

Marion Bauer (15 August 1882–9 August 1955), daughter of French Jewish immigrants in Washington state, was a member of what scholars have called the “forgotten vanguard” of modernism, part of a group which included Frederick Jacobi, Emerson Whithorne, Louis Gruenberg, and Albert Stoessel. Carol Oja remarks that this group “represented a transitional state between early-twentieth-century idioms—especially the lush textures and altered harmonies of French impressionism—and the varied approaches to dissonance that characterized modernism in the late 1920s.”¹ Bauer and her contemporaries were born about half a generation before such luminaries as Copland, Cowell, and Ruth Crawford, and scholars argue that this next generation of modernists quickly eclipsed the older one. However, Bauer had numerous and strong ties to this younger crowd of modernists through her work as mentor and teacher (she taught, among others, Milton Babbitt, and mentored Ruth Crawford), through her music reviews and criticism for the *Musical Leader*, through her fervent and influential advocacy of modern music in her books and in her leadership roles, and not least, through her continued success as a composer.

Her musical education began under the tutelage of her older sister, Emilie Frances, an accomplished pianist. In 1903 Marion followed her sister to New York, where Emilie Frances had established herself as a critic for the *Musical Leader*. There she studied with Henry Holden Huss, a prominent, if traditional composer at the time. A few years later Marion became Nadia Boulanger’s first American pupil, in an exchange arrangement of harmony and analysis lessons for English tutoring.

Back in New York, her teacher Eugene Heffley encouraged her to seriously pursue composition. She helped found the American Music Guild, whose members included Louis

¹ Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 157.

Gruenberg, Frederick Jacobi, Deems Taylor, and A. Walter Kramer. After another period of study in France, with André Gédalge, Marion established herself in New York as a professor at NYU (1926–51), prominent lecturer and author, and member of the Executive Board of the League of Composers. Far from being eclipsed by the younger generation, Bauer continued to be an important and influential figure in modern music throughout the 1920s, 30s, 40s and even 50s, almost to the very end of her life. She was the secretary for the Society for the Publications of American Music and a member of the American Composers Alliance (ACA) and the Society of American Women Composers. She spent twelve productive summers as a resident at the MacDowell Colony, where she met and befriended other female composers Ruth Crawford, Amy Beach, Mabel Daniels, and Miriam Gideon. She was affiliated with the Juilliard School of Music from 1940 until her death, and continued to write for the *Musical Leader* and *Musical Quarterly*. In 1933 she wrote an important appreciation book, *Twentieth Century Music*, which was reviewed in the *New York Sun* as being “the first important American contribution to the new music.”² She published four other books on music during her lifetime, some co-written with Ethyl Peyser, with whom she lived for some years.

In the 1980s, Virgil Thomson recalled that Bauer and the rest of her group “were no part of what we considered a modern movement,” nor were they part of “any group involving Harvard or Boulanger or Copland or any of that.”³ Ironically, Bauer had been involved with Boulanger several years *before* Copland became touted as the first in a long line, and Bauer’s music found itself on concert programs next to Copland’s and Cowell’s. She was influential in giving Copland a successful start in New York.

² Peggy Horrocks, “The Solo Vocal Repertoire of Marion Bauer” (DMA Dissertation, U. of Nebraska, 1994), 56.

³ Oja, 176.

Aside from brief experiments in 12-tone writing in the 1940s and 50s, Bauer's music never completely broke with tradition. In the 1920s her music was considered left-wing modernist, but by the 1940s it was regarded as well-constructed but conservative. Her impressive list of works includes songs, piano music, chamber works, and several significant orchestral works, including a *Symphonic Suite* (1940), *American Youth* for piano and orchestra (1943), and her *First Symphony* (1950). Many of her works received numerous performances: her most successful work, *Sun Splendor*, was premiered in 1947 by the New York Philharmonic under Leopold Stowkowski, and in 1951 she had a Town Hall concert devoted to her music.

Despite the high regard in which she was held during her lifetime, her prominent role as critic, author, lecturer, and teacher, and the many performances of her music prior to her death, Bauer and her music fell into obscurity for many years. Psychologist Grace Rubin-Rabson suggests that this may have been due to Bauer's status as a traditional composer in her later years.⁴ However, many people have commented on Bauer's energy, kindness, and dignity. At her funeral, musicologist Gustave Reese praised her as "a pioneer on the American scene" and characterized her music by its "craftsmanship, individuality, and elegance."⁵ Listeners can now hear these qualities for themselves in a number of recent recordings. Two recordings (1998 and 2001) featuring pianist Virginia Eskin are available through Albany Records.

⁴ Horrocks, 80.

⁵ Horrocks, 81.

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