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Performance for the
Society for the Study of Social Problems
and the
American Sociological Association

Jocelyn Zelasko
(Oakland University), Soprano

Amanda Sabelhaus
(Oakland University), Piano

Saturday, August 22, 2015

Jane Addams Hull-House Museum
800 S. Halsted Street,
Chicago, Illinois.

Eleanor Smith's

Hull House Songs

Program:

Introductory Remarks, Jessica Payette (Oakland University)

Franz Schubert, "Gretchen am Spinnrade"
(Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel), 1814.

Gustav Mahler, "Das irdische Leben" (The Earthly Life), 1892.

Carrie Jacobs-Bond, "Still Unexpressed," 1901.

Eleanor Smith, *Hull House Songs*, 1915.

"The Sweat-Shop" Lyric by Morris Rosenfeld

"The Shadow Child" Lyric by Harriet Monroe

"The Land of the Noonday Night" Lyric by Ernest Howard Crosby

"Suffrage Song (Let Us Sing As We Go)" Lyric by James Weber Linn

"Prayer" Lyric by Matthew Arnold

Closing Remarks, Graham Cassano (Oakland University)

JANE ADDAMS
HULL-HOUSE
MUSEUM



Sponsored by:
The Jane Addams Hull-House Museum,
Critical Sociology (Sage), and the
Oakland University Department of Music,
Theatre and Dance.

Program Notes:

Eleanor Smith was director of the Hull-House Music School during Jane Addams' tenure as Head Resident. Hull-House music programs were central to the settlement's mission and contributed to the development of talented young working class musicians across Chicago. But another aspect of Smith's work remains relatively unknown. In the years between 1900 and 1915, she composed a series of social protest songs Hull-House residents used for political organizing and culture building. They were usually performed in Hull-House concerts attended by neighborhood residents, Hull-House residents, and, sometimes, prominent members of Chicago society. And the performers were often students from the Hull-House Music School, including immigrant workers and the children of immigrant workers. Jane Addams wished *Hull House Songs* to fill a void hidden in the intersection of American musical and political culture. She differentiates Smith's songs from "old fashioned songs [that] with the exception of those of religion and patriotism, chiefly expressed the individualistic emotions of love, hope or melancholy." Against this old fashioned standard, *Hull House Songs* presents the "imperative" demand "that socialized emotions should also find musical expression." Like nations and religions, movements for social justice require art, and more particularly, song, to express, sustain, and inspire solidarity. Thus, the songbook is intended to provide the "inspiration and solace" that the "manifold movements of our contemporaries...so obviously need." In this sense, *Hull House Songs* might seem to resemble its historical contemporary, the Wobblies' *Little Red Songbook*. But against the Wobblies desire to "fan the flames of discontent," and their tendency to demonize capitalists and bosses, Addams argued that any critique of capitalism that simply attacked capitalists remained a partial representation, and produced an incomplete community. So in her settings of the poems for *Hull House Songs*, Eleanor Smith expurgates any reference to class conflict and the privileges of the bosses and capitalists. The compositions collected in *Hull House Songs* are critiques of capitalism as a system, not capitalists as individuals. Both Smith's songs, and Addams' essays on labor, attack the systemic elements of exploitation, while, at the same time, attempting to create solidarity between classes (against capitalism). In any case, this was the carefully crafted message behind *Hull House Songs*: Class struggle is against capitalism and exploitation, not against bosses and capitalists.

In 1901, the most renowned Yiddish language poet in the United States, Morris Rosenfeld (1862-1923), gave a reading at Hull-House. Infused with the imagery of class struggle and capitalist exploitation, Rosenfeld's work became the source for Smith's "The Sweat-Shop." In a translation by James Webber Linn,

Addams' nephew and future biographer, the song evokes the dehumanizing impact of proletarianization upon workers with the stirring cry: "We are machines!" But in his translation of the poem, Linn cuts some of the more biting critiques of the capitalist bosses, and cuts references to class struggle. The enemy of this song is capitalism, represented as a systemic process that destroys humanity and community.

Like "The Sweat-Shop," "The Shadow Child" attempts to humanize worker experience for a middle class audience potentially sympathetic to labor reform, while giving voice to immigrant workers' perception of their lives. The aim is not only to build solidarity within a class, but to enable communication across the class divide. Based upon a poem by the longtime friend of Hull-House and future editor of *Poetry* magazine, Harriet Monroe (1860-1936), "The Shadow Child" continues the critique of mechanized proletarianization, and adds to this a vivid portrayal of child and family labor in the sweatshop. "The big wheels grind us in their might/ And they will grind forever." In the poem, as in the song, this image of the struggling mother, and even more, the child, doomed to "feel the sunshine never," attempt to mobilize audience sentiment against capitalist exploitation by envisioning capitalism itself as an assault on mothers and children, and thus upon the community (or public) as a whole.

"The Sweat-Shop" and "The Shadow Child" were both clearly rooted in the German lieder tradition, and both were central to the settlement house's mission. Writing in 1901 in response to Smith's forewarning that she was considering resignation from Hull-House, Addams reveals that "The Sweat-Shop" was a pivotal song for musical outreach, and for her it was personally emblematic of the magnitude of Smith's contributions to Hull-House: "If you had only written 'The Sweat-Shop' and taught it to the girls, it would be in my mind a complete justification for all the 'room' you ever took." In a 1916 article in the *Music Supervisors' Journal* Smith herself designates "The Sweat-Shop" and "The Shadow Child" as a complementary pair and labels them as "modern dramatic labor songs," which she composed to improve upon the content of "spurious labor songs in which labor is only an incident in the conventional love song." While Schubert's *Gretchen am spinnrade* ("Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel," 1814) might be such a "spurious labor song," it is also almost certainly the model for "The Sweat-Shop." Both songs feature a *perpetuum mobile* accompaniment of continual sixteenth notes to represent the unceasing presence of the machine, which is only disrupted when the girl singing becomes lost in her thoughts and questions whether her mind and body

will ever be freed from this imprisonment. Smith sets Morris Rosenfeld's poem to a quintessentially Schubertian modified strophic form, in which the music for each verse of the text is varied to better convey the poetic nuances.

Ernest Howard Crosby (1856-1907) was a popular writer and Christian social activist whose causes ranged from anti-imperialism and anti-racism, to vegetarianism and labor reform. His "The Land of the Noonday Night" forms the centerpiece of *Hull House Songs* and perhaps occupies that central position because it is the most poignant expression of the demoralization that results from labor exploitation, while, at the same time proposing a solution to the problems all these songs express: socialism. Smith composed "Noonday Night" as a strophic form, in which all four verses are set to the same melody and accompaniment, to project the text with utmost clarity. The poem and song were both written in solidarity with striking Pennsylvania miners during the 1902 anthracite strike. The lyric describes the struggles and poverty of the miners and the difficulty of their work. And both song and poem end with a radical rejection of conventional ideas about private property. But while the song challenges private property rights and the private ownership of public resources, Smith's version cuts most references to class conflict and class privilege. Crosby suggests that the legal system is bought and paid for by the "men who own the mines" and "live like kings of old." But for Addams and Smith, strong legal protections were the only way in which an otherwise disempowered working class could reclaim its rights. These expurgated stanzas did not fit with the civil anti-capitalist reforms Hull-House hoped to accomplish by using the state as a battleground for public sympathy.

Hull House Songs was never meant to be a song-cycle. And the last two compositions don't always echo the style of the previous songs. Nonetheless, they are thematically connected to the others. "Suffrage Song," with a lyric by James Weber Linn, almost sounds as if it were written for the picket line. The marching rhythm militarizes the struggle, and the lyric provides the historical link between the suffrage movement of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and the twentieth century labor struggles Smith documents in the "The Sweat-Shop," "The Shadow Child," and "The Land of the Noonday Night." "Prayer," excerpted from Matthew Arnold's "Stagirius," is the only song in the collection set to the text of a deceased European poet. Jane Addams was fond of Arnold's work and describes the poem's function in *Hull House Songs* as "a prayer to be saved from the eternal question as to whether in any real sense the world is governed in the

interest of righteousness." Despite the religious overtones, Smith generates a modern and secular sensibility by steering her music for this text away from archaic and liturgical models, instead utilizing an abundance of chromatic mediants, all varieties of seventh chords, extended tertian chords, and chordal parallelism to replicate the vibrant soundscape of early-twentieth century French impressionism and American popular music idioms. And with the lyric, Smith once again emphasized the desire for civil discourse and mutual understanding across classes. "Let all doubts be dumb, Let all words be mild/ All strife reconciled, All pains beguiled!"

—Adapted from Graham Cassano and Jessica Payette, "*Hull House Songs* and the 'Public'" in Graham Cassano and Rima Lunin Schultz (eds), *Eleanor Smith's Hull House Songs: The Music of Protest and Hope in Jane Addams's Chicago* (forthcoming). Citations available upon request.

Biographies:

Graham Cassano is Associate Professor of Sociology at Oakland University in Rochester, MI. His most recent book, *A New Kind of Public: Community, Solidarity, and Political Economy in New Deal Cinema, 1935-1948* (Haymarket 2015), examines the intersection of race, popular culture, and the U.S. labor movement in the early twentieth century.

Jessica Payette is Associate Professor of Music at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. She received her Ph.D. in musicology from Stanford University with research specialization in fin-de-siècle Vienna and twentieth-century opera and ballet.

Amanda Sabelhaus is a staff accompanist at Oakland University and a Touring Artist for the Michigan Opera Theatre. She has performed on the grand stage of Carnegie Hall and has served as the official accompanist for the Metropolitan Opera Council Auditions. Since 2012, she has served as a resident pianist at the Sir James Galway International Flute Festival held in Weggis, Switzerland. Amanda resides in Troy, Michigan with her husband and two teenage daughters.

Jocelyn Zelasko is a versatile musician and teaching artist who has performed a variety of music from classical to contemporary in festivals and concerts around the world, including in Trinidad and Tobago, Greece, Canada, and the United States. In addition to her work as a performing artist, Ms. Zelasko is a lecturer of music theory and a PhD candidate at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan.