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Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular
(review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular. By Catherine Parsons Smith. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-520-25139-7. Pp. xiv, 376. Hardcover. \$34.95.

In her first chapter, Catherine Parsons Smith explicitly states that this book has multiple functions. First, it is a social history, focusing on the careers and interactions of “music makers,” a term Smith uses to encompass performers and composers as well as listeners, patrons, teachers, students, and entrepreneurs. In addition, it is a regional study that takes as its complicated subject the city of Los Angeles from the 1880s to about 1940. And finally, it is an account of the transformations that occurred in the American musical soundscape during and just after the turn of the twentieth century. Smith also points out what this book is *not*, saying that “it rarely deals directly with the notes or the sounds” of the music discussed therein. At times this was a disappointing exclusion, but understandable in light of the book’s wide-ranging scope and its challenging, circular foci.

Making Music in Los Angeles is divided into three parts, each of which covers roughly two decades. Part 1, “Music for the ‘People,’” discusses some key events and individuals in the late nineteenth century, including the 1887 visit of the National Opera Company, the establishment in 1898 of the Los Angeles Symphony, and the first attempts in 1888 at a local chapter of a musicians’ union. Also introduced are three impresarios and two performers active in the music scene in the 1880s and beyond. Harry C. Wyatt was the manager of the Los Angeles Theater, while Fred W. Blanchard was a music-store owner who initiated lectures and concert series at significantly lower prices than his competitors. Lynden Ellsworth Behymer, a publisher and publicist known for his assertive marketing techniques, receives his own chapter in light of his protracted role in the Los Angeles musical community from 1886 through the 1940s. Harley Hamilton, leader of two related but widely contrasting performing groups, the Los Angeles Symphony and the Los Angeles Women’s Orchestra, is treated in a chapter along with his violin stu-

dent Edna Foy, who in 1897 was not allowed to audition for the L.A. Symphony because she was female. The fact that Hamilton simultaneously led the Women's Orchestra but had to deny Foy the right to join the symphony illustrates the tricky gender issues to which Smith often alludes.

Part 2, entitled "Progressive-Era Musical Idealism," covers the first two decades of the twentieth century. While Smith does not outline the tenets of progressivism outright, its resonances in Los Angeles are made clear through the events included here. The belief that concert music could be morally uplifting and ethically valuable was not new in the 1910s, as Smith accurately points out (96), but such a view served to guide and at times control new endeavors over the next twenty years. Such undertakings included the construction of Temple Auditorium, later renamed Philharmonic Auditorium; the People's Orchestra project of 1912–13, which viewed concert music as public entertainment; the aforementioned production of Parker's ill-fated *Fairyland*; and the founding of the Hollywood Bowl around 1920.

In part 3 Smith attempts to move "From Progressive to Ultramodern," with mostly successful results. An unfortunate competition between two short-lived opera companies in October 1925 points to the waning popularity of opera for wider, popular audiences in the light of the new entertainments to be found in film and radio. Smith interjects a chapter on the New Negro movement and its effects in Los Angeles, pointing to key players such as Arna Bontemps, Harold Bruce Forsythe (first introduced in Smith's *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions* [University of California Press, 2000]), and William Grant Still himself, who settled in Los Angeles in 1934. Smith posits that black concert music, with its inherent reliance on notation and musical literacy and its setting in black churches, had a direct impact on the emerging jazz scene in Los Angeles that included artists like Jelly Roll Morton and Charles Mingus. In discussing the ultramodern, Smith chooses to focus on the events that led up to the 1939 advent of the Evenings on the Roof series, citing earlier occurrences like Olga Steeb's 1920s "Historic Recitals" (what Steeb played is never identified) and Henry Cowell's 1925 and 1926 New Music Society concerts. The penultimate chapter, entitled "Second Thoughts," reveals that immediately following Cowell's concerts, many local music-makers turned their focus away from American modernists. Some looked to European modernist composers, as in the formation of the local chapter of Pro Musica, while others simply could not accept the new styles at all, as evidenced by the mixed reception to Aaron Copland's solo turn in his Piano Concerto at the Hollywood Bowl in 1928. Smith asks why ultramodernism failed in Los Angeles after 1928, and offers a number of answers without privileging any one: patronage and audiences were not large or enthusiastic enough; commercial mass culture was increasing and pulling audiences away from concert music; traditionalists were simply more powerful within the music establishment in the city. Smith also acknowledges that the failure is representative of a wider cultural shift influenced by political events, immigration and segregation issues, and questions of gender and sexuality, citing the "well-advertised anti-woman attitudes" of younger male American composers (212). The section ends with a chapter on the Los Angeles Federal Music Project (FMP), part of the New Deal that provided relief to unemployed workers during the Depression. Musicians

were especially hard-hit with the advent of sound films and jukeboxes, rendering theater orchestras and club bands superfluous. Two local consequences of the FMP, an exploitative production of *La Traviata* that employed an excessive number of nonrelief workers, and the later organization of the California Society of Composers in 1937, illustrate in stark relief the abuses of power and control that occurred in the L.A. Music Project, as well as its distinctly conservative, even xenophobic bent. Smith calls this chapter "an indecisive farewell with suitably mixed implications," a fitting coda to her book.

Smith's organization is at times unwieldy for the reader. It can be difficult to wade through the overlapping dates and events that occur throughout each chapter of the book's three parts. In addition, there are some problems with specificity of citation and information. Dates are not included for most of the key players and, when provided, are found mostly in endnotes. Clearly this study is ambitious in its scope, and it is successful in illustrating that the music scene in Los Angeles before 1940 was thriving and richly diverse. Her wider conclusions, the "transformations" of the title, about opera's shift from a popular entertainment into an elite one, the symphony orchestra's pursuit of wider audience bases, and the move from European classical musical styles to progressive and ultramodern American sounds (and back again), create a straightforward, understandable backdrop to the specific accounts included here, which, taken individually, can at times be less clear. Intermittent editorial errors are somewhat distracting as well.

All reservations aside, however, Smith's book informs a lacuna of knowledge about a neglected period in American musical history and paints a colorful portrait of the music scene in early twentieth-century Los Angeles. Its illustrations, tables, index, and appendixes will be useful in further research that navigates this time period. While a true integration of the topics and themes is left ultimately to the reader, Smith has illuminated the way toward that goal and continued to advance the state of scholarship in American music.

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Country Music Originals: The Legends and the Lost. By Tony Russell. New York: Oxford University Press. 2007. ISBN-13 9780195325096. Hardcover. Pp. xviii, 258. \$29.95.

With his *Country Music Originals: The Legends and the Lost*, Tony Russell provides an excellent reference source that examines 110 artists who contributed much to the birth, growth, and development of early commercial country music. The author gives special attention to artists who have been forgotten or omitted by music historians and whose careers peaked during the first half of the twentieth century. *Country Music Originals* consists of brief entries, each averaging one to two pages, on selected artists, supported by a variety of accompanying visuals, including black-and-white photographs, concert advertisements, promotional materials by record labels, newspaper clippings, and selected discographies of accessible original recordings, compilations, and reissues. The volume's entries are ordered somewhat chronologically, and the author includes four "bridge" sections that examine context-specific issues such as the cultural contrast be-