

# belles lettres

A LITERARY REVIEW



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## The Next American President?

Henry Berger on Barack Obama





# Director's Notes



Professor Gerald Early

Nothing is so welcome as the sense of relief that accompanies the end of having orchestrated a major, pressure-packed event. It is akin to the feeling of being able to unclench one's jaw, of experiencing the evaporation of tension and the return of the normal frets and annoyances of banal life, which seem a familiar comfort. If the event is a success, the anxiety, as life-shortening as it probably is, seems worth the price.

On Friday and Saturday, March 14 and 15, the WU Center for the Humanities hosted the annual meeting of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI), the major international organization of entities

such as this one, a sort of showcase event for our center, our international coming out party, so to speak, or coming of age moment. The theme of this year's conference was "The Humanities in an Age of Science." Humanities center directors came from all over the United States as well as Ireland, Germany, England, Australia, the Netherlands, and other countries. Even our neighbors across the street, so to speak, the director and associate director of the Center for the Humanities at University of Missouri–St. Louis came and played an important role in one of the conference's workshops. Our keynote speakers, Mary Poovey of New York University, who spoke on the social history of the fact, and Peter Galison of Harvard University, who spoke on the history of scientific objectivity, were outstanding. Many found them inspiring in the range and power of their scholarship. We also held a panel session at the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, thanks much to the gracious hospitality of executive director Matthias Waschek.

What I am most grateful for is the participation of several of my Washington University colleagues, who did so much to make the conference so enormously incisive and intellectually rigorous, yet so remarkably accessible and open. Dean Robert Thach of the Graduate School gave welcoming remarks. Among the panelists were Sarah Rivett of the English Department, Garland Allen of Biology, Carl Craver of the Philosophy Department, Patricia Olynyk of the Sam Fox School, and Walt Schalick, former WU professor of medicine. I am especially grateful to Steven Meyer of the English Department, who provided a brief address on the significance of the theme of the conference that was both witty and wonderfully insightful. I thought his remarks were worth sharing, as they had the compactness and narrative coherence of a well-turned essay, and so, with his kind permission, they are included in this issue of *Belles Lettres*.

The success of the conference was in large measure due to the hard work of associate director Jian Leng and her two assistants, administrative assistant Barbara Liebmann and financial bookkeeper Robbi Jones. Never has a director been more enabled by such a capable staff!

This issue's core is music, with essays by WU professor of dance Mary Jean Cowell on Jerome Robbins, probably most famous for his choreography for *West Side Story*; by Michael MacCambridge on St. Louis's greatest musician, Chuck Berry, and the disturbingly brittle yet insouciant nature of his genius; and by Wayne Zade on jazz singer and, in effect, literary scholar Nancy Harrow, one of the truly underappreciated gems of modern American music. In addition, we have book reviews by WU graduate student Jerome Camal on the art of practicing and WU history PhD Ben Cawthra on the history of jazz criticism.

In addition, we have two nonmusic essays that, in some way, frame this issue: WU history professor emeritus Henry Berger writes about the political marvel Barack Obama—the man who would be president, and the African American who is poised to change American electoral politics forever—in a review of Shelby Steele's book about the famed Illinois senator. Also, Benjamin Israel writes an essay about how a black police officer and a black defense lawyer earned an acquittal for a black man who admitted killing a white police officer back during the halcyon days of segregation in St. Louis, a tale so amazing that it might have garnered a place in *Ripley's Believe It or Not* but one that, more importantly, reminds us of the astonishing competence and secret institutional courage of many black professionals back in the old days of segregated America. I am pleased to publish it in *Belles Lettres*.

Finally, we have an active blog on our website at <http://cenhum.artsci.wustl.edu/publications/blog.html>. Please read our entries, which are timely enough. I have written about the candidacies of both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Log some posts! I wrote about them mostly because I felt they would elicit no shortage of commentary, no matter what I said. I will probably write something later on John McCain, but after that, I doubt if there will ever be anything about politics again. I don't even like politics! But experience teaches one, as bedeviled as we mortals are by our inconsistencies and failed promises, to never say never.

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# Jazz, Literature, and What the Singer Sings

“All the Signs of Home”: Nancy Harrow, Singer, Poet, Composer

As I started to write this essay, I had just mailed a check for tickets to a concert by the newly arrived jazz singer Erin Bode. A native of Minneapolis and now transplanted in St. Louis, Bode is poised to take off from local gigs to a national career, having recorded two well-received albums for the St. Louis-based Max Jazz label. Bode must hope to shed the appellation “the new Norah Jones” soon, just as Jones was most likely eager to shed the appellation “the new Diana Krall” or “the new Jane Monheit.” Let’s not forget Tierney Sutton, Judy Niemack, Luciana Souza, Mary Stallings, Ann Hampton Callaway, René Marie, Karrin Allyson, or Claudia Acuña. If our ears are open, we are alive in the world of the female jazz singer in America.

Female instrumentalists in jazz, while their number has been increasing, lag behind the singers. Male singers in jazz—but for

Mark Murphy, Kurt Elling, and Kevin Mahogany—are fewer and farther between. Among instrumentalists, one thinks right off of veteran pianists such as Marian McPartland, JoAnne Brackeen, Toshiko Akiyoshi, and Marilyn Crispell, on down age-wise to pianists Renee Rosnes, Eliane Elias, Lynne Arriale, and Hiromi. Trumpeter-flugel-hornist Ingrid Jensen, soprano saxophonist Jane

American literary works, that Nancy Harrow has been creating and producing over the past fifteen years are a case in point. We must also note that Harrow brought to bear on this oeuvre a long career as an interpreter of the Great American Songbook in nine pristine recordings of standards with some of the most prestigious jazz musicians in New York as sidemen. Yet search the biographical encyclopedias, dictionaries, histories, and anthologies of CD reviews in jazz, and you will be hard-pressed to find her name. She appears in Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler’s *Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* and in early editions of *The Penguin Guide to Jazz*. Only the purveyors of the website AllMusic.com, who take its name literally and seriously, provide anything like a comprehensive overview of Harrow’s canon. I have mentioned her name to friends who are serious jazz fans and seen them shrug their shoulders. How does someone this gifted, prolific, and important fall between the cracks?

Jazz critics as prominent and distinguished as Whitney Balliett and Dan Morgenstern have praised Harrow highly. Balliett has said, “I don’t know all her literary CDs, but have liked her Willa Cather and her Scott Fitzgerald—certainly a unique and subtle song-and-lyric series. She is indeed a delight to be with—funny, laughing, smart, original.” Morgenstern prefers two other literary-jazz projects of Harrow’s: “I love her two fairy tales, *Maya the Bee* and *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*. She is a very special talent with a very special touch.” With endorsements like these, why don’t more jazz fans know about Nancy Harrow?

Nancy Harrow had the good fortune, or misfortune for a singer, of breaking into jazz during the 1950s and ’60s. By most estimates, these were the golden years of jazz, which still had a large audience and an extraordinary range of practitioners, from Louis Armstrong to Miles Davis. When she was enrolled at Bennington College, Nancy Harrow first was musically inclined toward dance and choreography, including jazz. Her major, though, was English, and she wrote a senior thesis on Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* (1860), under Ben Belitt’s direction—only to return to the novel nearly forty-five years later in her album of the same name, subtitled *Jazz Variations on a Theme by Hawthorne*. Meanwhile, in college a friend had a Billie Holiday album and played it often, and the music “sank in, I became enamored,” Harrow recalls.

It was after college that she began her immersion in singing jazz by returning to New York and hanging out at clubs. “I went to clubs all the time and heard Charles Mingus, Miles Davis. The ‘new’ jazz, modern jazz. Thelonious Monk, and everybody. I lived in New York and could do that. We lived in clubs. It was easy to meet musicians.” Harrow recalls being at Minton’s in Harlem in the audience and being nudged by a friend to ask the guitarist Kenny Burrell if she could sit in. She finally did ask and he said, “Sure,” so she sang with his quartet. “It was a wonderful experience,” she recalled, “because the audience kept talking



**Nancy Harrow**  
Norman Gholson, photographer.

Ira Bloom, composer-arranger-bandleader Maria Schneider, and the late guitarist Emily Remler all have made prominent careers in jazz. But the female jazz singers of today may be saving jazz at a crucial time in its history. And, although after many years she is not yet a household name, the singer, lyricist, and composer Nancy Harrow should be regarded as one of the most valiant of jazz saviors, and survivors.

Too often, though, brilliant creations and innovations in jazz can go unnoticed, or perhaps in today’s parlance, unhyped—this has always been true in jazz. The ongoing series of small jazz operas, or “Song Cycles” as she calls them, based on classic



back to me and making me tell the story." Burrell was later to appear on Harrow's first album and later played a duo gig with her at Café au Go Go—and in very distinguished company, I might add: opposite pianist Bill Evans and a comedian, Richard Pryor for the first week and George Carlin for the second.

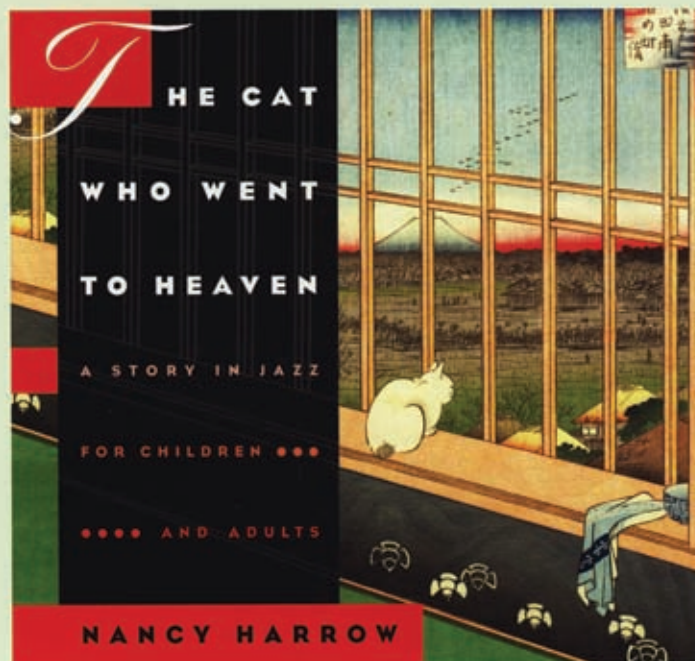
However, the first jazz musician to have a personal impact on Harrow was the pianist Dick Katz, "the only person I knew before I got into jazz who was a jazz musician," she has said. "He was the first person I went to when I decided I wanted to sing." Katz then led Harrow to another jazz pianist, Bill Triglia, who encouraged her to listen only to instrumentals and then to memorize the solos, which she did. She listened to Lester Young this way, first on Billie Holiday's records and also on his own; she listened to Ben Webster too.

Harrow listened to instrumentalists and to singers—among them Ella Fitzgerald, Mildred Bailey, and Lee Wiley—and to "what each learns from each. What the singer learns from the instrumentalist besides rhythm." I asked Harrow if she meant phrasing, and she responded, "Rather than phrasing, it's improvisation. And what the singer gives to the instrumentalist is the phrasing on the lyric, so that they're breathing with you, they're breathing when you breathe. I think Lester Young and Ben Webster both did that. You could hear it."

Aside from records, Harrow feels she learned from actually starting to work with musicians, just sitting in. She credits her longtime friend, the late pianist John Lewis, with being "really a teacher." Another nearly lifelong friend, the trombonist Bob Brookmeyer, recalled the many times Nancy sat in with the famous group he co-led with trumpeter Clark Terry at the Half-Note, a long-gone club in New York: "That's a very hard thing to do, but she worked at learning a sense of stage presence and confidence, very important things for a singer."

After marriage in her final year of college and graduation, Harrow worked in publishing, starting at the bottom at William Morrow and eventually working her way up to copy editor over five years. She recalls, "The woman I was working for was Erle Stanley Gardner's editor. She started to give me manuscripts to read and check. I discovered I had this talent for finding out what was wrong with his plots. Eventually, he demanded that I be in on every one of his manuscripts. He wrote not just Perry Masons but others." During the years at Morrow, Harrow was building up her repertoire as a jazz singer. She left the job and became a copy editor, which she could do on a freelance basis, including a stint for Simon and Schuster. Late one night in bed—her husband was trying to sleep—she was reading a book in galleys. "I was laughing hysterically to myself. I said to myself, this book is incredible," she reflects. "I think I was the first person to read *Catch-22*."

During her years in the publishing field, Harrow put in a concurrent period of sitting in and singing in clubs. In 1960 she recorded her first album and released it the next year on Candid. The prophetic title was *Wild Women Don't Have the Blues*, and the venerable Nat Hentoff was the A and R man. Already on her first album, she was backed by top players, including trumpeter Buck Clayton (who also did the arrangements), tenor saxophonist Buddy Tate, trombonist Dickie Wells, and pianist Dick



Wellstood. This was a highly acclaimed debut and readily led to a second album, *You Never Know*. John Lewis became important in this project, as he was in A and R for Atlantic Records at the time. Harrow and her husband had gone on vacation to Paris, where Lewis insisted she look up drummer Kenny Clarke. She did, and Clarke got her a job at the Mars Club there. During this engagement, Lewis told Harrow that he wanted to record her, and so it happened, in 1962, *You Never Know* was done and released the following year.

In 1962, Barbra Streisand landed her first role in a Broadway play, *I Can Get It for You Wholesale*, after doing what Nancy Harrow was doing then, singing in clubs in New York. Streisand's first album for Columbia came out the next year, was a spectacular success, and she has never looked back. "At the time," Harrow remembers, "I thought I would be like Barbra Streisand, though she hadn't quite made it yet. I dreamt of having a big career as a performer." Then her first child, Damon, was born in 1963. Perhaps Damon was destined to become the musician, poet, and publisher that he is. Harrow gradually withdrew from singing and performing. I asked Harrow if she felt she had a tough choice to make in doing so, and she seemed surprised by the question. She told me that with the arrival of the Beatles and the so-called British Invasion of rock in 1964, jazz jobs were already starting to get scarce. (Yet perhaps in a wry look back, Harrow released *The Beatles and Other Standards* in 1990!)

Before the arrival of her second son, Anton, a neuroscientist by profession but a talented singer in his own right (he appears on two of Harrow's literary albums, *The Marble Faun* and *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*), she had the chance to go on tour with Benny Goodman. "I was once presented with a choice," she recalls, "to tour with Goodman. I didn't go because I didn't want to leave Damon, and he was like two or three at the time—I just didn't want to leave him for that time." She also reflects now that women in jazz find it hard to have a home life. "Very few have children," she told me. "It's surprising, how few." But at the time, in the mid '60s, when faced with a dwindling jazz economy,



Harrow did decide to devote herself to her children for a while. Eventually, the opportunity arose in 1972–73 to edit a literary magazine, *American Journal*.

No doubt Harrow's literary experience deepened with her work with this magazine. Although the magazine had a brief life of only eight issues, Harrow published such writers as Mark Harris, Seymour Krim, Cynthia Ozick, Alfred Kazin, John Williams, Nat Hentoff, George P. Elliott, Leslie Fiedler, Phyllis LaFarge, and Peter Steinfelds. *American Journal* seems to have been a part of the New Journalism movement of the late '60s and '70s. Harrow explains, "The writers wrote highly personal essays on subjects of importance to them."

A chance remark by Nat Hentoff that "somebody should write a jazz opera based on *Invisible Man*" prompted Harrow to take up the challenge. She mentioned the idea to John Lewis, a very significant friend in her life and career, and he agreed that it was a worthwhile venture. Lewis knew someone who knew Ellison, and a dinner invitation with Lewis and Harrow was worked out. At dinner, they pitched the idea to Ellison, and he said they ought to try it. Harrow then wrote a whole script, and, she recalls, "I made songs up that I could imagine from the text, and I sent them to Ellison. And he called me up and said, 'Full speed ahead. But I can't give you permission until I hear some music.'"

Harrow and Lewis then applied to the Rockefeller Foundation to see if they could get a grant for Lewis to write the music. They were told a grant would be likely, but they first needed permission from Ellison, who would not give permission until he heard the music. Harrow says, "So it was Catch-22." Because of the magnitude of the project and his duties as pianist and music director of the Modern Jazz Quartet, Lewis could not afford to take time off to work on a score of *Invisible Man*. So, the project fell through. Undaunted even now, Harrow recalls, "I was so thrilled that Ellison would like what I had done. I don't know if it ever would have happened." Yet the creative impact of having written lyrics and having thought musically on an operatic scale was to be fully felt by Harrow when, nearly twenty years later, she was ready to produce *Lost Lady*, the first of her literary jazz albums.

By the mid '70s, Nancy Harrow sensed that mainstream jazz was ready for a comeback and that she was too. She vividly recalls getting a job at a club called the Cookery and heading back into the studio to make another album, this one for the Audiophile label. For the first time, she got full creative control on the project, and when she was stuck with musicians she thought inferior to those she had worked with, she opted to use just a trio, picking her own stellar accompanists: Jack Wilkins on guitar, Rufus Reid on bass, and Billy Hart on drums.

This album, *Anything Goes*, seems aptly named, given the influence Harrow had in making it. Even more significantly, Bob Brookmeyer brought her some sketch arrangements for the album, although he was not to play on it. The two would work together on two more of Harrow's "middle period" albums, *You're Nearer* (1986) and *Street of Dreams* (1990), and Brookmeyer indeed performed to his own very high standards on both.

Regarding the latter, he told me recently, "It was something that was radically different for us, and ultimately a couple of the most radical things had to come out—it was still a commercial bomb!" Mention of Jack Wilkins on *Anything Goes* brings to mind the fact that the guitarist accompanied Harrow alone on one of her next albums as well, *Two's Company* (1984).

Of special note also is *The John Lewis Album for Nancy Harrow* (1981). The album is significant because Harrow contributed the lyrics for two of Lewis's songs on it, "Distant Lover" and "As Long as It's about Love." The first is a ballad with a few surprising time changes; the second, a medium-tempo blues. Not surprising for a John Lewis project is its classical tinge, with violin and flute added to a jazz group of piano, guitar, bass, and drums. Perhaps this was a lesson not lost on Harrow in her literary albums, particularly *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*, with its very imaginative instrumental voicings.

These steady, lasting collaborations—such as those with John Lewis and later with pianist Sir Roland Hanna and drummer-singer Grady Tate—are important to note. Several musicians, as well as singers on the latest recordings, appear regularly on Harrow's albums, first-call players in a veritable repertory company under her direction. She remembers how "the feeling in the studio was so great when we made some of these ['80s] albums. It was such a teamwork thing, so warm and relaxed. And I was able to really express myself on them because I felt comfortable."

The first time Harrow wrote the music of a song on one of her own albums was on the re-released CD version of *Anything Goes* (1990), for which she added four new tracks, one of these being her own "A Little Blue." The story behind this song's particular creation is significant. Having met and admired the poet Raymond Patterson, she was particularly attracted to his poetry because he had written a lot about the blues, and she wondered why he had not gotten someone to write music to it. With determination, she asked a number of musician friends, but nobody wanted to do it. With more determination, she decided, "Well, I'll do it. It's so easy to write a blues melody. I thought he had written a good lyric, so I just did it."

The first time Harrow wrote the music and the lyrics on one of her own albums was on *Secrets* (1991), and the first song was "Sea Change" (there are four others she wrote). When I asked her what prompted her at this point to start writing songs, she told me, "It was not something I always wanted to do. I never even thought I could. But suddenly, because I had written the lyrics for two of John Lewis's songs, I thought, Well, maybe I could write a song." But another key impulse here is Harrow's decision to go back and learn jazz harmony in order to be able to accompany herself. She had played the piano in childhood but had stopped after college. She studied then with Sanford Gold, and then Norman Gold. After awhile, she could accompany herself on about twenty songs. She adds, "So I guess it was during this time also that I starting thinking of writing songs, because I was fooling around with chords."

With her literary experience and the experience of having written music for a blues poem by Raymond Patterson and the

*By the mid '70s, Nancy Harrow sensed that mainstream jazz was ready for a comeback and that she was too.*



music and lyrics for her own songs, by 1990 Nancy Harrow had come to a rich sense of the symbiotic relationship between American literature and jazz, a rich mine of study for academics these days. Several books, most recently David Yaffe's *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing* (2005), explore this relationship in detail. Another good book is Robert O'Meally's voluminous anthology of essays, *The Jazz Cadence in American Culture* (1998), particularly the final section, "Writing the Blues, Writing Jazz." Poets Sascha Feinstein and Yusef Komunyakaa published two volumes of *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* in the mid '90s (1991, 1996). So Harrow seems to have been a bit ahead of the academic curve in the field of jazz studies.

Harrow told me that over the years she had not been impressed with "jazz and poetry" readings in which poets read their poems to jazz accompaniment. She thought that the balance usually was not right: Either the poetry was good and the jazz bad, or the jazz good and the poetry bad. The phenomena of such readings probably originated with recordings made by Langston Hughes, with a group led by Charles Mingus. Or with the Beat writers in San Francisco, such as in the scene in chapter 2 of Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958) at Gallery Six one night: "Alvah Goldbook was reading his, wailing his poem 'Wail' drunk with arms outspread everyone was yelling 'Go! Go! Go!' (like a jam session)." Like the jazz poetry performances of the Black Arts Movements of the '60s and '70s, many jazz "readings" were social as well as artistic happenings, put together on the fly.

Nancy Harrow is more interested in what she thinks of as the jazz spirit that permeates American literature. The usual suspects who tried to reveal this spirit in what they wrote are well known: Lindsay; Eliot; W. C. Williams; Fitzgerald, of course; Hemingway; Faulkner; Hughes Claude, McKay Jean, Toomer, and other Harlem Renaissance figures; Ellison; Richard Wright; Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and other Beats; Amiri Baraka; and Michael S. Harper. But Harrow has been interested in unusual suspects: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Willa Cather. The children's writer Elizabeth Coatsworth. The German children's writer Waldemar Bonsels. Harrow has been drawn to writers who portray dreamers, souls on the outside of things, and people trying to find their way against the odds—the adapters, the improvisers, the creators, "struggling against the tide," as she put it to me.

Once Nancy Harrow returned to singing around 1975, she received some key advice from the late jazz club owner Barney Josephson, who told her, "You should study acting because you need to lose yourself, you know, in front of the audience more," something Bob Brookmeyer also had encouraged earlier. And so she did, enrolling in classes at HB Studio. Harrow recalls exactly a quotation from Uta Hagen, who taught there: "I believe in the immortality of the theater. It is the most joyous hideaway for all those who have secretly put their childhood in their pocket and gone off and away with it to play on to the end of their days." Harrow adds, "My childhood is completely vivid to me, and all the concerns I had as a child are still there, and I'm aware of

them." She told me that scenes and complications in *Maya the Bee* and *The Cat Who Went to Heaven* spoke deeply to her, stirring up childhood memories and anxieties, creative touchstones for her. Harrow spoke movingly about the song "Flying Home" in *Maya*, and these lines in particular (they occur as Maya is flying back to the hive to warn them): "Wonder if I'll find / the lindens and the pines / Have I forgotten all the signs of home?"

By the way, writer Jerry Tallmer, in a reminiscence about Barney Josephson, noted that he owned the "anti-nightclub" Café Society, whose motto was "The right place for the wrong people. Or, The wrong place for the right people. Take your pick." I think Nancy Harrow would be comfortable with either choice. The tension between them seems to run throughout all her literary jazz albums.

I asked Harrow why she was drawn to the particular historical and literary periods of her literary jazz albums, and her initial answer surprised me: "I think the period in which our parents were in their youth always holds a very special appeal. So, you find yourself gravitating toward that period. Which I think would explain the Fitzgerald era as a source for me. That's when my parents would have been in their youth, in their twenties.

They would have been around Fitzgerald's age—I think my mother was born in the same year he was."

Yet childhood and family history turn up as topics often in conversations with Harrow. She reflected recently on her attachment to Gilbert and Sullivan, a key early influence:

"There are some lyrics in *Maya* that remind me of them, like the song that Grady Tate sings as Peter the Rose Beetle, 'Without a How Do You Do (or a By Your Leave).'" Although she had studied more prose than poetry in college, Harrow maintains that what she calls the "poetry part" of her songs comes from her childhood memories of listening to Gilbert and Sullivan, in addition to her recollections of all of the songs she listened to and learned later. She sums up her influences this way: "It was taking Gilbert and Sullivan and imposing it on Harold Arlen, Gershwin, and making a combination. But the structure of rhyming came from Gilbert and Sullivan; it was all in my head from childhood."

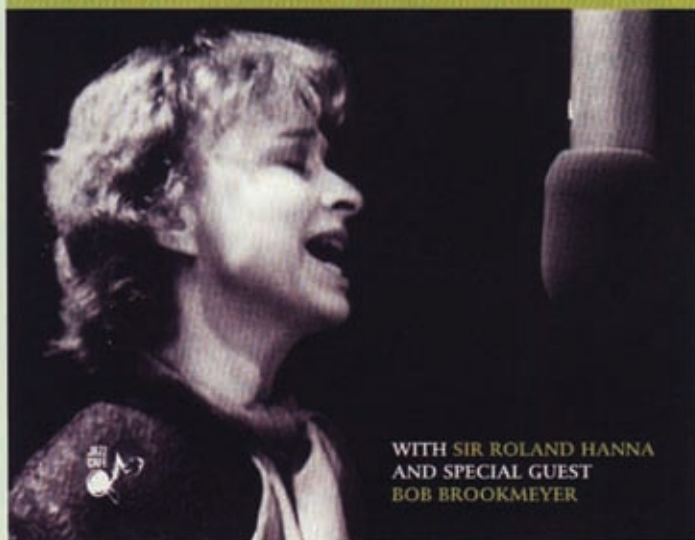
Her follow-up answer to my question about literary and historical periods and their influence was perhaps more to be expected: "I just felt comfortable with the period of Cather. But I think the reason is really the subject matter." Reflecting also on her choice of Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, Harrow told me, "I was drawn to that era also, without even realizing it. I chose that book because it was about sin, the sin of murder, and at that time, I was very fascinated by that. I still am, actually." So again we return to the preeminence of the outsider in American literature, one coming to terms with personal desires in a highly charged social context.

Harrow's first literary jazz album, *Lost Lady*, was based on her interest in Willa Cather's short novel of almost the same name, *A Lost Lady* (1923). This was about twenty years after the Ralph Ellison project with John Lewis that never came together. She first thought to do a jazz project on *Madame Bovary* because the story intrigued her. But because of her jazz instincts, Harrow felt more drawn to an American novel and chose the Cather,

*Harrow told me that over the years she had not been impressed with "jazz and poetry" readings in which poets read their poems to jazz accompaniment.*



## NANCY HARROW YOU'RE NEARER



CD cover, produced by Ted Ono for Tono Records, 1986.

which she had also long admired. She found it easy to write the songs: "Instead of pulling it out of yourself, the disparate things that happen to you, it was like a thread. You could just follow it and do it—it was easy for me to see where the songs should come in and I would just do it." Still, she worked on the Cather album for two years.

*Lost Lady* was received so positively that Harrow felt encouraged to try again. She remembered Waldemar Bonsels's 1912 story of *Maya the Bee* from her childhood—her mother, who loved it, had given her the book and told her to read this German classic. Harrow estimates that the book still outsells the Bible in Germany. Harrow had read it over and over again and loved it: "There was a female heroine, and this little bee meant a lot to me. Really, it's about death, that story. The bees have such a brief life; it's always on their minds, surviving the next day." Having started writing songs based on the book in 1994, Harrow received encouragement from the eminent pianist Sir Roland Hanna, who was to prove to be still another important friend and collaborator to her. She recalls with great affection the earliest demo of *Maya*, done on the cheap in a little recording studio, downtown near Chinatown, with just Hanna on piano, Daryl Sherman, and Grady Tate and Harrow in the vocal parts. Tate seemed the perfect touch for the project: "Grady is an actor and has this voice, and of course the jazz sense." The phrase "labor of love" turned up several times in my visits with Harrow, and she applied it to the humble beginnings of *Maya*.

Daryl Sherman, who sings the role of Maya on the CD, gave me an excellent synopsis of the at times ungainly processes in which *Maya* and *Cat* evolved as recordings. "Nancy's projects are very layered," she said several times with emphasis. She recalled the seminal importance of Harrow's initial ideas of a story and how, through some research and the use of her imagination, lyrics and melody fragments emerge for her. Next, song form is developed, cooperatively, collaboratively, with a music director and

some of the musicians. Sherman credited Hanna for enabling Harrow to flesh out a story line "color-wise, mood-wise—different rhythmic patterns, different feels." Sherman spoke also of how, with the musicians, the singers found a *balance* (her word) in interpreting Harrow's lyrics. Singers and musicians need to respond to one another's interpretations. "Getting the groove for the songs was so important in developing the fragments. This process is all very interactive."

At that time, little did Harrow know that *Maya* would be fruitful and multiply. Beyond the successful CD itself, the project ultimately emerged in another art form, puppet theater. She initially thought that *Maya* had potential as an animated film, so she sent it to a lawyer in Hollywood who sent it around to the studios. But then *Ants* came out, and then *A Bug's Life* did too, and she gave up on the idea. A period of six years, 1994–2000, elapsed before *Maya* appeared in CD form, delayed at least in part by the "bug" phenomenon. During this period, Harrow came up with the idea of doing *Maya* as a puppet-show performance. She has been at the center of every aspect of production ever since.

This first meant getting puppets made. After trying several puppet makers in New York, Harrow eventually lit on the idea of going to Poland to get the puppets for *Maya* made. She and her husband were planning to travel to Poland, his birthland, anyway, and Harrow knew that the art form of puppetry is taken very seriously in eastern Europe. She had been given the name of an authority on puppetry in Poland and played him the demo of *Maya*, which he liked. He introduced her to a man who ran Teatr Baj, a puppet theater, and he showed her five different sets of puppets, from five different designers, that had been built and used in shows. She immediately asked if puppets could be made there and sent over to the States and was told yes, absolutely. Zofia Czechlewska, the chosen designer, had even known the story of *Maya the Bee* and she made the puppets, shipping eighteen puppets and sets over in eight crates.

The show went through some trials and errors in its first performances in 1998, and emerged eventually in 2000 in a form in which the puppeteers were invisible and the puppets were redone to be manipulated better. Harrow came up with the idea of staging the show on Saturday morning—the kids would be up, and they could see this instead of watching cartoons. And so the run at the Culture Project, 45 Bleecker Theatre, began, and it still continues, now in its seventh year (although it has moved to a new venue, at 55 Mercer Street). Nancy claims to have seen it at least a hundred times: "I don't go every week. I go to keep the actors on their toes. If you don't, they might just run away with their ad-libs." Through such a long run, she has been amazed at how many girls named Maya have come to see the show, and she adds, "They all buy the t-shirt; it's very cute." (There is also a Maya doll!)

A similar series of creative endeavors has resulted in the evolution of Elizabeth Coatsworth's *The Cat Who Went to Heaven* (1930). Although Harrow composed and produced *The Marble Faun* and *Winter Dreams* after *Maya*, she was touched in a way similar to *Maya* by the *Cat* story. It was one of a number of titles suggested to her by a friend who was a fan of *Maya*, and again Harrow simply liked the story a lot and decided to do it. But by this time, Sir Roland Hanna—who had worked with Harrow on



*Faun* and *Dreams* in addition to *Maya*—had died. She reflected, “I had to find three people to replace Roland. Roland used to work on the original songs with me, and then he would play and arrange the music for the albums.” For *Cat*, pianist Kenny Werner did the original songs with Harrow, trumpeter Michael Mossman did the arranging, and pianist Kenny Barron played on the recording—“like having Art Tatum on your record,” Nancy said about Barron.

*The Cat Who Went to Heaven: A Story in Jazz for Children and Adults* is yet another Harrow project produced by John Snyder. Snyder states that he has every second of the sessions on tape, on video, on five cameras: “It’s probably a hundred DVD tapes; it’s huge,” he told me. Like *Winter Dreams*, it appeared on the Artists House label, and it is another labor of love. It involves a jazz piano trio, a string quartet, Clark Terry on trumpet, Frank Wess on tenor sax and flute, two Japanese musicians playing indigenous instruments, four singers, and a narrator. It was produced as an enhanced CD, and it includes a video interview with Nancy Harrow on the project in which she talks about her attraction to the story and her appreciation of the contributions made by the various musicians and singers to the project. Particularly noteworthy are her comments on how Grady Tate, an actor as well as singer and master drummer, adapts to nuances in the lyrics and music throughout the production, while not being familiar with the story (none of the musicians was). I had the chance to ask Tate what it was like to work with Nancy Harrow, and he responded this way: “She’s nuts! Unbelievably crazy, and just right on the money with everything that she goes for. All her stuff is very new, you haven’t heard it yet, you haven’t heard it before.”

In the text section of the CD, the narration, script, and lyrics are presented, as are all the piano music and the scores of all the musical parts. The project is aimed in large part at students in music schools, as Artists House is an educational, charitable institution. It should not be long before school productions of *Cat* are possible. This CD was chosen by Rob Lester in his “Talkin’ Broadway” feature as one of his top ten cast albums of 2006. Lester commented, “With elements of mystery and melancholy (an animal dies as a main event), plus Buddhism, this is far from just a ‘kiddie’ event. It’s a loving story, and very good, low-key jazz music.” (I should add here that Artists House has just reissued *Maya the Bee*, which first came out on Harbinger.)

*The Cat Who Went to Heaven* will soon be presented in puppet theater too, and again, Harrow has been involved in every facet of its presentation. The puppets, Bunraku puppets to be specific, are this time being made by two of the puppeteers who have been doing *Maya* for the past seven years. Joe Silovsky is building the set for the *Cat* puppet show, and puppets and set are meeting Harrow’s high standards and those of Will Pomerantz, who plays the narrator on the CD of *Cat* and who will stage the puppet production. She told me that there is no real script for this, as the story is told in lyrics with narration in places that need it.

Regarding text, the same is true of the animated film of *Cat*, and Harrow’s role in working with the animator, who happens to be Polish, has been choosing which songs are essential for the story, effectively cutting down the running time from sixty-seven

to thirty-eight minutes. She did the editing with Randy Funke, the recording engineer on the CD, and perhaps her early employment in editing has come to serve her well once again.

Another current project is a musical based on *Winter Dreams*, with a script written by Derek Goldman, head of the theater department at Georgetown University, a veteran of adapting novels and other literary works for the theater. Even before Goldman and Harrow met, she had performed a few of the songs from the album in an evening reading of letters of Fitzgerald and Hemingway. And so, as Goldman puts it, “It was not a long stretch from there to realize the possibilities of a jazz musical in *Winter Dreams*.” Like other collaborators of Harrow who are also friends of hers, Goldman spoke appreciatively of the give-and-take between them, over a period of about two years as several drafts of a script emerged. The script is, at this writing, soon to head into its second workshop reading in New York.

The fall of 2006 took Harrow to Japan to perform, a first for her. Because of her commitments to her literary jazz albums and associated activities, she had been too busy to perform for several years. But, as with everything I have heard her tell me about, she plunged into the trip with gusto and was rewarded and refreshed by the experience. She found the audience at the club, like most Japanese jazz audiences, well informed and hip. In a scenario that is often repeated by jazz musicians visiting Japan, Harrow found that her audience knew who she was and what albums she had recorded—in fact, some fans brought their forty-year-old LPs of hers for her to sign. So successful was her visit that four of her CDs were reissued there.

Less than twenty-four hours after we met for several hours of conversation over two days in June 2006, Harrow sent me some excerpts from her journal. Finding them again, I was struck by how accurately and acutely they assess her life and work. When I interviewed her, she joked with me about how she lived “a very examined life,” and I did not think much of that. But now I do. I offer these paragraphs not only as a summary of my own observations and perceptions of Nancy and her place in the pantheon of jazz but also as a promise that the best of life and work is yet to come. She writes:

I started out as a singer singing about love, desire, loss, betrayal, and memory, things that preoccupied me then. And as the years went by, the songs have changed some and have become about self-affirmation, independence, dreams, introspection. Then in a third stage the songs were about mortality, secrets, loss, and finally making a name, being remembered, recognition, longing and aspiration, jadedness, going on in spite of obstacles, changing, and looking back.

This evolution came about because I have sung longer than my adolescent preoccupations stayed with me. Or if they are still there, they are disguised now. The five literary albums have allowed me to get out of my own skin and express what someone else felt, like an actor does. Now I am using what I am moved by in literature as well as what I am moved by in music. Writing I admire, musicians I admire, and I put my own oar in with the lyrics and the melodies.

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