

Selected Non-Indianist Works of Charles Sanford Skilton: *The Witch's Daughter* – A Cantata for Soprano and Baritone Soli, Chorus and Orchestra (1918) and *Electra* – Music of the *Electra* of Sophocles, Composed for Women's Chorus and Orchestra (1920)

by

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Abstract

Charles Sanford Skilton (1868-1941) is widely remembered as an exponent of the Indianist Movement in musical composition, which was important from about 1880 to 1920. Little investigation has been completed on his works outside of his Indianist interest, leaving many gaps in our knowledge of his music. While compiling materials for this thesis, it was observed that Skilton, now nearly forgotten as a serious art music composer, was well received as a composer, theorist, and pedagogue during his life. Much of his extant works are comparable to Indianist composers such as Arthur Farwell and Charles Wakefield Cadman. Skilton was known for more than just his Indianist works; his legacy as an American music pioneer is quite worthy of acknowledgement.

This thesis examines Skilton's life, his compositions, public reception, and notable performances with specific focus on two selected works outside of his Indianist interest, *The Witch's Daughter* – A Cantata for Soprano and Baritone Soli, Chorus and Orchestra (1918), and *Electra* – Music of the *Electra* of Sophocles, composed for Women's Chorus and Orchestra (1920). These works together shed light on attributes of Skilton's compositional style and his relation to composers of the same period.

Acknowledgements

The inspiration for this thesis can be traced to a lecture given by Dr. Charles Freeman in a music history course at the University of Kansas. It was there my interest in eighteenth and nineteenth century American music was heightened. Upon taking an additional American music seminar, Dr. Freeman suggested that I look further into the life and music of Charles S. Skilton. My deepest gratitude is extended to Dr. Freeman for his encouragement to begin such a project.

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Introduction

To define a distinctly American sound is difficult. It is challenging for a nation, known as a cultural melting pot, to find one genre, composer, ethnic group or period and claim it to be distinctly American in sound or origin. First, one must pinpoint original elements of American music that were not influenced by a foreign source. Most of this influence in the area of concert music was heavily European. Many American composers during the nineteenth century were educated with primarily German training.

Perhaps the only real sounds that lie completely in the soil of the United States are the native folk music of African Americans and Native Americans. There was a rise of interest among composers of European extraction from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century in using American Indian themes. The themes used by American composers like Arthur Farwell, Thurlow Lieurance, and Charles Wakefield Cadman were an effort at capturing the beauty and mystery of Native American songs. The employment of these themes was an attempt to define an American sound and even more so, the American composer.

This thesis will focus on an American composer, Charles Sanford Skilton (1868-1941), who was mostly associated with the aforementioned American Indianist movement. Skilton believed that American music, as well as the subject matter, should be distinctly American. He stated, “It is not too much to hope that, in our fusion of the nations, we may acquire enough passion of Italy, the industry of Germany, the patriotism of Russia, to place our country next in the line of musical progress.”¹

¹ Charles Sanford Skilton, *Conductors and Non-Conductors* (Connecticut: Music Teachers National Association, 1912), 9.

Biographical Information

Charles Sanford Skilton was a New Englander, born 16 August 1868 in Northampton, Massachusetts. He received little or no formal music training as a child. In fact, his mother and father greatly discouraged his interest in music and required him to pursue other studies. His middle-class family consisted of his father, Otis Avery Skilton, and mother, born Adeline Maria Sanford.² His father, originally hailing from Connecticut, was a descendent of Henry Skilton, who was born in Coventry, England and a veteran of the Revolutionary War.³ His maternal side migrated to America from England in 1634 and also settled in Connecticut.⁴

Charles Skilton received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale University in 1889. However, music was still his primary interest. His parents encouraged that he teach to secure an income and steady occupation. Should a desire to pursue music still persist, his parents agreed he might do so upon completion of a period of teaching. He taught language courses at a preparatory school in Newburgh, New York from 1889 until 1891.

After completing this tenure his wish to study music was still intact. He then departed the United States for Germany in 1891, where he studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin.⁵ There, his pedagogues included Otis Boise, Benno Härtel, and Woldemar Bargiel,⁶ composition,

² Donald M. Swarthout, "Charles S. Skilton, Master Musician, Passes." *The Graduate Magazine University of Kansas*, March-April 1941, 12.

³ Ibid.

⁴ William Elsey Connelley, *History of Kansas: State and People* (Chicago: American Historical Society, Inc., 1928), 1811.

⁵ John Tasker Howard, *Charles Sanford Skilton* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1929), 23.

⁶ Woldemar Bargiel (1827-1897) was the most notable of Skilton's pedagogues in Berlin, Germany. He was the son of Berlin music teacher Adolph Bargiel. He was taught piano, violin, and harmony by his father. His mother Mariane Wieck (who divorced Friedrich Wieck in 1824) was the mother of Clara Wieck (Schumann). He was educated at the Leipzig Conservatory where he studied theory and composition. Edward Dannreuther and Elisabeth Schmiedel. "Bargiel, Woldemar."

and Albert Heintz, organ. He remained there until 1893. His time spent in Germany was also a large influence on Skilton's idea of the importance of a good conductor and his formulation that music education must be intentional as well as collaborative. For example, in 1911 Skilton published a paper entitled "Conductors and Non-Conductors" which was presented at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Music Teachers' National Association (MTNA) at the University of Michigan. In this paper, he tells of the necessary training for a good conductor and how this is achieved in Germany. His view throughout is clear that America must focus on the present "meager system of musical training in schools and colleges" before she can hope to produce any great musicians and conductors.⁷

Upon his return to America, Skilton acquired a position as director of music at the Salem Academy and College in Winston, North Carolina. There, he also assumed responsibilities conducting the Salem Philharmonic. He held both of these positions from 1893 to 1896.

He spent the winter of 1896 studying music in New York City at the Metropolitan College of Music. His teachers included Kate Chittenden, piano, and Harry Rowe Shelley, organ. He also took up composition studies with the great American master, Dudley Buck.⁸ It was under Buck that he began to gain attention as a composer when his Violin Sonata in G Minor was awarded first place in a competition held by the Music Teachers National Association.⁹

In 1898, he took a position as instructor of piano and music theory at the State Normal School in Trenton, New Jersey. While in New Jersey he performed frequently as a soloist on the

Oxford Music Online, "Woldemar Bargiel," accessed 7 January 2012, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/02048>.

⁷ Charles S. Skilton, *Conductors and Non-Conductors* (Hartford, Connecticut: Music Teachers National Association, 1912).

⁸ Howard, 357.

⁹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, University Archives, PP 460, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Box 4, Folder 1.

organ. He presented the works of many great composers such as Edward MacDowell, Franz Liszt, and Ludwig van Beethoven.¹⁰ Also while in New Jersey he founded the Monday Morning Musical Club, a civic project intended to increase musical participation in the community.¹¹

He soon joined the faculty of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas upon receiving an invitation to assume the position of Dean of the School of Fine Arts as well as professor in organ and music theory.¹² He began making immediate contributions to the performing arts in the Lawrence community as well as statewide. He served in positions such as chairman for the State Teacher's Association and as the first dean of the Kansas chapter of the American Guild of Organists. He also made strides to increase the amount and variety of concerts heard by the public through starting the May Music Festival. This was held annually and often featured major orchestras and traveling soloists, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.

Shortly after arriving in Kansas, he returned to New York City in December of 1903 to marry Helen Maude Grignard. Many accounts note that their marriage was indeed very happy. They were wed for nearly 20 years until the untimely death of Mrs. Skilton, due to heart disease, in July of 1922.¹³ She was survived by three children in addition to her husband.

While Skilton's presence at KU was mostly positive, there were concerns about his work as dean. The institution of a new Board of Administration in 1913 would ultimately be responsible for his removal from the position. They, citing Skilton with a lack of administrative

¹⁰ Ibid., Box 4, Folder 2.

¹¹ David Ewen, *Composers Since 1900* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1969), 542.

¹² J. Bunker Clark and Paul R. Laird. *Music & Dance at KU: A History of Two Performing Arts at the University of Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: School of Fine Arts, 2007). Skilton was the third dean to serve in the School of Fine Arts. He was preceded by William MacDonald, 1884-1890, and George Barlow Penny, 1890-1903. He is followed by Harold L. Butler, 1915-1923.

¹³ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 4, Folder 1.

abilities and “eccentricities,” decided in February 1914 that Skilton should no longer serve as dean of the School of Fine Arts. Chancellor Strong made a plea to the Board admitting Skilton’s shortcomings from an administrative standpoint but also maintained that Skilton was well-liked and respected by the faculty and students and his “musical knowledge and ability, scholarship, ideals, and moral standards were of the highest.”¹⁴ This allowed for one additional year as dean granted by the Board. However, upon review in 1915, the Board was still unhappy with his performance and denied him the position. He stepped down as dean in 1915, choosing to serve solely as a professor.

Throughout his tenure as dean, little to no compositional output is known. It is quite possible the administrative and advisory responsibilities as dean and professor left minimal time for him to compose. After his dismissal as dean, he reached new levels of local, national, and international acclaim as a composer as he generated the bulk of his compositions.

Another career breakthrough for Skilton came in 1915. He had taken on a private music theory pupil of Native American descent, Robert R. DePoe.¹⁵ DePoe, a student at Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, was also the hereditary chief of the Rogue River Indians in Oregon. DePoe proposed he would sing traditional tribal songs to Skilton in exchange for free lessons in music theory and counterpoint so that the songs would be preserved on paper. Skilton favored this exchange and this likely sparked his interest in Native American music.¹⁶

¹⁴ Griffin, *The University of Kansas: A History* (University Press of Kansas Library of Congress, 1974), 353.

¹⁵ James Smith, *Charles Sanford Skilton (1868-1941) Kansas Composer* (MA thesis, University of Kansas, 1979), 17.

¹⁶ Sketches of these themes were found in his scrapbooks.

Compositions and Style

For the duration of Skilton's compositional career, his styles included late Romanticism, Impressionism, and Neo-Classicism. He remained true to his personal style, primarily as an Indianist, rich with Romanticized motives, phrases, and harmonies. His compositions, for all intents and purposes, are of a traditional mold and adhere to conventional forms. It is difficult to follow an evolution of Skilton's style as the bulk of his output was composed post-1915, which occurred in his mature life.

In general, Skilton employed diatonic, harmonic styles with frequent chromatic alterations to the melodic line. As a result, there are frequent appearances of altered diatonic scales, diminished second scale degrees, augmented ninth and thirteenth chords, and even use of the whole-tone scale. Contrapuntally, Skilton most often adhered to fugato-like, imitative entrances. This is most readily observed throughout his choral writings, however, one can also observe a great deal of homophonic writing in these choral works. Furthermore, he composed flowing, conjunct melodies, many of which are quite memorable upon a single hearing. These characteristics are seen in most of his works outside of his Indian writings and form the basis for his compositional style.

Skilton's best-known work is *Two Indian Dances for Grand Orchestra*. This was originally scored for a string quartet. The first performance most likely occurred on 19 February 1916 by the Zoellner String Quartet at the University of New Hampshire.¹⁷ In the summer of 1916, while at the MacDowell Colony, Skilton rescored this piece for orchestra. The first performance of that version was 29 October 1916 with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.

¹⁷ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 2, Program Notes.

According to program notes found in Skilton's scrapbooks, his *Two Indian Dances* were based on native melodies supplied by his student Robert. R. DePoe.

The "Deer Dance" as described by Mr. Skilton,

... is a feature of the annual memorial service of the Rogue River tribe for those departed during the year. After a short mournful melody by the chief singer and women there is a commemorative speech by the chief, suggested by the violoncello solo and the dancing begins. The singers render a melody in two-four time while the drum plays in three four, not an uncommon effect in Indian music. While this is going on, the dancers pass in and out among the spectators, imitating the hunter pursuing the deer and other exploits of the departed.

The "Deer Dance" was one of the first melodies dictated to Skilton by his student DePoe. Depoe reportedly played a steady 3/4 rhythm on his drum while the sung melody was in 2/4. This idea of mixed meter resonated strongly with Skilton. Upon questioning DePoe about this he replied that this was the traditional manner in which the song was performed and he knew nothing about the mixed meter.¹⁸

Regarding the second dance, Mr. Skilton wrote,

The War Dance is a Cheyenne melody repeated over and over again in different ways, accompanied by the constant thudding of the drum and developing to a frenzy of excitement.

Dario Müller's liner notes in the album, *American Indianists Vol. 1*, suggests the *basso ostinato* in "War Dance" is similar to Chopin's Polonaise Op. 53. Skilton frequently uses the technique of *basso ostinato*, as it resembles greatly that of a drum traditionally used by American Indians.¹⁹ It is again present in his composition "Kickapoo Social Dance." Roughly four years after the publication of "Deer Dance" and "War Dance," he composed four additional

¹⁸ Smith, 18.

¹⁹ Dario Müller, *The American Indianists, Vol. 1* (Canada: Marco Polo, 8.223715, 1993), 2.

movements and entitled the new full work *Suite Primeval*. These new additions were: “Sunrise Song” from the Winnebago, “Gambling Song” from the Rogue River, “Flute Serenade” of the Sioux, and “Moccasin Game” also of Winnebago. The only available recordings of the “War Dance” and the Sioux “Flute Serenade” exist in piano reduction.²⁰

Two Indian Dances held popularity in cinema theaters as well. Sandor Harmati mentions these works being performed by a pit orchestra or organist during the two western films, *The Covered Wagon* (1923) and *Vanishing Race* (1925), before sound was added to film.²¹

His Indian-based musical compositions also included a three-act opera entitled *Kalopin*. This piece was, reportedly, inspired by the New Madrid Fault Earthquake in the Central United States of 1811 and the causes that were attributed to it by Chickasaw and Choctaw tribal legends.²² He completed this work in 1927 but it was never performed. Also, *The Sun Bride* and *The Day of Gayomair* contain content on Indian melodies as well as folklore. *The Sun Bride* received a public performance via radio on the National Broadcasting Company in the spring of 1930.²³ While much of his popularity as a composer does lie in this specific medium of Indianist composition, Skilton composed in nearly all genres and for various ensembles and orchestrations.

For example, his oratorio *The Guardian Angel* is based upon a legend of early Moravian settlers in North Carolina and a cantata, *Ticonderoga*, uses a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson as its libretto with subject matter regarding the American Revolution. Works such as *Lenore*, a cantata for baritone solo, quartet, chorus, and orchestra, using words by Edgar Allen Poe and

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 4, Program notes, Omaha Symphony Orchestra, 27 January 1926.

²² Howard, 358.

²³ Ibid.

chamber music, including various trios and string quartets, include no Native American content.²⁴ Skilton's known output consists of twenty-five chamber works (all of varied instrumentation), twenty choral works, twenty songs, eighteen orchestral works, sixteen pieces for organ, eight piano compositions, six cantatas, three operas, two masses, two works of incidental music, and one oratorio.

The notion of basing music on national folklore and popular melodies was not new. While evidence of nationalist ideas in music can be traced for generations, this practice most formally occurs in the Romantic period during the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century. Nationalism in music can be seen vividly in composers such as the Russian Five: Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin; Polish born Fryderyk Chopin; and the Czech, Antonín Dvořák.

Perhaps no one had more influence on American composers seeking nationalist ideals than that of Dvořák. He spent three years in America between 1892 and 1895 at the Director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York.²⁵ There he attempted to instill upon his students the desire to compose in distinctly national styles. This, for a country known to have an eclectic mix of culture, was no easy task. Dvořák, however, was a master at capturing and scoring sentiments and impressions in music. One can argue the best-known work of Dvořák composed while he was in America is the *New World Symphony*. This piece, first performed in 1893 by the New York Philharmonic, served as inspiration for native composers to seek content that was distinctly American. Charles Skilton, in a sense, belongs with a group of innovative composers seeking to define an American sound through use of native melodies and folklore.

²⁴ Smith, Appendix B.

²⁵ Howard, 699.

When asked about the point of view of his oratorio, *The Guardian Angel* (1925), Skilton stated, “it is to reproduce the piety of the founders of America, both as represented in the New England colonies and in some parts of the South. It is truly American in its production and in its characters. The writing of American themes by Americans, in their own way, is, I believe, the only way to develop a real American music.”²⁶

Reception of Skilton’s Music

During his life Skilton was not only a respected professor and pedagogue; his compositions were received well by many audiences. Many reviews and letters kept by Skilton exist in his personal scrapbooks. One newspaper review entitled “They Gave Skilton A Real Ovation” with subtitles including:

When his composition was played last evening for the first time the audience cheered him.

Theme and Variation in E Minor

Faculty Concert last Evening Was One of the Best Ever Given Here

Dean Skilton’s Standing as a Composer is Assured – Those who Took Part Last Evening in the Concert.

The review goes on to say,

Charles S. Skilton, dean of the Fine Arts School of the University of Kansas was given a big ovation last evening at the University when for the first time his composition “Theme and Variation in E Minor” was played. Following the rendition of that piece by Miss Anna Sweeney, there was a great applause and Dean Skilton was called before the audience. The composition is a classic one and a piece that will be given its standing in the musical world.

Dean Skilton’s fame as a composer is becoming known widespread among musicians. The play of the piece last evening by Miss Sweeney was done in such

²⁶ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2, *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 15 January 1926.

a manner that its interpretation was made clear to the audience, and Miss Sweeney is to be given unusual praise for the manner in which she played the composition.

More than 200 people were present at the annual concert of the fine arts faculty last evening and the program was indeed creditable.²⁷

Skilton's involvement with the Annual Music Festival in Lawrence was significant.²⁸ The Ninth Annual Music Festival occurred in Lawrence, KS in Robinson Gymnasium on 18 and 19 April 1912. There was great variety of compositions performed throughout this festival including works by Rachmaninoff, Schubert, Massenet, Wagner, and Beethoven. Among these European masters were the works of American composers MacDowell and Skilton. A review of Skilton's work during this festival appeared dated 20 April 1912 from the *Kansan* student newspaper and recalls:

The third and last concert was in a large part a local production. Professor Skilton in his first performance of his symphonic poem, "A Carolina Legend." To judge from the almost wild demonstration of approval that came at the end of the rendition, the music was not only of great beauty, but of a style clear and simple enough to be comprehended by an audience of ordinary people. This fact does not imply popularity in a disparaging sense, but rather that it appealed to that inborn feeling of harmony that is in every man and makes the love of acoustic harmony a real and valuable human faculty.

A letter from Kansas State Teachers' Association Lilian Scott dated 20 November 1915 praises Skilton as a performer of music, not just as a composer and pedagogue:

²⁷ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2, Folder 1, Review from the *Daily Kansan* or *Lawrence Journal World*. Bibliographic information was not available on clipping. The concert most likely occurred after 19 October 1911 and before 1 November 1911 as those are the dates on the clippings before and after this entry.

²⁸ The music festival was established at the University of Kansas in 1904. Its aim was to provide members of the KU and Lawrence community with the highest quality of musicians within a broad scope of performances. Guest artists, including a visiting orchestra of national reputation, were often invited to perform. The Lawrence Merchants' Association, university faculty, and citizens of Lawrence provided financial support for the festival.

I desire to express to you, personally and in behalf of the Kansas State Teachers' Association, my thanks for the pleasure you gave us in your organ recital Friday morning. The first number on the program is always, more or less, at a disadvantage, yet, I am sure it was less in your case judging from the close attention that the 5,000 people present gave to your playing.²⁹

Also among the letters is a post card from Percy Grainger dated 20 June 1920 that reads:

Dear Mr. Skilton, Hearty thanks and your kind letter of May 13 and also for your fascinating Indian Sketches, which I am delighted to have from you.³⁰

The well-known "March King", John Philip Sousa, also commented on of Skilton's compositions. In a letter dated 19 March 1921 Sousa writes to Skilton:

My dear Mr. Skilton: A couple of times last season I played the war dance of your suite and I intend to incorporate the entire number in my concert at Willow Grove this summer . . . I believe that there is an interest in our Indian music and I sincerely trust that your number will become a fixture for the repertoire of our bands and orchestras. With best wishes, believe me, John Philip Sousa.³¹

Skilton was also well received by fellow composers. Richard Strauss, in the *New York Musical Courier*, wrote the following in acknowledgement of Skilton's *Two Indian Dances*:

I shall not fail to recommend it to my friends in Germany who are leaders of orchestras.³²

²⁹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2, Folder 2. This recital occurred at the fifty-third annual session of the Kansas State Teachers Association held in Topeka on 11-13 November 1915. Works performed by Skilton included Liszt's *Fantasia and Fugue on the Name B-A-C-H*; G.W. Stebbins, *A Memory*; and DeThier, *The Brook*. An audience of 5,000 is quite large given the time and location of Topeka, KS. This number could be an exaggeration as a venue for an audience of this size may not have even been available.

³⁰ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 2, *New York Musical Courier*, 20 July 1922.

Throughout his life, more than just fellow musicians also praised Skilton. He received a letter dated 16 May 1933 from the Rt. Rev. James Wise of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas stating:

Both Mrs. Wise and I enjoyed beyond measure being part and parcel of that large group of people who gathered together to do you honor on the anniversary of your completion of thirty years of service to the University and also hearing the wonderful music of “Ticonderoga” and the “American Indian Fantasy”. We are proud and happy to sit at your feet as a master musician and appreciate more than I can tell you the privilege we have of friendship with you and the members of your family.³³

Notable Performances

The works of Skilton were performed often throughout the early 1900s. Some of the most noted orchestras in the country were eager to perform his works, which is evident through personal letters he kept. Among his correspondence with Frederick Stock, conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, is as follows:

Dear Mr. Skilton – ...we have procured from your publishers score and parts of your “Indian Dances”. Although I cannot hold out any definite promise concerning a performance of same this season, I wish to say that both of the Dances appeal very much to me and that I shall try very hard to present them on one of our programs this year.³⁴

This letter was dated 8 November 1917. Skilton did not need to wait long as a performance in fact took place on 14-15 December 1917. His *Two Indian Dances* played alongside other works including Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony and Dukas’ Scherzo from the *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*.

³³ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 4.

³⁴ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2.

In January 1918 Skilton was invited by Carl Busch to conduct his *Two Indian Dances* with the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra.³⁵ This performance took place on 15 February 1918. Skilton's Washington debut occurred much later on 17 December 1931. *Two Indian Dances* was performed with the works of Beethoven's Overture to *Egmont*, Jean Sibelius' *Finlandia* and others.³⁶

Skilton wrote vivid and picturesque melodies. His treatment of rather unadorned songs of Native American content is impressive. He created for himself a style rich with many European influences and also one that was distinctly individual. As stated in a *New York Musical Courier* review (date unknown) of a performance:

Mr. Skilton endeavored as nearly as possible to retain the impressions of the Indians of the West in their primeval surroundings; in other words, to write the music as the Indians would like to have it written, and not develop it into the symphonic idea of the white man.³⁷

In addition to orchestral performances of Skilton's *Two Indian Dances*, there were interpretations of his work by the dancer Lada.³⁸

³⁵ Carl Busch (1862-1943), Danish-American composer and music pedagogue noted for work within the Indianist movement and many works based on themes from the Western United States. He served as the director of the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra from 1911-1918.

³⁶ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2 and Box 4.

³⁷ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2.

³⁸ Lada, hailed as a pioneer of interpretive dancing, frequently danced to the works of Skilton, and many others, in performance. No additional information regarding Lada has been located.



Figure 1
Charles S. Skilton Collection, Lada in performance at Carnegie Hall

According to a *New York Musical Courier* article entitled “Three Skilton Compositions on Tour” dated 8 April 1920, Skilton’s *Two Indian Dances* were greatly enjoyed by audiences at Carnegie Hall:

Three compositions of Charles Sanford Skilton of Lawrence, Kans., are being presented on tour this season by well known artists: Harold Henry, pianist, is playing everywhere the Sioux flute serenade, one of three piano pieces dedicated to him about to be issued by the Carl Fischer Company; the Zoellner Quartet is featuring a new Indian piece, a sunrise song on a Winnebago melody and Lada, the dancer, is using the “War Dance” on her recital programs. She presented it in Carnegie Hall, New York, last December, where it was so well received that she repeated it at her second recital in the same hall a month later.³⁹

Lada, collaborating with Nahan Franko’s Symphony Orchestra, performed the following works on one of her noted recitals at Carnegie Hall:⁴⁰

³⁹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 1.

⁴⁰ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2, Folder 1. Program Notes.

Programme Carnegie Hall Tuesday 20 January 1920, 2.30 o'clock

I.

Overture to *Sakuntala* - Goldmark (orchestra)

Hungarian Rhapsody ... Liszt (Lada)

Habanera ... Chabrier (orchestra)

Valses Nobles et Sentimentales ... Ravel (Lada)

II.

Yohrzei ... Silberta (Lada)

Valse ... Sibelius (Lada)

Preghiera (Ave Verum from Suite "Mozartiana" ... Tschaikowsky

(transcription by Liszt) (orchestra)

Will O' the Wisp ... Spross (Lada)

III.

Golliwogg's Cake Walk ... Debussy (Lada)

Baccanale from Ballet Suite "Laurin" ... Moszkowski (orchestra)

The Blue Danube ... Strauss (Lada)

Dream Pantomime, from "Haensel and Gretel" ... Humperdinck (orchestra)

War Dance ... Skilton (Lada)

Conclusion

Skilton's rise to fame can be attributed to the heightened interest in Native American music during the "Indianist" movement. Likewise, his decline in popularity was a result of an end to the "Indianist" movement and the rise of different interests among composers and musicians in America. Another notable composer of the Indianist Movement was Arthur Farwell. Born in St. Paul, Minnesota on 23 April 1872, Farwell had a similar upbringing to Skilton. While in school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology he heard an orchestra performance for the first time. His desire to study music proved stronger than his current studies of engineering. He began taking music lessons in Boston and later traveled abroad to Germany and Paris.⁴¹

⁴¹ Howard, 375.

In addition to developing the Indianist movement through composition, Farwell founded the Wa-Wan Press.⁴² This was established to popularize the works of American composers, especially those whose compositions were based on sounds heard in America and were not acceptable to other commercial publishers.⁴³ At the time of this writing, the only known publishers of Skilton's compositions include Carl Fischer and J. Fischer & Bro. in New York and Arthur P. Schmidt and C. C. Birchard in Boston. Many of Skilton's works exist in manuscript with no known publication.

The selections to be considered here in detail fall into a small category of Skilton's output: *Electra* – Music of the Electra of Sophocles, Composed for Women's Chorus and Orchestra (1920) and *The Witch's Daughter* – A Cantata for Soprano and Baritone Soli, Chorus and Orchestra (1918). These works sit outside of his primary interest in the Indianist movement and are based more closely on Romantic European models. Skilton, a composer with 120 known extant works, completed several works containing little to no Indianist influence. It is my hope here to place Skilton in context with the school of late Romantic composers such as Brahms and Wagner as he possessed characteristics similar to this style of writing. For example, he employs a harmonic language including diminished and half-diminished chords with increased chromaticism and dissonance. Skilton also creates a synthesis of lyrical melody with cyclic unifying links to bring large sections of the works together. This thesis will shed light on the aforementioned works of an influential American composer and pedagogue at the University of Kansas. First to be considered in each following section is the poet, John Greenleaf Whittier and his poem as well as Socrates and his drama.

⁴² Founded in 1901, the Wa-Wan Press was short-lived existing only until 1912. G. Schirmer, who later abandoned the project, purchased it. The Wa-Wan Press published works of 37 composers among whom nine were women. However, none of the publications were the works of Skilton.

⁴³ Howard, 374.

John Greenleaf Whittier and *The Witch's Daughter*

American poet, John Greenleaf Whittier was born 17 December 1807 in East Haverhill, Massachusetts.⁴⁴ Growing up during the era following the War of 1812 paired with intense nationalism blossoming in the United States, Whittier was a product of the time. Literature, in addition to religion and politics, sought increased nationalistic ideals for the American culture as they broke from European models. The son of devout Quakers, Whittier was deeply influenced by the ideology of his religion, humanitarianism, and society.

Many of his works have become a staple in the American English language prose and poetry repertoire. Among Whittier's well-known works are *Leaves from Margaret Smith's Journal* (1849), *Maud Muller* (1856), and *Snow Bound* (1866). In addition to writing, Whittier was an advocate for and founding member of the antislavery Liberty party in 1840, ran for Congress in 1850, and assisted in the formation of the Republican Party in the mid-1850s.⁴⁵ He died in Hampton Fall, New Hampshire on 7 September 1892.

The Salem witch trials, which occurred in colonial Massachusetts between February 1692 and May 1693, were a series of court hearings and prosecutions of people (mostly women) accused of practicing witchcraft. The Salem trials as literary subject grew very popular among poets and writers around 1820 and generations after.

Most notable of these depictions are additional works by Whittier, *The Witch of Wenham* and *Calef in Boston* (1849); Nelle Richmond Eberhart's libretto for *A Witch of Salem: Grand Opera in Two Acts* (1926) (which included music by fellow Indianist Charles Wakefield

⁴⁴ Robert and Horace Scudder, *The Complete Poetical Works of Whittier* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1894).

⁴⁵ Roland H. Woodwell, *John Greenleaf Whittier: A Biography* (Haverhill, Massachusetts: DBL Commercial Printers, 1985).

Cadman); and Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (1952), upon which Robert Ward based his opera of the same name in 1961. Whittier's work *The Witch's Daughter* is not as well known as some of the aforementioned literary adaptations of the Salem witch trials. It does, however, serve as an important facet in the understanding of the events that occurred. Whittier's piece was originally published under the name *The Witch's Daughter* in 1857; however, it was changed to *Mabel Martin; A Harvest Idyl* in 1875 upon recommendation of the publisher. The full work exists in the following parts:

- Proem⁴⁶
- I. The River Valley
- II. The Husking
- III. The Witch's Daughter
- IV. The Champion
- V. In The Shadow
- VI. The Betrothal

Whittier wrote the following regarding his work, *The Witch's Daughter*:

Susanna Martin, an aged woman of Amesbury, Mass., was tried and executed for the alleged crime of witchcraft. Her home was in what is now known as Pleasant Valley on the Merrimac, a little above the old Ferry way, where, tradition says, an attempt was made to assassinate Sir Edmund Andros on his to Falmouth (afterward Portland) and Pemaquid, which was frustrated by a warning timely given. Goody Martin was the only woman hanged on the north side of the Merrimac during the dreadful delusion. The aged wife of Judge Bradbury, who lived on the other side of the Powow River, was imprisoned and would have been put to death but for the collapse of the hideous persecution.

The substance of the poem, which follows, was published under the name of *The Witch's Daughter*, in *The National Era* in 1857. In 1875 my publishers desired to issue it with illustrations, and I then enlarged it and otherwise altered it to its present form. The principal addition was in the verses, which constitute Part I.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A proem acts much like a preface or brief introduction to a book or speech and is most often written by the author of the work in which it precedes.

⁴⁷ Scudder, 62.

The text allows for the scene to be set of a “traditional” courtship between a female and her male suitor. Every occurrence of Mabel Martin is that of a submissive and passive woman. The role of Esek Harden, in contrast, is that of a strong-willed and courageous male willing to go against societal expectations and espouse the witch’s daughter. Whittier’s text implies such gender roles that a woman, without a man, is nothing. Upon Esek Harden choosing to be with Mabel Martin in spite of her mother’s misfortune, she responds:

“O truest friend of all!” she said,
“God bless you for your kindly thought,
And make me worthy of my lot!”

Also of note regarding Whittier’s use of language at the time of his writing in 1857 is the notion that much of his prose can be considered quite gendered as well as the subject matter sexualized. The reader or the audience would not have taken content such as this lightly. For example, intentional references to male and female bodies can be observed such as the following:

How pleasantly the rising moon,
Between the shadow of the mows,
Looked on them through the great elm boughs!

On sturdy boyhood, sun-embrowned,
On girlhood with its solid curves
Of healthful strength and painless nerves!

In this regard, throughout Whittier’s poem, and Skilton’s adaptation 61 years later, one can observe the reinforcement of gender roles and expectations as well as a certain aspect of

hetero-normativity, or the view that biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender roles are aligned. Skilton also observed a gendered approach as he clearly divided the sections of Mabel Martin and Esek Harden as solo roles and frequently divides the chorus between men and women.

Skilton's *The Witch's Daughter*

Skilton's cantata, *The Witch's Daughter* was noted by the *Musical Standard* as "the first serious treatment in music of the Colonial tragedy of the Salem Witchcraft as depicted by Whittier in his rugged and homely ballad."⁴⁸ Anticipation for Skilton's new work, *The Witch's Daughter*, speaks highly to his success as a composer during this time. A column in the *New York Musical Courier* dated 14 March 1918 reads:

The Carl Fischer Music Company of New York City, has in preparation a cantata entitled "The Witch's Daughter," on a poem by Whittier, and music by Charles S. Skilton, of the music faculty of the University of Kansas... The cantata is for chorus, with soprano and baritone solos and piano or orchestral accompaniment. It takes about a half an hour for performance and is the first large work by an American composer to deal with the episode of the Salem witchcraft. The music was composed at the MacDowell Colony last summer. Several choruses have already made arrangements to present the work next season. It will be ready about the first of June.⁴⁹

No composer's notes or performance directions are present in the 65-page score. The work is scored for solo soprano and baritone, chorus, and orchestra. The score available is a piano reduction with no information regarding orchestral instrumentation. Carl Fischer in New York published the work in 1918. The cover of the vocal score states "orchestra score and parts

⁴⁸ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, *University Kansan*, 21 March 1919.

⁴⁹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, *New York Musical Courier*, 14 March 1918.

may be obtained from the publisher.” Queries to the publisher about a full score and parts were not successful.

Inspiration behind Skilton’s conception of *The Witch’s Daughter* appears in a review in the *Kansas City Star* dated 9 May 1922 regarding a performance given in Fort Scott, Kansas at the Kansas Music Federation meeting, where it was the featured choral work. It reads:

Professor Skilton says he read “The Witch’s Daughter” in Munro’s sixth reader as a boy in school. The cruelty of the villagers, who scorned the girl after burning the mother, dwelt in his mind. When he wanted a subject for a choral work he recalled Whittier’s tale of love and witchcraft, and found it quite modern enough for his needs. The musical setting he has given it is strangely exciting, the voices leaping upward in sharp ascents, while the orchestra suggests the superstitious shudders of early New England.⁵⁰

The Pageant Choral Society in St. Louis gave the first performance of the Skilton’s cantata on 14 January 1919. *The Witch’s Daughter* was performed along with Paine’s *Hymn of the West*, Foster’s *The Americans Come!*, and Busch’s *The American Flag*. Soloists Cora Libberton, soprano, and Corporal Finlay Campbell, baritone, performed the cantata with full orchestra and over 200 voices in the chorus, assisted by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. This premiere performance apparently was a success. Reviews from the *New York Musical Courier* stated:

The ability to take a more or less staid bit of poetry like the Whittier “The Witch’s Daughter” and make it thoroughly interesting is nothing short of genius, and Charles Sanford Skilton is to be congratulated for his success in this particular. There is much beauty in some of the solo parts and the orchestration is at all times interesting in the rich background it affords for the soloists. Both Cora Libberton and Corporal Campbell were very enjoyable in this number. The audience was

⁵⁰ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 2, *Kansas City Star*, 9 May 1922.

interested in the development of this ballad and finally insisted upon the appearance of the composer, that their appreciation might be expressed to him.⁵¹

Additional performances of Skilton's cantata occurred in various locations. Performance programs of *The Witch's Daughter* give better insight into possible numbers of singers and musicians used in the work. For example, a review from the *Kansas City Star* dated 9 May 1922 regarding the Kansas Music Federation in Fort Scott, Kansas, reads:

The festival chorus made its first appearance last night. It numbers two hundred singers from Pittsburg, Coffeyville, Parsons, Independence, Kansas City, Wichita, and Fort Scott. After only one mass rehearsal, Walter McCray of Pittsburg directed a performance of Charles Skilton's *Witch's Daughter*. The work made a profound impression.

Likewise, *The Witch's Daughter* was performed on 25 April 1923 in Pittsburg, Kansas. A review of this performance states,

Professor C. S. Skilton has returned from Pittsburg, Kansas, where he attended the performance of his choral work, "The Witch's Daughter", at the Pittsburg Festival. It was presented by the chorus of three hundred and fifty voices and orchestra of thirty-five under the direction of Walter McCray: the soloists were Mrs. Herbert Hakam of Pittsburg and Mr. Gustav Holmquist of Chicago.

This is the fourth performance of the work since its premiere in St. Louis, and two large choral societies, one of them in Canada, have already announced it for next season.⁵²

The Witch's Daughter was not Skilton's only interest in the literary works of Whittier. He also set Whittier's poem, *Kansas Emigrant Hymn*. A performance of this work occurred on 11

⁵¹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 2, *New York Musical Courier*, date unknown.

⁵² Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 2, *New York Musical Observer*, August 1922.

March 1934 at the University of Kansas.⁵³ It was included in a program entitled “Compositions of American Composers” presented by the Xi Chapter of the Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, and held in the University Auditorium. It was performed in addition to the following works: Howard Hanson’s *Vermeland* (organ), H.A. Matthews’s *Music When Soft Voices Die* (chorus), Charles Griffes’s *The White Peacock* (piano) and *By A Lonely Forest Pathway* (baritone solo), Blair Fairchild’s *The Train* (piano), Francis Hopkinson’s *Beneath A Weeping Willow’s Shade* (baritone solo), Geoffrey O’Hara’s *Guns* (baritone solo), Charles Repper’s *Dancer in the Patio* (for two pianos), and Deems Taylor’s *O Caesar, Great Wert Thou* (chorus).

Skilton’s use of Greenleaf’s poem, *The Witch’s Daughter*, was not his only cantata. He also set the following literary works to music: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *The Ballad of Carmilhan*, Edgar Allen Poe’s *Lenore*, the Latin poem *Pervigilium Veneris*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Ticonderoga*, and *A Moravian Legend*, whose text was written by librettist Abbie Farwell Brown at the MacDowell Colony.⁵⁴

The Music of *The Witch’s Daughter*

In regards to *The Witch’s Daughter*, Skilton chose not to use the full text as it appears in Whittier’s work *Mabel Martin*. For example, the opening proem and Section I, “The River Valley,” are omitted. This does not affect the storyline as these omitted stanzas serve only as description of Mabel Martin’s town, Pleasant Valley, outside of Amesbury, Massachusetts. Skilton’s primary focus, however, is the tale of fear, desire and, ultimately, love between the witch’s daughter, Mabel Martin, and her suitor, Esek Harden.

⁵³ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 4, Folder 6, bulletin.

⁵⁴ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, *Lawrence Journal World*, 10 November 1925.

The division of *The Witch's Daughter* occurs in nineteen sections. Only major sections of the work are accounted for in the following list and intervening measures have been excluded.

They are as follows:

Table 1

<i>The Witch's Daughter</i> by Charles S. Skilton			
Cantata for Soprano & Baritone Soli, Chorus & Orchestra			
Section	Performing Forces	Stanzas of Whittier's Poem	Measures of Skilton's Work
1	Chorus (full)	1 – 15	41 – 199
2	Soprano Solo	16 – 22	206 – 286
3	Chorus (full)	23 – 31	294 – 436
4	Baritone Solo	32 – 35	437 – 474
5	Chorus (full)	36 – 37	475 – 492
6	Soprano Solo & Chorus (full)	38	493 – 511
7	Chorus (women)	39 – 40	522 – 539
8	Chorus (men)	41 – 43	541 – 567
9	Chorus (women)	44 – 46	571 – 598
10	Chorus (men)	47 – 48	598 – 618
11	Chorus (women)	49	619 – 626
12	Chorus (men)	50	628 – 634
13	Chorus (women)	51	639 – 653
14	Baritone Solo	52 – 54	653 – 684
15	Chorus (women)	55	684 – 695
16	Soprano & Baritone Duet	56	695 – 721

17	Chorus (full)	57 – 58	726 – 744
18	Baritone Solo	59 – 61	748 – 776
19	Duet & Chorus (full)	62 – 65	778 – 865

Throughout the cantata, we see each performing force assume a different role in telling the story of *The Witch's Daughter*. The chorus provides much of the background, summary, and narrative portions of the story, which assists the audience in following the performance. This also aids in heightening dramatic moments or providing insight into what the characters may be thinking. The chorus in turn represents the general population of the story. The solo soprano alternates between telling the story of Mabel Martin in a third person perspective, as though she is narrating, as well as assuming the role of Mabel Martin herself as if she is in character. Such a variety of roles can be observed, likewise, in the part of the solo baritone.

A review of Skilton's *The Witch's Daughter* from the *New York Musical Courier* dated 3 October 1918 sheds light on Skilton's compositional style, which was heavily influenced by European training:

This cantata for soprano and baritone solos, chorus and orchestra, has for a text John Greenleaf Whittier's poem in which the American poet has very successfully imitated the old romantic ballads of Europe where witch stories were formerly believed. It is the sort of story Dvorak [*sic*] might have chosen. Charles Sanford Skilton has chosen wisely, therefore, for this type of romantic ballad has been found suitable for musical setting since composers began making music for other than religious words. The poet has selected an old theme and expressed it in modern English. The composer, however, has rightly chosen a thoroughly modern style for his music. His harmonic progressions belong to that international style which is in vogue today. There are plenty of excellently written contrapuntal mannerisms of the fugal kind. The orchestration is not to be seen in the vocal score, but there can be no doubt about the ability of the composer of the two *Indian Dances* to score the accompaniments of a cantata. The real strength of this

form of composition lies in the choral writing, and in this respect *The Witch's Daughter* is solidly strong. There are some effective bits of unaccompanied choral part writing, which would do credit to any composer, and there are many strikingly dramatic passages.

A notable feature of this work is that the composer has made use of styles and forms that are modern and international without becoming the least degree a plagiarist. His pages do not suggest well-known or rare effects in the works of his predecessors.⁵⁵

The *cantata*, which originated in Italy in the seventeenth century, is a direct descendant of monody and became a leading form of vocal chamber music throughout the Baroque period. The form of the cantata is typically seen as a juxtaposition of contrasting segments, each containing smaller forms. At the time of Skilton's conception of *The Witch's Daughter*, the cantata was still being used as a form of vocal writing. After 1900, composers such as Ralph Vaughn Williams were composing cantatas of both sacred and secular content. Skilton utilizes vocal writing characteristics such as refinement of style and careful, yet intentional, use of dramatic or virtuosic concerns.

Skilton generally adheres to a combination of diatonic harmonic styles with chromatic alterations to the melodic lines and accompaniment figures. He does not shy away from altered diatonic scales and freely uses augmented chords and augmented seconds, perhaps an overlapping technique from his Indianist writings. His contrapuntal style contains frequent use of imitative entrances, most notably observed in his choral writing throughout this work.

In general, Skilton composes conjunct, smooth melodies. There are several moments in *The Witch's Daughter* in which the chorus predominates when the writing is both homophonic and imitative. An excerpt of Skilton's choral writing in this work containing imitative

⁵⁵ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, *New York Musical Courier*, 3 October 1918.

characteristics is seen below in Example 1 with a homophonic excerpt immediately following in Example 1.1.

Musical score for Example 1, featuring vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Piu lento (♩ = 69)". The lyrics include: "And thith-er came young men and maids, Be - neath a moon that, large and low, thith-er came young men and maids, Be - neath a moon, that men and maids, Be - neath a moon that, large and low, And thith-er came young men and maids, Be - neath a moon that,"

Example 1

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 91 – 99

Musical score for Example 1.1, a choral excerpt. The tempo is marked "Adagio (♩ = 76)". The lyrics include: "Dear God and Fa-ther of us all, For - give our faith in cru - el lies, - For - give the blind - ness that do - nies, the blind - ness that de - nies!"

Example 1.1

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 294 – 309

The aforementioned compositional characteristics are seen in most of his non-Indianist works, such as the piece under consideration, and form the basis of his style. *The Witch's Daughter*, although non-Indianist, most assuredly carried out Skilton's desire to write music about events that were distinctly American or based on American history.⁵⁶

Skilton begins the work with a substantial orchestral introduction.⁵⁷ In regards to style found throughout this opening prelude, Skilton can be most readily defined as an extension of nineteenth-century Romantic composers who adapted a variety of compositional techniques found among twentieth century composers such as Neo-Classicism. For much of the work, Skilton employs four- and eight-bar phrases, creating balanced musical structure and clear, prepared cadences. This can be seen in Example 2 below.

⁵⁶ Charles Sanford Skilton, *Conductors and Non-Conductors* (Connecticut: Music Teachers National Association, 1912).

⁵⁷ As noted above, only a score in piano reduction was available for use.



Example 2

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, Prelude, measures 1 – 35

While Skilton was familiar with Neo-Classical characteristics, he is more comparable to the likes of late nineteenth-century Romanticism. His music, though composed alongside many twentieth-century masters such as Igor Stravinsky and Paul Hindemith, is quite traditional in the sense of regular phrase structure, melodic leaps, and modulatory episodes.

Additional compositional characteristics employed by Skilton can be observed in the use throughout of recurring motives and themes, which lend audible structural points of reference the audience can easily identify. This technique appears frequently in the works of nineteenth-century composers and one also observes it throughout much of Skilton's works. These moments serve as musico-dramatic unification, demonstrating Skilton's awareness of the importance of the text and his sensitivity in pairing appropriate music with text. The musical realism and ability

to express human emotion achieved by Skilton constitute perhaps his greatest accomplishments in the piece. This is no surprise as he was so well versed in characterizing Native American idioms in his Indianist works as well as an accomplished composer of choral works.

The first observance of this lies in the statement, and restatement, of what can be called the “principal theme.” This occurs five times throughout the work. It is first heard in the soprano treble line in measures 18 – 40 (see Example 3) in the opening prelude in the key of G major.



Example 3

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, Prelude, measures 18 – 40

It again appears in measure 203 preceding the beginning of the soprano solo, measures 568 – 579, and concludes the work in measures 850 – 865. The appearance of this theme, and in accordance with the text, divides this work into four large sections and serves as transitory music between contrasting sections and aids in Skilton's continuous music approach to the work rather than a work with clearly divided movements or sections. The fifth time that this theme appears is

perhaps the most intriguing of all. In Example 4 below, the principal theme sounds in the baritone solo line beginning in measure 634 and concluding in measure 638. It is to be performed “as from a distance.” This recognizable theme is, perhaps, used to call Mabel Martin to Esek Harden, as if it were a voice in her head or the voice of God.

The image shows a page of musical notation for a baritone solo and piano accompaniment. The top system features a baritone solo line with the instruction "mollo esp. (♩ = 72)" and "BARITONE SOLO". The lyrics for this system are "came A voice whose bur-den was her name." The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a complex rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes. The bottom system features a baritone solo line with the instruction "(as from a distance)" and the lyrics "bel Mar - tin, Ma - bel - Mar - tin!". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern, marked "colla voce" and "p". The page number "21109-68" is visible at the bottom left.

Example 4

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 632 – 638

Likewise, the first use of sixteenth-note figures fits well with the text set here, “winds blow freshly in to shake the red plumes of the roosted cocks.” This figure imitates rushing winds and draws special attention to the text as the increased chromaticism and quickened rhythmic motive first appear here. Skilton apparently felt this was an important moment in the text and highlighted it. This is seen in Example 5 below.



Example 5

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 56 – 58

An additional example of musical unification is seen in Example 6 below, first sung by the chorus in measures 36 – 53 in the opening of the work. This material appears again near the conclusion of the work in measures 721 – 727. While Skilton has set new text here, the music found in the choral parts is an exact duplication. What is different, however, is the accompaniment figure. The sixteenth note figures only appear as seen in Example 7 and not at the first statement of this theme in Example 6. While the sixteenth-note figure, appearing as ascending runs or a flourish, does not predominate, perhaps this would have been more audible depending on the orchestration.

Skilton possibly chose to embellish this accompaniment nearing the end of the work as this had been heard previously and he evoked a new mood or feeling in conjunction with the text. In the first statement, Example 6, the text is merely referring to the “harvest time” while upon its second occurrence, Example 7, the text details the time Esek Harden and Mabel Martin spent together, more specifically “Beside their happy pathway ran the shadows of the maid and man.”

CHORUS *mf simply*

It was the

more:

pleas - ant har-vest time, When eel-lar-bins are close-ly stowed, And

And

p

gar - rets bend be-neath their load, *poco rit.* And the

gar - rets bend, And gar-rets bend be-neath their load,

poco rit.

109 - 68

Example 6

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 36 – 49

Allegretto

lot!"

kind!"

Allegretto

Sofa tacent

CHORUS

He led her

forth, and, blent in one, Be - sido their hap - py path - way ran The

sha - dows of the maid and man

The sha - dows of the maid and

He led her through his dew - y fields, To where the swing - ing man.

marc.

p

s...

Example 7

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 721 – 737

An additional example of recurring themes and motives is seen below in Example 8 beginning in measure 74 – 75 in the accompaniment. This motive occurs quite frequently and

only appears when the chorus is singing in full unison. It appears first in the key of E major but also again in a modulatory sequence with the theme being recomposed to fit the new key center in which the work has reached. It does not seem to be used for any textual purpose rather than as a recurring motive found in the accompaniment, subordinate to the chorus. This likely functions solely as recycled material acting as transitory music connecting contrasting sections of the work preparing for the return of full chorus in a newly established tonal center.



Example 8

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 74 – 75

Aside from the above-mentioned techniques used by Skilton, he also employs other varied compositional techniques of interest. As seen in Example 9 below, Skilton adapts the medieval technique of *hocket*, whereby two or more voices alternate in the singing of the melody one note at a time, in the third division of the work.

Allegro (♩ = 92)
(with mockery)

But cru-el eyes have
But cru-el eyes have
Look, look!
Look, look!

Allegro (♩ = 92)

found her out, And cru-el lips re-peat her name,
found her out, And cru-el lips re-peat her name,
Look, look, the witch, the witch! And
Look, look, the witch, the witch! And

Example 9

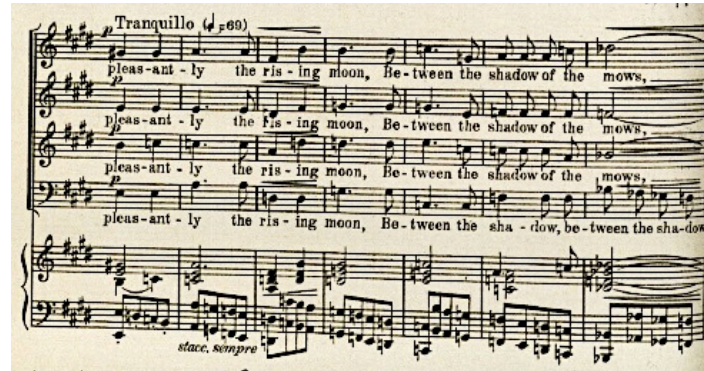
Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 382 – 387

The Witch's Daughter contains a notable influence of famed opera composer, Richard Wagner. Skilton adopts the Wagnerian model of continuous music. There are no moments in the score nor any indications noted in the music where there is to be a cessation in performance.

There are occasional uses of *fermata*; however, these appear to only be brief moments of repose.

Likewise, Skilton primarily avoids cadences until the end of stanzas or the end of a scene. This results in frequent modulatory episodes, deceptive cadences, and chromatic alterations to establish new tonal centers. Skilton frequently begins new sections in one established tonal area and modulates to both related keys and foreign keys. As seen in Example 10 below, Skilton utilizes a descending circle of fifths from each measure beginning in measure 117 and ending

this pattern in measure 123. With the exception of measures 118 and 122, each of these chords appears in major while the aforementioned two measures appear in minor. Perhaps this is taking place to evoke the notion of “the rising moon” as seen in the text below.



Example 10

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 117 – 123

Measures 70 – 81 of the work act as a transitory episode between new stanzas. Here we see not only a change of key but also possible Indianist influence in Skilton’s writing. Example 11 shows this motive being used by Skilton in measures 70 – 73 of *The Witch's Daughter* and its striking resemblance to music found in Example 12, measures 25 – 32 from *Two Indian Dances*, movement II, “Deer Dance.” The resemblance noted lies in both rhythmic emphasis, or the use of *staccato* eighth notes and heavily accented “strong” beats, as well as the evocation of modality found in the melodic lines. As seen in the examples below, the harmonic language is suggestive of an E major scale with a flat 6th scale degree. While this does not possess specific modal characteristics, its aural qualities evoke such a mood.



Example 11

Charles S. Skilton, *The Witch's Daughter*, measures 70 – 73

A musical score for a string ensemble piece titled "Deer Dance" from "Two Indian Dances, Movement II". The score is written for five staves: I. Violin, II. Violin, Viola, Cello, and Bass. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The I. Violin part has a melodic line with eighth notes. The II. Violin part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Viola part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Cello part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) in the fourth measure. The Bass part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The word "simile" is written below the Cello staff in the second measure.

Example 12

Charles S. Skilton, *Two Indian Dances*, Movement II – Deer Dance, measures 25 – 32

Conclusion

While few indications are available that subsequent performances of this work occurred during succeeding decades, *The Witch's Daughter* was successful in its time. It serves well, now, the role of a “period piece” demonstrating the school of native composers in search of content that was distinctly American. This was an attempt to establish an American model of cultural development and a shift from traditional European models. Taking largely from Dvořák’s lasting influence on cultural development in America, this work pays homage to the ideal of seeking out American folk influence and using it as a means of musical and cultural identity in America.

Though Skilton has taken a somewhat eclectic approach in writing *The Witch's Daughter*, he remained consistent to his style as a composer throughout, which was largely a choral and vocal composer using the orchestra as accompaniment to operas, oratorios, and cantatas. He perhaps believed these vocal genres based on, or descriptive of, events from American history, was the best manner in which to express American sentiments through music.

The *Electra* by Sophocles

Greek playwright Sophocles is one of few ancient playwrights whose work has survived and, along with contemporaries Aeschylus and Euripides, is one of the most celebrated and important Greek playwrights. He was born in 495 B.C. northwest of Athens. While he completed more than 120 plays, only seven survive. These include *Aisa (Ajax)*, *Women of Trakhis*, *Philoktetes*, *Electra*, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Kolonos*, and *Antigone*.

Sophocles' most powerful character drama written around 410-109 B.C., *Electra*, takes place after the conclusion of the Trojan War and is set in the palace at Mycenae. The list of characters in this work include:

Table 2

Characters in Sophocles' <i>Electra</i>	
Paedagogus, or, Tutor	Servant and former tutor of Orestes
Orestes	Son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, King of Argos
Chrysothemis	Daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, younger sister of Electra
Electra	Daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, elder sister of Orestes
Clytemnestra	Queen of Argos, wife of Agamemnon
Aegisthus	Cousin of Agamemnon, lover of Clytemnestra
Plyades	Friend of Orestes, non-speaking role
Chorus	Women of Mycenae

The plot of the work is based on the legend of the House of Atreus. This would have been a familiar story amongst audiences of Greek theater. Many of the themes in the work come from misdeeds performed within the family of Atreus, in which Electra was a descendant. Through his

play, Sophocles is able to identify and express a wide range of universal human emotion including love, hate, suffering, and joy.

The play begins in Mycanae, where Paedagogus and Orestes discuss, before the palace of murdered Agamemnon, how to avenge the death of the king. Electra enters alone, mourning the death of her father and anxiously awaiting the arrival of her brother Orestes. The chorus is heard lamenting the inevitable fate of Electra's life, stating that death is a part of life regardless of the manner in which a person dies. The duty felt by Electra in this play is ultimately to avenge the death of her father. Electra's lamenting is not in vain as we see the triumphant return of Orestes at the end of the play followed by the death of Aegisthus.

An interpretation of the play by author and Greek drama scholar, David Greene, follows:

Sophocles is often concerned with the power of hate – in the *Ajax*, the *Trachiniae*, the *Philoctetes*, and the *Oedipus at Colonus*. The *Electra* is a play about the power of hate and misery bred in a particular personality, which finally seems to lose the natural power to create. The girl cannot live spontaneously. Her life is a series of responses – of hate for ill treatment, of love and hope for the fulfillment of revenge. The events of the years gone by shape everything else, to the elimination of any sense of the immediate present, except as the continuation of the past. The *Electra* is perhaps the best-constructed and most unpleasant play that Sophocles wrote. The tightness and cogency of the plot go together with the absence of nobility and magnitude in the chief character in a way which never occurred again in the extant plays. For sheer clarity and power, its author probably never improved on it.⁵⁸

In regards to performance of these works it would have occurred much like this,

Theatron, the Greek word that gave us theatre: in English, meant both “viewing place” and the assembled viewers... they were participants in a religious festival, and they went to watch plays only on certain days in the year, when shows were

⁵⁸ David Green and Richmond Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Centennial Edition, Volume II Sophocles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 336.

put on in honor of Dionysus... What they saw were three sets of three tragedies plus a satyr play, five separate comedies and as many as twenty song and dance performances called *dithyrambs*, put on in honor of Dionysus by choruses representing the different “tribes” into which the citizen body was divided. There was a contest for each different event, with the *dithyramb* choruses divided into men’s and boys’ competitions, and a panel of judges determined the winners... Attendance at these events was on a large scale: we should be thinking of football crowds rather than typical theatre audiences in the modern world.⁵⁹

In addition to size and scale of these theatrical performances it is important to note that often they would have occurred in a large open air theater rather than a traditional theater as we know it today.

The ideal performance spaces in these circumstances was a hollow hillside to seat spectators, with a flat area at the bottom (*orchestra*) in which the chorusmen could spread out for their dancing and singing and which could be close off by a stage-building (*skēnē*) acting simultaneously as a backdrop, changing room and sounding board.⁶⁰

Likewise song and dance would have played an integral role in the performance of ancient Greek tragedy. P. E. Easterling describes this historical context, which perhaps is Skilton’s motive for choosing a popular Greek tragedy to be set to music:

Song and dance by choruses and the accompanying music of the piper were integral to all these types of performance... In tragedy there were 12 (later 15) chorus men... The rhythmic movements, groupings and singing of the chorus contributed crucially to the overall impact of each show, enduring that there was always an animated stage picture even when only one or two actors were in view.⁶¹

⁵⁹ P.E. Easterling, *Introduction to Greek Theatre, Sophocles Electra: Cambridge Translations from Greek Drama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 113.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

E. Teresa Choate argues, “Theatrical performance is the most ephemeral of the arts.”⁶² Upon completion of performing theatrical works, much of the living work of such art vanishes. The same occurs with the closing of any musical, orchestral, instrumental, or vocal production. As noted in the analysis of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* by Søren Kierkegaard,⁶³ “... he hurries into a perpetual vanishing, precisely like music, about which it is true that it is over as soon as it has ceased to sound, and only comes into being again, when it again sounds.”⁶⁴ This likewise applies to the performances of Skilton’s *Electra* as information regarding performance practice and specific staging or orchestration instructions are lost unless specifically accounted for by the playwright or composer.

Skilton’s *Electra*

Between the years 1889 and 1895 *Electra* grew ever popular across theater stages in the United States. E. Teresa Choate discovered it became “the project of some of this country’s most significant directors, actresses, and producers.”⁶⁵ Choate’s research reconstructs eleven productions that took place during the aforementioned time period. As Skilton was a resident of New England at the time, he could have observed, or been aware of, one or more of the following productions:

- (1) 1889, David Belasco and Franklin H. Sargent directed an adaptation of Henry DeMille’s *Electra* at the American Academy of the Dramatic Arts in New York City

⁶² E. Teresa Choate, *Electra USA: American Stagings of Sophocles’ Tragedy* (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corporation 2009), 11.

⁶³ Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher who lived from 1813-55.

⁶⁴ “Kierkegaard’s *Don Giovanni*,” in Piero Weiss, *Opera: A History In Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 149.

⁶⁵ Choate, 11.

- (2) 1908, Mrs. Patrick Campbell directed and played the role of Arthur Symon’s translation of the Hugo von Hofmannsthal adaptation at the Garden Theatre in New York City
- (3) 1913-28, Margaret Anglin produced, directed, and starred in nine productions of the Edward Hayes Plumptre translation at the Arch Street Opera House in Philadelphia⁶⁶

Skilton’s training in classics and interest in theater may possibly have spurred his interest in setting such a popular theatrical work to music. The tradition of ancient Greek theater most certainly would have contained musical performances with the spoken play, or between scenes – a model that Skilton employs for his own work.

Electra is divided into a prelude, eight scenes with three interjectory choral odes, and finale. There are also sections of dialogue. There is no indication regarding the dialogue that would have been spoken as it is omitted in the score. The divisions are as follows:

Table 3

<i>Electra</i> by Charles S. Skilton		
Music of the <i>Electra</i> of Sophocles, Composed for Women’s Chorus and Orchestra		
Section	Performing Forces	Measures of Skilton’s Work
Prelude	Orchestra only	1 – 63
Scene I	Dialogue	Not set to music
Scene II	Monody – Electra	64 – 128
Scene III	Electra, Chorus	129 – 339
	Dialogue	Not set to music

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11-13.

Scene IV	Chrysothemis, Electra, and Chorus	340 – 347
	Dialogue	Not set to music
	Clytemnestra's Dream	345 – 355
	Dialogue	Not set to music
	Interlude	356 – 360
First Choral Ode	Chorus	361 – 487
Scene V	Interlude	488 – 517
	Dialogue: Clytemnestra, Electra, and Chorus	Not set to music
	Interlude	518 – 538
	Clytemnestra's Prayer	539 – 579
	Dialogue	Not set to music
Scene VI	Electra and Chorus	580 – 625
Scene VII	Interlude	626 – 629
	Dialogue: Chrysothemis, Electra, and Chorus	Not set to music
Second Choral Ode	Chorus	630 – 729
Scene VIII	Orestes, Plyades, Electra, and Chorus	730 – 802
	Dialogue	Not set to music
	Recognition Scene: Electra, Orestes, and Chorus	803 – 882
	Dialogue	Not set to music
	Electra's Prayer: Electra	883 – 894
Third Choral Ode	Chorus	895 – 935
Finale	Electra, Chrysothemis, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, Orestes, Plyades and Chorus	936 – 1022

Electra, in regards to Skilton's entire output, is rather early in his musical career. Skilton did not begin composing until late into his time at Yale. There, he set a poem entitled "The Burial of Moses" to music as one of his first compositions. This sparked the interest of Dr. Benjamin Blodgett, director of music at Smith College, and he challenged Skilton to set the choral odes from Sophocles' *Electra* to music.⁶⁷ Skilton completed the composition his final year at Yale with the initial performance at Smith College in 1889.⁶⁸ Skilton revised *Electra* thirty years later in 1919. In this edition, as reviewed by *Musical America*, Skilton "rewrote the odes a bit for the new score and they are charming choral pieces for women's voices."⁶⁹ One does not know why he chose to revisit this piece after three decades but perhaps this was an attempt to complete a project that, to him, felt unfinished.

Article reviews regarding the performance of *Electra* and notes left by Skilton indicate this work had minimal staging requirements and, with an available piano reduction, was very accessible to theater departments as well as dramatic music clubs. Minimal personnel and limited scenery paired with the fact that the lead roles do not sing, made *Electra* well suited for colleges and music clubs. It was stated in the *Pacific Coast Musician* that each of the choral odes could be used in a concert setting and used out of context from the whole work if desired, as all three are full and sonorous.⁷⁰ *Electra* should be performed without interruption. The only performance suggestions given by Skilton are as follows:

⁶⁷ Skilton frequently attended recitals as a young man. Dr. Blodgett was his sister's piano instructor and was a large influence on Skilton. Whether he took lessons or not from Dr. Blodgett is unknown. It is likely he sought aid from his sister as his parents resisted any formal musical training for him.

⁶⁸ John Tasker Howard, *Charles Sanford Skilton* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1929), 15.

⁶⁹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, *Musical America*, 26 July 1919.

⁷⁰ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 2, Folder 3, *Pacific Coast Musician*, May 1920.

To perform “Electra” it is necessary to have, in addition to the speaking cast and attendants, a chorus of fifteen singers, one of whom should be able to speak for the chorus in dramatic scenes. While fifteen in the traditional number, the chorus might be reduced to four if necessary. The six funeral dancers are not essential to the performance, but add to the effect.

The accompaniment may be rendered with piano alone, or with the addition of a few orchestra instruments, if the full orchestration is not available.

The translation employed is that of Lewis Campbell slightly modified in the chorus dialog, except for the choral odes, which have been especially translated by the composer in the original rhythms. If desired the Greek could be used for the entire performance.

The Play should be given without interruption and lasts almost exactly two hours. It requires a minimum of scenery; a central door with shrubbery on each side, two long benches for the chorus, and an altar, being the essential properties.⁷¹

It is likely “full orchestration” would have consisted of typically used instruments of the time. This inference is made based upon known orchestration used by Skilton in other choral and orchestral works such as *The Guardian Angel*, which was scored for a full complement of strings, winds, brass and percussion.

In regards to publication of this work one letter, found amongst Skilton’s personal papers, contains correspondence with the Arthur P. Schmidt Co. suggesting that publications during this time were difficult as it came near the conclusion of World War I.

Owing to the Government restrictions on the production of new material during the war and the difficulty of getting works engraved and printed, it has been necessary for us to hold back a large number of compositions, which under ordinary circumstances would have appeared before this.⁷²

⁷¹ Charles S. Skilton Collection, *Electra* score, p. 4.

⁷² Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, personal letter dated 7 May 1919.

While many translations exist of Sophocles' *Electra*, Skilton used that of Lewis Campbell (1830-1908), a classics scholar known best for his work on Sophocles and Plato. Campbell published fourteen works. While Skilton used Campbell's translation for the odes, he provided translations from Greek to English for the choruses on his own.

The premiere of the re-adapted version of *Electra* occurred at the University of Kansas in the fall of 1919. It was under the direction of Professor Arthur MacMurray and Skilton conducting. According to the *New York Courier* regarding the premiere,

It will be presented by the Dramatic Club of the University of Kansas with an all-star cast of student actors, a chorus of fifteen girls and the student orchestra, assisted by players from the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra. The date of the performance is June 5 and Professor Skilton will conduct. The dramatic director is Professor MacMurray. The title role will be taken by Florence Butler, a daughter of Dean H.L. Butler, of the School of Fine Arts. Although the play will be presented according to the classical tradition in every detail, the music is of modern type. Leading motives are employed for certain characters and modern harmonic devices are used freely. The lyrical scenes of "Electra" are accompanied by music with the spoken words, and the chorus dialogues employ unison recitative, accompanied by hard chords in modal harmony. The three choral odes are sung in harmony with full orchestra accompaniment. The music for these was written by Skilton years ago, when he was a student at Yale, for a performance at Smith College, and has been adapted for the present work. The text employed is generally that of Lewis Campbell's translation but for the vocal portions Skilton, who is a Greek scholar, has made a special translation in the rhythm of the original Greek, so that the work might be performed in that language if desired, as it was at Smith College. The music is to be published by the Arthur P. Schmidt Company of Boston.⁷³

Figure 2, below, is an image taken from *Musical America* from 26 July 1919 depicting the scenery and staging used for *Electra*.

⁷³ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, *New York Courier*, 5 June 1919.



Figure 2

Scene taken from staging production of *Electra* at the University of Kansas, 1919.

According to an *Electra* program found in Skilton's personal papers, another production of this work took place on Thursday and Friday, 20-21 November, year unknown.⁷⁴ It occurred at the College of Fine Arts at Syracuse University in Crouse College Auditorium. It listed André Polah, conductor, and Florence B. Chambers, director.

The performance cast was as follows:

⁷⁴ Charles S. Skilton Collection, Box 1, Folder 2.

Table 4

Electra	Mrs. Florence B Chambers
Orestes	Professor Kirk Ridge
Paedagogus	Professor George Mulfinger
Clytemnestra	Miss Ruth Dowd
Aegisthus	Mr. Donald Wright
Chrysothemis	Miss Barbara Moore
Pylades	Mr. Robert Youngquist
Attendants	Mr. Milton Weiler and Mr. Harlow Hopkins
Ballet Director	Miss Norma Allewelt
Costume Design	Mr. Arnold Bauer
Stage Designer	Mr. Arthur Hall
Rehearsal Accompanists	Miss Myra Gillett, Miss Huldah Jordan, Miss Dorothy Eisenhart

In addition to an overview of plot, listed in this program are the university orchestra members totaling 48 individuals. This assists in speculation regarding how this work might have been scored. The chorus was comprised of 39 women and the ballet listed 35 individuals, presumably all women according to their listed names.

The Music of *Electra*

Skilton possessed great knowledge of Sophocles' *Electra* as well as ancient Greek tragedy. As a scholar of literature at Yale, his understanding of the Greek language and culture was beneficial to setting the text of *Electra* to music. This is regarding his execution of speaking cast, attendants, chorus of fifteen female singers, and use of a dramatic reader. The music

composed by Skilton is in no way based on Greek melodies. Rather, it is composed in a free style with occasional suggestions of modality in lieu of tonality.

Skilton's compositional approach to *Electra*, from a harmonic perspective, is most often functional harmony with expression of both major and minor modes of a key signature, a practice quite common in the history of European art music. Skilton's harmonic approach, though composed in the twentieth century, is comparable to late Romantic composers such as Brahms or Wagner.

The work, as previously mentioned, begins with an instrumental "prelude" of moderate length in the key of D minor. Present are staging directions to set up the beginning of Scene I. As stated in the overview of the work, presumably written by Skilton, "the action of the play begins some years later, when Orestes may be expected to return. The scene is in front of the royal palace."⁷⁵

The staging directions indicated in the score include the Priestess entering with a lighted torch, stopping to light the altar flame. Upon reaching measure 27, there is increased harmonic chromatic motion. The directions for the priestess at this time are to invoke the gods above. After two measures of growing chromaticism and a *crescendo*, more chromatic movement is present a second time as she is now to invoke the gods below. This can be observed in measures 26 – 33 in Example 13 below.

⁷⁵ Charles S. Skilton Collection, *Electra* score, p. 3. Some years later refers to the following events: "King Agamemnon, commander of the Grecian host in the expedition against Troy, on his return to Mycenae was murdered by his unfaithful wife Clytemnestra and her paramour Aegisthus. His infant son Orestes was rescued by his daughter Electra and sent away in the care of a faithful tutor to grow up in a distant land and become his father's avenger. Electra remained at home, continually mourning for her father and denouncing the murderers, who treated her with the utmost contempt and abuse, while favoring her sister Chrysothemis, who had accepted the situation."



Example 13

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 24 – 33

Throughout *Electra* there is frequent use of motivic repetition often associated with a character, mood, feeling, or event. A notable example of this musico-dramatic unification is the theme associated with the main character, Electra.

ELECTRA 13

O daughters of a noble line, Ye come to soothe woe. I see, I know: Your
me from my troublous

Andante $\text{♩} = 66$

love is not unrecognized of mine. But yet I will not seem as I for -

got, Or cease to mourn my hapless father's lot. Oh, of all love That

ever you may move, This only boon I crave— Leave me alone to rave!

p
without Ped.
rit.

Example 14

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 145 – 154

The arpeggio outlining the G minor tonic, as seen in the bass line of Example 14, appears throughout the duration of the work and nearly every time Electra is on the stage or part of a scene. Electra's first appearance in Scene II does not correspond with this motive; however, it can be observed in the bass line of measure 145 in Example 14 and is very similar to that heard upon Electra's entrance in measures 64 – 67 of Scene II (Example 15 below).



Example 15

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 64 – 67

The aforementioned motive appears in other octaves, diminution, and transposition as well. For example, as seen in measure 323 in Example 16 below, the motive appears displaced one octave higher but appears in the same key of G minor. The left-hand arpeggio in measures 324 – 326 is then treated sequentially.



Example 16

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 323 – 326

Example 17 below, measures 268 – 270, shows a motive in the bass clef line that has been altered rhythmically and tonally; however, it still possesses qualities that can be associated with the original motive. While the pitches that are now employed vary and the intervallic relationship has been altered, the rhythm appears in diminution and is aurally similar to the original motive.

Closely conjoint in cruel villany, By whom my
 life was plunged in black des - pair? Oh, to the workers of
 such deeds as these

accel.

accel. e molto cresc.

ten.
rit.

Example 17

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 268 – 271

A secondary motive of rapid sixteenth notes is also often associated with the presence of Electra is seen in measures 762 – 769. (See Example 18 below.) This does not function strongly as an independent motive; however, the recurring intervallic relationships and rhythmic arpeggio figure suggests it is associated with Electra. The presence of this motive aids in communicating drama through music. It often precedes an emotional climax of the main character further implying its relevance to her presence on stage.

68 old all vainly, with sweet toil! never wast thou thy mother's darling,
 For nay, but

mine, And I of all the household most thy nurse, While

'sister, sister,' was thy voice to me. But now all this is

vanished in one day, Dying in thy death. Thou hast carried all away

Allegro con fuoco

Example 18

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 762 – 769

The third motive of exceptional note occurs throughout much of the work and, in a sense, ties each scene and the piece as a whole together. The motive, observed in the upper treble clef lines beginning in measure 13 of Example 19 below, occurs at transitory moments in the work tying scenes and dialogue together.



Example 19

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 12 – 23

Presented first in the Prelude to *Electra*, a portion of this theme also occurs briefly in measures 78 – 79 in Scene II, as seen in Example 20 below.



Example 20

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 78 – 79

It is presented again in its entirety in measures 92 – 99 of Scene II, measures 323 – 330 of Scene III, and finally in measures 844 – 852 of the Recognition Scene. It can be observed in measures

745 – 755 of Scene VIII having undergone a few embellishments to the original rhythmic grouping. For instance, measure 747 in Example 21 below is now ornamented with sixteenth notes rather than eighth notes as before. Aside from this, it is scored quite similarly.



Example 21

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 745 – 747

As mentioned, *Electra* contains several leading motives, many of which are very effective for musico-dramatic unification and heightened dramatic affect. Among the most effective is Skilton’s use of a popular twentieth-century technique, the whole-tone scale. This appears first in the Finale, which concerns Orestes killing Aegisthus in spite of Clytaemnestra’s efforts to intervene, is an evocative place for such a compositional device.

As seen in Examples 22, 23, and 24 below, many occurrences throughout the Finale of the whole-tone scale coincide with text that implies strife, turmoil, and death. Again in the finale Skilton reuses the whole-tone scale in coordination with Clytaemnestra stating, “O son, have pity!” in reference to Aegisthus’ inevitable death.

FINALE

Enter ELECTRA. *EL.* O dearest women! Only bide in
they are even silence still.
now About it.

Allegro con fuoco $\text{♩} = 63$

without Ped.

Example 22

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 936 – 938

CLYTEMNESTRA: Ah! ah! Woe for the house, Desert of friends, and
filled with hands of

(within)

without Ped.

death!

Example 23

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 946 – 948

EL. Hark! yet again that *CLY. (within)* O son, have pity! Pity the womb that bare thee.
sound!

p legg.

Example 24

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 953 – 954

Skilton's Indianist Influence Present In *Electra*

While *Electra* is unrelated by subject to Skilton's earlier Indianist works, he still perhaps brought its influence into a portion of this Greek adaptation. Scene V, involving Clytemnestra, Electra, and the Chorus, begins with purely instrumental staging music. This particular excerpt from *Electra* stands out prominently from the remainder of the music, regarding both accompaniment and staging. As seen below in Example 25, musical characteristics found in his Indianist works are employed. For example, the grace note followed by an accented downbeat, paired with *staccato* quarter notes in triple meter is suggestive of a dance and a compositional device used regularly by Skilton in his Indianist works, specifically *Two Indian Dances*. (Please see Example 26 below.) Suggestion of Indianist influence is further heightened by Skilton's notes found in the score, "in barbaric style." The term barbaric is often used in association with a person, or group of people, perceived to be savage, uncivilized, or a member of a tribe. In addition, the rather simple harmonic structure, repetitive rhythm and pitch schemes result in an exotic sounding interlude.

SCENE V.
Clytemnestra, Electra and Chorus

Allegro $\text{♩} = 60$
(in barbaric style)
(3 measure groups)

Enter Clytemnestra and attendants

Ped. on first beat only of each measure

Example 25

Charles S. Skilton, *Electra*, measures 488 – 517

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: I. Violin, II. Violin, Viola, Cello, and Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The I. and II. Violin staves are mostly empty. The Viola, Cello, and Bass staves contain rhythmic accompaniment. The Viola part begins with a *poco maestoso* marking and a *mf* dynamic. The Cello and Bass parts also feature *poco maestoso* and *mf* markings. Later in the score, there are *accel.* markings for the Viola and Cello parts.

Example 26

Charles S. Skilton, *Two Indian Dances*, No. 2 War Dance, measures 1 – 12

Conclusion

While the story of *Electra* possesses no “American” idioms, it was a work popular as a staged play and likely well-known by many patrons of the arts. It serves now as a model of musical output heavily influenced by a composer’s personal interests. Nearly all of Skilton’s works were successful only during his lifetime. The same can be said for the lasting presence of *Electra* on the public stage. There are no indications that this work has again been performed after its initial success in the early twentieth century. While Skilton adapted a varied approach in writing *Electra*, he remained consistent to his style as a composer, a style that was most observed as a choral and vocal composer using the orchestra as accompaniment as well as a tool in heightening dramatic affect.

Summation

History shows us that there are three stages in the musical growth of a nation: first, the educational stage, when composers are learning their art from other countries, as Italy learned from the Netherlands, Germany and France from Italy, Russia from France; second, the national stage, when a country becomes aware of its own possibilities in music, and seeks to realize them through use of folk music and interpretation of national ideals, as Grieg did in Norway, Smetana in Bohemia, Sibelius in Finland; third a universal stage, where a nation highly educated in music, with a fully developed national style, expresses humanity as a whole in the largest achievements of art like the operas of Wagner. These three stages are not exclusive of one another, but may all exist at once, which is to some extent the condition in America at the present time.⁷⁶

Skilton, in addition to being a composer, organist, and theorist, was also a historian. In the above passage, he recognized that he was part of an American attempt to formulate a national style. As previously mentioned, the Indianist movement can be regarded as a phase of musical and cultural exploration. Perhaps this is why Skilton sought additional American ideals and idioms for his compositions as well as continuing to draw from his European training.

So, why was Skilton so highly respected while now his name is nearly forgotten? When he began as a composer, his studies at Yale University, abroad at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, and at the Metropolitan College of Music in New York City, set him apart from many of his inexperienced American counterparts. In the early twentieth century, there were only a relatively few well-trained American composers and musicians. Perhaps he would not have been as successful had he been composing the bulk of his output later in the twentieth century.

⁷⁶ Charles Sanford Skilton, *Modern Symphony Forms, Fundamentals of Musical Art*, Vol. 14 (New York: The Caxton Institute, 1927), 121-122.

There is still much to be said about the success of the novelty found throughout his compositions. His Indianist works brought an exotic appeal to the concert hall. In addition, many of his works, both Indianist and non-Indianist, were often performed alongside familiar and established European composers such as Beethoven, Dvořák, and Tchaikovsky. Skilton's orchestral and vocal works made an impression, as they were typically the only works of a native born American composer on the program.

Though many of Skilton's works are deserving of a revival, I strongly doubt many of his compositions will again be heard. The classical musical culture of America likely feels no connection to his pieces and quite possibly prefers those of the European masters to that of a lesser-known, early American music pioneer. The sense of American musical styles can more readily be observed in the genres of jazz, pop, film scores, and even Broadway musicals, not the likes of early twentieth-century concert hall pieces. It may have never been possible for Skilton to truly attain or define an "American sound" or fully express a sense of nationalism in his art music. One can speculate that the works of later nationalistic composers such as Aaron Copland succeeded those of Skilton.

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