, the authors mostly treat them subtly through careful analysis of Chen's compositions: “Rather than any one specific analytical approach for music by Chen Yi and other new wave [Chinese] composers, a more revealing strategy seems to be an investigation that is multipronged, marshaling technical details in a close reading to elucidate ways in which the music constructs meaning” (172). Accordingly, the heart of Miller and Edwards's book is made up of close technical descriptions of a selection of compositions by Chen Yi throughout her career so far, accompanied by brief contextual chapters constructed primarily from the authors' interviews with the composer. By focusing on Chen's musical statements and her own words, the authors foreground her perspective, complicating and expanding existing analytical frames related to her life and music.

After a brief introductory chapter explaining the authors' general approach, chapter 2 is an extensive biography which places Chen's life within political and historical context, particularly focusing on China's Cultural Revolution and waves of immigration from China to the United States post-Cultural Revolution. Beyond details of the composer's life, the chapter

also provides information on her generation of composers at the Central Conservatory of Music in China in the 1970s, the graduate students at Columbia University mentored by composer and professor Chou Wen-chung through the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the diasporic communities of Chinese musicians in New York whose warm welcome of Chen contributed to several of her early-career successes.

Chapters 3 through 6 are primarily close readings of Chen's music supplemented by abundant notated musical examples. Chapter 3 explores her general composition style and factors influencing her musical development, and chapters 4, 5, and 6 are made up of chronologically organized analytical vignettes of selected solo and chamber works, works for instrumental ensembles, and vocal works, respectively. These chapters occasionally include brief interpretive comments, but they are made up mostly of close descriptions of Chen's compositions focused on moments demonstrating her distinctive compositional voice, stylistic relationships between pieces, and sources of inspiration and influence for each work. The authors' detailed musical descriptions throughout the works-driven chapters are sharp and their technical descriptions are clear. Miller and Edwards forgo summary in their concluding chapter, instead expanding upon several themes that arise through their close readings, including issues of diaspora, exoticism, intersectionality, and gender, among others.

Miller and Edwards's focus on close investigation of individual pieces throughout the book allows them to highlight stylistic consistencies and developments in Chen Yi's music. Her compositions are often complexly layered and crafted with "a sophisticated theoretical construction undergird[ing] an expressive, emotional work," and the authors regularly refer to iterations of this "balance of head and heart" in her music (99). Chen's style also involves frequently borrowing musical elements from her own earlier compositions, and Miller and Edwards's rich textual references to these many borrowings mirror and complement Chen's compositional style. Their references to Chen's self-borrowing across multiple works is particularly strengthened by the book's thorough reference materials.



The authors' close readings also shine where they closely trace Chen's use of Chinese traditional music and folk music of ethnic groups in China in her compositions. Miller and Edwards's descriptions of Chen's works especially highlight the ways her many uses of Chinese music are conveyed through subtle rhythmic, timbral, and formal elements as well as more direct references. The authors' analyses demonstrate that Chen Yi's musical engagement with her Chinese birthplace and adopted American identity is nuanced, complex, and cannot be explained through facile interpretations relying heavily on concepts like exoticism or hybridity. Though their approach to Chen's Chinese American identity and the ways her experiences structure her compositions was generally rich and politically engaged, I did find myself wondering why the authors' frequent references to Chen's borrowing of ethnic minority groups' folk musics did not consider the political complexities around that borrowing, particularly where Chen does so in the name of general cultural bridging or unification. Such ethnic minority group cultural borrowing is certainly not a practice unique to Chen Yi or her compositions, but I found myself wishing for a discussion of this issue.

Though part of the University of Illinois Press "Women Composers" series, the authors do not prioritize discussion that foregrounds Chen Yi's experiences based on her gender throughout the book, instead mostly saving investigation of gender as a theme for the final chapter. This seems to be in keeping with Chen's own views that gender discrimination has had a minimal impact on her life and that she was not aware of it until her work with the Women's Philharmonic Orchestra in the 1990s. Miller and Edwards gracefully balance Chen's descriptions of her experiences with the broader realities of gender impacts through data demonstrating that if she has experienced minimal gender discrimination, she's an outlier rather than the norm, and that systemic discrimination is still rampant in programming by professional orchestras today. The authors point out that though Chen Yi has had an "exceptionally successful career," we might consider "how many more performances, commissions, and prizes she might have received if institutional bias were not part of the equation" (178). Miller and Edwards's book does an important job highlighting Chen Yi's impressive body of compositions and accomplishes valuable work toward acknowledging Chen's steadfast commitment to teaching and mentorship. In this way, the authors themselves battle the unequal treatment of women composers, Chen Yi included, that they identify in the book.

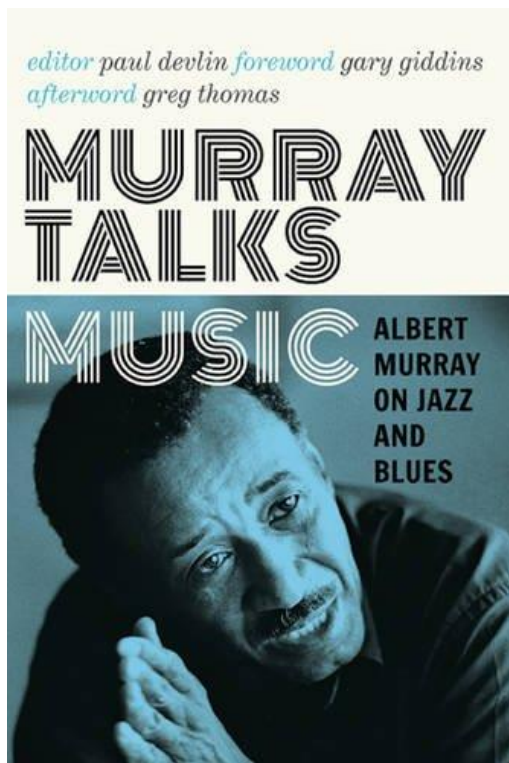
Miller and Edwards's analyses of individual works provide useful entry points into Chen Yi's compositions for researchers and performers alike, and the questions they raise throughout the book are provocative. Their exciting but brief issue-focused discussions in the final chapter read like an agenda for future research, though there are many more possible directions for scholarship on Chen's music not addressed in the book. Ultimately, Miller and Edwards's *Chen Yi* provides a solid foundation for performers and scholars interested in Chen's music and is an important contribution to both the UIP "Women Composers" series and the growing body of research on Chen Yi.

[*Murray Talks Music: Albert Murray on Jazz and Blues*](#). Edited by Paul Devlin. University of Minnesota Press, 2016. 273 pp. ISBN: 9780816699551. Hardcover.

Emily Ruth Allen

In *Murray Talks Music: Albert Murray on Jazz and Blues*, editor Paul Devlin presents a compilation of (mostly) unpublished interviews and prose pieces that provides further context on the musical perspectives of polymath Albert Murray. Though he wrote acclaimed literary works like *South to a Very Old Place* and *The Omni-Americans*, Murray was also a jazz and blues critic that held working relationships at different points with individuals like Ralph Ellison, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie, to name a few. He was also active in jazz scenes from the ground up; for example, when most of the interviews in *Murray Talks Music* took place, he was working with the organization Jazz at Lincoln Center. Therefore, the book provides insight on his various experiences, as well as larger themes from his core texts on music history and aesthetics such as *Stomping the Blues*. Each primary source opens with summaries to contextualize the interview or prose piece and highlight the key ideas presented. For example, in the Dizzy Gillespie interview, Devlin emphasizes that this conversation clarifies Murray's perspectives on bop.

Because *Murray Talks Music* was published in 2016, it is a useful aid for audiences to look back at Murray's output over his career. Scholars in jazz and literature may find the unpublished materials helpful due to their rarity, as Devlin worked with the Murray estate to compile this collection. On the other hand, the book's narrative reflexivity will allow even readers new to Murray's work to the text as a gateway to understand his well-known publications from earlier decades. Thus, Devlin describes *Murray Talks Music* as a "coda" to Murray's previous writings on music.



The book's content is diverse in terms of participants and format. It begins with a foreword from jazz critic Gary Giddins and an introduction from Devlin himself, both of whom situate the primary sources in terms of their larger themes and insights on Albert Murray's persona. The book also uses his perspectives on music to present his insight on Black American life and literature (e.g., he describes a "hero" figure in many of his writings on the blues idiom, Black masculinity, and key characters in his fictional writing). The beginning and end of the core content seems organized appropriately to guide the reader, opening with Murray's interview with Wynton Marsalis that focuses mostly on big picture concepts and concluding with Murray's last published nonfiction piece. Between these sections the reader is presented with Murray's interviews with people like Dan Minor and Billy Eckstine, complemented by his prose pieces on topics such as second line practices and Count Basie. All of this is followed by an afterword from journalist Greg Thomas, an acknowledgments section, two appendices (Murray's lists of jazz arrangements), an index, and plates. The photos in the back, all taken by Murray, are visual glimpses into his place in U.S. jazz history, such as his relationship with Duke Ellington. These back materials therefore provide excellent overviews of Murray's musical contributions compared to other books that do not put as much emphasis on this side of his career.

Since Murray's passing in 2013, his work has been celebrated in edited collections from scholars like Paul Devlin and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *Murray Talks Music* complements these other texts by primarily focusing on music and the decades just before his death, providing a glimpse into the body of writings that Albert Murray has produced.

[Whisperin' Bill Anderson: An Unprecedented Life in Country Music](#). Bill Anderson with Peter Cooper. University of Georgia Press, 2017. 352 pp. ISBN: 9780820349664. Hardcover.

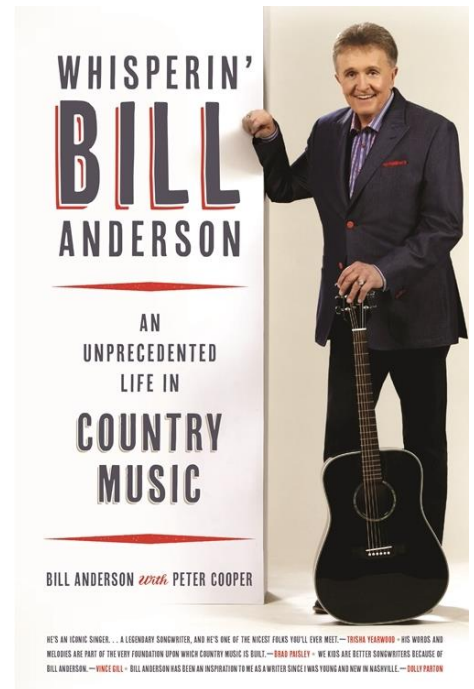
Holly Riley

Whisperin' Bill Anderson: An Unprecedented Life in Country Music, a co-written autobiography between the eponymous Anderson and musician and scholar Peter Cooper, tells the story of one of the longest-running careers in country music. It's not a flashy, boozy, "hard country" tale that might come from the lives of Haggard or Cash, but rather a gentle, detail-filled narrative that traces the ins and outs of the country music industry from the 1950s to the 2010s through Bill Anderson's softly humorous tone. In twenty-two short chapters, the authors describe Anderson's "unprecedented life in country music." Indeed, as Anderson notes in the final chapter, he is the only country songwriter to chart his songs across seven consecutive decades; this breadth of insider experience makes *Whisperin' Bill Anderson* a uniquely fascinating read for those interested in the history and industry of the genre.

Anderson tells a detailed story of his life and career in country music, beginning with his childhood in Columbia, South Carolina and Decatur, Georgia, and continuing into his initial forays into radio DJing in college and his first success as a songwriter with "City Lights" in 1958. The story weaves through his life and career in a roughly chronological fashion, with plenty of sidebars mid-chapter for relevant backstory or pertinent tales. When he tells a story, Anderson will often pause and recall a way this particular part of the narrative played out in the past or future—for example, he recounts childhood memories of attending a baseball game with his mother when he talks about his songwriting process for "Mama Sang a Song," and his story of being inducted into the Grand Ole Opry in 1961 includes a smattering of sidebar tales from his favorite Opry moments across many decades of his career. This time-hopping storytelling technique is deeply engaging for the reader, and clearly demonstrates the appeal of Anderson's approach as a musical raconteur. He traces the stories of his early tours and songwriting successes, forays into television, romantic endeavors, and career decisions in a robust narrative form that rubs elbows with virtually every "who's who" in country music.

Though Anderson talks plenty about his songwriting and musical processes—his lyrical inspirations and development of his iconic singing/talking voice, most notably—this is equally a book about the music industry and its developments across many decades of the twentieth century. The book also exposes stories of racism and sexism worked deeply into country music's industry history, such as the discrimination levied towards Charley Pride or the gendered pushback faced by Connie Smith. When Anderson talks about these things, he does so matter-of-factly, without apology: "it was a different time, and not necessarily a better one" (157). This approach occasionally feels as though it lacks a necessary and direct condemnation of the industry's historic discrimination practices, though this tonal shift would perhaps feel stark in comparison to Anderson's steady voice of calm positivity. A theme that emerges throughout the text is Anderson's deep and ongoing attention to the relationship-building side of the music industry, describing the regular letters, thank-you notes, and outreach that were the pillars of his musical success. Humility and kindness shine through his voice, and it is clear that the longevity and substance of Anderson's career is in no small part due to this deep attention to detail.

Though the book clearly benefits from the scholarship and historical fact-checking of scholar Peter Cooper, the seamlessness of the tale pauses slightly in his brief introductions to each chapter, which are the only portions of the book written outside of Anderson's first-person voice. Cooper begins each of these chapters with a short (usually one-paragraph) overview of Anderson's career at the current moment in the timeline, though this context typically becomes clear from the chapter read itself. There is also surprisingly little attention—only two short chapters—devoted to Anderson's mid-career slump in the 70s and 80s, which feels a bit hasty in comparison to the prolific detail given throughout the rest of this text. The final third of the book quickly returns to Anderson's rebound success in the mid-1990s, his induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame and Country Music Association Song of the Year award in the early 2000s, and his closing reflections on a robust career in the changing country music industry. Still, these concluding chapters of Anderson's return to country



stardom in its twenty-first-century framework are a satisfying resolution to a decades-long tale. This late-career comeback is perhaps most striking in the example of Anderson's award-winning "Whiskey Lullaby" and the song's unexpected path to an internationally acclaimed recording by Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss in 2004 (though imagine if, as Anderson explains, it *had* been a Chicks song!)

Anderson and Cooper take an unassuming tone in the writing of this book, telling stories with the language of talking to a friend and the detail of a warm summer's night. Anderson's writing and storytelling are also hilarious, in the most gentle and understated manner. Sprinkled throughout every chapter is an abundance of little quips and jokes, told so softly and matter-of-factly that one almost misses them before they evoke a genuine chuckle. Anderson is clearly a deep appreciator of a good zinger and retells a number of them from some of his favorite collaborators in the music industry, including Grandpa Jones, Jimmy Gateley, Ronnie Milsap, and Tex Ritter. Though the most seasoned historians of twentieth-century country music will appreciate this book for its rare detail and insight into plenty of formerly unwritten moments, a range of scholars, students, and music lovers will enjoy this deep and conversational tale. And while *Whisperin' Bill Anderson* employs a narrative positionality rather than a theoretical one, those conducting scholarship on country music may glean both relevant stories and larger conceptual themes from this text. It's a subtle gem of a tale about a rich life in country music and is likely to make readers from any background want to put on a few Bill Anderson records and hum along.

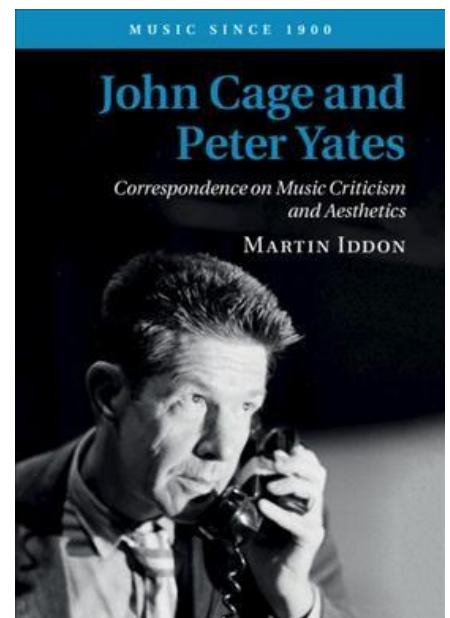
[John Cage and Peter Yates: Correspondence on Music Criticism and Aesthetics](#). Martin Iddon. Cambridge University Press, 2019. 310 pp. ISBN: 9781108628815. Hardcover.

Vivianne Asturizaga

John Cage and Peter Yates: Correspondence on Music Criticism and Aesthetics portrays a vivid account of the relationship between John Cage and Peter Yates. This must-read text for scholars of twentieth-century musical aesthetics and John Cage complements Martin Iddon's previous work of the correspondence and wider professional relationship of Cage and David Tudor with composer Pierre Boulez. The book also keeps extensive, informative, and cross-referenced detail in footnotes and a helpful index that lead the readers into an edifying rendezvous with the text.

Iddon draws from primary source materials found in Box 3, Folder 1-2 at the Special Collections & Archives of UC San Diego and the John Cage Collection at Northwestern University. One hundred fifteen letters from 1940 to 1971, chronologically organized, are interconnected and enhanced by Peter Yates's thirty-four published and unpublished articles principally drawn from Yates's writings in *Arts & Architecture* and *Arts in Society*. Each page advances the understanding of the intricate and frank relationship Cage and Yates developed throughout the years and anchors their developing philosophical thought on American experimental music. What strikes me the most is how the resultant conversation of these organized letters and articles conveys ideas about consonance and dissonance in music in the U.S. in the second half of the twentieth century. Concepts such as noise, silence, a musical tone, the revival or usage of musical instruments, improvisation, or the role of musicians in society are among the many topics of exchange between Cage and Yates that, at the same time, provide a gateway to a better understanding of culture and aesthetics of the time.

Aside from depicting the fragmented and plural "American" sound at the half of the twentieth century, the book also provides an essential look into Yates's mindset as a creator of the concert series Evenings on the Roof in Los Angeles, music critic for the magazine *Arts and Architecture*, interviewer with the California Employment Service, and lecturer and chair of the music department at the State University of New York's College at Buffalo. *An Amateur at the Keyboard* (1964) and *Twentieth Century Music* (1967) indicate the fruits of this thinking at a time when Yates is not only conversing with Cage and Lou Harrison but also with important musical figures in the world of twentieth-century music, including Milton Babbitt, Henry Cowell, Ingolf Dahl, Lukas Foss, Peyton Houston, Alan Hovhaness, Charles Ives, John Kirkpatrick, William Kraft, Ernst Krenek, Toshiro Mayuzumi, Harry Partch, Roger Reynolds, Wallingford Riegger, Ned Rorem, Arnold Schoenberg, Virgil Thomson, and Edgard Varèse, among others.



Iddon's organization also reveals Yates's profound appreciation for John Cage's philosophy. "Composing's one thing, performing's another; listening is a third" (72) is the essence of Peter Yates's writings that describes what the work of art is doing to the identity of American music at the time based on John Cage's idea of sonic performances. Furthermore, it is evident throughout the text how Yates highlights the significance of Cage's work as an admirer of his, shown, for example, in a letter to Cage: "Dear John ... You have changed the world ... I started writing to thank you in my pleasure for what you are doing to correct the world..." (271-272), referring to sound and the philosophy of music that Cage has built.

Although the letters attest to the trust and collaboration between Cage and Yates, it is Cage's edited work of Yates's writing as reflected in the articles where the reader best understands the kind of relationship the two men had: Cage as inventor and artist and Yates as admirer and supporter. Iddon also suggests that Peter Yates was transcendental in Cage's metamorphosis throughout his career because of their exchange. As I was reading, however, I did wonder whether the addition of some of Cage's lectures and writings intertwined with the articles and letters could clarify further the authors' argument. Nevertheless, Martin Iddon's book sheds light on an enigmatic figure and the aesthetics of American music in an organized and thoughtful way.

Bulletin Board & Member News

[Greg Reish](#) (Middle Tennessee State University, Center for Popular Music) has received a Fulbright-Garcia Robles Scholar Award to Mexico for spring semester 2023. He will serve as U.S. Studies Chair in the North American Studies Program at the Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Veracruz, with a project entitled, "Teaching U.S. History, Culture, and Identity through Popular Music."

Call for *Bulletin* Contributions

The *Bulletin* editorial board invites members to contribute feature articles, reviews, and news, as well as ideas for future *Bulletin* segments or series. We welcome essays and opinion pieces on current issues in American music (broadly conceived) and music scholarship; reports on concerts and conferences of interest to our membership; transcriptions of interviews with prominent persons in American musical life; reviews of recent books, online resources, media (including albums and documentaries) pertaining to American music; and updates on our members' scholarly, creative, and professional activities. You can contact members of the editorial board via the [SAM website](#) or via the email addresses listed at the bottom of the *Bulletin* issue.

The *Bulletin* of the Society for American Music

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Editorial Board

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Items for submission should be submitted via the [Bulletin's information page](#). Photographs or other graphic materials should be accompanied by captions and desired location in the text. Deadlines for submission of materials are 15 December, 15 April, and 15 August.