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portion and detail. McEwen contends that the anatomical accuracy and meticulous preparation of the book's graphics (each was individually hand-colored) distinguish it as "the supreme refinement of illustration before the invention of photography."

Why has Audubon's art been forgotten? McEwen believes that "the oversight is largely due to the fact that Audubon remains the subject of folklorists and natural historians." Audubon's life as a quiet backwoodsman, for example, is often cited as a classic example of fervent 19th-century romanticism. The bastard son of a French naval officer and Creole woman from Haiti, Audubon returned with his father in 1789 to Nantes, France. There, according to McEwen, he claims to have "witnessed some of the most bloodthirsty events of the [French] Revolution, perhaps the most notorious being when republicans sank so many boatloads of royalists in the Loire that the river actually dammed up with corpses." (Some modern biographers think he "embroidered" his life a bit.) Nevertheless, McEwen argues that Audubon was affected by the great terror of his formative years, a feeling that seems to show up in his later works ("the stricken great black-backed gull, the fierce hawks and their victims, the two golden-eye in the act of being shot . . .").

In 1803, Audubon left France for America, to enter business and marry. But he failed repeatedly as an entrepreneur. By the time he was 35 years old, he decided to abandon business altogether and just paint birds. Within six years he had completed enough good drawings to persuade a London publisher, Robert Havell, to produce his major work.

To McEwen, Audubon—despite his relative artistic obscurity—still ranks as a quintessential American artist, one whose influence appears in the works of American painters as diverse as Winslow Homer, Ellsworth Kelly, and Jackson Pollock. In fact, Audubon's motto "America my country," says McEwen, "implies not just the freedom symbolized by his birds, but also that of the radiant skies and great rivers of his backgrounds, the forests and 'dark fields of the republic.'"

Golden Tunes in Tin Pan Alley

"The Great Songwriters of Tin Pan Alley's Golden Age: A Social, Occupational, and Aesthetic Inquiry" by Edward Pessen, in *American Music* (Summer 1985), University of Illinois Press, 54 East Gregory St., Champaign, Ill. 61820.

It may be that "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?"—Yip Harburg's 1932 song about the Great Depression—stands out as the typical product of the Tin Pan Alley songwriters of the 1920s and '30s. But to Pessen, a historian at the City University of New York, "Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries" (penned in 1931 by Lew Brown) might be a more appropriate choice.

For the most part, Pessen contends, popular songwriters knew little of tin pans or alleys. While Irving Berlin, Billy Rose, and Ira and George Gershwin did come from working-class homes, they were more the exception than the rule. Musicians such as Cole Porter, Oscar Hammerstein II, and

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Vincent Youmans—whose upper-crust parents often looked askance at their sons' songwriting careers—were far more typical. In fact, notes Pessen, nearly two-thirds of those he deems the "outstanding" composers and lyricists attended college, one-third went on to professional school (usually law), and nearly 90 percent came from what were considered well-to-do families. This at a time when only five to 10 percent of American youths went to college and barely one percent completed professional school.

But popular music was fast becoming big business. Sparked mainly by the expansion of the record and radio broadcasting industries, professional songwriters copyrighted more than 100,000 popular tunes during this 20-year "golden age" of American songwriting. Of course, most of those ditties were flops. (Even the "giants" of the era could only count about five percent of their total output as commercially successful.) Yet the ones that hit, hit big. Royalties from recordings and sheet music of Berlin's "Alexander's Rag Time Band" (1911) pulled in more than \$100,000 the first year; "Cheek to Cheek" (1935), about \$250,000. Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Lorenz Hart each grossed about half a million dollars a year just from their songs. Outside this elite circle, Pessen finds a handful of unexpected "one-shot" winners. The essayist Dorothy Parker occasionally tried her hand at writing lyrics and made it to the top-playing song charts with "How Am I to Know?" and "I Wished on the Moon." But poet Ogden Nash, a more prolific lyricist, succeeded only with "Speak Low."

While it is true, says Pessen, that "Tin Pan Alley rarely sang a song of social significance," he also believes that historians can glean something useful from the lyrics of that era. "The best of the songs . . . are gems that merit our attention not only for their value as a social barometer but also because they are things of beauty."

OTHER NATIONS

*Gorbachev
As Reformer?*

"Waiting for Gorbachev" by Peter Reddaway, in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 10, 1985), 250 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10107.

For nearly two decades now, says Reddaway, program secretary at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, the Soviet Union has just been "muddling through."

Rates of crime, alcoholism, and divorce have risen; birth rates and industrial productivity have fallen. Chronic shortages of basic food and medicine persist. And, Reddaway observes, a perceived "lack of order" in everyday life has "demoralized" the Soviet population. Social discontent may provide the catalyst necessary to provoke a "change of course" in the Soviet government. "The entire situation might seem tailor-made for a reforming leader," namely Mikhail Gorbachev.