WHAT IS SOCIOLOGICAL ABOUT MUSIC?

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KEY WORDS: cultural production; cultural consumption; interaction; institutions; genres; boundaries

Forthcoming: *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2010

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Abstract

The sociology of music has become a vibrant field of study in recent decades. While its proponents are well aware of this field's contributions and relevance, we focus here on demonstrating its merit to the broader sociological community. We do so by addressing the following questions: What is music, sociologically speaking? How do individuals and groups use music? How is the collective production of music made possible? How does music relate to broader social distinctions, especially class, race, and gender? Answering these questions reveals that music provides an important and engaging purchase on topics that are of great concern to sociologists of all stripes – topics that range from the micro-foundations of interaction to the macro-level dynamics of inequality.

INTRODUCTION

The first generations of sociologists took it upon themselves to delineate a specific swatch of reality that belonged exclusively to the fledging discipline, proclaiming that society was a reality sui generis and surrendering the state to political science, markets to economics, space to geographers, and the past to historians. But in the last half-century, now that sociology has secured its place in the academy, we have stepped out from the terrain of "society" narrowly framed to one broadly oriented and have embraced such fields as economic sociology, political sociology and the various "sociologies of." Each of these fields faces questions of what general theories or analytical tools our discipline offers and what is uniquely sociological about the subject matter. This paper reflects on a burgeoning field of inquiry that offers distinctive challenges and insights – the sociology of music.

Like many specializations in sociology, scholars have often gravitated toward the sociology of music because of a personal interest. Not surprisingly, they have also found a ready audience in other music lovers. As evidenced by the seminal works of Max Weber, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alfred Schutz, Howard Becker, Richard Peterson, Pierre Bourdieu, and Tia DeNora – sociology has long offered an important vantage by which to understand music, the people who do it, and the effect that it has on people. Recent work continues to show the contributions that sociology brings to the study of music; it is also marked by efforts to speak to a broad sociological audience and to contribute to other areas of the discipline.

This broader relevance of music sociology is our focus here. While other works survey the roots and development of this specialized field (Dowd 2007, Martin 1995), we take a different approach by demonstrating how the sociological salience of music can be framed in terms of following questions: 1. What is music, sociologically speaking? 2. How do individuals

and groups use music? 3. How is the collective production of music made possible? 4. How does music relate to broader social distinctions, especially class, race, and gender? By addressing these questions, we show that the sociology of music is relevant for such varied subfields as stratification, social movements, organizational sociology, and symbolic interactionism. Beyond highlighting its broad relevance, we also stress an ongoing theme: music is a mode of interaction that expresses and constitutes social relations (be they subcultures, organizations, classes, or nations) and that embodies cultural assumptions regarding these relations. This means that socio-cultural context is essential to understanding what music can do and enable. Indeed, when the same music is situated across these contexts, it can work in dramatically different fashions (as sociologists would expect). What is sociological, then, is less the sonic qualities than the social relations that music is both a part of and shaping.

WHAT IS MUSIC, SOCIOLOGICALLY SPEAKING?

Music is not a singular phenomenon and, hence, not captured by one definition. Still, issues of what music "is" set the boundaries of the field by clarifying what is and is not being studied. Scholars in the social sciences and humanities emphasize that the distinction between music and "not music" is ultimately a social construct – one that is shaped by, and shapes, social arrangements and cultural assumptions. Given that the construction of what we think of as music is so widely accepted, its socio-cultural underpinnings can oftentimes be invisible. Following musicologist Phillip Bohlman (1999), we bring this construction to the fore by discussing how music can be conceptualized as both object and activity. These conceptualizations, as shown in subsequent sections, have tremendous implications for the production and consumption of music.

Music as Object

Music is often treated as an object – a thing that has a moment of creation, a stability of characteristics across time and place, and potential for use and effects. As such, music can be abstracted from its time and place and put into new contexts – such as when Bach's *B Minor Mass* is performed in a secular, rather than religious, setting more than 250 years after its creation. Transforming the fleeting sounds of music into an object is a social achievement that requires sociological explanation. That said, sociologists treat music as different kinds of object, as illustrated by but two of the following types in the literature: music as an institutionalized system of tonality, and music as a commodity. Both have long histories and undergird the view of music as a written and / or recorded "text" that can be possessed, circulated, and inspected.

Music as an institutionalized system of tonality means, fundamentally, that certain notes are regularly utilized and repeated frequently enough that they can be treated as "things" – the sonic building blocks for songs, symphonies, and other compositions. One fundamental aspect of tonality is the division of pitch into distinct tones (i.e., "notes"). Although this division could be approached in highly idiosyncratic fashions, Max Weber (1958) points to a remarkable uniformity found across time – a system of tonality, he argues, that began in and sets apart the West. This system emerged as the division of pitch shifted from an ad hoc approach to one of systematic calculation based partly upon advances in mathematics and acoustics. This eventually resulted in "equal temperament" of the early 1700s – those 12 notes per octave (C, C-Sharp, D, D-Sharp, etc.) that are equidistant from each other and that permit a song to be transposed easily from one key to another (e.g., when the melody and harmony for "Happy Birthday" can be shifted up or down in terms of pitch while retaining its character). As the division of pitch grew more "rational" via the calculations involved in equal temperament, so too did other elements in

this system: harmonic elements grew somewhat predictable and stable (such as the common usage of major chords); written notation that detailed these notes and harmonies grew more precise; and manufacture of standardized instruments capable of playing the notes of equal temperament grew more prevalent – as exemplified by the piano capturing the 12 notes per octave via its white and back keys. This ongoing rationalization, Weber suggests, facilitated the flourishing of distinctive and elaborate music in the West – such as orchestral music – and it also revealed social processes about rationalization in general. Although this system is neither the only nor most "scientific" way for dividing pitch into notes (Duffins 2007; see Becker 1982: 32-33), this musical object is widely taken-for-granted, especially in the West, and it shapes the very manner in which individuals hear music (see Cross 1997).

The achievement of music as an object goes far beyond its codification in notation and the rationalized system of tonality. In many places, music is embodied in objects of exchange ("commodities"). This buying and selling of music has occurred for centuries, with the range of commodities growing more expansive. An early precursor involved the buying and selling of labor – with the state, Church, and aristocracy serving as patrons that secured the services of musicians and composers (Abbott & Hrycak 1990, DeNora 1991, Scherer 2001). Outright commodification of musical objects took root in the (late) 1700s with the expansion of commercial music publishing and the rise of copyright laws that fixed sets of notes as distinct entities. The objectivation of notes and words into a product helped composers move from patronage into the freelance marketplace (Lenneberg 2003, Scherer 2001); almost concurrently, commercial venues that featured performance of these musical texts proliferated (see DeNora 1991, Weber 2006). In the present, publishers and others are financially compensated when those texts are performed in a variety of venues and / or disseminated by others for profit (Dowd 2003,

Ryan 1985). Commodification expanded further in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when the application of technologies freed music from the fleeting nature of performance and the static nature of the printed page. The technologically "captured" performance became a product widely disseminated by the emergent recording, radio and film industries (Dowd 2003, Sanjek & Sanjek1991). These industries continue to offer such products, with additional captured performances coming via such sources as iPods and online music (Bull 2007, Leyshon et al. 2005). The commodification of music is now commonplace and a fact of life in most societies – which Adorno (2002) and others lament. What exactly is owned – the notes on the page, the performance, the technological reproduction – is a matter of conflict, whose adjudication has far-reaching consequences for the social dynamics of music (see Leyshon et al. 2005, Sanjek & Sanjek 1991).

This self-conscious examination of how music is treated as an object has lessons for social construction more generally. Because the achievement of music's object-ness is relatively culturally and historically specific, it can be studied as a model for the process of "reification," whereby human creations are mistakenly treated as simply resulting from nature (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Just as the seven-day week is one of many ways of dividing time, so too is equal temperament but one way of dividing pitch. That both are treated as "natural" speaks to the deep entrenchment of these inventions in daily life (Duffins 2007, Zerubavel 1985). Its object-ness as commodity is also instructive. Music's object-ness, its embeddedness in institutions, its pervasiveness in everyday life, its popularity as an avocation and its affirmation in a discourse of transcendent sanctification make it an accessible exemplar of the process of social construction. The study of sociologically similar phenomena – such as art, technology, and

money – could learn from the process by which much of music (but not all) became a commodified object.

Music as Activity

Scholars critical of the treatment of music as an object have frequently asserted that music is more fruitfully understood as a process – an activity. Rather than an object with fixed qualities, music can be treated as something always becoming that never achieves full object status, something unbounded and open, something that is a verb ("musicking") rather than a noun. Musicologist Christopher Small (1998: 2), who coined the term musicking, makes the point forcefully.

> Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely.

This activity is evident in the performance of music – given its physical nature – but also in the efforts that precede and enable such performance. In the realm of classical music, which is known for its performers who resolutely seek to capture the intention of the composer as conveyed in notation, the rendering of these musical texts involves considerable process containing both musical and "non-musical" elements. Among professional string quartets in Great Britain, the most financially and critically successful are those whose members adeptly handle inter-personal issues that arise during practice and concerts (e.g., conflict, leadership) and who focus on musically pleasing themselves rather than the audience (Murninghan & Conlon 1991). Similarly, the quality of orchestral performance is wrapped up with evaluations of conductor competency and legitimacy, which often emerge in rehearsal (Benzecry 2006,

Khodyakov 2007, Marotto et al. 2007), and with dynamics of informal and formal relations that unfold within and beyond the concert (Allmendinger & Hackman 1995, Glynn 2000, Khodyakov 2007, Marotto et al. 2007). Even the supposedly isolated figure of the concert pianist grapples with conflicting expectations of powerful others (e.g., competition judges, conservatory faculty) – such as simultaneous calls to ignore or treat the persistent pain that can result from extensive play of technically demanding music (Alford & Szanto 1996, McCormick 2009). (Pain also figures prominently in the careers of ballet dancers; see Turner & Wainwright [2006]). The object of musical notation that lies at the heart of classical music is made alive by the musicking that surrounds it.

In the realm of jazz, which is known for improvisation that can render a song differently every time, the development of improvisational skills is an ongoing process, as well. In order to improvise, jazz musicians develop such cognitive skills as understanding the relationship between chords and individual notes and identification with the character and role of their particular instrument. They acquire such corporal skills as knowing how to use their body in the delivery of this "instantaneous" music. They learn interactional skills and etiquette for collective performance that involves the spontaneous musical passages of soloists, turn-taking among soloists, and accompaniment that ably responds to the expected and unexpected directions that improvisation takes. Their mastery of improvisation, in turn, is shaped by a larger context containing familial support, mentorship, social connections among musicians, and the changing landscape of performance opportunities (Berliner 1994, Dempsey 2008, Gibson 2006, MacLeod 1993, Sudnow 1978). What appears to be ephemeral – the improvisation that is commodified at jazz venues and on recordings – is actually embedded in extended activity that connects both the musical and non-musical.

Small's musicological position is inherently sociological because it highlights the intertwining of music and interaction, thereby resonating with much scholarship. Small's (1998) approach highlights a number of actors involved in ongoing activity of music. Yet, as an anonymous reviewer correctly notes, Small tends to focus on actors associated with musical performance (e.g., ticket-takers at concerts). In contrast, the art world approach of Howard Becker (1982) gives consideration to all people involved in the creation and dissemination of music – including, for lack of a better term, support personnel who may have little involvement in the musical performance itself. Consequently, the process of musicking should be of interest to proponents of sociological approaches that address interaction and cognition more generally – such as ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, the sociology of work and organizational sense-making. Those approaches reveal that individuals collectively work to interpret and enact the world that they confront. Musicking provides a powerful example of such efforts – particularly in showing that the "facticity" of musical scores and performances rests on inter-subjective interpretations that are invented in and sustained by interaction. This becomes especially apparent when considering the usage of music by listeners.

HOW DO INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS USE MUSIC?

Approaching music as merely an object or an activity risks treating it as set apart and self-contained rather than as part of, and inseparable from, social life (Bohlman 1999). Many thus focus on how music is embedded in social life (e.g., social relations). Hence, DeNora (2000) speaks of "a range of strategies through which music is mobilized as a resource for producing the scenes, routines, assumptions and occasions that constitute 'social life.'" That is, people use music to give meaning to themselves and their world.

Like Griswold (1987), we treat "meaning" as shared significance that occurs when music points to something beyond itself, representing some aspect of social life. We first discuss how academics grapple with musical meaning. This covers important ground and situates our discussion of how people use music to define who they are individually and collectively. Of course, when focusing on the embeddedness of music in social relations, music performed for audiences is but one of a manifold set of social relations. That so much musicking takes the form of, say, performer/audience relations is a characteristic of Western society to be explained rather than a restrictive assumption to impose on analysis (Turino 2008).

Embeddedness of Musical Meaning

The embeddedness of music complicates the construction of meaning, as meaning is not solely located in either a musical object or activity. Drawing inspiration from DeNora (1986), we address two broad approaches to this complication – those who emphasize the musical object (what we label here as "textualists") and those who emphasize the activity ("contextualists").

The textual approach often treats music as analogous to language. The most straightforward example comes from numerous studies focusing on song lyrics. Sociologists and others probe meaning by interpreting one set of words (lyrics) into another set describing it. For instance, in an ambitious analysis of more than 400 songs found on best-selling hip hop albums, Kubrin (2005: 366) ultimately interprets their lyrics as "[helping] construct an interpretive environment where violence is appropriate and acceptable." Acknowledging that rappers could have different lyrical intentions and listeners could have divergent interpretations of these lyrics, Kubrin nevertheless roots the meaning in violence while connecting it to inner-city streets that he notes are familiar to hip hop artists and audiences (but see Rodriquez 2006: 664).

The textual approach is less straightforward when scholars turn to the music itself, especially given an important difference between music and language. Whereas basic elements of language (words – "dog") have meaning, basic musical elements (notes – "C-Sharp") have trivial, if any, meaning. Some handle this by focusing on the structure of music (e.g., interrelationships among individual notes) and tracking the meaning from there (DeNora 1986).

This focus on musical structure has extensive roots in the humanities. Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick ([1854] 1957) argued that, just as language can be analyzed in terms of the formal structures of its syntax, so can music be parsed into its formal features (thereby launching the formalist approach in musicology). He also argued that music parallels language only in its syntax (structure) and not its semantics (meaning), thus stopping short of linking the two. Musicologists from Cooke (1959) onward have aggressively made that linkage. Susan McClary (1991) locates meaning in this interplay between musical structure (text) and social life (context), as when arguing that certain music (e.g., classical sonatas) projects the same tension as conventional literary plots – pitting the dominant masculine against the subordinate feminine before resolving into the triumph of masculinity. Walser (1999) similarly elaborates how the musical structure of heavy metal (e.g., rhythms, timbres) ties to broader notions of masculinity. Some suggest that meaning arises when musical structure calls to mind the phenomenal world. The sonic ebb and flow of Gamelan music in Bali and Java evokes for listeners the natural cycles of calendars and cosmos and feels not only natural but beautiful and powerful (Becker & Becker 1981), while the arc in Mozart's music – with its definite sequence that points to the ending, much like a narrative plot does – conjures for listeners the linear notions of time that mark modernity (Berger 2007).

Some sociologists likewise focus on musical structure. For example, Cerulo (1995) analyzes 161 national anthems by heeding the relationship of notes that unfolds within each anthem simultaneously (e.g., harmony that occurs when notes are sounded together) and temporally (e.g., successive notes in a melody). On the one hand, Cerulo focuses intently on the texts of these anthems, observing how certain musical relationships have gained political meaning. Anthems with melodies that proceed smoothly with small differences in pitch between successive notes (i.e., "intervals") have a different meaning than those anthems with melodies filled with large differences: the small intervals of "God Save the Queen," signify a hymn of honor, whereas the leaping intervals of "La Marseillaise" arouse a call to arms. On the other hand, Cerulo links the musical structures of these anthems to such things as the political environment. Nations with few political voices (i.e., authoritarian governments) tend to choose anthems with basic musical structures – as the widely shared worldview accompanying this (imposed) solidarity requires little explanation politically or musically. Nations with many political voices (i.e., multiparty democracies) gravitate toward anthems with complex musical structures – as much elaboration, politically and musically, is needed to overcome differences.

The contextual approach differs markedly. Contextualists particularly focus on listeners – who, in the textual approach, are often ignored, imagined or simply the academics themselves. Martin (2006) criticizes as sociologically naïve the "new musicology" that probes music for its social meaning. DeNora (2000: 22) charges that textualists "often conflate ideas about music's affect with the ways that music actually works for and is used by its recipients instead of exploring how such links are forged by situated actors." Feld (1984: 383) similarly advocates going beyond "readings" of music to investigate "the primacy of symbolic action in an ongoing

intersubjective lifeworld, and the ways engagement in symbolic action continually builds and shapes actors' perceptions and meanings." The most explicit argument is by Small (1998: 13):

> The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds…but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance…

He illustrates this with an insightful account of the meanings created by a classical music concert, including the architecture of the concert hall, the physical relations of participants, the conventions for behavior, and microsocial interaction, all of which frame the music itself and the discourse around it.

The contextual approach maintains that the meaning is never purely in the music because there is never "a" meaning. While some listeners deplore the violence in rap lyrics – reducing the range of lyrics to that particular meaning – others hear them as signifying a needed critique, a political rallying cry, and / or an emergent art form (Binder 1993; Watkins 2001). According to contextualists, whether rap music foments violence or conciliation depends less on its lyrics or sounds than on what people do with it. Thus, meaning is more a set of activities (e.g., interpretation, reflection) than a product. As Alfred Schutz (1951) argued, musical meaning is particularly sociological because it both happens through interaction and makes interaction possible. By this logic, music and its meaning do not simply unfurl in a social context but are also part of the context itself (Seeger 2004).

Music and Meaningful Construction of Identity

Music and its meanings inform people, quite profoundly, about who they are. From aging punk rock fans (Bennett 2006) and passionate opera connoisseurs (Benzecry 2009) to youthful dance club devotees (Thornton 1996) and bluegrass music enthusiasts (Gardener 2004), music both signals and helps constitute the identity of individuals and collectivities.

DeNora (2000) is the leading sociologist addressing musical meaning and individual identity. Through interviews and observation, she finds that individuals construct an identity (a "me") by using music to mark and document important aspects of their lives – including memorable events and evolving relationships – and to guide how they negotiate such activities as shopping, aerobics, and lovemaking. Like some academics described above, individuals find meaning by linking text and context – using music to signify their evolving autobiographies. However, this is best seen as an ongoing activity steeped in interactions with others (e.g., lovers). Moreover, meanings that individuals identify are not necessarily the same as those of academics. Some like classical music (i.e., Mozart) because it is good background music for studying and not because, as Berger (2007) suggests, it resonates with the modern flow of time. Music thus "gets into" individuals via a deliberate meaning-making process. That said, music also "gets into" the body with little forethought – as when certain musical elements inspire action (e.g., marching) or rest (DeNora 2000, McNeill 1995, Small 1998).

Music is a "technology of the self" (DeNora 2000). It is something in which to lose one's self apart from others. Classical music aficionados can seek transcendence while listening to albums in the confines of their home (Hennion 2001), and iPod users can create sonic solitude while surrounded by strangers in a bustling city (Bull 2007). Music is also something by which to find one 's self amidst others, which is of particular interests to sociologists. Construction of an autobiographical soundtrack is an intra-individual process, suggests Hesmondhalgh (2007),

because people compare themselves to others – imaging how their experiences and perspectives do (or do not) lead to similar musical preferences (for possible implications of this, see Salagnik & Watts 2008). Meanwhile, many use music to develop their private faith while connecting themselves to a religious community (Chaves 2004, Wuthnow 2003).

Groups likewise use music as a tool for building identity – an "us" (Roy 2002). The relationship between a group and music flows two ways: music is identified by people inside (and outside) the group as "belonging" to it, and membership in the group is marked partly by embracing this music. Sometimes this occurs in a sustained and tacit fashion. Among the Suyá in central Brazil, daily enactment of relationships through ceremonial singings helps create a collective identity, which influences tremendously other aspects of Suyá life. Musicking "re-creates, re-establishes, or alters the significance of singing and also of the persons, times, places, and audiences involved. It expresses the status, sex, and feelings of performers, and brings these to the attention of the entire community" (Seeger 2004: 65). Music does not simply "reflect" this group but plays a performative role in defining it. The two-way relationship can also occur in a deliberate and sudden fashion, as when groups come to see particular music as signifying both their "us-ness" and their plight. African American slaves used spirituals with religious lyrics to define themselves and covertly critique deplorable conditions (Douglass [1845] 1993; see also Du Bois [1903] 1997). In the early 1900s, some 400,000 textile workers walked off the job after encountering local music that taught them of their solidarity and offered prescriptions for action (Roscigno & Danaher 2004). Serbian students of the late 1990s drew upon rock music to mobilize against Milošević – simultaneously constructing "a collective identity and a discourse of opposition that demarcated them not only from the regime but from other oppositional forces…" (Steinberg 2004: 22).

Music can be a "technology of the collective" because people gravitate toward those who share similar tastes (Bourdieu 1984, Roy 2002). This is particularly important in contemporary societies, as individuals can potentially be members of many (disparate) groups (see DiMaggio 1987). "Music scenes" research grapples with this – acknowledging the ease with which individuals can enter (and exit) groups that coalesce around particular types of music (Bennett 2004). The gathering of like-minded individuals occurs not only within locales – as Grazian (2003) has critically demonstrated for Chicago blues – but also across physical locales (Román Velázquez 1999) and virtual spaces (Beer 2008). This fluid and evolving construction of "us-ness" sometimes results in sprawling collectives – like the extreme metal scene that brings together enthusiasts and musicians from such far-flung places as Brazil, Israel, Malaysia, and Sweden (Kahn-Harris 2007). Of course, tastes can also prove divisive, as groups sometimes use music to define themselves against others (Bourdieu 1984, Roy forthcoming).

Scholars in the social sciences and humanities demonstrate that meaning does not simply reside in the content of media goods but in the interplay between audiences and content. Such stalwarts as Griswold (1987) emphasize the contingent nature of meaning, whereby the social situation of readers shapes how they interpret novels. Music scholarship provides important evidence of this contingent meaning by problematizing how musical content gets into people's minds, bodies and – especially – their activities. In doing so, it also shows the linkage between meaning and musicking plays a crucial role in identity construction. Music's role in defining of "me versus not-me" and "us versus them" should especially appeal to social psychologists (Killian & Johnson 2006) and social movement scholars (Eyerman & Jamison 1998). They will likely agree that the question of "how" musical meaning arises is perhaps more sociologically compelling than what it "is (DeNora 1986). Put another way, scholars within and beyond music

sociology can bring together "texts" and "contexts" by attending to what music "affords" both individuals and groups – including its affordance of identity construction and (collective) action (DeNora 2000, 2003; see Clarke 2005). In doing so, they will see the powerful resource that this sonic material offers daily life.

HOW IS THE COLLECTIVE PRODUCTION OF MUSIC MADE POSSIBLE?

Musical creation is deeply social. Even when one person is apparently responsible for music (e.g., recording original songs in a "bedroom studio"), her efforts are most likely intra-individual (Becker 1982). This occurs when that person utilizes the long-established system of tonality (Weber 1958), relies upon technologies devised by others (Jeppesen & Frederiksen 2006), or engages conventions shared by many (Hesmondhalgh 1998). Particularly intriguing are frequent instances in which musical production is explicitly collective – where individuals and organizations with their own respective interests come together for delivery of music (Regev 1998).

Several approaches take this aggregation as something to explain – including the art worlds approach (Becker 1982), the production of culture approach (Peterson & Anand 2006), field theory (Prior 2008), and neo-institutional theory (Johnson et al. 2006). They all point to widely-shared cognition that enables this collective production to work – (oftentimes) taken-for-granted ways of viewing the world ("institutions") that bring together individuals and organizations into a (somewhat) coherent "field." Heeding DiMaggio (1987), we focus on the differentiation of music into categories ("genres") and the ranking of certain genres ("hierarchy"). Both play crucial roles in collective production by similarly orienting innumerable actors in relationship to each other across time and place.

Genre as Collective Enactment

A distinctive feature of modern Western music is the way that "genre" simultaneously categorizes cultural objects and people. Some definitions of genre emphasize the content of cultural objects more than the people engaging such objects, as when Rosenblum (1975:424) defines genre (i.e., style) as "particular mannerisms or conventions that are frequently associated together." Other definitions bring people a bit more into the mix – as when Walser (1999: 29) summarizes, "Genres…come to function as horizons of expectations for readers (or listeners) and as models of composition for authors (or musicians)." Still other definitions emphasize more fully that genres are socially relevant in different ways for different actors and that people, as well as the music itself, can be categorized by genres. For example, Fabbri (1982, 1989) offers a well-known attempt that treats "genre" as socially accepted rules and specifies what those rules entail for specific genres – such as the Italian "canzone d'autore" ("author-song") and its creators ("cantautori" – singer-songwriters). These generic rules address technical aspects of music (e.g., the unpolished sound of cantautori), the semiotic (e.g., how cantautori convey truth via sincere words), the behavioral (e.g., the unassuming on-stage posture of cantautori), and the ideological (e.g., cantautori's commitment to justice). Though comprehensive, Fabbri's definition of genre is criticized for being too static, as it glosses over changing aspects of genre (Negus 1999, Santoro 2004). Finally, a stream of scholarship in sociology (Lena & Peterson 2008, Lopes 2002, Peterson 1997, Santoro 2004) emphasizes that genres are "moving targets" with evolving, rather than fixed, elements that morph over time – sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly (Becker 1982). We take the latter view here.

Collective enactment of musicians anchors these moving targets, both sustaining and changing genres in the process. While some musicians invent a new genre (Prior 2008), most only confront existing genres. Current understanding of a given genre serve are powerful tools for socialization, particularly when conveyed via mentors, peers, publications, and recordings (Bayton 1998, Clawson 1999, Curran 1996). In adopting a genre as their own, novices learn conventions regarding what to play (the "swing" of jazz drumming) and how to play (the pounding approach of rock drumming), as well as conventions about equipment (the massive drum-sets of heavy metal) and appearance (the "big hair" of certain rock genres). Pursuit of a genre thus links novices to others who appreciate these conventions – a field spanning the local (Crossley 2008), virtual (Beer 2008), and imagined (Lena 2004). However, conventions are not hard-and-fast rules. Given sanctions for being "generic," few musicians slavishly adhere to all – contributing to a gradual drift in what constitutes a genre. Some choose to subvert conventions, mavericks that can (decisively) re-define a genre (Becker 1982). Of course, musicians are not always bound to a single genre. Those adept at multiple genres can spur innovation, as when they combine disparate elements of various genres into a new fusion; they can also benefit economically, as when expanding the range of available gigs for which they are qualified (Dempsey 2008, MacLeod 1993). Small wonder that jazz musicians conversant in a wide range of genres enjoy more critical and financial success than others (Pinheiro & Dowd 2009). In short, the institution of genre allows musicians, as well as audiences and mediators, to negotiate collectively the vast possibilities of musical material by relying upon a shifting mixture of precedence and uniqueness (Becker 1982).

Businesses collectively enact genres too – but in a less dynamic fashion than musicians. Rather than focus on all available genres, large music firms have historically mined relatively

few – taking a "mainstream" approach that emphasizes well-known conventions and established musicians rather than the cutting edge developments of unheralded musicians. One notable example, for instance, occurred in the mid-1900s, when major recording and radio firms championed "pop" music (e.g., Perry Como) while rock, country, and R&B percolated on the periphery (Dowd 2003, 2004, Phillips & Owens 2004, Roy 2004). Some suggest that such a conservative approach then (and now) stems from managerial preferences for predictability and from formalization that can make large organizations sluggish (Ahlkvist & Faulkner 2000; Negus 1999, Rossmann 2004). Regardless of the reasons, this historically conservative approach also creates opportunities for small music firms to compete by addressing those genres that large firms overlook. Consequently, small firms have often championed new genres that transform the music business, thereby forcing large firms to deal with such once-peripheral genres as blues, jazz, R&B, rock'n'roll, and electronica (Dowd 2003, Hesmondhalgh 1998, Phillips & Owens 2004). In the late 1900s, often smarting from the transformative success of small firms, large recording firms in North America, Europe, and Japan moved proactively to address more than the mainstream. They established small divisions within their firms (to emulate small firms) and entered into contractual alliance with a host of small firms – thereby funding, and benefitting from, an expanding range of genres (Asai 2008, Burnett 1996, Dowd 2004, Negus 1999). Across the 20th century, then, small and large firms enacted a proliferation of genres deemed commercially viable – with online music in the 21st century likely pushing further this proliferation (see Asai 2008, Beer 2008, Leyshon et al. 2005). For these organizations, genre is "a way of defining music in its market or, alternatively, the market in its music" (Frith 1996).

Collective enactment of genre highlights issues of classification that have informed sociology since the days of Durkheim (Lamont & Molnár 2002). For many, classification is a

cognitive map imposed upon reality, as though reality is there before its classification. Zerubavel (1991), for instance, analyzes the logic by which we divide the world – distinguishing between continuous dimensions, mental gaps, etc. In contrast, collective enactment of genre reveals that reality is sometimes constructed amidst the process of classification – that ongoing cognition about, and action for, genre categories informs their collective definitions at a particular time – which, in turn, informs subsequent cognition and action. This resonates with the "duality of structure" described by Sewell (1991: 27), as genres "are constituted by mutually sustaining cultural schemas and sets of resources that empower and constrain social action and tend to be reproduced by that action."

Hierarchy and Classical Music

Differentiation of music can also entail hierarchy. The hallmark of subcultures is their members' insistence on the superiority of their favored genre ("punk rock rules!") and the attendant hierarchy of people based on their associations with that genre (Bennett 2004). More remarkable is when disparate individuals from many groups acknowledge the merit of particular genre(s). To illustrate such widely held hierarchy, we turn to a broad ranking that has centuries-old roots and has been upheld internationally: the touting of classical music as superior to popular music.

The ranking of classical music over popular music requires that those categories have relevance. Yet, the former category has not always existed (Weber 1984, 2006). European patrons and audiences long favored contemporary music – often devised for one-time performance at social events – rather than the repeated performance of complete works from the past (i.e., "classics"). The Paris Opera of the 17th century was arguably more concerned with

extolling both Louis XIV and the French language via musical spectacle than with creating great art (Johnson 2007). DeNora (1991) locates an important shift in Vienna of the late 1700s. Aristocrats once distinguished themselves by sponsoring musical ensembles that played new music, but as those further down the social ladder did so too, aristocrats turned to another way of distinction – the refined ability to appreciate complex and demanding music of Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn. While their emphasis on these "classics" did not gain widespread acceptance at the time, it presaged what was to come.

Hierarchy took root on both sides of the Atlantic with the proliferation of performance organizations that offered only classics – cordoning them off from popular music of the day (Allmendinger & Hackman 1996; Benzecry 2006, Levine 1988, Santoro forthcoming). In the U.S., DiMaggio (1982, 1992) emphasizes "first mover" organizations that did so in the domains of orchestral music (the Boston Symphony Orchestra) and opera (the New York Metropolitan Opera). Under the guidance of "cultural entrepreneurs" drawn from and connected to urban elites, both organizations combined the elevation of classical music with the nonprofit form – as the BSO did upon its founding in 1881 and the Met did when discontinuing its for-profit status in 1939. The nonprofit provided relief from the vagaries of audience demand because donations from various sources could compensate for low ticket-sales that typically resulted from featuring only "serious" works while eschewing entertaining tunes. These first-movers respectively made this hierarchy viable for US orchestras, and later for US opera companies, providing examples to emulate. From the late 1800s onward, orchestras offered programming that overwhelmingly emphasized the works of the past – such as the very composers once touted by Viennese aristocrats (Dowd et al. 2002, Kremp 2009). Moreover, at the turn of this century, non-profit

organizations remain preeminent among U.S. orchestras and opera companies, while for-profit organizations dominate the production of popular music (DiMaggio, 2006).

Developments in the broader field of musical production further solidified this hierarchy, but recently, have contributed to its erosion. In Europe and North America, recording companies and broadcasters of the early 1900s gave prominent attention to classical music – using albums and shows to educate listeners on the merits of this music. By the mid-1900s, these for-profit corporations began marketing classical music as a specialty product, if at all (Dowd 2003, Katz 1998, Maisonneuve 2001). From the mid-1900s, educators and critics in multiple nations instructed many on the importance and worth of classical music – showing surprising agreement on its exemplars (e.g., Beethoven). In recent years, educators and critics give increasing attention to the worth of popular music – raising its stature relative to classical music (Bevers, 2005; Dowd et al. 2001, Janssen et al. 2008, van Venrooij & Schmutz forthcoming). Meanwhile, in the U.S., non-profits may have grown less effective at insulating classical music from popular music, as declining audiences and dwindling donations have made ticket sales a central concern (DiMaggio 2006). Despite these recent developments, this institutionalized hierarchy remains surprisingly robust. This simple ranking enabled, and was enabled by, a transnational field of musical production.

Musical hierarchy should appeal to organizational sociologists – who have likewise emphasized the context in which particular organizations are embedded ("field") and the cognitive (and tacit) foundations of such fields (Johnson et al. 2006). However, some organizational scholars note the relative inattention paid to (a) actual people rather than institutions, (b) expressive aspects of fields rather than, say, utilitarian, and (c) de-institutionalization rather institutionalization (Glynn & Dowd 2008, Glynn & Marquis 2004).

The above scholarship on musical hierarchy therefore offers a corrective: it is rife with the actions and discourse of people who mobilized organizations and / or constituencies to proclaim an aesthetic preference and, in recent years, to deal with challenges that face this preference. Moreover, as we will see below, this particular form of musical hierarchy has implications for listeners and social stratification more broadly (Bourdieu 1984).

HOW DOES MUSIC RELATE TO BROADER SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS?

If musical differentiation and hierarchy aligned smoothly with the stratification of society, sociology of music would have little to say about broader social distinctions like race, class and gender. However, various aspects of music sometimes invert stratification, turning it on its head. While white listeners have sometimes devalued music by African Americans because of racial associations (Frith 1996, Lopes 2002), they sometimes imbue "black" with a positive value (e.g., authentic) and "white" with a negative (e.g., inauthentic) (Cantwell 1997, Grazian 2003). As one ethnographer observes about hip-hop, "Whites who pick up on African American styles and music do not necessarily want to be black; they seek to acquire the characteristics of blackness associated with being cool" (Rodriquez 2006: 649). Music consequently plays a complex role: it upholds stratification when people use it to reinforce social distinctions but undermines it when used to reach across distinctions (Roy 2002, 2004). As such, music enters into social relations and helps constitutes fundamental distinctions on a micro- and macro-level.

Musical Bounding of Distinctions

"Bounding" is one mechanism that shapes a society's system of alignment between conceptual distinctions (e.g., how music is classified into genres) and social distinctions (e.g.,

race, class). It thus links consequential distinctions – as when (de)valued musical genres are aligned with (de)valued groups of people (Lamont & Molnár 2002, Roy 2001, Zerubavel 1991). Because bounding does not simply "happen," it is important to identify those actors involved. We consider below the bounding done by music companies, critics and employers, and listeners. The latter is particularly interesting given the issue of "homology" – where particular groups of listeners gravitate toward music whose properties parallels aspects of their social location (DeNora 2002, Frith 1996, Martin 1995, Shepherd & Wicke 1997). Such homology is more circumscribed than the type of homology emphasized by earlier scholars who sought to demonstrate the parallels between entire societies and their musics (Adorno 2002, Lomax 1962, Weber 1958).

Commercial producers and distributors probably have the greatest impact on how the general public forms associations between musical genres and social distinctions (e.g., race). The racialization of music has been at the core of commercial music in America since its origins. The first genre of American commercial popular music arguably was the minstrel, which was based on white men's appropriation of black culture. Throughout much of the 1800s, minstrelsy was not only the place where most non-Southerners learned about African Americans, but it substantially informed immigrants about what it meant to be a white American (Lott 1993). Minstrelsy even supplied the name for the oppressive apparatus of legal segregation that framed race relations for much of the 20th century – "Jim Crow." In the late 1800s, when publication of sheet-music became the most profitable part of the music business, visual images added new power to racial stereotypes. Music publications were adorned with cover pages displaying "Sambo" caricatures – African-American cartoons with exaggerated lips, bulging eyes, flat

noses, mocking top hats, and gigantic bow ties – which all congealed into an icon of derision (Lhamon 1998, Lott 1993, Roy forthcoming).

The sharp racialization carried over into the era of recorded music. In the 1920s, record companies targeted racial groups in their marketing. While some executives were surprised that people other than white middle class urbanites would buy records, most record companies created special labels and catalogs for "race records" and "hillbilly music" – before eventually adopting the names "rhythm and blues" and "country and western" (Dowd 2003, Peterson 1997, Roy 2002, 2004). Concurrently, large recording firms prominently featured jazz orchestras of white musicians while hoping to avoid the stigma that purportedly flowed from the "hot" jazz of black musicians – as when they relied on pseudonyms to hide the identity of well-known black musicians like Louis Armstrong (Phillips & Kim 2009, Phillips & Owen 2004).

Well-placed individuals also shape the alignment of genres and social distinctions. Those offering public discourse about music – critics, academics, and journalists – are the most visible group doing so and perhaps the most influential. Schmutz (2009) finds clear evidence of "gender-bounding" by newspaper critics in four nations over 50 years. As critics collectively devoted increasing coverage to particular popular music genres, they also reduced relative attention given to women artists in those genres. This critical discourse makes the association that valued genres are the domain of men more than women. This talk is not cheap because other well-placed individuals – potential employers – have similarly devalued women over the years. Compared to men, women musicians have historically faced a narrow range of instruments and responsibilities (Bayton 1998, Clawson 1997, DeNora 2002), unstable employment (Coulangeon et al. 2005), limited commercial success (Dowd et al. 2005), and disgruntlement from fellow instrumentalists when their presence in symphony orchestras moves from token numbers to a

sizable minority (Allmendinger & Hackman 1995). The alignment between genre and gender has often worked against women in popular and classical music.

Listeners of various types are involved in bounding. A notable strand of British scholarship, for instance, details the symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a particular subculture – its subjective experience – and the music it uses to express or reinforce its focal concerns (Bennett 2004). Hence, punks' general rejection of respectability is reflected in their strident music that subverts mainstream musical aesthetics, just as piercing their faces with safety pins subverts the meaning of mundane objects (Hebdige 1978).

While members of subcultures may intentionally use music to construct their position in the social order, Bourdieu (1984) argues that members of classes do so with little forethought. The economic situation of each class shapes its members' disposition toward music in a particular fashion – with this disposition seeming natural. Given the limited finances and free-time of the French working class, they favor pleasurable music that requires little training to appreciate. The French upper class, possessing considerable resources and leisure time, tends toward the cerebral rather than the entertaining – such as the classical music that requires much training and cultivation to appreciate. The privileged standing of the upper class means that its disposition is widely seen as "legitimate" – as when familiarity with classical music serves as "cultural capital" that facilitates opportunity and success in a variety of domains. Armed with French survey data showing class-differences in musical appreciation and modes of listening, Bourdieu (1984: 18) asserts, "Nothing more clearly affirms one's 'class,' nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music." For him, the homology between musical preferences and social classes is systemic for France. This homology may matter outside of France too, but possibly in a less clear cut fashion. Cultural capital contributes to educational success in the US, for instance,

but those who possess, and benefit from, it are not necessarily affluent (Aschaffenburg & Maas 1997, Dumais 2002).

Musical Bridging of Distinctions

"Bridging" is another mechanism that shapes the alignment of conceptual and social distinctions (Roy 2002, 2004). It blurs the linkage between distinctions – as when a musical genre once limited to a particular social group is embraced by other groups (Lamont & Molnár 2002, Roy 2001, Zerubavel 1991). Our discussion below somewhat parallels that of bounding, but it also raises differences. In the case of listeners, bridging edges alignment away from homology and towards "heterology" – where conceptual distinctions map less cleanly, if not more complexly, on particular social distinctions (Coulangeon & Lemel 2007, García-Álvarez et al. 2007).

While businesses played a substantial role in early racialization of American music, some later moved away from a strict segregation of black and white music(ians). Since the early 1900s, a single organization (ASCAP) worked on behalf of composers and publishers to secure payment whenever venues or broadcasters used their compositions; however, its leaders resisted dealing in "race" and "hillbilly" music – leaving without economic representation these genres and their composers (e.g., Jelly Roll Morton). Chafing from fees charged by ASCAP, broadcasters established their own organization in 1939 – BMI. It aggressively represented genres that ASCAP had ignored and provided the economic foundation for the burgeoning of those genres from the 1940s onward (Dowd 2003, Ryan 1985). These genres further benefitted when record companies of the mid-1900s moved away from the stringent categorization of an earlier era. Folkways Records purposefully mixed African American and rural white performers

on key albums without identifying their race for listeners. Large recording firms did not go as far, but they did complement their focus on "pop" music by investing heavily in country music and R&B. Moreover, these firms soon realized the value of "crossover success" – as when African American performers could fare quite well in the pop market targeting white audiences (e.g., Nat King Cole) (Dowd 2003, 2004, Peterson 1997, Skinner 2006). The relaxation of boundaries filtered down to instrumentalists from the mid-1900s onward when their union grew more receptive to representing country musicians and when it finally integrated once racially segregated operation in U.S. cities (Dowd 2003, Dowd & Blyler 2002, Peterson 1997). While not completely eliminating racialization in American music (Negus 1999), such bridging has made it less blatant and provided opportunities for once marginalized genres to reach new audiences.

The discourse of well-placed individuals likewise can likewise bridge across distinctions. Even in that despicable era, the relationship of slaves to music was complex (Roy forthcoming). Owners used the music of slaves to regulate the pace of labor and to entertain at white social events, but they often heard as "noise" the spirituals that slaves enacted on their own in richly symbolic and, at times, defiant ways. To great effect, abolitionists, folklorists, and academics convinced some whites that this "noise" is actually important music. Frederick Douglas and others argued compellingly that spirituals dramatized the humanity of African Americans, revealed their relationship to the almighty, and portrayed them as full, if not equal, human beings (Cruz 1999). In subsequent eras, critics and academics have (successfully) made the case to whites that other genres associated with African American musicians – particularly jazz and hip hop – are neither noise nor immoral but emergent art forms that merit careful consideration (Binder 1993, Lopes 2002; see Lena & Peterson 2008). Recent analysis reveals that the genre labels that critics employ in their reviews are oftentimes overlapping – particularly blurring the

boundaries of the "pop" and "rock" genres with those "R&B" and "hip-hop" (van Venrooij 2009). The alignment between genre and race is growing more fluid in much discourse.

Recent scholarship suggests that listeners, particularly high-status individuals, are engaged in considerable bridging – aligning a varied range of music to their own daily experiences (see Peterson 2005). This bridging is not new, however. Despite early commercial classification and segregation of "race" and "hillbilly" music, many black and white musicians of the time, even in the South, knew each other, learned from each other, and sang each other's songs (Roscigno & Danaher 2004, Roy 2002, forthcoming). Musicians, academics and others created the genre of "folk music" in opposition to those commercial classifications and as part of a project to trace various national musics to the primordial past; race was especially salient given debates over whether the "true" American folk music was in, say, the English ballads of the mountaineers or the hybrid spirituals sung by slaves (Roy 2002, forthcoming). Following the convoluted history of folk music, by the 1960s, educated urbanites in the U.S. valorized folk music precisely because it is the music of common folk, both black and white. The more marginal, humble, and unsophisticated the makers of the music, the better for these enthusiasts (Roy 2002, forthcoming). We see here an alignment that stands the class system on its head, with the advantaged identifying with the disadvantaged.

This past bridging of folk enthusiasts presaged a recent trend of bridging that is notably unfolding in multiple nations. Among those Dutch with high educational attainment and occupational prestige, one segment displays a notable fondness for classical music; however, another segment is marked by its passing familiarity with a wide range of musical genres liked by less privileged groups (van Eijck 2001). The latter segment's "omnivorous" tastes complicate stratification because, for a socially advantaged group of listeners, the alignment between social

and symbolic boundaries is more "heterologous" than Bourdieu's argument suggests (García-Álvarez et al. 2007). Even in France, recent survey results "radically eliminate any attempt to map the distribution of musical taste in terms of … homology: highbrow is no more music of the upper-class than pop music the music of the lower class" (Coulangeon & Lemel 2007: 98-99). However, these omnivorous tastes in musical genres do not mark the end of stratification by any means. Instead, they appear to represent a new form of currency that the advantaged can deploy in highly individualized ways (Ollivier 2008, Savage 2006, Warde & Gayo-Cal 2009).

Because the groups that are bounded and bridged by music are rarely socially equal, music plays an important role in sustaining and reconfiguring stratification. Not surprisingly, the relationship of music to inequality has been the focus of some of the theoretically richest and most widely discussed work in the sociology of music. This work should be of interest, then, to students of stratification because it reveals the role of what may seem innocuous – musical tastes and preferences – in helping to create and mark such socially consequential distinctions as race, gender and class.

CONCLUSION

The sociology of music illuminates how sociologists examine a variety of dimensions about social life more generally. From the microsociological concerns of how precognitive interaction "tunes in" the way we relate to the macrosociological concerns of how social distinctions are constituted and reinforced, the sociology of music offers important lessons. Though we can do little more than baldly make a claim, we would argue that the most profound lessons for non-music sociology are found in the distinctive qualities of music.

While music's non-unique qualities are studied by other specializations in sociology (e.g., its organizational and interactional aspects), probing its unique qualities highlight the taken-for-granted qualities of non-musical interaction. For example, Bourdieu (1984) explains how it is music's abstract, content-less quality that makes it appropriate for cultural capital. This insight has transformed the study of stratification to include the ineffable as well as the countable. Similarly it was the attribution of music to slaves that abolitionists used to assert their humanity. Though the Christian content of spirituals might have boosted the sympathy that white audiences felt for the enslaved, it was the act of making music that mitigated the image of savagery. Cruz (1999) has described how the use of music to humanize American slaves presaged a new kind of relationship between dominant and subordinate groups that he calls "ethnosympathy" – a simultaneous embracing of and distancing toward a group seen as culturally different. Thus the study of stratification and ethnic relations have benefitted from the sociology of music, not when music is treated like another form of signification or a vehicle for lyrical expression, but when treated as a special kind of activity that people do. Indeed, by answering the four questions listed at the outset of the paper, we hope to have shown the import of music for all kinds of sociologists.

We as a discipline are just beginning to develop the conceptual and methodological tools to capture fully the social dynamics of music, but as we make further progress, it will be benefit the discipline and the store of human knowledge as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper benefitted greatly from the insightful and helpful comments of others. We thus thank the following individuals for helping us revise and refine this paper: Ron Aminzade, Claudio

Benzecry, Rogers Brubaker, Tia DeNora, David Grazian, Jenn Lena, Gabriel Rossman, Marco Santoro, Vaughn Schmutz, Tracy Scott, Tony Seeger, Marco Verboord, and the UCLA Seminar on Theory and Research in Comparative Social Analysis. We also thank the anonymous *ARS* reviewer, managing editor Erin Wait, and editor Karen Cook for their assistance in preparing and improving this paper.

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