Great Jazz, Long Unheard, Is Rediscovered

After 70 Years in Crates, the ‘Savory Collection’ Is Being Burnished for Its Place in Posterity

By LARRY ROHTER

For decades jazz cognoscenti have talked reverently of “the Savory Collection.” Recorded from radio broadcasts in the late 1930s by an audio engineer named William Savory, it was known to include extended live performances by some of the most honored names in jazz — but only a handful of people had ever heard even the smallest fraction of that music, adding to its mystique.

After 70 years that wait has now ended. This year the National Jazz Museum in Harlem acquired the entire set of nearly 1,000 discs, made at the height of the swing era, and has begun digitizing recordings of inspired performances by Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Bunny Berigan, Harry James and others that had been thought to be lost forever. Some of these remarkable long-form performances simply could not fit on the standard discs of the time, forcing Mr. Savory to find alternatives. The Savory Collection also contains examples of underappreciated musicians playing at peak creative levels not heard anywhere else, putting them in a new light for music fans and scholars.

“Some of us were aware Savory had recorded all this stuff, and we were really waiting with bated breath to see what would be there,” said Dan Morgenstern, the Grammy-winning jazz historian and critic who is also director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University. “Even though I’ve heard only a small sampling, it’s turning out to be the treasure trove we had hoped it would be, with some truly wonderful, remarkable sessions. None of what I’ve heard has been heard before. It’s all new.”

After making the recordings, Mr. Savory, who had an eccentric, secretive streak, zealously guarded access to his

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Doug Pomeroy, above, a recording engineer, is transferring the Savory Collection from disc to digital form. Originally recorded by William Savory, right, an audio engineer, in the late 1930s, the collection features live performances by jazz musicians like, top from left, Coleman Hawkins, Cab Calloway, Fats Waller and Lester Young.
A Tribute to Alban Berg and His Viennese Influences

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y. — "My job tonight is to allay any residual fears you might have," the conductor Leon Botstein said from the stage of the Sosnowsky Theater at the Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College here on Friday night. Was there a hint of concern in his statement? Perhaps. For the 21st season of the Bard Music Festival, which started on Friday, Mr. Botstein and his collaborators are focusing on the life and times of the 20th-century Viennese composer Alban Berg.

You might think special pleading would no longer be needed. Berg, who was born in 1885 and died, painfully prematurely, in 1935, left a relatively small oeuvre of mature pieces, including the two greatest operas of the 20th century, "Wozzeck" and "Lulu."

But one aspect of Berg’s career continues to draw attention above others: He was a prominent disciple of the composer Arnold Schoenberg, whose development and promulgation of atonal and 12-tone composition decisively shaped the course of modern music during the middle of the 20th century. For those who view Schoenberg as the start of everything wrong in modern music, Berg is guilty by association.

In subscribing to Schoenberg’s methods, Berg extended a putative lineage devoted to musical logic, from Beethoven and Brahms into Schoenberg’s work. What made Berg’s music stand apart from that of Schoenberg and most of his disciples was a reconciliation of modernist techniques with emotional efficacy and unambiguous communicativeness: qualities that made Berg as much an inheritor of a Romantic line running through Schubert, Wagner and Mahler. Accordingly, and somewhat unusually for a Bard presentation, you sensed an agenda at work during the first weekend, titled “Berg and Vienna.” In six long concerts and related lectures, weight was shifted from Berg’s debt to Schoenberg toward his strong connections to other Viennese late Romantics, like Mahler, Zemlinsky and Schreker (whose opera "Die Ferne Klang" was presented here in previous weeks as a precursor to the Berg events).

The initial concert on Friday was a concise overview of Berg’s career arc, including some of his most approachable works. Jeremy Denk’s account of the Piano Sonata, a wistful, elusive study in post-Wagnerian chromaticism, seemed conjured on the spot. Wagner and Strauss resounded in the vocal lines of the “Seven Early Songs,” mingled with Impressionist daubs in the piano writing; the soprano Christine Goerke sang magnificently, with elegant accompaniment from the pianist Pei-Yao Wang.

Berg’s “Four Pieces” (Op. 5), for clarinet and piano, had dramaturgical concision and a lapi-dary gleam in a riveting performance by the clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein and the pianist Danny Driver. And even if you didn’t know that Berg planted numerous references to an extramural affair in his “Lyric Suite,” a superb account by the Daudal Quartet made plain the urgent passions and melancholy regrets encoded into the work.

The Saturday afternoon program, "The Vienna of Berg’s Youth," included rudimentary piano works and flegding songs by Berg that pointed to the strong influence of Schubert and Brahms. The clotted late-Romantic sound of a similarly youthful Piano Quartet by Anton Webern, who along with Berg became a Schoenberg adherent, offered no hint of the gemlike miniatures of Webern’s later years.

More distinguished were two works by Zemlinsky, based on opera by Richard Dehmel. The pianist Aleksis Bax showed a dreamy ease in "Fantasies über Gedichte von Richard Dehmel"("Fantasies on Poems by Richard Dehmel"); the tenor Nicholas Phan, with Ms. Wang, was poised and insightful in five elusive songs Zemlinsky composed nearly a decade later. Agreeable works by Joseph Marx and Karl Weigl indicated a more conservative agenda.

Saturday night’s concert by the American Symphony Orchestra, meant to show the powerful influence of Mahler, opened with a businesslike account of the Adagio from his unfinished Symphony No. 10: music searing in its emotional impact and rich with the promise of future developments Mahler would not live to realize. Berg’s “Three Pieces” (Op. 6), despite a shaky performance, suggested how Berg’s orchestral writing might have

KenKen

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Answers to Previous Puzzles

1 2 4 3
4 3 1 2
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Great Moments in Jazz, Rediscovered After 70 Years

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DAN MORGENSTERN, director, Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University

collection, allowing only a few select tracks by his friend Benny Goodman to be released commercially. When he died in 2004, Eugene Desavouret, a son who lives in Illinois, salvaged the discs, which were molding in crates; this year he sold the collection to the museum, whose executive director, Loren Schoenberg, transported the boxes to New York City in a rental truck.

Part of what makes the Savory collection so alluring and historically important is its unusual format. At the time Savory was recording radio broadcasts for his own pleasure, which was before the introduction of tape, most studio performances were issued on 16-inch 78-r.p.m. shellac discs, which, with their limited capacity, could capture only about three minutes of music.

But Mr. Savory had access to 12- or even 16-inch discs, made of aluminum or acetate, and sometimes recorded at speeds of 33 1/2 r.p.m. That combination of bigger discs, slower speeds and more durable material allowed Mr. Savory to record longer performances in their entirety, including jam sessions at which musicians could stretch out and play extended solos that tested their creative mettle.

"Most of what exists from this era was done at home by young musicians or fans, and so you get really bad-sounding recordings," Mr. Schoenberg said. "The difference with Bill Savory is that he was both a musician and a technical genius. You hear some of this stuff and you say, 'This can't be 70 years old.'"

As a result, many of the broadcasts from nightclubs and ballrooms that Mr. Savory recorded contain more relaxed and free-flowing versions of hit songs originally recorded in the studio. One notable example is a stunning six-minute Coleman Hawkins performance of "Body and Soul" from the spring of 1946; in it this saxophonist plays a five-chorus solo even more adventurous than the renowned two-chorus foray on his original version of the song, recorded in the fall of 1939. By the last chorus, he has drifted into uncharted territory, playing in a modal style that would become popular only when Miles Davis recorded "Kind of Blue" in 1959.

Glimpsing the Jazz Hierarchy

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Billie Holiday, shown here at a jam session at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1943, is featured in the Savory Collection singing a live version of her famous anti-lynching anthem, "Strange Fruit."

FROM DISC TO DIGITAL

"This has been on my mind for 30 years," Mr. Schoenberg said. "I cultivated and pestered Bill Savory, who never let me hear a damn thing and wouldn't even tell me what was in the collection besides Benny Goodman," for whom Mr. Schoenberg, 52, used to work.

But because of deterioration, converting the 975 surviving discs to digital form and making them playable is a challenge. Mr. Schoenberg estimates that 25 percent are in excellent shape, he said, "half are compromised but salvageable, and 25 percent are in really bad condition," of which perhaps 5 percent are "in such a state that they will tolerate only one play" before starting to flake.

The transfer of the Savory collection to the music library at Columbia University official, who is now a scholar at the university's Institute of Jazz Studies, is an ambitious project. For now, however, it remains just that: a project. But Mr. Schoenberg and his colleagues are hoping to raise the funds to complete it. And they are hopeful that the collection will one day be heard and enjoyed by a new generation of listeners.

ONLINE:

LOST AND FOUND

Audio excerpts from "The Savory Collection," a new CD, are available online.

Photo by Don MililTIME LIFE - GETTY IMAGES
music, the discs also include a few performances by the Norwegian soprano Kirsten Flagstad, taken from one of her very early tours of the United States, and several by Arturo Toscanini’s NBC Symphony Orchestra. There are even speeches, by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Pope Pius XII, and a broadcast of James Joyce reading from his work.

The collection also provides a glimpse into the history of broadcasting, thanks to the presence of Martin Block, a WNEW announcer who hosted a show called “Make Believe Ballroom,” on many discs. Walter Winchell coined the term “disc jockey” to describe Block, whose citation when he was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame gives him credit for being “the first radio disc jockey to become a star in his own right.”

Mr. Savory himself played piano and saxophone, and his choice of what to record reflects a musician’s refined tastes. “We’re lucky that he was such a jazz fanatic, because he really knew who was good and who wasn’t,” Mr. Schoenberg said.

According to his son Eugene, Mr. Savory was born William Desavouret in June 1918 aboard the ocean liner Mauretania, where his parents were passengers immigrating to the United States from France. (Mr. Desavouret, Mr. Savory’s son, said he did not know why his father changed his name.) He grew up in New Jersey and Southern California and showed an early fascination with technology, which led, while he was still a teenager, to his entry into the recording business.

A Mysterious Man

As best as can be reconstructed, Mr. Savory went into a Manhattan recording studio to make a demo for a group he played in, found that the equipment was not working and offered to repair it. That led to his being hired to maintain the gear and eventually to a contract with a studio that specialized in transcribing live performances off the air for radio networks and advertisers.

“His doing these air checks, he told me, to get the balance in the recording, and recorded the shows on his own,” said Susan Schmidt Horning, a historian of technology and culture who teaches at St. John’s University in Queens and who interviewed Mr. Savory several times. “I think he was just interested in recording and loved music. He did it because he could do it. He knew the value of these recordings, artistically and commercially, and wasn’t going to let them go. “The recordings that the museum acquired end around 1940, when Mr. Savory moved to Chicago to work for Columbia Records and CBS. During World War II he was initially assigned to the Naval Research Laboratory, where, Mr. Desavouret said, he helped develop radar for all-weather fighter aircraft, but later also served as a test and combat pilot.

At war’s end, Mr. Savory went back to work for Columbia, where he was part of the team that invented the 33⅓-r.p.m. long-playing record. In the 1960s he moved to Angel Records, EMI’s classical label; engineered or produced numerous albums there under the name W. A. Desavouret, married Helen Ward, a former singer in the Goodman band; and eventually moved to Falls Church, Va.

“As an engineer, Bill was remarkable, the guy who developed the technique for cutting the masters” of 78-r.p.m. recordings that were being transferred to the new format, said the jazz record producer George Avakian, 91, who worked with Mr. Savory at Columbia in the 1940s. “He was an all-round character, a humorous, delightful guy who never got as much credit as he deserved, and he did so much.”

Mr. Avakian said he remembered hearing a few songs from the collection in the late 1950s, when he visited the Savory home, and still recalled the experience.

Left, William Savory with a 1950s vintage tape machine; right, Doug Pomroy, at left, an audio restoration specialist, and Loren Schoenberg, executive director of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem. Above, the digital information extracted from one of the old Savory discs.
Nearing 40 and nearly broke, pouted from his last job as an English professor, a folkloric buff named Robert Winslow Gordon set out in the spring of 1926 from his temporary home on the Georgia seacoast, lugging a hand-cranked cylinder recorder and searching for songs in the nearby black hamlets.

One particular day, Mr. Gordon captured the sound of someone identified only as H. Wylie, singing a lilting, swaying spiritual in the key of A. The lyrics told of people in despair and in trouble, calling on heaven for help, and beseeching God in the refrain, "Come by here."

With that wax cylinder, the oldest known recording of a spiritual titled for its recurring plea, Mr. Gordon set in motion a strange and revealing process of cultural appropriation, popularization and desecration. "Come By Here," a song deeply rooted in black Christianity's vision of a God who intercedes to deliver both solace and justice, by the 1960s became the pallid pop-folk sing-along "Kumbaya." And "Kumbaya," in turn, has lately been transformed into snarly shorthand for ridiculing a certain kind of idealism, a quest for community.

Conservative Republicans use the term to mock the Obama administration as naïve. Liberals on the left wing of the Democratic Party use it to chastise President Obama for trying to be bipartisan. The president and some of his top aides use it as an example of what they say their policies are not.

Yet the word nobody wants to own, the all-purpose put-down of the political moment, has a meaningful, indeed proud, heritage that hardly anyone seems to know or to honor. Only within black church circles can one, to this day, still hear "Come By Here" with the profundity that Mr. Gordon did almost a century ago.

"I find it troubling, but not surprising," said Glenn Hinson, a professor of folklore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who has studied the song. "Yet again, a product of African-American spirituality has been turned into a joke of joking and derision. It's a sad commentary, and it's a sad reversal."

The current political landscape — Red State, Blue State, Tea Party, MoveOn.org, Congressional gridlock — only adds to the insult's appeal.

"Kumbaya" 's less you ridicule the whole idea of compromise.
History of Phonograph Record Technology - "Electrically" Recorded Discs

Technical change was afoot. During World War I, radio technology was greatly accelerated in part by military sponsorship. By the end of the war, the vacuum tube was commercially available for use in low-cost radios as well as radio transmitters and all sorts of other devices. It was not long before various inventors returned to the idea of using an electrical signal from a microphone to drive an electromagnetic disc recording device. With the addition of the vacuum tube, the microphone's weak signal could be stepped up to drive the cutter. While there were numerous proposals to do this, the technical problems were considerable.

Edison (who was one of the first to experiment with electrical recording technology, lagged behind his competitors but eventually introduced this electrical recording system for studio use.

The Western Electric Company (whose research activities were soon to be taken over by the Bell Telephone Laboratories) developed an electronically amplified, electromagnetic disc cutter of high quality in the early 1920s, as well as a conventional-looking but improved acoustic phonograph on which to play the resulting records. The new device was marketed to phonograph and record manufacturers (and also became the basis of talking films and "transcription" recorders used in radio stations).

In October, 1924, Columbia Phonograph Company experimented with this new "electrical" recording equipment developed by Western Electric. The new records sounded different than those recorded by the acoustic process, and consumers responded well to them. The trade-name "Orthophonic" was attached to both the recording process and the record player.

Victor released its last phonograph discs made by the original acoustic process in 1925.

Edison meanwhile had announced a long-playing, 12 inch disc capable of holding 20 minutes of music per side. While this format did not become a commercial success, the next year the company marketed its first electrically-recorded "diamond" discs. Struggling, Edison in 1927 offered a phonograph capable of reproducing either Edison vertical cut discs or his competitors' more popular lateral cut discs. Finally, in 1929 Edison ceased production of records and pulled out of the home phonograph business.

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History of Phonograph Record Technology- The 78 RPM disc

During the 1930s and 1940s, there were all sorts of experiments with the phonograph. Western Electric's "electrical" recording technology briefly became the basis of talking pictures in the late 1920s before finding a place in radio stations, where it was called the transcription recorder. Columbia in 1931 introduced the first "long playing" record. Resembling the later LP, these 12-inch diameter discs had finely spaced grooves and turned at just 33 1/3 rpm. There were even experiments with stereo. But through all this, the standard 10- and 12-inch, shellac-based discs remained the top sellers.

It was not until after World War II that new technologies displaced the old. A new disc introduced by RCA in the late 1940s began selling well. This 45-rpm disc doomed the older records, which were now known, like the '45' by their speed of rotation-- 78 rpm. Many people hung on to their record collections, and most record players had a '78' setting until the 1980s. However, sales of 78-rpm discs fell off during the 1950s, and the last records were issued by about 1960.

The date of the very last 78-rpm record is not known, although some claim that the last one issued in the U.S. was Chuck Berry's "Too Pooped to Pop " (Chess 1747), released in February 1960. There were almost certainly later released on small labels, and there are documented cases of 78 discs released as late as 1961 in Finland. According to one source, 78s were deleted from the EMI catalogs in 1962.

It's worth mentioning that Moby Grape's 1968 LP, Wow, featured a song that was recorded at 78 rpm.

(End)

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Great Falls Select brewery

How beer is brewed - Wikipedia

baseball team travel secretary

1958 movies - see Wikipedia

Elvis Presley 1958 songs

Terror in a Texas Town
Good Day for a Hanging
The Man Who Walked the West
From Hell to Texas
Showdown at Boot Hill