

Humanities Project Proposal

Title

Exploring early American congregational singing and dramatic performance in relation to “The Crucible”

Participating and Co-sponsoring UR Faculty

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- Matthew BaileyShea, Chair: Arthur Satz Department of Music / matt.baileyshea@rochester.edu
- Michael Anderson, Eastman School of Music, Musicology Department / manderson@esm.rochester.edu
- Jonathan Dunsby, Eastman School of Music, Chair: Music Theory Department / jdunsby@esm.rochester.edu
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Participating Guest Faculty

Ian Quinn, Chair, Yale University Department of Music / ian.quinn@yale.edu

Overview

Harnessing the direct emotional rawness, power, and simplicity of shape-note singing, and using it as a vehicle to accompany and underscore the action of Arthur Miller’s classic play, *The Crucible*, this project provides students and others in the university community with an opportunity to explore and learn this iconic and important form of community music-making. The project places shape-note music-making firmly at the center of early American liturgical worship, using its 19th century congregational roots to contrast with, and evoke the 17th century congregational worship of Miller’s Salem, Massachusetts. The project will center on the invitation of noted music theorist and shape-note singing practitioner, Dr. Ian Quinn (Chair, Yale Department of Music; MA & PhD ESM ’04) both to hold open workshops teaching shape-note singing to participants, to present a music theory colloquium to graduate students in the Music Theory Department of the Eastman School of Music, and to deliver a public lecture on the subject of shape-note music. (Other smaller class visits and/or tie-ins with students in Musicology, the River Campus Music Department, and the Department of English, etc. may also be possible during the many visits we intend during the fall semester.) Dr Quinn will collaborate with Theatre Program faculty to dramaturgically link individual hymns to the production being produced by the UR’s International Theatre Program (opening December 1, 2022).

Description and Academic Rationale

Theatrical performance focuses primarily on the experiential conveyance of narrative in a way that most effectively evokes in the audience member the intellectual and emotional effect that

the text demands. While historical veracity is often drawn upon to inform dramatic performance, more frequently historicity is not a goal in itself. Rather, the universality or cross-temporal reach of a text is celebrated in production by the harnessing of a diversity of aesthetic and artistic influences which cumulatively shape the performance into one whose echoes summon from the spectator the universality of the narrative being expressed. *The Crucible* does this in its very form and content. Miller's use of events from 17th century Massachusetts to evoke the McCarthy HUAC hearings of the 1940's-50's is clear. His use of an invented but evocative patois to reflect the vernacular speech of Salem villagers and, indeed, colonial authorities, also takes artistic theatrical license to achieve his dramatic aims. That being said, *The Crucible*, speaks equally eloquently to our own time as it did to Miller's. Questions of truth, "hysteria," communities under stress and turning to fabricated beliefs to achieve political goals are obviously as relevant to our world as they were to Millers (and to Salem's).

The religiosity of the Salem townfolk and indeed the "theocracy" of 17th century Massachusetts in the text of the work is both at once a key element in the narrative and also a critical backdrop to the action. At seminal times in the play, the singing of psalms is referred to and the effect of those psalms on the "possessed" young women of Salem is referenced. The political and social organization of congregationalism is also important to understanding the societal conditions within which the Salem witchcraft panic and trials took place.

Finding an effective dramatic way to help express and evoke the above—and to emphasize the multiple echoes throughout history of the text—was an overriding concern of mine in approaching the production. The music used in the stage presentation is important in this regard and may involve many diverse musical styles and genres. But live singing is also integral, and I wanted to use a similar heterodox selection in the live, sung elements of the production. The idea to use shape-note singing, even if historically anachronistic, felt dramatically appropriate. The simplicity of the *Sacred Harp* hymns, and the way in which the singing of shape notes draws both on communality and a raw unschooled musicality, in short the power of the group expressed in song, feels like a direct expression of the sacred without the artifice of sophistication that later liturgical music carries with it. Though the advent of shape-note singing post-dates the Salem trials (emerging some 150 or so years after the events of the play and within a different religious context) the fact that shape-note singing found its American roots in New England, embodies many of the attributes that mirror the society in which the play takes place, and has an emotional resonance and power that supports the emotional trajectory of the dramatic narrative, makes it feel a peculiarly good "fit" for Miller's masterpiece.

This Humanities Project proposed seeks to achieve three goals in three phases/stages:

1. Dramaturgy

In this phase we will select material from the *Sacred Harp* tunebook and potentially other repertory from early American sources to dramaturgically enhance, underscore, and accompany the production of *The Crucible*. To this end, Dr. Quinn will collaborate with Nigel Maister to source diverse material and to develop the repertoire to be used in the production.

2. Instruction/Workshops

In this phase, Dr Quinn will teach both the members of the cast of the production, interested students in the Arthur Satz Dept of Music, other River Campus Departments and Programs, and the Eastman School of Music (in addition to any other interested individuals) the repertoire and the techniques of shape-note singing. There will be 3-4 weekend workshops over the course of the semester when Dr. Quinn will be in Rochester to lead singings. These will be part of the rehearsal for the cast and thus form part of ENGL 294, but they will be open to participation from anyone in the university community and may form elements or count towards other courses' work or participation requirements.

3. Public Lecture and Colloquia

The third element of the Project is to introduce the university community to shape-note singing: its history, theory, and methodology. This would take the form of a public lecture by Dr. Quinn, followed by a Q&A. Though this might particularly speak to and be targeted at appropriate Music Dept. classes and students, we also see this as an event that might engage those in other academic disciplines, including Theatre, Religion and Classics, History, English, and the Eastman School of Music. Additionally, with a long tradition and active *a capella* student group scene on campus, it is not unlikely that this early hymnody and its practice might extend to those extra-curricular students equally. Finally, Dr. Quinn will participate in a colloquium with graduate students in the Music Theory Department of the Eastman School of Music.

Both this approach to the music for the production of *The Crucible* and the opportunity afforded by a Humanities Project grant to explore, learn, and participate actively in the communal practice of shape-note singing allows for interdisciplinary learning and exchange, not only between music and theatre, but also between River Campus and ESM, and between the Yale Department of Music and the University of Rochester. Artistically, this opportunity allows us to explore different forms of community expression and link them to mid-20th century dramatic literature and 21st century theatrical storytelling. It allows students to encounter a form of music-making that is thrilling, open, extremely democratic and egalitarian, and one which has deep roots in American culture. It further allows for discussion of how using non-contemporaneous or ahistorical elements in contemporary artistic praxis can yield outcomes that enrich both. Having a significant scholar/practitioner in the field guide both the dramaturgy and experience of learning this musical form is an opportunity that not only will enrich students and interested university participants but might also engage local shape-note singing groups outside of the university's immediate orbit.

Expected learning outcomes:

- 1) increased understanding of early American music-making forms, their history and theory
- 2) practical experience and learning of the fundamentals of shape-note singing
- 3) immersion in specific shape-note repertoire and public performance of that repertoire in conjunction with the production of *The Crucible*
- 4) increased awareness of the intersectionality of ahistorical forms as used in contemporary performance/production praxis

- 5) for actors: extension of skillsets in media that they might otherwise not need to draw on
- 6) for musicians/music students: extension of skillsets in musical forms they might otherwise be unaware of
- 7) For graduate students: an opportunity to engage with a significant scholar in the field

Bios

Ian Quinn (visiting scholar)

Ian Quinn has degrees from Columbia University (B.A., 1993) and the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester (M.A., 1998; Ph.D., 2004). Before joining the Yale faculty, he taught at the University of Chicago and the University of Oregon. In 2008-09 he was a Residential Fellow of the [Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences \(CASBS\)](#) at Stanford.

Quinn edited the [Journal of Music Theory](#) from 2004 to 2011 and serves on the editorial board of the [Journal of Mathematics and Music](#), which launched in 2007. He was co-organizer (with Richard Cohn) of the 2009 meeting of the Society for Mathematics and Computation in Music. He serves on the executive committee of the Northeast Music Cognition Group (NEMCOG), which meets several times per year in New York, New Haven, and Boston. He also organizes the [Yale-New Haven Regular Singing \(YNHRS\)](#), a weekly shape-note singing group.

His publications have twice won awards from the Society for Music Theory: the Emerging Scholar Award in 2004 for "Listening to Similarity Relations," *Perspectives of New Music* 39/2 (2001), and the Outstanding Publication Award for "General Equal-Tempered Harmony," *Perspectives of New Music* 44/2 (2006) and 45/1 (2007).

Nigel Maister (Primary UR collaborator)

Nigel Maister is the Russell and Ruth Peck Artistic Director of the UR International Theatre Program.

Selected productions include *Stupid Fucking Bird*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Madame de Sade*, *Cinderella* (by Joel Pommerat; US premiere), *The Rochester Plays* (by Spencer Christiano; world premiere); *The Winter's Tale*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Adding Machine: A Musical*, *Hello Again*, Peter Handke's *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*, his own adaptation of Gorki's *The Lower Depths* and Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Miss Julie*, *The Threepenny Opera*, the New York premiere of Manfred Karge's *Conquest of the South Pole*, the American premiere of his own translation (from the French) of Bernard Marie Koltè's *Roberto Zucco* (also Infernal Bridegroom Productions, dir. Troy Schulze), the world premieres of Andy Bragen's *The Hairy Dutchman*, W. David Hancock's *The Puzzle Locker*, Howard Marc Solomon's *The Wildman*, Ernesto Brosa's *Towards Canaan*, and his own *Punch!* (at the American

Living Room Festival at Here, NYC). He has directed *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Lie of the Mind* (both in Bulgarian) in Bulgaria, Kushner's *A Bright Room Called Day* in South Africa, and staged John Cage's Song Books for the ESM's "Ossia" new music ensemble, and Benedict Mason's AWS/Miller - The Fifth Music: Resume with C.P.E. Bach at Miller Theatre in NYC.

He has acted in Europe, South Africa and the US, and studied clowning in the Czech Republic, Noh theatre with Noh Master, Akira Matsui, and puppetry at the National Puppetry Conference at the O'Neill (where he has also twice taught as a guest artist).

He has worked with and/or assisted Peter Sellars, Giorgio Strehler, Richard Foreman, Christopher Alden, Tazewell Thompson, Theodora Skipitares and was the Assistant Director on the original NYTW production of *Rent*. For two seasons he was a staff director at Glimmerglass Opera, working on productions of Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and Offenbach's *Bluebeard*.

He is the author of six plays and performance works, three librettos, and a song cycle. His music-theatre work *Paper Planes* will be part of the inaugural season of the Perelman Performing Arts Center in New York City in 2024. His production and text of *I Was Here I Was I* (music by Kate Soper) received its world premiere at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Temple of Dendur in the Sackler Wing in Summer 2014. The world premiere of his piece for narrator/actor and music ensemble, *Paper Trails* (with music by Stefan Freund), was performed as part of John Adams's "In Your Ear" festival at Carnegie Hall's Zankel auditorium. His adaptation of Robert Fagles's *The Iliad* received its world premiere at the University of Rochester in April 2000. His short fiction has been published by (amongst others) Penguin in *Lynx - Contemporary South African Writing*, and *New Contrast: New South African Writing*, *Prism International*, and *Tongues: Contemporary World Literature*.

Budget Summary (see attached budget)

Honorarium: **\$2500** for 4 workshops & 2 lectures (1 public)

Travel: **\$1824**

4 roundtrips (New Haven-Rochester)

Food: **\$1200**

Reception after the talk - \$300

Speaker dinner - \$500

Guest meal per diem - \$400

Copying/Workshop Administration: **\$50**

TOTAL: \$5,574