

THE

SONNECK SOCIETY

for American Music

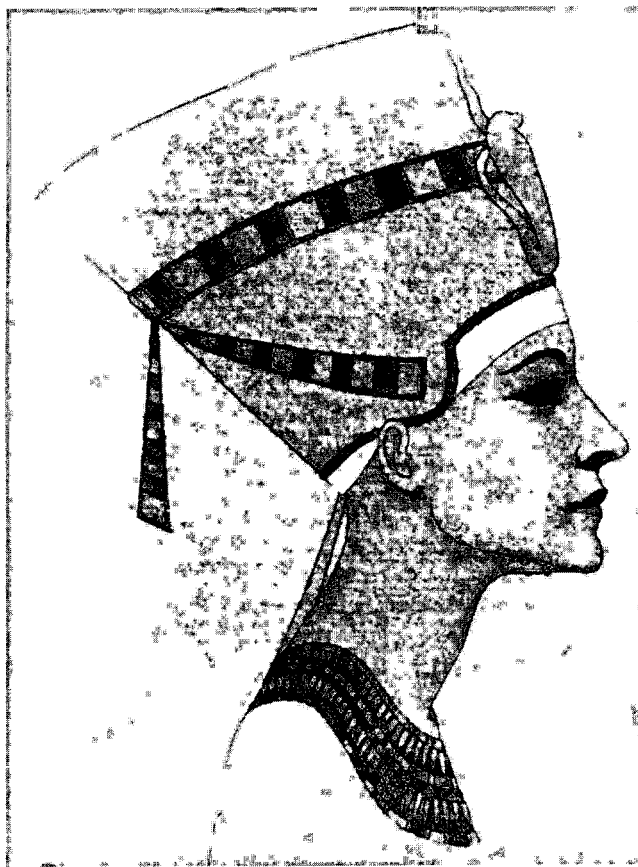
BULLETIN

Vol. XXIII, No. 1

Spring 1997

AN AMERICAN COMPOSER ANSWERS THE CALL TO EGYPT

by Ann Sears



Ruth Lynda Deyo began her remarkable musical career as a Wunderkind of the keyboard. Like many virtuosi, she performed her own works from childhood, but these early piano pieces were only a suggestion of the profound interest in composition she would develop as a mature woman. Her attraction to opera and ancient Egyptian culture was also evident during her childhood. In the 1920s these various threads of her musical and imaginative life came together to draw her to Egypt, where she performed frequently, composed, worked as a pioneering ethnomusicologist, and became something of an Egyptologist—all at a time when women engaged in few of these activities.

By the time of her first trip to Egypt in 1924, forty-year-old Ruth Lynda Deyo (1884-1960) traveled with the credentials of a well-established concert pianist. From age three she had played her own compositions and those of other composers at parlor concerts, church gatherings, and local musicales. On September 8, 1893, the nine-year-old prodigy gave a recital of her own works in the Assembly Hall of the Women's Building at the World's Colombian Exposition in Chicago, playing eight short pieces, including *By the Sea*, *Twilight Serenade*, *Caprice*, *Hymn*, and several dances; some of her compositions were published that year. Although she was compared to the young Mozart and urged to tour, her mother prudently arranged further instruction. In 1894 she began piano study with William Mason in New York, describing him as "an inspiring teacher."

Drawing of Ruth Lynda Deyo posed as Nefertiti, by Hamzeh Carr. Ruth Lynda Deyo Collection, Gebbie Archives, Wallace Library, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts.

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From the President

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

First, I send to all of you special greetings and good wishes. I realize you will be reading this in the more-or-less springtime, but it's shortly after the New Year as I write, and I'm a creature of season and time (plus fluffy snowflakes are falling across Middle Tennessee out my window). So, Happy New Year! Or "Springtime," if you absolutely must.

During my turn at the helm, I've used these letters to highlight special issues, problems, solutions, initiatives, and programs that affect the Society and the membership. I've touched upon publications, the Internet, conference programming, policy making, and more. This time, I'd like to double back and report, once more, upon our Interest Groups and what is being done to support and encourage this most important aspect of the Society's work.

The subject of Interest Groups was the sole agenda item for a three-hour meeting of the Long Range Planning Committee in Baltimore last November. Some of us characterize the Interest Groups as the "structured anarchy" wing of The Society. As Interest Groups have grown and the concept broadened, there has sometimes been more emphasis on "anarchy" and less on "structure." So, in the spirit of anarchy, we ironically scheduled a meeting!! The mission of the LRPC was to construct a sluice along which the creative energies of the Interest Groups might flow more easily, with even greater force. At the same time, the overall mission of The Society must remain primary, for the good of all.

Administratively, an Interest Group Council has been formed, with a representative elected by each one of the Interest Groups. The Council is headed by a Board liaison, appointed by the president. (A job to which Jean Geil has taken like a fish to water, to my eternal gratitude!) The Council will meet annually (and counsel with each other via e-mail more frequently); all Interest Groups are expected to report to it.

Participation of the Interest Groups in the annual conference has already changed the nature of conference programming, and promises to do so even more. For starters, conferences hereafter will have an "Interest Group Conference Room," for the exclusive use of the groups. It will be scheduled throughout the conference with whatever the Interest Groups propose. (E.g., Thursday: 8:30 a.m.: session by "Research Resources"; 10:00 a.m.: panel discussion by "Musical Theater"; 12:00 p.m.: brown bag roundtable by "Gospel Music"...)

To insure that Interest Groups might take advantage of extraordinary opportunities, such as renowned scholars in the area of the conference, the Board has allocated each group an initial budget of \$100. That money can be rolled-over from year to year, accruing as subsequent Boards (presumably) allocate additional monies.

I hope this doesn't strike you as overly technical. I go into detail here because I believe these decisions could (and perhaps should) affect each member of The Society,

as well as the general health and outreach of The Society. The Republicans stole from us the idea of "The Big Tent." We have long been a society of people with unusually diverse interests. (I'd like to see a list of the other societies to which our members belong, and compare it to that compiled by the members of any other music society! Where else do composers, historians, librarians, publishers, performers, amateurs, folklorists, etc. gather in such diversity?) Interest Groups give us the possibility for community within society, and it's a special opportunity, unique in its concept and structure to the Sonneck Society. I would hope that all of you are already involved in one, two, or more. If not, now's the time. Jump in!

[For the record, the current Interest Groups are: American Band History Research; American Music in American Schools and Colleges; Folk and Traditional Music; Gospel Music; Music of Latin America and the Caribbean; Musical Biography; Musical Theater; Popular Music; Research on Gender in American Music; Research Resources; Twentieth-Century Music. If your interest isn't here, gather the signatures of nine other colleagues and submit your petition to the Board. I assure you, the Board is all for you.]

* * * * *

By the time you read this, the Sonneck gavel will have been passed on to Anne Dhu McClucas. (That's figuratively, of course, since the original Sonneck gavel has been missing-in-action for several years now!) How pleased I am that such a capable person comes along at just this time! (To clean up the mess I leave, some might say, although I hope not.)

Quite honestly, I cannot express to you the honor it has been to serve as your president. I have seen service and dedication to our society way, way beyond anything one would reasonably expect. I have asked many of you to take on jobs and tasks and, to a person, you've responded beyond my dreams. I've flirted with publishing here a "Special Thanks" list, but the problem would be length, and the nightmare that I might leave some deserving soul off. So, I'll be getting around to it in my private way. I do want to state what might be the obvious: that you are a society of wonderful, warm, dedicated human beings (who happen also to be professionals, instead of the other way around). From my experience, we have something extraordinary here, worth special nurturing.

(Four bells.) Anne Dhu! Your watch.

Sincerely,
Dale Cockrell

Time constraints at the end of the annual meeting of The Society in Seattle precluded appropriate acknowledgement of the contributions of outgoing Board members Kathryn Bumpass, Secretary, and Karen Ahlquist, Member-At-Large. Past-President Dale Cockrell particularly wishes the membership to know of the special support, much beyond the call of duty, lent by Kathy. Kudos all around!

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SCHEDULED CONFERENCES

24th National Conference

February 18-22, 1998

Kansas City, Missouri

Host: University of Missouri, Kansas City

Karen Ahlquist, program chair

Kay Norton, local arrangements chair

25th National Conference

March 10-14, 1999

Fort Worth, Texas

Host: Texas Christian University

Michael Broyles, program chair

Allen Lott and Michael Meckna,

local arrangements co-chairs

Planning to move? Please notify the Society at P.O. Box 476, Canton, MA 02021. E-mail: acadsvc@aol.com

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THE AMERICAN MUSIC NETWORK

* * *

NEW ADDRESSES!

E-mail:

sonneck@aaln.org

This is our national address.

Listserv: sonneck@nevada.edu

This is our mailing list.

Home Page:

<http://www.aaln.org/sonneck>

This is our window to the world, where others can find out about us and our programs.

Membership Service:

acadsvc@aol.com

This is the place to send changes of address and enquire about membership status

AMERICAN MUSIC WEEK

First full week of November beginning on Monday

November 3-9, 1997

November 2-8, 1998

November 1-7, 1999

FEATURES

Grieg and MacDowell: A Tale of Two Edwards

by William H. Halverson

In December, 1905, as American composer Edward MacDowell lay gravely ill with the sickness that was soon to take his life, Edvard Grieg wrote a touching letter to Mrs. MacDowell expressing "my own and my wife's heartfelt compassion" to the MacDowells in their hour of trial. "I am a great admirer of MacDowell's muse," he wrote, "and I would regard it as a severe blow if his best creative period should have to be terminated so abruptly."

That Grieg should have written such a letter when he did (December 14, 1905) is quite remarkable, for he himself was a very sick man at this time. He had confided to his diary just a few days earlier his concern that his rapidly ebbing strength might well mark "the beginning of the end" for him, and a week after writing the letter he was admitted to the hospital in Christiania (now Oslo). In addition to expressions of sympathy for the MacDowells, the letter contains important observations about the artistic temperament—observations that Grieg no doubt felt applied as much to himself as to MacDowell. The 1905 letter adds a touching coda to a brief correspondence between Grieg and MacDowell that occurred during the years 1899-1902.

Mrs. MacDowell wrote in 1950 that her husband and Grieg "never saw each other, but they corresponded constantly." Only six letters are extant, however—three from MacDowell to Grieg, three from Grieg to MacDowell—and the internal evidence seems to indicate that they are the only letters the two men ever exchanged. Though both write in the elegant style characteristic of the time, MacDowell's letters also express the awed respect of a younger man for his world-famous Norwegian colleague.

In the earliest extant letter, dated October 10, 1899, MacDowell requested Grieg's permission "to dedicate to you my third sonata for piano, about to be published." The letter then continues:

A number of years ago a critic in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* said that my music itself was a dedication to you...I will confess that the critic was right to some



Edward A. MacDowell



Eduard Hagerup Grieg

extent, for your music lies closer to my heart than I can well say. I have dedicated much to you in my thoughts...

Grieg apparently was unaware that MacDowell was fluent in German, for his brief reply of October 26 is in what he himself describes as "bad English." He thanked MacDowell for his letter and his kind words and added, "it will be a great honor and pleasure for me to accept your dedication."

The sonata was not published as quickly as MacDowell had expected, and he evidently felt obliged to explain the delay to his celebrated dedicatee. On December 13, 1899, he sent Grieg a second letter telling him of the delay and, among other things, thanking him "for your good words, which have the same sincere ring as your music. You of course must realize what it means to me to receive encouragement from you, and how your friendly interest will inspire me to do better things." He requested that when Grieg received the music he "tell me squarely what you disagree with the most in it." He concluded by saying, "The name of Grieg is adored from one end of this country to the other."

MacDowell's so-called "Norse" sonata for piano, Op. 57, was finally published in early 1900. The "motto" attached to this work is one of the composer's finest literary creations:

Night had fallen on a day of deeds.
The great rafters in the red-ribbed hall
Flashed crimson in the fitful flame
Of smouldering logs;
And from the stealthy shadows
That crept 'round Harald's throne
Rang out a Skald's strong voice
With tales of battles won:
Of Gudrun's love
And Sigurd, Siegmund's son.

On June 30, 1900, Grieg sent MacDowell a letter (in German) containing substantive and highly complimentary comments on the sonata:

In the handling of your Nordic material you are only partly under Wagner's influence. And that is good