TFPZ
Presents

GEORGE ANTHEIL

A Modern Mind

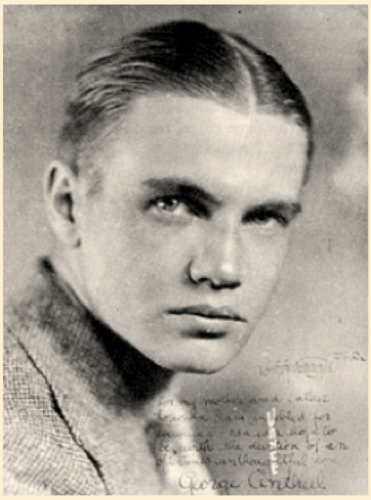
The Life of a Composer, Writer, Inventor, and All Around Renaissance Man

Issue No. 15

George Johann Carl Antheil

was born July 8, 1900 in Trenton, New Jersey

His parents, both German immigrants, owned, operated and lived above a shoe store



Raised bilingually, George was educated in the city public schools, although he dropped out of Trenton Central High School in 1918

His musical prowess, however, often brought him to nearby Philadelphia, where he eventually caught the eye of musical patron Mary Louise Curtis Bok, who arranged for him to study at Settlement Music School

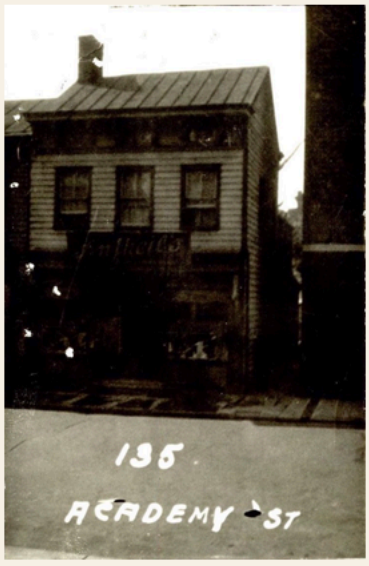
In 1922, a 21-year-old George left Trenton for Europe

After spending some time in Paris and traveling around performing concerts, he arrived in Germany, where he worked as an assistant musical director in Berlin

In addition to composing ballet and theatre, George's first opera, "Transatlantic," premiered in 1930 at the Frankfurt Opera and was a huge success*

* This opera has everything: Politics, gangsters, fast food (no really) and something called a "bathtub scene." The only thing that's missing is a large, horn-helmeted woman!

However, the growing Nazi party did not take to his avant-garde style or "Bad Boy" persona and he returned to the United States in 1933



By this point, his parents had moved their shoe store to 135 Academy Street, across from the Trenton Free Public Library

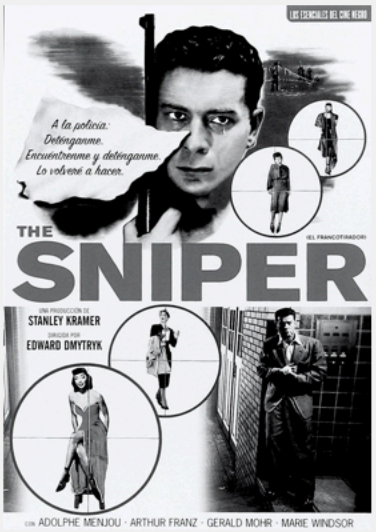
After some time in Trenton, George tried his luck in New York City

HOLLYWOOD CALLS

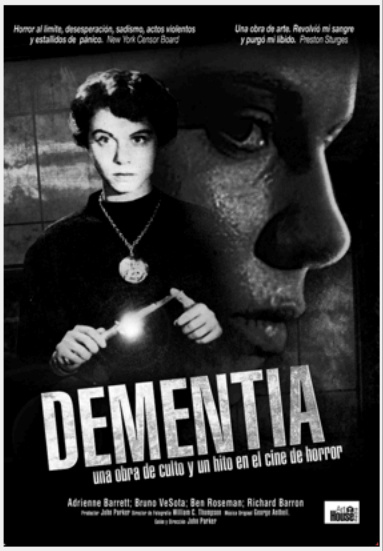
In 1936, George moved to Hollywood, where he became an in-demand film composer working for big name directors like Cecil B. DeMille and Nicholas Ray

His more than 30 film scores include:

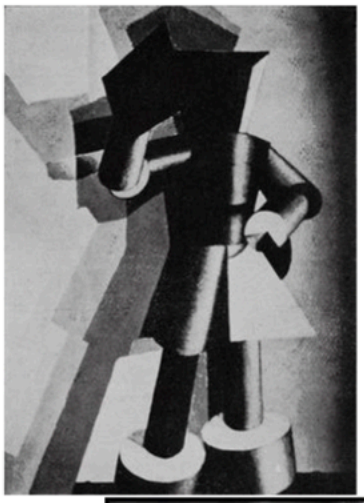
- **The Scoundrel (1935, his first film score)**
- **The Plainsman (1936)**
- **Tokyo Joe (1949)**
- **In a Lonely Place (starring Humphrey Bogart, 1950)**
- **The Sniper (1952)**
- **The Pride and the Passion (1957)**



The 1955 film 'Dementia' contains only his score and is otherwise silent



Ballet Mécanique



George's best known work is arguably Ballet Mécanique, originally written for the experimental film of the same name

Premiering at Carnegie Hall in 1927, the scaled-down American debut was a disaster, mainly due to a host of technical difficulties and George's oversized ambition

Critics were merciless, calling it "boring, artless, and naive"

This bad showing greatly affected George's reputation in the United States, which never fully recovered in his lifetime

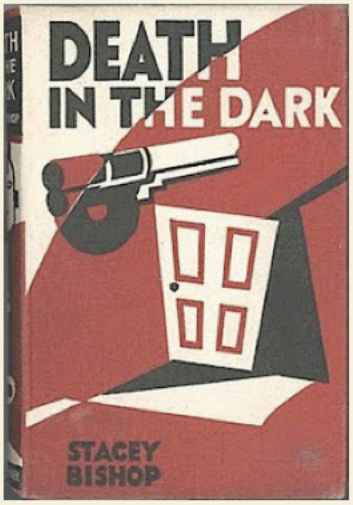
Today the work is considered a masterpiece in its field and has gone on to inspire other composers such as Sergei Prokofiev and Erik Satie

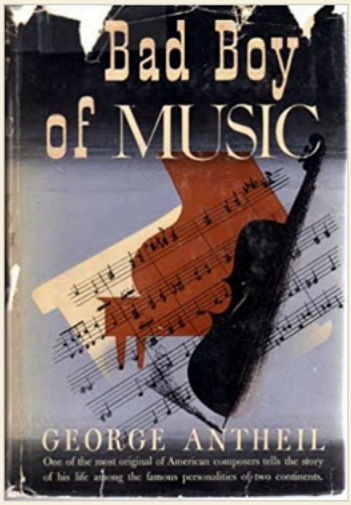
More Than Music

George wasn't just a composer

In 1930, he wrote a murder mystery called "Death in the Dark" under the pseudonym 'Stacey Bishop'

From 1936 to 1940, he was the film music reporter and critic for Modern Music magazine





His memoir, 'Bad Boy of Music,' named after his earlier persona, was released in 1945 and became a bestseller

George was also involved in politics

Before World War II, he was involved with the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, no doubt an outcome of his treatment in Germany

The Inventors

In 1941 George met actress Hedy Lamarr

Together they developed a radio guidance system that used codes to synchronize frequencies

Their original plan was to use the system to give torpedoes made for the war effort the ability to "hop" frequency channels

These days the system, which George originally created via a player piano, is better known for its use in telecommunications

For their efforts, they were inducted posthumously into the National Inventors Hall Of Fame in 2014

George Antheil passed away on
February 12, 1959 in New York City

He was 58 years old

He is buried in Riverview Cemetery
in his hometown of Trenton

As an artist, composer and scholar, he leaves behind a legacy of innovation, discovery and creativity

He is the very definition of the phrase,
"Trenton Makes, The World Takes"

Thanks For Reading!

For more information on
Trenton Free Public Zine
visit us at
www.trentonlib.org/zine-library
or call (609) 392-7188

Thanks again to Laura for compiling the info!

© 2022