

Proceedings of the American Musicological Society
Southwest Chapter
Spring 2018

Saturday, April 7, 2018, Collin College, McKinney, Texas

Immigrants, Indians, and Americans:

Native American Imagery and the Formation of Identity in the Music of Victor Kolar (1888–1957)

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Abstract:

In this paper I examine questions of national identity in the music of the early twentieth-century Czech-American composer and conductor Victor Kolar. Immigrant musicians in the United States during the early twentieth century had to navigate a landscape of varied and, at times, conflicted conceptions of national identity. I will show how Kolar attempted to navigate these issues through his use of culturally-laden musical material in his compositions, such as Native American themes and Czech medieval hymns. Drawing upon the works of Alan Trachtenberg and Philip Deloria as models for the examination of appropriation of Native American imagery and the specific use of Longfellow's *Hiawatha* in the creation of an American identity by immigrants during the early twentieth century, I present an extensive examination of Kolar's use of Native American imagery in his tone poem, *Hiawatha*, which was written soon after his immigration to the United States, and his reliance on Czech folk melodies and medieval hymns in his later *Symphony in D*. Such comparison explores how Kolar sought to create a uniquely American identity and then later re-establish his Czech roots as a Czech-American. Kolar's struggle to create an American identity and still retain a connection with his country of origin is emblematic of both the experience of many immigrant musicians as they served as working musicians in America's orchestras, concert halls, and theaters and the larger process of identity formation that took place in immigrant communities during the early twentieth century.