and our subsequent understanding of this music. Grubbs opens his study with the avant-garde hillbilly fiddle player Henry Flynt as an example of a musician who was little known in the 1960s, but who has become increasingly important in retrospect with the recent release of archival recordings. In the 1960s, Flynt struggled to reconcile his eclectic and omnivorous musical tastes vis-à-vis Cage’s prejudice against jazz and pop. His polystylistic, experimental recordings did not find an audience in the 1960s when the walls between genres seemed impenetrable. Today Flynt’s combination of styles from different time periods, social strata, and geographical locations seems prescient. Grubbs points out that it is difficult to imagine today that Flynt’s music did not participate in the emerging postmodern dialogue. Indeed, it could not have since it was mostly unknown until the fin-de-millennium (pp. 23–24).

Access to music through the release of archival materials, the rerelease of out-of-print LPs on compact disc and digital media, has prompted a rewriting of the history of experimental music, minimalism, and electronic music. Grubbs describes several other musicians in the post-Cage 1960s and their various reactions to Cage’s work. One wing of post-Cage composers devoted themselves to making music that was impossible to capture on a recording. Others went in the other extreme, embracing recording and recording technology to the point that the studio became their primary musical instrument. Some following Cage (like Luc Ferrari) developed the idea of acoustic ecology—that recordings can preserve an aural landscape of a physical site, an idea akin to traditional ecological studies. Ferrari and others are inspired by Cage compositions like 4’33” that functionally frame ambient noises, but reject the idea that a recording is just a postcard that ruins the landscape. Grubbs explores the nature of the recording as a documentary device by comparing the aural recording to other recording media from the 1960s, especially photography and film.

Throughout the book Grubbs combines a discussion of musical style with an equally acute discussion of recording techniques and recorded sound. This story with Cage at the center engages music by myriad other composers active in the 1960s and their creative processes. Grubbs connects Cage’s work to the work of others through the most compelling links. Christian Wolff’s Duo for Violinist and Pianist (1961), which includes long stretches of silence, was connected to the publisher Edition Wandelweiser, which promoted the work of composers who “privilege silence in their work” (p. 184). And Grubbs connects Cage’s 1960 piece Cartridge Music (which uses turntable cartridges to pick up sounds on objects other than records) to Yasunao Tone’s pieces like Solo for Wounded CD (1985) that use more recent technology in a similarly unconventional way. These connections are a virtuosic display of knowledge and Grubbs’s ability to make links across time periods and styles is evocative of the kind of conversations one might have in a record store with a fanatical employee who knows everything and is excited to share the knowledge with you. Indeed, these are the kinds of conversations that Grubbs mentions in the preface.

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Denise von Glahn’s Music and the Skillful Listener: American Women Compose the Natural World offers evocative descriptions of compositions influenced or inspired by nature by nine North American women. It is a very readable book that is appropriate for and will likely appeal to undergraduates and general readers with music-reading skills. Von Glahn avoids using the term “ecomusicology” (the burgeoning subdiscipline on whose coattails her book rides) and most of the critical and theoretical aspects of ecocriticism, instead defining her purpose as examining “the many processes individual composers engage in when they reflect nature’s presence in music” (p. 2). She is upfront about the limitations of her “single,
homogenous demographic” of “educated, white, middle-class” women, which helps situate this book among other recent publications that engage with the intersections of music and the environment (p. 2). Although she writes in her introduction that she “wanted to study [her] topic in depth,” von Glahn more often provides brief and tantalizing glimpses of the more in-depth studies possible for many of the works she describes; I hope that her book serves as a springboard for scholars to create truly comprehensive analyses of many of the pieces she includes (p. 3).

Von Glahn devotes a chapter each to Amy Marcy Beach, Marion Bauer, Louise Talma, Pauline Oliveros, Joan Tower, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Victoria Bond, Libby Larsen, and Emily Doolittle, exploring the (greatly varying) extent to which their compositions owe a debt to the composers’ involvement with or response to nature. She divides the women into groups of threes: those who saw “Nature as a Summer Home” (Part 1); those who found “Nature All Around Us” (Part 2); and those who are working in a world “Beyond the EPA and Earth Day” (Part 3). Von Glahn briefly provides some contextual background on writing about nature and visual art focused on nature by North American women, citing the rapturous accounts by Transcendentalists like Margaret Fuller and the paintings of Eliza -beth Gilbert Jarrow. Von Glahn touches lightly on recent feminist ecocriticism such as that by Lorraine Anderson and asks several framing questions about the nature of “women ‘nature composers,’ ” their values, and the reach of their works, before taking up the topic of three composers who created musical works referring to nature while in residence at the MacDowell Colony: Beach, Bauer, and Talma (p. 22).

This first section and its search for historical roots among composers addressing nature is, however, the weakest part of the book. Von Glahn notes the countless women’s compositions that address nature prior to the twentieth century, but does not sufficiently explain the highly gendered conventions during this time that sanctioned such topics as appropriate for women. Nor does she address the issue of privilege that the women both of that time and ours enjoy that assists them in their creative process. Her emphasis on the MacDowell Colony as a singular place of inspiration to these composers is overstated: it was not the only artists’ colony her subjects attended, and von Glahn ignores the fact that their reasons for attending had more to do with being able to escape the mundane duties of everyday life in order to focus on their work than a desire to be close to nature. In addition, perhaps because of the chronological distance from these composers, and because of the vast amounts of archival material necessary to sift through in order to fully understand these composers’ relationships with nature, these chapters lack the accuracy and authority bestowed by the still-living composers of the later chapters.

Following a biography drawn from Adrienne Fried Block’s biography of the composer, von Glahn adds to our understanding of Amy Beach by presenting a short but useful description of Beach’s song “A Hermit Thrush at Morn.” Von Glahn’s comparison of the song with plein-air paintings is apt, but all too brief. Von Glahn turns next to Bauer, who, like Beach, was raised in an atmosphere and arts world in which music ostensibly about nature was considered highly appropriate for women; she, however, appears to have seen other opportunities and embraced natural topics deliberately. Although Bauer later moved away from writing works that are obviously inspired by nature, it was her “moody musical evocation of [an] exotic and forbidding place” (p. 57)—the violin and piano piece *Up The Ocklawaha*, op. 6—that helped her to establish herself as a composer. The author’s study of the piece is less convincing than that of the Beach example, but her analysis of Bauer’s “White Birches” from the piano suite *From the New Hampshire Woods*, op. 12, is more satisfying, connecting the rhythms and quiet dynamics with the “delicate, shushing, flickering leaves” of the trees. Von Glahn concludes the first section by looking at Louise Talma’s use of birdsongs in her work, primarily in *Summer Sounds*, citing Talma’s sketches, which often include notes about the weather and her surroundings. While it is true that Talma employed overheard birdsong in the rows she used for her works, a more comprehensive reading of Talma’s letters shows that she took dictation from everything around her, from the

Indeed, Talma had a rather strong aversion to actual nature, blaming storms and wind for poor health, complaining about the noise of a cat’s mews and raucous birds while she was at the American Academy in Rome, and writing that her time spent at the Huntington-Hartford Colony in California was “quite grim” because of the local flora and fauna (Talma, letter to Thornton Wilder [5 February 1958] Thornton Wilder Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University). Nonetheless, von Glahn does a nice job of describing Summer Sounds as a work inspired by nature, even if it does not thoroughly consider Talma’s idealized visions of nature or offer the more thorough analysis of the birdsong elements that von Glahn suggests is possible.

The second section focuses on Oliveros, Tower, and Zwilich. Von Glahn gives readers a quick overview of Oliveros’s “Deep Listening,” the practice for which she is best known, before discussing Oliveros’s own interpretation of the influence of her rural Texas youth on her music. Von Glahn quotes the composer extensively before describing Oliveros’s Three Songs for Soprano and Piano, which von Glahn explains as “like a seal that has the whole ocean for its home” in that it “moves freely in harmonic and temporal space” (p. 109). Since the work in question sets a poem that refers to a seal, it is not difficult to make this connection, but it suggests one of von Glahn’s best abilities: her talent for creating an environmentally-connected narrative for works such as these, providing listeners with not-improbable relationships and narratives they might not otherwise create on their own. In her analysis of Tower’s Black Topaz, von Glahn suggests hearing the widely-spaced piano notes as “unique crystals of sound” and picturing dolce passages as “shimmering radiance” coming from the gemstone of the title. However, von Glahn’s writing all too often slips from evidence-based evocation of ecological images to the purple prose of some program notes: vibraphones “create a quivering, quaking iridescent sound” (p. 156); the “composer is dancing with her music” (p. 160); a “flurry of activity conjures whirling, swirling, wind-driven snow squalls” (p. 164). Von Glahn finds a happy medium in her chapter on Zwilich, which includes both descriptive walk-throughs and more evidence-based analysis of Zwilich’s Symphony no. 4, “The Gardens.” This chapter, with its use of Zwilich’s own commentary on the work and the incorporation of concepts from ecocritics and philosophers, is one of the strongest in the book.

Von Glahn opens the final section with a discussion of growing environmental consciousness, and introduces readers to Bond and her work Thinking Like a Mountain. The author explains the ways in which Bond integrated Chinese folk materials with Western art music techniques to accomplish her goal of creating a piece that, while avoiding text painting, represents the concept of an “every-mountain.” An exploration of Dreams of Flying likewise illuminates Bond’s use of tonal ambiguity and drones in representing gravity. Further descriptions of pieces offer a good overview of Bond’s work. Von Glahn next considers Larsen, whose oeuvre contains numerous pieces about the environment, many of them politically motivated. She connects two of Larsen’s large-scale works, Symphony: Water Music and Missa Gaia with Claude Debussy’s La mer and other Western art music forms. Here, Larsen provides the descriptive wording, asking flutes to “sound as crickets” (p. 246) and writing that the Missa Gaia is about “a land which can be terribly beautiful and gentle, a land which can be harsh—but which is always giving and renewing” (p. 254). Von Glahn’s descriptions of the Missa Gaia offer a valuable walk-through of the piece, explaining each movement’s literary and musical references and basic development. In another strong chapter, von Glahn looks at the work of Doolittle, who brings scientific knowledge, artistic instincts, and political activism to her work, resulting in her sensitivity to what the author calls “cross-species commonalities” (p. 282). Interviews with Doolittle let von Glahn include the composer’s own descriptions and analyses of her works, although von Glahn also contributes by tying
Doolittle’s work to that of Charles Ives and Igor Stravinsky. Brief discussions of Doolittle’s works for viola da gamba and several chamber works hint at the rich body of work awaiting future scholars. And all in all, that is what von Glahn’s book offers: enticing entryways into deeper and more specific examinations of the relationships between composers and their environments.

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Silent Film Sound and Music Archive


In Reclaiming Late-Romantic Music: Singing Devils and Distant Sounds, Peter Franklin seeks to reassess the importance of a repertoire largely shunned by musicologists because of its popular appeal and its purported historical irrelevancy. As Franklin notes, criticisms of late-romantic music are numerous and scathing. Writing to Alban Berg in 1929, Theodor Adorno, for instance, described one of Franz Schreker’s operas, *Der ferne Klang* (The Distant Sound, 1901–12), after which Franklin’s book is partially entitled, as “palatable only to maidservants; a series of kitsch postcards” (Adorno quoted in Franklin, p. 144).

Franklin, however, unabashedly admits his own love for this music that many scholars publicly profess to disdain (even if they secretly like it). He includes numerous descriptions of his own pleasurable experiences listening to the music. Franklin’s delight in the subject matter is also evident from the prose style, which can be as entertaining as the music under consideration, teeming as it is with many colorful adjectives and metaphors. For instance, consider this celebratory description of Franklin’s first experience of hearing Gustav Mahler’s Symphony no. 2:

The silence is broken by a music whose solemn processional only gradually begins to be interrupted by rhetorical outbursts of more urgent emotion. These seem to initiate greater animation, as if in preparation or catastrophe before calming once more. A more sensuous unfolding now quietly takes over; it will shortly embrace us with an impressive new theme that seems to aspire to higher things and grows in self-confidence. It carries our spirits forward, higher and higher, until a dizzying outburst of grandeur confirms the arrival of our heart’s desire—perhaps we visualize a sunburst glory out of the mists of a mountain landscape. Slowly, however, the moment passes and the music quiets with the realization of loss, becomes a nostalgic lament for what was, what might have been. (p. xi)

As entertaining as such descriptions are, however, this is not a book for the general public. Any reader expecting light fare will be surprised by complex ideas interwoven into the lively descriptions, many of which can only be grasped through careful contemplation and several readings. It is a book for serious music scholars and aestheticians.

If Franklin’s book seems, at times, anecdotal, discursive, and occasionally redundant, this can be explained by the fact that it emerged from a series of six lectures given at the University of California, Berkeley, when Franklin was Visiting Ernest Bloch Professor in the fall of 2010. Unsurprisingly then, there are plenty of references to the scholarship of Berkeley Professor Richard Taruskin, whose monumental history of Western music (Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols. [Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005]) elicits Franklin’s admiration. Even so, Franklin seeks to add “footnotes,” as he puts it, to Taruskin’s scholarship, and to create a more nuanced vision of the importance of late-romantic music (p. 17). Franklin’s six lectures, which make frequent reference to literature and visual art, became six chapters, several with descriptively “late-romantic titles” replete with natural imagery, allusions to emotion, and descriptive adjectives. A few of the more colorful include “Sunsets, Sunrises, and Decadent Oceanics” and “Making the World Weep.”