

2021

Sound, Sociality, and Music: Part One

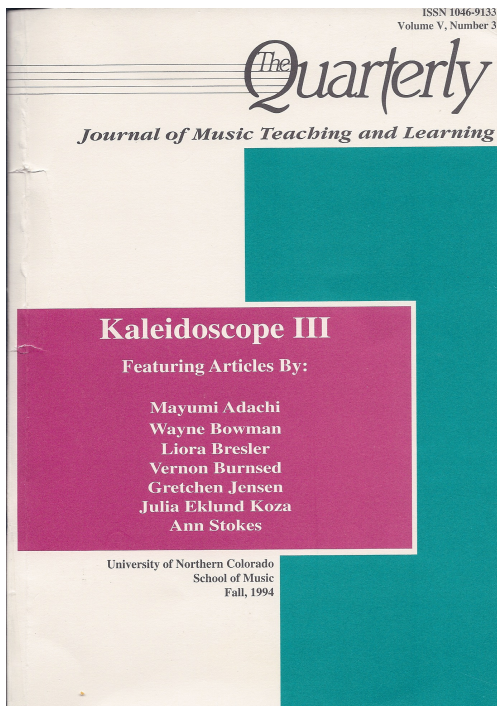
Wayne Bowman
Brandon University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme>

Recommended Citation

Bowman, Wayne (2021) "Sound, Sociality, and Music: Part One," *Visions of Research in Music Education*:
Vol. 16 , Article 27.

Available at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol16/iss5/27>



Title: Sound, Sociality, and Music: Part One

Author(s): Wayne Bowman

Source: Bowman, W. (1994, Fall). Sound, sociality, and music: Part one. *The Quarterly*, 5(3), pp. 50-59. (Reprinted with permission in *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 16(5), Autumn, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>

It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Sound, Sociality, And Music: Part One

By Wayne Bowman
Brandon University

For Franz music was the art that comes closest to Dionysian beauty in the sense of intoxication. No one can get really drunk on a novel or a painting, but who can help getting drunk on Beethoven's Ninth, Bartok's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, or the Beatles' *White Album*? ... He considered music a liberating force: it liberated him from loneliness, introversion, the dust of the library; it opened the door of his body and allowed his soul to step out into the world to make friends

... Noise masked as music had pursued [Sabina] since early childhood. During her years at the Academy of Fine Arts, students had been required to spend whole summer vacations at a youth camp ... Music roared out of loudspeakers on the site from five in the morning to nine at night. She felt like crying, but the music was cheerful, and there was nowhere to hide, not in the latrine or under the bedclothes: everything was in range of the speakers. The music was like a pack of hounds that had been sicked on her. At the time, she had thought that only in the Communist world could such musical barbarism reign supreme. Abroad, she discovered that the transformation of music into noise was a planetary process by which mankind was entering the historical phase of total ugliness.¹

Profoundly contrasting accounts like these make the already difficult task of describing music's nature and value extraordinarily challenging, so challenging that it is tempting to sweep Sabina's perspective under the philosophical carpet and declare Franz's the quintessentially musical. This is hardly a surprising stance for a music education profession. After all, Franz's words comfort, reassure, even inspire. According to him, music promises liberation from the pedestrian and mundane. It is an all-consuming involvement where his being yields to music's ebb and flow. This is probably "peak" or transcendental experience, what T.S. Eliot called "music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all, but you are the mu-

sic while the music lasts."² But noise masked as music? A pack of hounds? A barbaric aggressor? Sabina's comments sound a lot like Kant's complaints that music "scatters its influence abroad to an uncalled-for extent ... [becoming] obtrusive and [depriving] others, outside the musical circle, of their freedom."³

For the sake of argument, assume that Franz and Sabina, as well as Eliot and Kant, are describing the same music, the very same "piece" or performance. How can it generate such disparate experiences, such profoundly contradictory senses of what music is and does? Do we write off Sabina's unfortunate experience to ignorance? To personality disorder? To psychological or perceptual deficiency?

Conventional music education philosophy maintains that whatever values music may have incidentally, its most important and most musical value is aesthetic in nature. Aesthetic value is intrinsic and universally accessible,⁴ residing in more or less autonomous structures (works, pieces, songs) that

Wayne Bowman is Professor of Music Education at Brandon University, Brandon, Manitoba, Canada. His research interests include philosophy of music, as well as the philosophical, historical, and social foundations of music education.

possess this value in varying degrees. Given music that is aesthetically well endowed, Franz presumably experiences what he does in virtue of having rightly perceived it, while Sabina's experience stems from some failure of full and proper perception of properties objectively present in the music. She has failed to discern what it "truly" says, or reveals, or means — what it "objectively" is.

This is admittedly a convenient way of dispensing with the problem, but it is not very illuminating. Perhaps Sabina acquired considerable perceptual sophistication in the Fine Arts Academy and yet still hears noise masked as music. Who has not felt like Sabina in the presence of a work widely considered to be absolutely replete with aesthetic value? Are there not times and situations in which Beethoven just will not do, when he seems overblown and pretentious, or when his persistence seems more like ranting than singing? Can the "same" music be both liberating and oppressive, both intoxicating and barbaric?

From the standpoint of aesthetic worth, apparently it cannot. Since Sabina's responses do not derive from qualities demonstrably in the musical "object," they must be extramusical, subjective, merely personal. Experiences not directly linked to attentive qualities are musically incidental and irrelevant. Truly worthwhile music is valuable because of its intrinsic aesthetic qualities. Music that fails to display such essential qualities conspicuously and copiously is aesthetically deficient, less genuinely musical. Thus, we can sort music and musical experience by aesthetic value: one bin for aesthetic (intrinsic, expressive, formally grounded, genuinely musical) values and responses; and another for the rest. Since music's educational significance derives from this aesthetic foundation, music education is that endeavor dedicated to nurturing the appreciation of works primarily intended for and suited to contemplative gratification.

How can it [the same piece or performance] generate such disparate experiences, such profoundly contradictory senses of what music is and does?

The non-aesthetic remainder is merely social, sensual, political, commercial, or entertaining.

A strongly contrasting perspective maintains that music is a function of intentionality, a process of active construction. On this view, perceptions are more personal achievements than receptive acts. Musical meanings are negotiated, not absorbed; constructed, not given; appropriated, not bestowed. Musical experiences never reside in a hermetic, "aesthetic" realm, but are part of our lived, social reality. Sabina's experience is not an aberration. Both she and Franz hear what they hear in virtue of similarly constructive

processes whose roots extend deeply into the nature of sounds and their embeddedness in human sociality. Franz's intoxication and Sabina's pursuit by hounds are not so much "right" and "wrong" as different manifestations of the same process. Despite their differences, Franz's and Sabina's experiences both derive in part from the peculiar character and quality of sound. Franz revels in it and finds it intoxicating. Sabina feels violated by it. It is an aggressive, noisy intrusion from which she longs to

escape. I am intrigued by the possibility that these starkly contrasting experiences may share a common root. They are, after all, both ways of experiencing music.

In what follows, I propose that music's distinctive nature and value lie in its *sonorous* and *social* character; that sound and sociality are constitutive of musical experience; and that to marginalize either, as well-intended aesthetic doctrines sometimes suggest we ought, seriously distorts our understanding of music itself. Preoccupation with the idea of aesthetic commonality among the arts, and the equation of aesthetic with musical value, clouds our understanding of the uniquely musical, what music alone contributes to our being. Music does not consist so much in works for contemplation as it does in sounds and the ways people use them.

I propose that music's distinctive nature and value lie in its *sonorous* and *social* character; that sound and sociality are constitutive of musical experience; and that to marginalize either...seriously distorts our understanding of music itself.

Sonorous Experience

It is intriguing how often philosophical efforts to describe music's nature and value seem to revolve around abstractions like reference, form, expression, and presumed commonalities among "the arts." Surely, the primitive human relationship to sound can tell us at least as much about music's power and import as can resemblances to soundless experiences and concepts. What does our basic way of experiencing sound have to do with music's special power and its ubiquitous presence within human societies?

As a point of departure, I will draw on the writing of David Burrows⁵ who vividly describes the profound contrasts between human visual and aural encounters with the world. The most characteristic products of visual experience are objects or things out-there. Vision "sorts things out in space, putting them in their places in relation to each other and to us" (16). The visible world of reflective surfaces has a "cool constancy" that conveys the impression of fixity, reliability, solidity. The world given us by visual perception, then, is phenomenally objective, categorical, and abstract. Michel Serres puts it more directly yet: "If you close your eyes, you lose the power of abstraction."⁶ Moreover, Burrows continues, seeing has a distinctive sense of reaching out to the seen, an outwardness not unlike the sense of touching (21). The objects of sight are always attended by a sense of separateness, of distance from our lived human center. Finally, visual experience is unambiguous. Sight relentlessly seeks clarity and distinctness, the detection of configuration and likeness. It is hardly coincidental that the achievement of intellectual insight is so often indicated by the metaphorical expression "I see!"⁷

Sonorous experience, on the other hand, contrasts with the visual at almost every turn. It lacks vision's sense of durable constancy. Sound's "objects" require continuous, mo-

ment-by-moment renewal. Where sight gives us physical entities, the aural world is phenomenally evanescent, processual, and disembodied. Says Burrows, "We see the world as a noun and hear it as a verb." (21). In contrast to vision's outward, touching sense, auditory experience involves an inwardness more nearly analogous to being touched (21).

Sounds do not line up one beside or behind one another as the objects of sight generally do. Rather, sounds emanate in all directions at once, intermingle, coalesce with, and pass through each other. Sound's touch is no surface sensation but one of penetration. It reaches within and passes through us. So, whereas visual experience is of things out-there, sonorous experience is a corporeal one of events in here. "Sight draws me out, sound finds me here. And sound goes beyond touch, which respects the perimeter of my skin, and beyond its degree of intimacy in seeming to be going on in me as much as around me" (16). The human experience of sound has a natural sense of interiority often noted in musical experience.⁸

Sound also has an urgency unparalleled in visual experience. This "peremptory immediacy," as Burrows characterizes it, can neither be ignored nor controlled, and may assume qualities ranging from the intoxicating to the violent and invasive. Thus, the sonorous world is characteristically more urgent and engaging, and our relationship to it more vulnerable than is typically the case in visual experience.

Finally, sound lacks sight's distinctness or specificity. It is a fundamentally ambiguous phenomenon. If vision gives us facts, asserts Burrows, then sound gives us rumors; if seeing is believing, then hearing is "guessing and hoping" (20). The experience of sound is fundamentally equivocal, polyvalent, and uncertain. These qualities impart to sound unparalleled power to soothe or startle, console or alarm, to intoxicate or offend. Sound

generates feelings of both *oneness* and *mystery*; Burrows remarks: “oneness because sound subordinates issues of distance and direction to those of energy — it surrounds the hearers and synchronizes them with one range of its source’s activity; mystery because this range of activity is rarely tied in any inherent and necessary way to what matters about the size and shape of its source” (25). Vision is an experience of separateness (of I and it, of subject and object); hearing is connection.

Sound, then, is an utterly unique mode of construing and constructing the world. The world, remarks Attali, is not for beholding but for hearing.⁹ Sound’s peremptory immediacy, its ambiguity, its diffuseness, and its vital transience impart to human existence qualitative experiential dimensions unparalleled in any other realm, unknowable in any other way. Hearing is vastly more than a biological orienting mechanism, and sounds are definitive aspects of who hearing people are.¹⁰

Sounds contribute profoundly to our sense of being alive to the world. They affirm our bond with the world and confirm its unity. Through sound we transcend the insularity of selfhood, the I-it duality of visual experience. Sounds nurture our sense of being in the world by neutralizing the opposition between the in-here and the out-there. Sounds temporalize and vivify the static inertness of the unheard world.

Of course, humans also use uttered sounds as means for communication, but despite their transitivity, the sonority of sound-signs and speech is never superfluous. Speech is never reducible to its visual record. The advantages language imparts to humanity are sonorous in origin. In speaking, people sound themselves. The inflectional, rhythmic, intonational, dynamic, and timbral aspects of speech are essential to the discrimination of meanings, mood, character, and veracity. Speech’s sonorous qualities always comprise a vital part of the understood. A slight intentional shift can transform the most mundane phrase into a musical event (“cellar door” has always been a personal favorite). In short, words and speech are first and foremost sonorous, and how we experience them is a function of habit, disposition, or intentionality. Sound’s sensuous surface is

never entirely purged even when it is pressed into service as a conveyor of non-sonorous meaning.

What, then, of sound experienced as disruption or intrusion? What about noise? Note that noise is relative to a system or a frame of reference. No sound, or combination of sounds, is inherently noisy or inherently musical. One sonorous system’s noise may be another’s music and vice versa. Noise interferes, diverts, distracts, interrupts, and intrudes. It impedes otherwise meaningful engagement and, as sound, noise has unsurpassed capacity to seize attention and arrest meaningful activity.

The young man who pulls his car alongside mine in traffic, with the stereo blaring, fancies himself surrounded by music, but it is not music for me. It is an incursion on my psychological center. This is not to pass judgment on its authenticity or craftsmanship or any other such thing. Perhaps in another situation or under other circumstances, I might hear music instead. Now it is only an intolerable encroachment, imposition, or assault on my personal “space.” Because of the distinctive phenomenal characteristics of sound, this is no minor nuisance, but a massive violation of my very self; the aural equivalent, if such were possible, of rape. If we are the music while it lasts, so, too, are we the noise while it lasts. Sound matters a lot to us, at least in part because it enters us, making us resonate along with it for good or ill, becoming in that process not so much something we have as *are*.

If noise is sound that imposes, interferes, and invades, music is sound welcomed and sound embraced. Thus, it is at least possible to hear anything musically. It is pointless to attempt to define music in terms of characteristics of the sound itself, of consonance, of tonality, of pattern, or of structural unity. Surely, this was one point of John Cage’s *4’33”*, whose musicality was a function of whatever sounds occurred within its duration. Music is a result of my willingness that it be so, of my consent that its sounds relate to me in at least one of the various possible ways I accept as musical. When I do this, Mikel Dufrenne suggests, sound ceases to be an “it,” becoming, rather, “a quasi-subject, a

Sound, then, is an utterly unique mode of construing and constructing the world.

'thou' who addresses me."¹¹ Musical sound is no external presence but an event within which I dwell unconditionally. In words reminiscent of T.S. Eliot, Thomas Clifton pronounces, "Music is what I am when I experience it."¹² This being the case, Clifton concludes, the phrase "good music" is redundant and "bad music" an oxymoron; for sound perceived musically is always good. If it is not good, it is not, by definition, music. It is at best, after Kundera's Sabina, noise pretending to be music: sound that does not succeed in making itself music-for-me.

Whatever else it may be, to whatever uses it may be put, music is sound. Efforts to elucidate the nature and value of musical experience should therefore be grounded in the phenomenal character of sonorous experience. Sound captures and reflects or, more boldly, creates and constructs aspects of the world no other experience can. There can be no experiential equivalents to music or noise in any other sensory realm, nor are music and noise acoustical or culture-free phenomena. Any sound may claim musical status given the proper cultural, contextual, and intentional conditions; and conversely, any sound may be experienced as noise, including the masterpieces of the Western Art Music canon.

In every known culture, music is accorded great import. Rarely are people casual or indifferent about their musics. In fact, they are often more passionately attached to, and defensive of, musical tastes and preferences than any others. Music matters so much, I submit, because of sound's immediacy, perfusiveness, and inwardness. It matters so much because of its capacity to touch the vital center of our being, inducing a kind of resonance with itself. Both the intensity with which we embrace music and the repugnance we feel toward "impostors" are functions of the distinctive nature of sound: its intrusiveness, its penetration, its intimacy, and its relentless emergence. This tells only half the story, though. For music is not an achievement of solitary individuals or sound disassociated from shared human contexts.

The worlds it creates are shared, collective ones. Music is fundamentally social and fundamental to human sociality.

Social Integration and Differentiation

I have said that musical experience uniquely dissolves dualities of self-other, inside-outside, and subject-object. On the other hand, sound that fails to become music for me can be an obnoxious, antagonistic presence, a foreign something I come up against, or Sabina's pack of hounds. In virtue of its ability to articulate one-ness and other-ness, sound has the capacity to demarcate psychological and cultural territory as few other things do. Sound is fundamental to our sense of being alive to and part of the world. Musical sound transforms these personal phenomena into social ones because of its remarkable capacity to surround us and to create synchronicity among us. In view of these powers and capacities, I submit, the sociality of music is no more incidental to its nature and value than its sonority. Music integrates, while noise divides. Sound defines and consolidates culture on the one hand, while it delineates cultural differences on the other. Music is thus a potent social and cultural organizer, and a powerful political force as well.

These assertions may seem vexations to those who construe music as artifact rather than social process. To them, music's emancipation from social tethers and its ascent to its autonomous "Artistic" station is commonly considered the most salient event in the history of music. Great music, by definition, is that which transcends the mundane social world. It is independent of, impervious to, and untainted by social or political concerns. Still, even enlightened Western societies take remarkable pains to preserve and perpetuate music they consider desirable and worry openly about the potentially pernicious effects of music they find unsavory or objectionable. I wonder if this is at least partly due to the profoundly contrasting ways we experience musical sound and the noisy remainder. Noise is difference. Noise is other. Noise threatens,

violates, intrudes, and alienates. By contrast, the relationship of the self to music is one of unconditional, empathetic presence.

Where noise disperses consciousness, music centers it. Making or taking music together creates and sustains a sense of unconditional collective presence in the world, a process in which the insularity of selfhood is transformed into a domain of shared concern. “We” ceases to be so much a plurality as a new unity, one commonly designated “community.” Musical experience invokes and nurtures oneness, a shared world unencumbered by contingencies of time and space. This experience is a special kind of experiential common ground which, owing to the special character of sound, brings and binds us together as few other experiences can. Singing voices merge into a sonorous unity that is profoundly centering, both individually and collectively. Music, then, is one of our first and most fundamental ways of being in the living social world. Collaborating in its creation and enactment forges collectivity into community; subjugates difference to commonality. Music is a powerful means of social integration which transforms distances into connections. Music creates, both within and among us, a flowing, centered oneness that, while it lasts, brackets the out-there, oppositional world.

Yet as Sabina reminds us, music can be extraordinarily fragile. The possibility is ever present that this centering experience may come undone, fly apart, dissolve into noise. Music’s nature and value are not absolute, but the result of intention and convention. Musics are not facts of nature but contingent products of human behavior and interaction. The difference between music and noise is not acoustical but contextual. This means, I submit, that while musics may create and reinforce social affinities, they may, and do, underscore differences as well. Musics may sustain social synchrony but may undermine it as well.

It is small wonder that we find intrusions upon musical experience so disturbing or that individuals and societies are so protective of appropriated musical terrain. Given sound’s ambiguity and music’s fragility, we should not underestimate the threats inherent in incursions by noise or noises masked as

music. Music is an important part of who people are, and “competing” music may indeed implicitly threaten the existing sociopolitical order, a suspicion that has caused people from Plato to the rulers of modern totalitarian states no little worry.

Music and Sociality: Issues for Music Teachers

If musical meaning and value are not absolute, universal or intrinsic, but contingent; and, if musics are wed in important ways to social orders — if, that is, music is not a purely aesthetic phenomenon — teachers of music are confronted with a host of frequently unasked questions. Whose music?¹³ Why? If music and sociality are inextricably linked, lines of inquiry like the following become unavoidable:

- What kind of sociality is reflected and legitimated in this music? How?
- Whom does this music empower and whom does it marginalize?
- What counts as music in this setting?
- How do those whose music this is express themselves about it or use it?
- Who controls its production and dissemination? How?

If music is truly central to human sociality, the domain of educationally relevant musical inquiry cannot be arbitrarily defined to exclude its social, moral, and political implications.

If music is “universally” anything, it is a form of social behavior revolving around sound. Like all social behavior, music is intimately bound up in attachments and relationships among people. There is no music or set of musical practices (or even musical value) that is not socially embedded. However else we may wish to construe them, musics are “always the result of people doing things together in particular places and times.”¹⁴ Music does not “work” in the lives of people who have not been conditioned for it. People’s beliefs, convictions, and behaviors are as central to fully understanding music as are sounds and their organization. Musical values, norms, and attitudes are learned through socialization processes in which they become a particular group’s “shared prerogatives,” as well as “expressions of social solidarity against other groups.”¹⁵ Music articulates sameness and difference; inclusion and exclusion; who “we” are and

For music is not an achievement of solitary individuals or sound disassociated from shared human contexts. The worlds it creates are shared, collective ones. Music is fundamentally social and fundamental to human sociality.

who “they” are.

The idea that different musics are alternative social frames of reference rather than hierarchical (superior-subordinate) value domains does not quite equate with comfortable and time-honored assumptions of the supremacy of art music. In fact, many among the more extreme adherents of the social perspective go so far as to attribute the very idea of “art music” to a hegemonic effort to preserve the ascendancy of elite sociocultural groups. For them, aesthetic doctrines such as universality and autonomy serve primarily to sustain the superiority of established “musical taste cultures,” in comparison to those who do not “get it” are deemed inferior or deficient.¹⁶

Since musical culture and social identity are coextensive constructions, the determination to reproduce one musical culture at another’s expense is at root an act of “symbolic violence ... the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power.”¹⁷ On this view, musical education is an effort to direct and control consciousness by trivializing or suppressing alternative modes of awareness. As John Shepherd puts it, there is no music “that is not opaque, structuring the world in one way rather than in any another.”¹⁸ The choice of music and musical experiences for inclusion in compulsory education is an irrevocably political act.

Education “invariably involves some imposition on the learner,” concedes one distinguished advocate of aesthetic education; only imposition is justified where there are “generally acceptable criteri[a] for good, bad, better, and worse ...”¹⁹ Since serious music presents “a bigger slice of life, of reality, of truth, and of goodness”²⁰ than popular music, its preservation through formal education (and the neglect of the popular remainder) is justified.²¹ Clearly, the crux of the argument is whether the slice presented by “serious” music is bigger or simply very different. If

the latter is true, as the social relativist maintains, it must be acknowledged that attempts to “educate tastes” are quite capable of destroying thriving cultures.²²

Debate over serious and popular music brings the differences between the aesthetic and social paradigms into high relief. Aesthetic theories are resolutely non-sociological. From their perspective, one of the most distinctive characteristics of worthwhile music is its freedom from social forces, its capacity to transcend cultural differences and speak to anyone who will only adopt the proper (aesthetic) frame of mind. Music’s true significance is a function of its internal (formal, objective) properties. In contrast, popular music is largely socially determined and tainted by its commerce with the extramusical world. As another spokesman of the aesthetic paradigm has written, “A vast wasteland of musical inanity exists in the popular music field because of the enormous profit to be made catering to mass desires for experiences only marginally related to music as such.”²³ Unlike music whose aesthetic value is its “be-all and end-all:

pop music does not primarily exist to serve aesthetic purposes. It exists primarily to serve social and psychological needs of teenagers. To say that most pop music is musically valueless is to say something which certainly is true, but is also beside the point. It is just as unfair to judge pop music as a whole by musical standards as it is to judge concert music by standards of social usefulness.²⁴

Social matters are irrelevant to serious music, and popular music is merely social: almost, it seems, non-music.

Graham Vulliamy points to a cluster of misconceptions that often undergird the assumed superiority of serious to popular musics.²⁵ First, advocates of serious music see it as a field comprised of distinct styles and genres, while pop music is one homogeneous field, notable primarily for its

...devotees of popular music find that field as differentiated and diverse as devotees of serious music find theirs.

"commerciality." Second, serious music's value is primarily musical (i.e., artistic or aesthetic), whereas popular music is only incidentally so, since "musical" value excludes social-situatedness.²⁶ Third, consumers and performers of pop music are musically naive, extensively influenced by marketing strategies and motivated primarily by profit. Finally, whereas serious music makes demands upon one's attention, popular music, lacking art music's formal integrity and complexity, is an entertaining diversion.

But Vulliamy goes on to show that devotees of popular music find that field as differentiated and diverse as devotees of serious music find theirs. Pop-music fans, like their serious-music counterparts, generally construe "classical" music as a single, homogeneous domain. Both camps, then, are guilty of drawing numerous and subtle distinctions among their own musics while lumping "the rest" under a single banner.

Within virtually all pop genres there exist musicians whose serious commitment to their music leads them to reject commercialism at considerable financial cost; audiences whose preferences are rooted in the detection of subtle qualitative characteristics; and pieces accorded higher or lower value on the basis of originality and avoidance of cliché and stereotype. More to the point, denigrating popular musics for being commercial berates them for being what sociopolitical conditions simply dictate they must:

Whilst the establishment castigates all "popular" music for being commercial, its heavy subsidisation of European "serious" music ensures that much of the latter need not even be concerned with commercial considerations. Thus much classical music ... which might not otherwise prove profitable is helped by government grants and subsidies, whilst both jazz and rock music, to survive at all, have to be commercially viable ...²⁷

Even among devotees of serious music, there exists a corpus of standard works which, because of their familiarity and consequent commercial viability, constitute the perennial core of most concert programming.

Popularity and commercial viability are not irrelevant to the serious music world. Nor is serious music a socially transcendent phenomenon, accessible to anyone with sufficiently cultivated perceptual skills. It is replete with its own social codes, rituals, and modes of acceptable dress and behavior that effectively unite the social group of serious music lovers and distinguish it from "others." In short, pop music is not purely social or commercial, nor is serious music utterly independent of such influences. Claims to serious music's transcendence simply mask the economic systems that serve to subsidize it.²⁸

Of our original four misconceptions, this leaves the notion that popular music exists merely to entertain, being deficient in formal integrity and complexity. Its appeal consists in visceral or glandular responses to sensory properties, whereas serious music's more sophisticated and complex configurational, harmonic, and expressive properties endow it with superior musical value. This argument mistakes differences between genres for differences in value.

The European traditions in which most serious music is rooted prioritize (internal) harmonic and structural complexity, attributes closely allied to the use of written (visual) scores and amenable to structural (rational) analysis. The African and Caribbean musical traditions that have strongly influenced much popular music, on the other hand, are predominantly aural, achieving their musicality in ways distinctive to aural modes of transmission and retention: through timbral color and inflection,²⁹ antiphonal small-scale repetition, and improvisation. In such music, structure, rather than being "what music is," serves simply as a vehicle within which to make music — music that revolves around a personally creative endeavor.

Serious music's putative superiority is largely a function of its audience's dominant social status, and the centrality of the visual-rational interpretive framework to Western intellectual traditions. Literacy, rationality, perceptual vigilance, structural sophistication,

and susceptibility to analysis are central among its value criteria. The equation of literacy with musical value, however, marginalizes the priorities of aural musical traditions. And the equation of rationality with musical value tends to underplay the centrality of human agency, the doing of music, compared to the analytical/visual and reproductive priorities inherent in notated traditions.

Art music's musical superiority is maintained by declaring its particular values universal and ultimate and by expropriating "serious" music's perspective to all musical styles. Music that does not conform or subscribe to art music's particular value systems is thus trivialized and marginalized. Differences in style or genre are not differences in musical value.

Recognizing popular and serious musics' common social ground casts a rather different light on the question of the music's import to humanity. Musics create and shape collective identity. Musical experience shows us that society is possible. It helps both define "we" and "them," to distinguish "us" from "other." As Jacques Attali asserts, "No organized society can exist without structuring differences at its core."³⁰ Musical activity, I submit, is one of our most potent means of doing just that.

In the second part of this essay, I shall explore this line of thought in more detail and hazard some tentative thoughts on its practical significance for music education.

Notes

1. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (New York: Harper, 1984): 92-93.

2. T.S. Eliot, Section V of "The Dry Salvages," in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harvest/HBJ, 1988 [Centenary Edition]).

3. Kant. The third critique, Section 53.

4. This because it is something for which we are apparently "hard-wired" genetically or psychologically. The claim to music's being a "universal language" is not far removed.

5. David Burrows, *Sound, Speech, and Music* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990). In the following section, references to Burrows are indicated by parenthetical page numbers. I have explored Burrows from a slightly different perspective in "Sound, Society, and Music Proper," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 2 (1) (Spring 1994), 14-24.

6. Quoted in Jacques Attali, *Noise* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989): 6. Similarly,

Kundera suggests, "to see infinity, close your eyes." *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

7. According to some feminist literature, visual epistemological metaphors (seeing the light, illumination, the mind's eye, etc.) are more characteristic of men's thought than women's. Recent women's literature more often uses the metaphor of voice because of its emphasis upon closeness, relatedness, interaction, and subjective involvement in knowing. Visual epistemological metaphors imply objective detachment and a static reality. See *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, by Mary F. Belenky et al (NY: Basic Books, 1986). The idea that social relatedness and subjectivity may be uniquely implicated in sonorous experience has direct relevance for the theme of music's sociality explored later in this paper.

8. G.W.F. Hegel's notion of music's "sounding inwardness," for instance; or the idea of "indwelling."

9. Attali's actual assertion is considerably more blunt: " ... [T]he world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible." *Noise*: 3.

10. A phenomenology of deafness would be a fascinating contribution to this line of thought. A compelling step toward this end is Oliver Sacks' *Seeing Voices* (1989: University of California Press).

11. Cited in Thomas Clifton, *Music As Heard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983): 80.

12. Ibid: 297.

13. John Shepherd's book by this title is the source for a number of references later in this paper: *Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Languages* (London: Latimer, 1977).

14. Wilfrid Mellers and Pete Martin in the preface to Simon Frith (ed.), *World Music, Politics, and Social Change* (New York: University of Manchester Press, 1989): x.

15. Trevor Wishart, "On Radical Culture," in John Shepherd, *Whose Music?*: 234.

16. The deification or apotheosis of European art is not socially benign. In Milan Kundera's *Immortality* (Harper Collins, 1991), 335-6, a character has this to say about what he calls "the terror of the immortals": "I don't deny those symphonies their perfection ... I only deny the importance of that perfection. ... They are inaccessible to man. They are inhuman. We exaggerated their significance. They made us feel inferior. Europe reduced Europe to fifty works of genius that it never understood. Just think of this outrageous inequality: millions of Europeans signifying nothing, against fifty names signifying everything! Class inequality is but an insignificant shortcoming compared to this insulting metaphysical inequality, which turns some into grains of sand while endowing others with the meaning of being!"

17. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977): 5.

18. John Shepherd, "Music and Male Hege-

mony," in Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, *Music and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

19. Harry S. Broudy, "A Realistic Philosophy of Music Education." In R. J. Colwell (ed.) *Basic Concepts in Music Education, II* (Niwt, CO: The University Press of Colorado, 1991): 87.

20. Ibid: 89.

21. Broudy grounds his claim to serious music's superiority — to its "bigger slice" as it were — in an appeal to the authority of those he designates "the learned." An opposing view would be Trevor Wishart's ("On Radical Culture": 237) contention that the "learned" may be more accurately described as an ideologically motivated and economically isolated "intelligentsia."

22. Cecil Taylor vividly calls it "that [expletive deleted] liberal idea of uplifting the black man by destroying his culture." (Quoted in Graham Vulliamy, "Music Education: Some Critical Comments," in *Journal of Curriculum Studies* [Vol. 7, 1975]: 22). One is reminded, too, how the musical sophisticates James Keene calls the "arbiters of good taste" domesticated the crude, raucous musical fare of the early American singing school, only to precipitate its demise by marginalizing the kind of music and musical experiences such schools had previously thrived by nurturing.

23. Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Second edition: Prentice-Hall, 1989): 144.

24. Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education*, (First edition: Prentice Hall, 1970): 106-7.

25. In addition to "Music Education: Some Critical Comments" (note 37) Vulliamy's views are developed in "Music and the Mass Culture Debate," and "Music as a Case Study in the 'New So-


cology of Education'," both in John Shepherd's *Whose Music?*

26. This definition clearly favors musics whose social aspects are rendered inconspicuous, whether by ideological assertion or by subtle systems of institutional support. On this view, music becomes "musically valuable" strictly on the merits of its "internal" attributes.

27. Vulliamy, "Music and the Mass Culture Debate": 196.

28. Parenthetically, the ascendancy of the status of jazz from "popular" to legitimate North American "art form" in recent decades is an excellent example of how music's purported musical legitimacy is a function of its acceptance by higher social status groups. A great clamor to institutionalize jazz studies has ensued in the very postsecondary institutions where, ironically, jazz was a pariah a few short decades ago. Jazz is no more (and no less) "serious" than it was previously, nor have its aesthetic values changed significantly, nor has jazz become less commercial; indeed, it would become so at considerable risk of extinction. What has changed is simply its constituency.

29. Shepherd mounts a persuasive argument that timbre (so often incidental to aesthetic accounts of music) is the very "essence of sonic events," the feature that imparts to sounds their sonic individuality. Timbre is, moreover, the "vibratory essence that puts the world of sound in motion and reminds us ... that we are alive, sentient, and experiencing" (*Music and Male Hegemony*: 158).

30. Attali, *Noise*: 5. 

Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education Volume 30, 1993

Articles

A Comparison of Musical Performance Accuracy Between Teacher-Taught and Peer-Taught Kindergarten and First Grade Students – *Carol A. Prickett and Marilyn Jones*

A Comparison of Knowledge of Children's Songs Among Older Adults, College Students and Children – *Janice N. Killian*

Instrumental Student Motivation: An Exploratory Study – *Man Lin Chang and Eugenia Costa-Giomi*

Toward a Black Aesthetic: The effect of Race on Preference and Perception of Selected Popular Music – *Steven J. Morrison*

Suitability of a Personal Heart Rate Monitor for Use in Music Research* – *Albert LeBlanc, Patricia Shehan Campbell, and Peggy Coddling*

*This research was supported by a grant from the Yamaha Corporation of America, through the National Music Education Research Project.

The Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education is published annually by the Missouri Music Educators Association. Copies can be obtained by sending \$2.00 (cash, check, or money order, payable to Missouri Music Educators Association) to the editor: Randall G. Pembroke, *Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education*, 4949 Cherry, Conservatory of Music, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO 64110-2229.