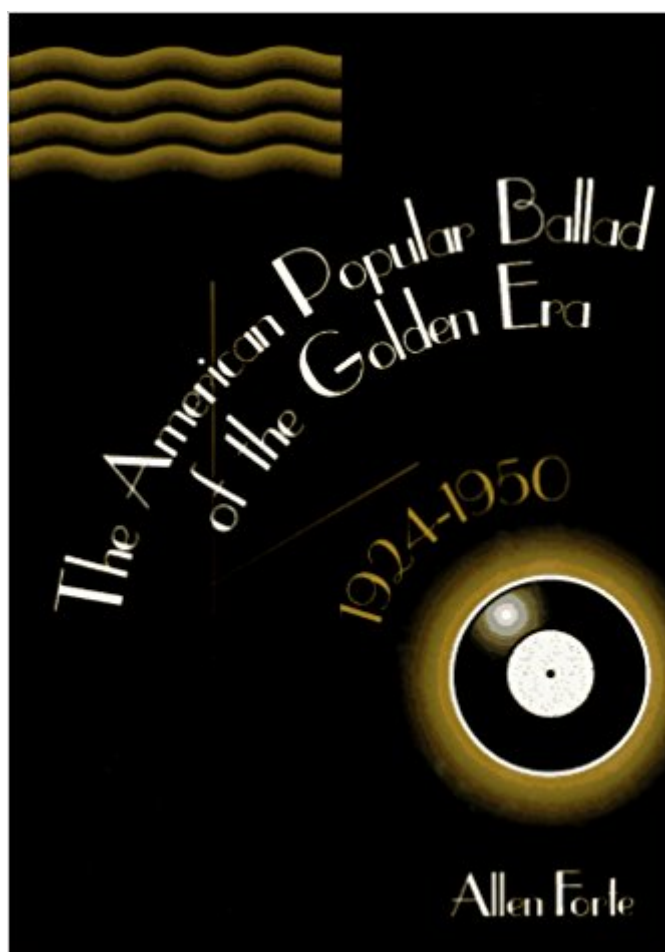


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The American Popular Ballad Of The Golden Era, 1924-1950: A Study In Musical Design



Synopsis

In this pathbreaking book, Allen Forte uses modern analytical procedures to explore the large repertoire of beautiful love songs written during the heyday of American musical theater, the Big Bands, and Tin Pan Alley. Covering the work of such songwriters as Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, and Harold Arlen, he seeks to illuminate this extraordinary music indigenous to America by revealing its deeper organizational characteristics. In so doing, he aims to establish it as a unique corpus of music that deserves more intensive study and appreciation by scholars and connoisseurs in the broader fields of American popular music and jazz. Expressing much of the traditional tonality associated with European music in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the love songs of the Golden Age are shown to draw on a rich variety of elements--popular harmony, idiomatic lyric-writing, and Afro-American dance rhythms. His analyses of such songs as "Embraceable You" or "Yesterdays" in particular exemplify his ability to convey the sublime, unpretentious simplicity of this great music.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Co-Winner of the 1997 Wallace Berry Distinguished Book Award, Society for Music Theory "He brings the technique to bear on American popular ballads of the 'Golden Age.'... The book is brilliantly planned and ... elegantly written."--The Times Literary Supplement

The author is a professor of the theory of music at Yale. As such, he's on to something here, but in his hands American popular music becomes little more than an academic subject. Missing in his

heavyhanded academese is the accessibility that has made these songs so popular in the first place. As a pianist who plays these songs over and over and who takes them seriously as a pre-eminent American contribution to world culture, I learned little except some biographical facts (inexplicably, though he has a gender-oriented chapter on women in this genre, he leaves out Dorothy Fields, one of the best in either sex). Additionally, the book is not inexpensive and no discount is offered. My thanks to for its liberal return policy. Note: There's an enthusiastic five-star review of this book which I suspect was written by the author or a close friend. It's undeserved. Alex Wilder's American Popular Music is much the better book, and much cheaper, too!

The author examines a selection of standard popular ballads, using Schenkerian analysis, a technique developed for analyzing the deeper structures of classical music and one very important in the field of musicology. This approach offers a new perspective on this beloved repertoire and reveals both its similarities to and differences from Western art music. The introductions to each analysis--offering general information--can be enjoyed by all; and the analyses themselves, while complex, are fascinating for the scholar. Altogether, this book helps instill a new respect for these popular song composers. Only partially appropriate for the general reader, this book is essential reading for those seeking a more scholarly approach to the topic.

According to its blurb this book "seeks to illuminate this extraordinary music indigenous to America by revealing its deeper organizational characteristics". Professional music theorists and graduate students familiar with the earlier and notorious "The Structure of Atonal Music" know that this is something more ominous than "heavy handed academese". The author's method of "revealing...deeper organizational characteristics" is to arbitrarily circle arbitrary sets of notes, assign them meaningless names like "4-17", and make trivial assertions about the integers from zero to eleven. If you're interested in American popular music you should get hold of something that really has to do with American popular music, not this.

More analytical than Wilder's similar reference, but Wilder covers a few more composers. Anybody who is serious about the subject will need both sources.

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