Journal of the Society for American Music (2011) Volume 5, Number 3, pp. 430–432.
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New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany, from the Zero Hour to Reunification. By Amy C. Beal. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

"The American avant-gardist functions in an egalitarian, heterogeneous society (within a vast, 'open' landscape) where individuals create their own artistic frameworks, and American society depends on and values such individuality" (6). Accordingly, composers from Charles Ives (died 1954) through Larry Polansky (born 1954) have frequently been characterized as "'desert plants' whose ability to survive in a cultural desert has made [them] all the more admirable" (221)—or so the (German) mythical understanding of the U.S. experimental tradition has it. In fact, the reality, as Amy Beal demonstrates in this meticulously researched and painstakingly argued book, is that—a few genuine "desert plants" such as Harry Partch, Lou Harrison, and Peter Garland notwithstanding—a significant number of the most radical creative musicians in the United States were, during the second half of the twentieth century, often indulgently supported by the West German cultural establishment. Indeed, as several of Beal's subjects assert, the financial assistance and encouragement provided by the Germans was crucial to their success. As Steve Reich tellingly puts it,

> America certainly appreciated my music as much as any European country, but America, from the 1970s when I began up to now, simply does not have the money set aside for the arts the way Europe does. That's the difference. To put it in simple terms, it's a lot easier for me to go to Cologne than it is to go to California. Not because people in California don't know about my music, it is because it's harder to find things like WDR [West German Radio] in California. (201)

Inevitably, much of *New Music, New Allies* consists of data: Who invited whom to do what, when, and where. Thus the book's seven main chapters trace a largely chronological narrative from the "Zero Hour" when the U.S. Office of War Information imposed strict policies concerning cultural re-education and information control (one wonders what parallels may ultimately emerge from postinvasion Afghanistan and Iraq), through the establishment and development of the America Houses and Darmstadt's (in)famous Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, to the emergence of U.S.–dominated music festivals and other events in Cologne, Munich, Berlin, and elsewhere. Some interesting themes emerge: the significance in the immediate postwar period of such supposedly marginal figures as Harrison Kerr; the importance of radio stations and recording companies in the dissemination of "approved" new music; the crucial role of David Tudor as the avant-garde's "house pianist" in the 1950s and 1960s, when he premiered not just the works of the New York School, but also of Boulez, Bussotti, and Stockhausen; the surprisingly strong influence of Cage, his associates, and his followers throughout the period in question—as La Monte Young put it, "I had to go to Europe to really discover Cage" (111); the political and critical in-fighting among various German individuals in positions of power (such as H. H. Stuckenschmidt, Wolfgang Steinecke, Ernst

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196311000204 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thomas, Hans G. Helms, and Hans Otte); and the early enthusiasm in Germany for minimalism, exemplified by Steve Reich's 1972 visits to Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Cologne, and Berlin.

Data notwithstanding, one of Beal's great strengths as a scholar is her ability never to lose sight of the larger issues underlying the tales she tells. Although her introductory and concluding chapters are relatively (and regrettably) short, they accomplish a great deal in setting out the fundamental questions associated with her topic. Thus she deals convincingly with the degree to which it was "individual, autonomous decisions within Germany" rather than "American institutional policy regarding new music" that created "a context of prolific exile for American experimental music" (2). Similarly, though perhaps unwittingly, Beal demonstrates conclusively that U.S. experimentalism is best understood not so much as a *tradition* but rather as an overlapping and sometimes confusing series of *networks*, both in the United States and internationally. (In this sense, one could imagine a sequel dealing with—say—the networks linking U.S. radicalism with France, Italy, Japan, or Britain: In this last case, the spirit of the New York School lives on in England through the legacy of Cornelius Cardew and the continuing efforts of such figures as John Tilbury, Michael Nyman, and Howard Skempton.)

The most interesting—and paradoxical—issue that emerges in *New Music, New Allies*, though, is the very distinct impression that West Germany's enthusiasm for (or even obsession with) U.S. music in the postwar period is premised in a basic misunderstanding of both the country and its culture. As Beal notes in her introduction, before quoting some pregnant lines from Goethe's 1827 text "To the United States": "America's assumed innocence and its distance from history and tradition are the most privileged tropes running through German literature and criticism" (6). Yet, as Steve Reich opined in the 2002 interview with Beal quoted earlier,

> I would say my music is basically misunderstood in Germany, and still is. I think my music is as far away from the Germanic musical tradition as it is possible for music to be, and they have never . . . to this day, figured out what my music is really about. . . . I think it's a Germanic blind spot, and it's understandable because I have absolutely nothing to do with the tradition from Haydn to Wagner. I might have something to do with J. S. Bach . . . and Kurt Weill, but those are the only two German composers that could possibly have any parallel with what I do. (201)

Tellingly, *New Music, New Allies* ends with Beal's visit to Halberstadt in Sachsen-Anhalt, which, since the millennium, has been "the unlikely home of the 'John-Cage-Orgelkunstprojekt' *Organ²/ASLSP* (As Slow As Possible)" (254). There, in a medieval chapel, the St. Buchardi Klosterkirche built between 1214 and 1320, Beal encounters an organ that, until the year 2639, will be performing at an almost inconceivably slow pace one of Cage's more philosophically speculative works—viz., what does "as slow as possible" actually imply? Her generous assessment of the project concludes that "*ASLSP* as it is currently being realized offers a truly unique aesthetic experience, one that is intricately connected to its physical setting and to Cage's unexpected role in that place's history, even as a beacon of utopian hope for the future" (255). A more worldly (or cynical) view might be that the project stands

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196311000204 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rather as a bizarre testament to both the remarkable benevolence, but also the basic befuddlement, of Germany's enduring embrace of American radicalism.

David Nicholls

Journal of the Society for American Music (2011) Volume 5, Number 3, pp. 432–435.
© The Society for American Music 2011
doi:10.1017/S1752196311000216

Hold on to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973–1992. By Tim Lawrence. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice. By Kyle Gann. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Since the late 1980s, musical life in New York City's downtown scene has proved a fruitful ground for research. Beginning with the work of Samuel Gilmore, scholars such as Bernard Gendron and George E. Lewis have explored the ways in which diverse populations lived and made music together in the geographically bounded space of lower Manhattan during the last quarter of the twentieth century.[1] The two books under review here contribute handsomely to this expanding field of study. Kyle Gann's *Music Downtown* reports on the scene as it existed in the 1980s and 1990s and is a collection of primary sources describing musical activity below 14th Street. Tim Lawrence's *Hold on to Your Dreams* is a biography of one of downtown's pivotal and, until recently, nearly unknown figures—composer-producer Arthur Russell. Because of his explorations of experimental music, disco, and pop music, Russell was able to forge associations among diverse musicians and to take the lead in bringing them together.

Gann is a staunch advocate for downtown composers, and his *Music Downtown* is an essential contribution to our knowledge of the scene. Selected from his hundreds of articles written while he was music critic of the *Village Voice*, Gann's collection can be thought of as a sequel to Tom Johnson's *The Voice of New Music* and provides a first-person view of musical activity from 1986 until the century's end.[2] Included in *Music Downtown* are interviews from the period with Robert Ashley, Yoko Ono, Carman Moore, Glenn Branca, Maria de Alvear, and others. Also included are essays on music, society, and aesthetics as well as concert reviews that document Gann's critical concerns. Gann's collection of essays reads like a serialized novel, replete with riveting characters and high drama. He even pens a comic murder mystery

[1] Samuel Gilmore, "Schools of Activity and Innovation," *Sociological Quarterly* 29/2 (Summer 1988): 203–19; Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and the American Experimental Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[2] Tom Johnson, *The Voice of New Music: Writings from the Village Voice, 1972–1982* (Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Het Apollohuis, 1991).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196311000204 Published online by Cambridge University Press