

**The Twenty-sixth, Twenty-seventh, Twenty-eighth, and Twenty-ninth
Commissioned Works
of the American Accordionists' Association
Composers Commissioning Committee:
Carlos Surinach: *Prelude of the Sea*
David Diamond: *Introduction and Dance*
José Serebrier: *Danza Ritual*
William Grant Still: *Lilt***

No. 18 of an Ongoing Series on the Commissioned Works of the AAA

2022 update and expansion of original version that appeared in the *2015 AAA Festival Journal*

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Eight years after she commissioned the first composer under the auspices of the AAA Composers Commissioning Committee, Paul Creston, to write serious contemporary music for or including the accordion, and next assigned twenty-four more commissions to eighteen other similarly renowned composers afterwards, Elsie Bennett, founding chair of the committee, set upon a new project, best described in her own words in a letter, dated November 10, 1965, to the already twice commissioned American master David Diamond:

The newest project I am working on . . . is to commission some easier teaching pieces. The reason I thought of this idea is related to my own teaching experiences, and my experiences as judge in many accordion contests.

You see, the pieces we have commissioned thus far, are really only for a virtuoso, or an outstanding student who probably studied for six or more years. We don't have the opportunity to use the pieces too often. Also, our young students are brought up on complete tonality, and no dissonance whatsoever.

I brought my idea to the governing board of the AAA and they have agreed to it. I wouldn't dream of commissioning a person who hadn't already written a piece on commission and now understands the instrument.

Not only did Diamond agree to write a piece at the intermediate level, but also two other past AAA commissionees, Carlos Surinach and William Grant Still, accepted such commissions. * A fourth person who joined in this project, though having not composed for the accordion before, was the noted South American conductor and composer José Serebrier, who actually volunteered to write for the AAA.

All four events and their resulting commissioned works are discussed separately below.

Carlos Surinach: *Prelude of the Sea*

The first to sign a contract for this project was Surinach, on March 24, 1965. The result was *Prelude of the Sea*, a charming, short, tri-partite piece in A/B/A form. Oddly, the composer offered no explanation for the programmatic title. Elsie Bennett paraphrased a musical description of the work given to her by Surinach, however, in an article she wrote for the winter 1966 edition of *Accordion Horizons*, entitled “A.A.A. Commissions: New Compositions,” that included similar descriptions of four other new works as well:



[*Prelude of the Sea*] is in three-part song form, the first and third parts are exactly the same. [Surinach] desired to preserve the basic character of the accordion, therefore, he made the first and third sections song-like and lyrical, while the middle section affords the intermediate student the opportunity to display his showmanship and ability. It employs the Flamenco scale. [Surinach] originated this scale although it has its roots in the Spanish music so familiar to him.

Bennett made the point of announcing that the Surinach piece would “make contemporary music available to the intermediate accordion student.” Given some of the mildly dissonant

interplays between the traditional sounding melodies (particularly of the A section) and the

mostly chordal left-hand accompaniments, the *Prelude* is truly a gentle introduction to contemporary music for the young novice.

The opening and closing sections, as well as the middle one, are loyal to F as the tonal center and frequent point of repose in the music. The outer sections, marked “Moderato,” are indeed identical to each other as stated above, and are purely in the key of F major in the right-hand melody (and perhaps, in its indicated forte dynamic, more flamboyant than “song like,” as the composer described them through Bennett above), with no pitch departures from its traditional scale of F/G/A/B-flat/C/D/E/(F). However, the left-hand part presents many unexpected, unconventional chromatic and sometimes dissonant harmonic progressions that are conspicuous departures from the key’s built-in diatonic harmonies one would normally expect to hear supporting this tonally plain, though rhythmically “catchy,” melody. They can also create some tricky fingerings for intermediate students in a few places but are certainly not inappropriate to introduce at that stage. See Figure 1 below.



Fig. 1. Beginning of both Moderato A sections of *Prelude of the Sea* (measures 1-5 and 33-37)

As may be observed in Figure 2, the middle Allegretto section is in constant, frenetic sixteenth-note motion, creating melodic phrases of unequal length that sporadically and unexpectedly halt at and just as abruptly abandon brief single eighth-note cadence points, usually A, C, or less often, F (thus keeping the ear oriented to members of the F-major tonic triad despite various chromatic notes in both hands distracting the ear somewhat from that tonal centering).

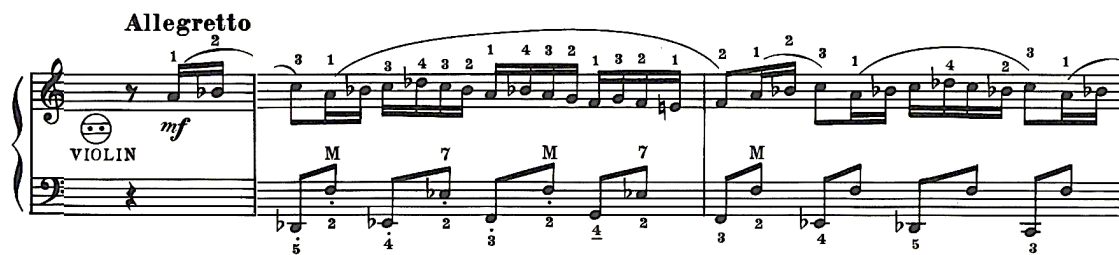


Fig. 2. Beginning of the B section (“Allegretto”), measures 20-22, introducing the composer’s created Flamingo-like scale (F/G/A/B-flat/C/D-flat/E) in the right-hand melody and recurring chromatic “ground bass” accompaniment in the left hand (the latter to be discussed below).

As the description above indicates, Surinach invented scales for the melodic lines suggestive of the Flamenco scale but not by any means identical to it. To explain, the traditional Flamenco scale consists essentially of two four-note tetrachords made up of a half step, augmented 2nd (equaling three half steps), and another half step. The two tetrachords are separated by a whole step. If built on F, then the notes would be F/G-flat/A/B-flat/C/D-flat/E/F. Instead, Surinach created a hybrid scale in which the first tetrachord, F/G/A/B-flat, is also the initial tetrachord of the F-major scale, and the second tetrachord, C/D-flat/E/F forms the upper tetrachord of the F-harmonic minor scale. (See, again, Figure 2)

In the middle/part of the section there seems to be a reorientation to another created scale on A that matches the “textbook” version of the octatonic scale; i.e., alternating half and

whole steps: A/B-flat/C/D-flat/E-flat/E/F-sharp/G/(A). This hoists the ear to higher and more climactic points in the melodic line. The B section ultimately ends dramatically with five powerful rising iterations of a less “pure” F octatonic scale, with the step arrangement of HWHWHWW, resulting in F/G-flat/A-flat/A/B/C/ D/E before colliding with the climactic final F-major tonic triad ending. See Figure 3.



Figure 3. End of section B, measures 29-32. Dramatic ending using five repetitions of an F octatonic scale (in blue brackets) created by the composer

Undergirding the entire erratic melodic line of the Allegretto is a constant oom-pah line in the left-hand part in which the fundamental buttons repeatedly play a kind of “ground bass” pattern of D-flat, E-flat, F, and G in ascending and descending order down to C, eventually breaking into more random order, and finally just the tonic-dominant notes of F and C. The fundamental basses are the “oom” while the “pahs” are alternating F-major and E-flat 7th chordal buttons, until the ending when the steady F-C fundamental-button pattern occurs, combined with the traditional tonic F-major and dominant C7 chords. (Observe the left-hand part in Figures 2 and 3.)

Prelude of the Sea was published by Alfred Music in 1965 and appears in the listing of works by the composer in the biographical entry for him in *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (as did Diamond’s *Introduction and Dance* and Still’s *Lilt* in the *Groves* entries for these composers).

David Diamond: *Introduction and Dance*

A year later, David Diamond agreed to write his *Introduction and Dance* in response to a formal letter of invitation by Elsie Bennett dated March 17, 1966. It was for the princely sum of \$150! (One more zero might need to be added to that amount today.)

Bennett had expected Diamond to have the piece well under way by the spring and inquired in a note to him in May if he had finished it yet or could be assisted in any way (with scores of other accordion pieces, the loan of an accordion, etc.); but this was a busy

period for Diamond. From 1965 to 1967 he taught at the Manhattan School of Music and was busy finishing his ninth string quartet while beginning the tenth. Also, during those two years he was the recipient of several awards, among them the Rheta Sosland Chamber Music prize for his String Quartet No. 8, the Stravinsky ASCAP award, and election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.



1966, at his Iroquois City approximately Bennett offered him the *Introduction and Dance*.

In the fall, however, a postcard commemorating the Belgian Waffle House in the 1964 New York World's Fair and postmarked November 21, 1966 (two years after the event), was sent by Diamond to Bennett carrying the message that the accordion piece was completed. Corresponding with this proclamation is the composer's supplied statement "20 November 1966 / Rochester, N. Y." in small print below the final measure of the 1967 Southern Music publication (see Figure 1 below).

Another mailing the next month from Diamond on stationery from New York's Hotel Iroquois (the composer's abode at the time), dated December 1, was sent to Bennett with the manuscript ready for publication. In the letter, Diamond gave her permission to change any of his register indications, or to add any elsewhere in the score as she saw fit. He also suggested that the right-hand oboe switch might serve as well as the violin one

with which he opens the piece and that the penultimate measure at the end might work well with bellows shake. However, no bellows shake indication appears in that measure, for musically good reason, nor was the violin register indication replaced by that of the oboe in the final Southern Music publication of the score the next year, suggesting that no one changed any of Diamond's original register markings.

Scant little was mentioned in any publication about *Introduction and Dance*. The only comment of any substance at all appears in an article by Bennett entitled "David Diamond and the AAA" in the Fall 1968 issue of *Accordion Horizons*. After giving full descriptions of Diamond's previous two AAA commissions, a brief paragraph observes that *Introduction and Dance* "anticipates its lively main theme in a short, meditative opening section, and is distinguished by the spare rhythmic style, sometimes syncopated, for which Mr. Diamond is well known."

The very brief, seventeen-measure beginning section, Adagio, is indeed short enough to only be entitled "Introduction" in the score rather than, perhaps, "Prelude." It, like the longer Allegretto to follow, is largely based on a composer-created seven-note scale on

A, the first five notes of which, reflect the key of A major and last three A minor (using only the natural minor form): A/B/C-sharp/D//E/F/G/(A). Changing meters, mostly in the first four measures (5/4 to 3/4 to 4/4 to 3/4) add a moderate sense of erratic downbeats, thus creating the “syncopation” mentioned in the Bennett article.

The left-hand part consists of sustained chord-only buttons on three consecutive harmonies, A minor, F major, and E major. The last chord is the “dominant” harmonic function in the key of A, thus acting as a half cadence and giving the effect of incompleteness and hence “things to come” at the end of the section. See Figure 1.

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of 'Introduction and Dance', measures 1-8. The score is in 3/4 time, marked Adagio (♩ = 60). It features a Violin part and a Piano accompaniment. The Violin part starts with a melodic line in A major/A minor, with fingerings 1, 3, 1, 3, 4, 2. The Piano accompaniment consists of sustained chords: A minor (m), F major (M), and E major (M). Dynamics include p, mp, and m.

Fig. 1. Beginning of *Introduction and Dance*, measures 1-8

What “comes,” of course, is the Allegretto section. It, too, starts with the same curious A scale that began the Introduction, but this time in eighth instead of quarter notes and at a faster tempo. This motif will obsessively return multiple times throughout the entire 91 measures of the movement in various scale types (major, minor, modal, or made-up forms by the composer) on different initial pitches (usually A or G, though). It will also sometimes be intervallically altered, start on a weak beat of the measure, and/or be truncated. More stable in the movement is the meter, which persists in 3/4 time throughout, having the effect of a lilt, if at times, comically faltering, waltz. The faltering aspect is due to Diamond’s playfully disorienting the listener’s sense of where the downbeat is now and then by starting this prominent, main right-hand motif on the weaker second beat of the measure and/or having the normally accented “oom” of the oom-pah bass accompaniment sound on the second rather than the “normal” first beat of the measure. Incidents of these humorous rhythmic disruptions are sampled in measures 3 through 6 of Figure 2.

Allegretto ($\text{♩} = 80 - 100$)

Main melodic motif in normal rhythmic position

Main melodic motif in "off-beat" position

Fig. 2. Beginning of the Allegretto section, measures 1-6.

Sandwiched in between the many occurrences of the above-described motif, now to be referred to as the A theme, are three other brief and distinctly different themes, which will be labeled B, C, and D. They appear in measures 9-12, 27-30, and 37-42 respectively (see Figures 3, 4, and 5 below) and supply much needed and varied contrasts to the almost excessive number of returns of the A theme, despite its charming cleverness in transposition, subtle changes of scale and mode sources, and amusing metrical shifts.

Fig. 3. B theme of Allegretto section, measures 9-12

Fig. 4. C theme of Allegretto section, measures 27-30

Fig. 5. D theme of Allegretto section, measures 37-42

The sequence of all these odd elements results in a rondo-like form consisting of widely disproportionate sections that may be diagrammed as follows: A B A¹ A² C A³ D A⁴ A B A⁵ Coda. Though the “keys” of various segments of the movement are often beyond certain identification, these cobwebs are suddenly parted at the end by the powerfully driven eleven-bar coda (measures 81-91) which is clearly and emphatically in D major, featuring only its dominant and tonic harmonies in the most traditional ways possible. (See Figure 6).

20 November, 1966
Rochester, N. Y.

Fig. 6. Final measures of Coda of Allegretto, measures 84-91.

The result of all these somewhat quirky ingredients is a delightful little jigsaw puzzle of a piece that, though musically simple in nature and technically devised for the promising young amateur, could play hooky from the local music school recital and turn up on a

professional program as one of the lighter pieces, if only a fun encore.

José Serebrier: *Danza Ritual* (subtitled “*Toccata*”)

The next commissioned work occurred under very unusual circumstances for the AAA Composers Commissioning Committee. Early in 1966 Elsie Bennett received a curious letter in the mail dated January 3 from José Serebrier, serving at the time as the associate conductor to Leopold Stokowski, famed director of the American Symphony Orchestra, stating that he “had been interested for some time in obtaining a commission from your [Bennett’s] association to write a short concerto for accordion and orchestra, or perhaps a solo work.”

Serebrier was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, to Russian and Polish parents. He graduated from the Municipal School of Music in Montevideo at fifteen, having studied violin, solfege, and Latin American folklore. He next studied counterpoint, fugue, composition and conducting with Guido Santórsola, and piano with his teacher’s wife, Sarah Bourdillon Santórsola. He was soon awarded a United States State Department Fellowship to study composition at the Curtis



José Serebrier and Leopold Stokowski ca. late 1960s, around the time Serebrier was commissioned by the AAA

Institute of Music with Vittorio Giannini. He continued this pursuit later with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood and studied conducting with Pierre Monteux. His first symphony, written at the age of 17, was premiered by Stokowski as the last-minute substitute for Charles Ives’s Fourth Symphony, which proved still unplayable at the time.

Serebrier's New York conducting debut with the American Symphony Orchestra was at Carnegie Hall in 1965. At the time, Ives' Fourth Symphony had been considered so difficult that it was performed using three conductors at its premiere in 1965, almost 50 years after its composition. Stokowski, Serebrier, and a third conductor performed it this way. A few years later Serebrier conducted it alone and made his recording debut with the work, much to high critical acclaim. This is the point his already illustrious career had reached at the age of 28 when he sought an accordion commission from the AAA. (Now in his mid 80s, he continues to be an internationally acclaimed and highly active conductor and composer.)

Bennett and Serebrier met on March 9, two months after she had received his first letter and discussed ideas for his composing a concerto. Eager to get started with this project,

Serebrier immediately wrote a letter (on American Symphony stationery) to Bennett and posted it that afternoon. In it he expressed how much he enjoyed their meeting and how fascinated he was with all the aspects of the accordion she had shown him then. He also obsequiously added that he felt the AAA was extremely fortunate to have such an “imaginative” and “creative” person as Elsie. To this he added another request:

I was also thinking that you might want to commission me, at the same time, for a small work of intermediate difficulty, like the one Surinach did for you. This way, with the added income, I would be able to devote more time to the entire project.

This angling on his part proved successful, for the AAA Board approved the proposal at their next meeting, as indicated in a letter of March 15 to the composer. The fee would be \$300 for both pieces (which Bennett mentioned was more than the members had intended to pay at first). Furthermore, the Board stipulated that Serebrier would have to write the intermediate solo first. Bennett explained that there were reasons for this, despite her stated conviction, relayed to Diamond in the quotation above, that one should first write a virtuosic piece before composing an intermediate level one: if he wrote the solo first he would have a better understanding of the accordion when he tackled the more difficult task of writing a professional-level concerto for the instrument;** and AAA affiliated accordion associations in the various states were preparing for local competitions, various divisions of which required test pieces. If his solo was good and appropriate enough for one or the other of the lower divisions, he might profit well from sales of his piece to the many involved contestants.

Serebrier’s agreement with these conditions was soon followed by a contract from the AAA, dated March 17. The due date in the contract for both pieces was December 1 of the year, but a very hectic concert tour for the composer, plus work on at least one new composition (*Star Wagon*, for chamber orchestra) and the untimely death of Elsie’s husband, Mort, on December 6, delayed the submission and processing of the music until at least the end of January 1967, if not around June 21, when Bennett next met with Serebrier.

There are no known articles by Bennett or anyone else regarding Serebrier’s solo piece, which he titled *Danza Ritual*, with the subtitle *Toccata* in parenthesis. There is only brief mention of its recent publication by O. Pagani in the September 1968 issue of *The Music Journal* (under “Books and Music”).

Whether *Danza Ritual* is truly at the intermediate level may be held up to debate, since it is essentially a *moto perpetuo* piece with the tempo marking “Molto allegro (as fast as possible)” and consists entirely of incessant flying sixteenth notes in the right-hand part except in a few places near the end where there are trills (at which point the far less taxed left hand briefly takes over the ongoing sixteenth note momentum in easy patterns), and two occurrences of brief right-hand, descending glissandi. There are also quite a few places in the right-hand part that, given the tempo, are very difficult and awkward to play owing often to sets of wide, one-directional leaps and repeated notes.

Perhaps a more appropriate sub-title for this composition would be “Etude,” the generic term meaning “study” applied by past predominantly keyboard composers such as Czerny and Chopin to their collections of short, single-movement, technically

challenging, fast-fingered pieces. No developing young piano student escapes assignments of these technique-building pieces during their intermediate and advanced training periods. (However, the baroque era generic title “toccata” is considerably similar in its technical implications to that of the etude in that such pieces tended also to be flashy in many parts of their scores, showing off the harpsichordist’s or organist’s digital dexterity. Consider, also, Ernst Krenek’s virtuosic AAA commission, *Toccata*.)

Some places where the repeated-note passages occur might be better executed via bellow shake, though that is not indicated in the score. Black keys are often employed due to a prevalent use of the whole-tone scale (example from the opening phrase: D-flat-E-flat-F-G-A-[B, not appearing in that phrase]). Many other runs involve equally difficult, widely spaced arpeggiated chords, including the augmented triad (a harmonic by-product of the whole tone scale), with difficult crossings under of the thumb.

Despite all these difficulties, however, this is an electrifying work in a steady, hard-pushed 2/4 meter employing the robust master shift throughout the right-hand part accompanied by interesting left-hand bass solos in sustained quarter- and half-note values that act as melodically unifying elements against the constantly flighty right-hand onslaught of sixteenth notes.

The overall form of the composition is tripartite, with a lengthy A section (measures 1-41); B section, divided into two repeating sections of near equal length (measures 43-50 and 51-58 respectively); and truncated return of A (thus labeled “A¹”, measures 59-86, the last seven of which contain a brief rising and trilling chromatic scale-dominated codetta of sorts. This format is somewhat reminiscent of the so-called “minuet and trio” or “scherzo and trio” forms often employed in second or third movements of instrumental works during the Classical period and that music scholars often label as “compound ternary form.”

A hint of Spanish or Latin American flavor may be sensed by the listener at the outset of the A section due to prevalent occurrences of alternating D-flat major and D-major bass chords in the left hand, the latter of which suggests the frequent use in that culture of the so-called “Neapolitan” chord (a major chord that can be built on the chromatically lowered second note of the major or minor scale, often serving as a colorful substitute for the essential primary subdominant harmony—G-flat major in this instance--of the key). If, in this opening excerpt, one hears the D-flat major chord as the tonic, which would be natural since it is the initial harmony of the section and is also supporting a D-flat whole-tone pentachord melody in the right hand (D-flat/E-flat/F/G/A), the D major one that follows in measure 3 will possibly be perceived as the Neapolitan chord (mercifully “misspelled” enharmonically in the score from the proper but complicated-to-read E-double flat major triad--E-double flat/G-flat/B-double flat--to the simpler read D/F-sharp/A). Accentuating this cultural effect further is the obsessive alternation in the first half of the A section of rippling whole-tone pentachords on D-flat (spelled out above) and D (D/E/F-sharp/G-sharp/A-sharp), a half step higher, undergirded by the D-flat and D-major left-hand chords. To this, the composer also included two unusual scales in measures 5 and 6 that never appear again in the work: a rising and rarely encountered Locrian mode on D and a completely made-up descending octatonic scale based on E-flat. Perhaps both were the coincidental result of such a highly chromatic work in

general. See Figure 1 below to view all that is discussed in this paragraph.

Molto allegro (as fast as possible)

Db whole-tone pentachord
D whole-tone pentachord

Db?: I?
Neapolitan chord?

D Locrian mode
Composer-created octatonic scale

First of many slightly varied returns of Db whole-tone pentachord (as well as those of the D pentachord)

Fig. 1. Beginning of Serebrier's *Danza Ritual*, measures 1-8. (Refer to paragraph directly above for discussion of all illustrated herein.)

These persistent melodic whole-tone figures become more and more obscure later in the section as they gradually mix with distracting sustained pedal tones and increasing chromatic scale activity leading to the contrasting, but no less hyperactive, B section. See Figure 2 below.

Db whole-tone pentachord
D whole-tone pentachord
Bb pedal tone

cresc.
poco.

Middle voice ascending chromatic scale
Lower voice ascending chromatic scale

(Continuing Bb pedal tone)
A pedal tone

poco.

(Continuing middle voice ascending chromatic scale)

(Continuing lower voice ascending chromatic scale)

Fig. 2. Measures 17-24 and center of A section. Gradual departure from the pentachord motifs into more chromatic activity, though the pentachords will return once more in the middle voice before B section.

The initially darker sounding B section, made so by a sudden, one-beat, right-hand, three-octave downward glissando plunge to the bottom end of the right-hand piano keyboard range, presents elements of higher drama than earlier via increasingly wider-spaced rising and falling sixteenth-note arpeggios of minor, diminished, and augmented triads, and a single A major-minor 7 chord. These figures decorate and push an eleven-note left-hand melody of sustained values that commences in the first repeating section of eight measures and then again, with very slight rhythmic adjustments, in the second repeating section of seven measures before running straight into the A¹ section and its prominent returning initial D-flat whole-tone pentachord. See Figure 3 below.

B section
1st repeating segment: broken chords on middle-voice G pedal

End of A section and long connecting ascending chromatic scale to gliss. Into B section

ff B.S. $E_b +$ $E_b +$ $AMm7$

legato
Bass theme

Gm $F\#^{\circ}7$ Gm $AMm7$ $E_b +$ G°

Beginning of 2nd repeating segment: no pedal tone, freer harmonic arpeggios

$E_b +$ B°

Repeat of first section's bass theme with slightly altered rhythm

Figure 3. End of A section and beginning of B section, measures 41-53.

Some interesting 20th century devices in the final nineteen bars of the A¹ section not encountered earlier in the work are the left-hand sixteenth-note broken chords in fourths (“quartal harmony”), accompanying and dissonating trills in the right hand, and, via a dramatic descending right-hand glissando in the penultimate measure, a final “tone cluster” cadence point which the composer instructs the performer to strike with “full fist” against a left-hand quartal verticality (E, A, D) in the bass. See Figure 4 below.

“Shrunken” pentachord from the once all-whole tone structure with +5 range prevalent and frequent in opening A section to combination of half and whole steps and resulting $\ast 5$ range here.

Half-step trilled ascending chromatic scale to final upper pre-cadence point (E) in penultimate measure.

Arpeggiated E-A-D quartal chord, Alberti bass style ostinato accompaniment leading to the final lower pre-cadence point (D) in penultimate measure.

accelerando molto e cresc.....

* With full fist.

Tone cluster

Pre-cadence point

Final cadence point

Fig. 4. Ending of A¹ section and piece, measures 78-86.

Whether *Danza Ritual* was ever chosen to serve as a test piece for either the state or national AAA competitive divisions is unknown to this writer, who could not find any extant AAA contest publications or records announcing such.

William Grant Still: *Lilt*

Elsie Bennett had formed lasting friendships with practically all the composers she commissioned, but perhaps none closer than those with Paul Creston and William Grant Still. When she decided to commission the set of intermediate level pieces, Still was certainly going to be on her list (as was Creston to be later on when he composed his *Embryo Suite*)** not only due to his friendship but the “accessible” quality of his tonal/modal and often blues-leaning style of composition. His earlier *Aria*, though having its moments of technical challenge and requiring a mature sense of expression on the part of the performer, was not among the most difficult of the commissioned works for sure (and certainly not as hard as the Serebrier piece).

In a feature article on Still in the November



Elsie Bennett and William Grant Still at his Los Angeles home, February 21, 1968.
Elsie Bennett photo album

1963 issue of *The Music Journal* we find him still saying good things about the accordion: “. . . I know this instrument has wonderful possibilities and there are always fine accordianists who would like to see more music composed specifically for their instrument.”

Elsie Bennett and the AAA eventually followed up on this notion personally for Still by asking him to write another accordion solo. The expressed goal of this commission, as stated in a letter from Bennett to the composer dated February 21, 1965, was "to write a simple piece that could be used for teaching purposes." The contract was sent to Still the following summer, on July 5, 1966, and the resulting piece, indeed easier technically, but, typically, not expressively, was entitled *Lilt*.

An article in the Fall 1968 *Accordion Horizons* magazine announced the publication of *Lilt* by Pietro Deiro Publications and the fact that it had been chosen as a test piece for both the AAA Eastern Cup and New York State regional competitions that year. In addition, Still is quoted as describing his new piece as a "jaunty, good-humored little tune with an easy, infectious rhythm." As simple and delightful sounding as the piece is, however, its form and key scheme are rather complicated (as was true, also, of *Aria*). The following synopsis will demonstrate this.

[A section](#), measures 1-60:

Introduction, mm. 1-8; introductory melody in A-Dorian mode (A-B-C-D-E-F-sharp-G).

Moderato con grazia - ♩ = 92

The musical score for the introduction (measures 1-8) is in 3/4 time and A-Dorian mode. The tempo is 'Moderato con grazia' at 92 beats per minute. The right hand melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various fingerings (e.g., 1 2 1 2 3 4, 2 5 4 3 2 4, 2 4 5 4 2 5, 3 5 5 1) and dynamics (mf, m). The left hand provides a simple accompaniment with 'sempre stacc.' (sempre staccato) marking.

Almost seems to be the main theme until **Main Theme 1** follows it in mm. 8-24, now in A-Aeolian mode (A-B-C-D-E-F-G), which comes across more as a pentatonic scale, however, in that it never uses the B and F (thus A-C-D-E-G).

The musical score for 'Main Theme 1' (measures 8-24) is in 3/4 time and A-Aeolian mode. The tempo starts with 'molto rit.', changes to 'a tempo' for the main theme, and returns to 'molto rit.' at the end. The right hand melody uses fingerings (e.g., 2 5, 2 1 2 5 2 1, 3 1 2 1 2 4, 2 1 3 1, 2 4 2) and dynamics (m, M). The left hand accompaniment includes a 'M' marking.

Following a curious **four-measure interlude** of melodrama involving a kind of syncopated volley between recurring F-sharp minor 7th and A-minor/Major 9th chords, Main **Theme 2** commences at m. 29, and is back in A Dorian mode, but with dramatic, faster rhythm, that ultimately descends to its end via the E Aeolian mode (E-F-sharp-G-A-B-C-D).

The musical score for Theme 2 (measures 29-34) is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 29-32) shows a syncopated melody in the right hand with numerous fingerings (e.g., 2 1 3, 5 2 1, 5 1 2 3, 5 1 4 2, 5 2 1 3, 2 3 4) and slurs. The left hand provides a steady bass line. The second system (measures 33-34) continues the melody, ending with a fermata on an E minor seventh chord. Performance markings include "B.S." (Basso Continuo), "sempre stacc." (always staccato), "rit." (ritardando), and "poco" (poco ritardando).

It eventually pauses on an E minor seventh chord that, acting as a modal half cadence, complete with dramatic fermata, brings back **Theme 1** in its original form, but with a different ending: E major-minor 7th chord, acting as a conventional dominant 7th half cadence preparing the listener for the entrance of the

B Section, mm.61-86:

Theme 3, mm.61-68: Enter a squeaky little carefree tune using the piccolo register. It is in A major, but mostly leaves out steps D and G-sharp, thus rendering it more of a pentatonic scale (A-B-C-sharp-E-F-sharp) once again.

The musical score for Theme 3 (measures 61-68) is presented in a single system. The right hand features a carefree, pentatonic melody in the piccolo register with fingerings (2 5 4, 2 5 1, 5 4 3 2, 1 2 3 4) and slurs. The left hand has a simple bass line with chords marked 'M' (Major), 'm' (minor), and '7' (dominant 7th). The piece begins with a "Tempo I" marking and ends with a fermata. Performance markings include "p" (piano).

Theme 4, mm. 69-76, abruptly follows in a dramatic, choppy, C-sharp Phrygian mode (C-sharp/D/E/F-sharp/G-sharp/A/B) but is once again given pentatonic treatment by avoiding D and F-sharp in the melody.

Theme 3 returns, mm.77-86, in A again, but now extended, ending on a climatic and sustained E-eleventh chord (the dominant chord of both A major and A minor) that ushers in the return of

A Section: also extended, and considerably varied with a dramatic ending on the single tonic note A.

The general form, then, breaks down into what is commonly called “rondo” form, in which two or more melodic themes alternate with each other (ABACDCABA order of themes in the case of *Lilt*). This often happens within a larger tripartite ABA format. *Lilt* is an excellent example of this format, as demonstrated in this table:

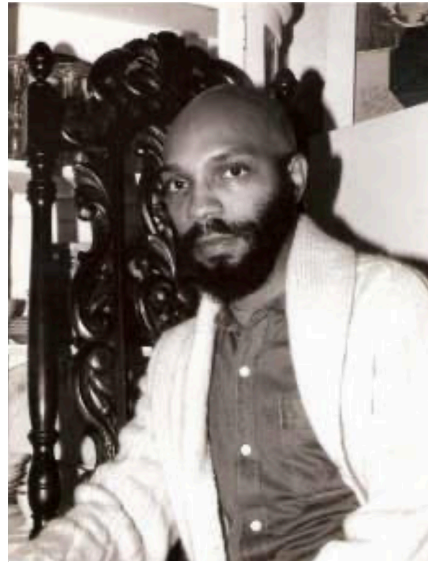
Larger tripartite form	Section A	Section B	Section A returning but modified
Rondo within larger tripartite form	Themes	Themes	Themes
	1, 2, 1	3, 4, 3	1, 2, 1
	(A, B, A)	(C, D, C)	(A, B, A)

To summarize, *Lilt* is similar to *Aria* in its form, its serene, gentle lyricism, and its essentially tonal key schemes (A minor / A major / A minor with Still’s usual modal and pentatonic leanings), and follows a similar rondo plan, framed within larger A/B/A sections. And, as may be expected for a student level composition, it is melodically, harmonically, and formally simpler and more "popular" in nature than was its lengthier and more serious predecessor.

Curiously, if one is to go by the chronological listing of works in the book *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music*, edited by Robert Bartlett Haas, both accordion pieces were written in times of seeming inactivity for the composer. It appears that *Lilt* was the only work completed in 1966; and *Aria*, along with the orchestral tone poem *Patterns* and the "Lyric" string quartet, all purportedly completed near or during 1960, followed the Third Symphony and the opera *Minette Fontaine* by a year, with nothing showing for the bulk of 1959. The years between 1960 and 1966 are furiously busy, however, with at least sixteen works listed in the chronology, including the opera *Highway 1, U. S. A.*, the orchestral works *Los Alnados De Espana*, *Preludes*, and *Threnody: In Memory of Jan Sibelius*, and the Folk Suites, Nos. 1 through 4, for various chamber ensembles.

What is more remarkable is that, to the best of the writer's knowledge, William Grant Still is the only published African American composer to have written for the classical accordion to date. A former classmate of the writer at the Peabody Institute, the late Ronald Roxbury (an African American who grew up near Salisbury, Maryland), wrote an excellent and highly idiomatic set of four atonal *Preludes* at about the same time Still's *Lilt* was published. The writer had the pleasure of premiering that composition at Peabody not long after its creation.

A few years later, Roxbury had promised to write two works for William Schimmel, a concerto for accordion and strings and a duet for accordion and



Ronald Roxbury, ca. early 1980s.
Roxbury family estate

guitar, but they never materialized before Roxbury's untimely death in 1986.***



Finally, the distinguished African American composer Ulysses Kay (1917-95) accepted a contract from the AAA, dated November 24, 1961, which he regrettably soon returned to Elsie Bennett, explaining that he had tried but felt that he could not succeed in writing something fitting for the instrument.

Be that as it may, the accordion world should feel very privileged to possess these two little gems, *Aria* and *Lilt*, by Still which show every evidence of

having been written from the heart and with the same effort and enthusiasm that he had put into his more celebrated major works. They are, in the writer's opinion, thoroughly good Still, and a delight to perform.

In closing, there is no record of an official premiere of any of these four student-level compositions, nor any mention of assistance in their creation from professional accordionists, such as Carmen Carrozza, Joseph Biviano, and others, who did so in the past. There is no doubt that Elsie Bennett would have been available for help, of course. She probably had members of the AAA Board inspect the finished manuscripts as well, though no evidence of this appears in her AAA correspondence.

All four composers' larger, virtuosic works did have official premieres, however. Carrozza premiered Surinach's *Pavana and Rondo* at Carnegie Hall, where also Joseph Biviano and the Beau-Arts String Quartet premiered Diamond's *Night Music*, Joseph Soprani premiered Diamond's *Sonatina* at the Donnell Library in New York, Myron Floren premiered Still's *Aria* at New York's Town Hall, and Serebrier's *Passacaglia and Perpetuum Mobile* was premiered by an unknown accordionist with the Colorado Philharmonic Orchestra, a youth ensemble created and led by conductor Walter Charles that eventually evolved into the present day National Repertoire Orchestra (about which more in the 2016 AAA Festival Journal article).

*The previous AAA works were Surinach's *Pavana and Rondo* (5th commission, commissioned in 1959), Still's *Aria* (8th commission, 1959), and Diamond's *Night Music*, for Accordion and String Quartet (15th commission, 1960) and *Sonatina* (18th commission, 1962). See earlier articles in this series on these works in the following previous issues of the AAA Festival Journal: 2000 (Surinach), 2001 (Still's *Aria*), 2004 (Diamond's *Night Music*), and 2005 (Diamond's *Sonatina*).

**Serebrier did go on to write the concerto, which he entitled *Passacaglia and Perpetuum Mobile*, for strings, brass, and percussion. It, along with Creston's *Embryo Suite* will be discussed in the next installment of this series in the 2016 AAA Festival Journal.

***For more information about Roxbury and to study an analysis and hear a recording of his *Four Preludes for Accordion* by the writer, go to section 2 of the AAA website's CCC articles list page, <http://www.ameraccord.com/aaacommissions2.php>, and see the writer's article "Classical Music for Accordion by African-American Composers: The Accordion Works of William Grant Still (1895-1978) and Ronald Roxbury (1946-1986)." *The Free-Reed Journal*, vol. 1, Center for the Study of Free-Reed Instruments, City College of New York.

Still's Lilt was performed by Dr. McMahan in the 2014 AAA Master Class and Concert Series at Tenri Institute, in New York City, the summer before the original print version

of this article appeared in the 2015 AAA Festival Journal. He has also recorded it and it may be heard on the AAA website's Music Commissions home page.
