

Afterword: Music, Sound, History

Abstract

This afterword offers historiographical context for historical writing on music, stretching back to the pioneering work of Eugene Genovese and Lawrence Levine in the 1970s. For the articles in this special issue, it suggests Christopher Small's concept of "musicizing" as a useful way to think about music as social practice and proposes that these articles take on added power when read in relation to the recent scholarship on the history of the senses and especially of sound. Finally, it encourages historians' expanded use of music as an interpretive tool.

When I was in graduate school, a senior historian I respected once said to me, "I've never read a good book about music," by which he meant a good *history* book. I was gratified when, years later, he had kind words for my dissertation on the origins of the modern music business, but, still, his remark stuck with me.¹ Indeed, it was representative of a broader wariness about music in the historical profession at large, which I found strange given (a) music's historical ubiquity, (b) historians' expanded purview since the rise of the new social history in the 1960s, and (c) the fact that music had figured prominently in two acclaimed and influential books of the 1970s: Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* and Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*.² While it is true that most leading history journals today do review books about music here and there, they publish articles on music only quite rarely. Music, one might conclude, is still generally understood as peripheral to the "real" work of historians, despite its far-reaching social, cultural, political, and economic power.

As James Millward has pointed out in his contribution to this special issue, some of the reasons for historians' aversion to music are not obscure. For one thing, most historians lack the specialized knowledge needed to analyze musical forms and structures, rendering music more opaque than other types of sources (e.g., textual, visual, material). For another, there is the perceived paucity of sources, given the ephemerality of sound, especially for music from before the age of mechanical reproduction, and the shortcomings of even the best musical transcriptions. These issues do not present insurmountable obstacles, however. As the articles in this special issue demonstrate, there are many ways to write about music, and not all of them involve musical theory and analysis. Second,

all historians must grapple with silences, incomplete archives, and the complex ways extant sources mediate the past. Music may involve some unusual challenges, but these need not place it outside historical analysis.

In recent years, scholars such as Karl Hagstrom Miller, Penny Von Eschen, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Michael J. Kramer, Matthew Karush, John Troutman, and Hiromu Nagahara (all of whom trained in history) have challenged this marginalization, showing the historical significance of music for subjects whose importance historians have long recognized, including not just “culture” (always an ambiguous designation) but also globalization, citizenship, race and segregation, nationalism, and diplomacy and international relations.³ Their work builds on an earlier group of historians who began writing seriously about music starting in the 1980s and 90s, including William Weber, George Lipsitz, Robin D. G. Kelley, Lewis Erenberg, and James H. Johnson.⁴ Meanwhile, changes in musicology, ethnomusicology, and other fields have led to an outpouring of historically valuable work by scholars trained in disciplines other than history. Taken together, such scholarship repudiates the suggestion that music is only a historical sideshow.

One valuable dimension of the articles in this special issue is the ways they conceptualize music as social practice. In this respect, they are concerned not simply with systems of sound but with what the musicologist Christopher Small famously called “musicking.” For Small, music was best approached not as a *thing*, self-contained and autonomous, but as an activity—something that “happens”—dependent on a wide range of actors, conditions, and relations. European concert music, for example, was constituted not by notes on a page but by the interrelations of, say, composers, conductors, instrumentalists, instrument makers, audiences, ushers, and ticket-sellers. For Small, it did not make sense to think about music in the abstract, for it was always socially (and therefore historically) situated, coproduced by people with various interests and motivations. This is a potent concept for historians, as it places music in a web of social and economic relations and brings to the fore the interconnectedness of production, distribution, and consumption for understanding the causes, contexts, and consequences of a given musical phenomenon.⁵ Thus, whether they engage with Small’s work or not, a number of the preceding articles adopt and adapt his approach. Jason McGraw’s contribution illuminates the enabling and limiting social conditions for Jamaican music in postwar Britain; Christina D. Abreu shows how the complex gender politics of Cuban and Latin popular music shaped the reputations and careers of three of the field’s leading female practitioners; and James Millward details the design, circulation, and influence of the sitar and its music as constituted by musicians, instrument-makers, imperial and colonial officials, and others across many centuries of Indian history.

Some of the articles emphasize distribution, consumers, and reception; others focus on performers and performance. One—Jason McGraw’s essay—does both. Regardless, what unites all of the articles is that they demonstrate the relevance of music to issues of established interest to historians, including globalization and cosmopolitanism; postcolonial community formation; the social structuration of race; the dynamics of cultural hierarchy; gender, identity, and power; and the construction of historical memory. For example, the articles by McGraw and Michael O’Malley both historicize the production and policing of what literary scholar Jennifer Stoeber has called “the sonic color line,” that is,

the social relations related to ways that race is made and remade through sound.⁶ Other articles can help us think about such issues as how genres are constituted and the work that generic distinctions do (Michael Schmidt, Panagiota Anagnostou, O'Malley); the role of female artists (Abreu) and workaday musicians (Palomino) as shapers of structures of feeling; and the cultural and sometimes political implications of developments in technology and packaging (Millward, Schmidt, McGraw).

These articles on music take on additional power when read against the recent surge of interest in the history of the senses and especially of sound. The idea of writing the history of senses was first proposed by Lucien Febvre eight decades ago, but it did not get much traction until the pioneering work of Alain Corbin in the 1980s and 1990s.⁷ Since then, often in dialogue with anthropologists, historians have gradually explored what sensory history might look like, beginning with the premise that sensory experience is, to a greater or lesser extent, socially constructed.⁸ In 2007, Mark M. Smith published in this journal an article titled, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History." It was followed by a number of special features or issues on the topic in other journals as well as an article about sensory history in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.⁹ Meanwhile, a new journal on the subject, *The Senses and Society*, was launched in 2006, as were several book series.¹⁰

In recent years, an even greater number of journals have dedicated special issues not just to the senses but to sound in particular—both reflecting and catalyzing a sharp growth in the interdisciplinary field known as sound studies (or sometimes "sonic studies"). Two journals dedicated to the subject have been launched as well.¹¹ Bringing together work in history, literature, anthropology, ethnomusicology, art history, media studies, disability studies, and other fields, this literature probes how *sound* and a number of related concepts (*hearing, listening, noise, silence, deafness*, etc.) come to refract and contribute to a wide range of social, political, and economic relations. Rather than taking sensory or sonic experience as transhistorically constant, these scholars posit that sound as both a material and discursive phenomenon has ever-changing functions and meanings and that attending to these reveals structures of feeling and power that would otherwise remain hidden. Music—which composer Edgard Varèse defined as "organized sound"—is especially generative for understanding the human auditory environment, and recent work in sound studies provides a context for recognizing musical soundscapes as sites where culture is both made and contested. If the work of sound studies is, as Jonathan Sterne put it in the introduction to his *Sound Studies Reader*, making sense of "what sound does in the human world and what humans do in the sonic world," then it may offer some valuable cues for using music as an analytic in historical scholarship.¹²

Returning to the essays in this special issue, then, I would identify several places where sound studies scholarship could enter into dialogue with these articles. To take one example, scholars such as Jennifer Stoeber, Clare Corbould, Derek Vaillant, John Picker, Karin Bijsterveld, and Hillel Schwartz have all written productively about noise as a social construct and the ways that definitions of noise have been used to restrict and police the behavior of working-class communities and people of color. Putting their work in conversation with Jason McGraw's article would reveal ways that the racialization of noise in postwar Britain extended patterns visible in other times and places and

show how developments in Britain belonged to a longer and broader tradition of using noise ordinances as tools of surveillance and repression.¹³ To take another example, recent books by Christine Ehrick and Allison McCracken on the politics of voice and gender could illuminate Christina Abreu's analysis of songstresses Graciela, Celia, and La Lupe. Having restored the metaphorical voices of these women, Abreu invites us to consider more deeply their actual voices and the ways that those voices conformed to or deviated from normative notions of how "respectable" women should sound. Applying the approaches of Ehrick and McCracken would reveal how the politics of gender operated not just socially but sonically as well.¹⁴

The other articles also present opportunities to connect with sound studies. Michael Schmidt's article on the Louis Armstrong reissues of the 1950s shows how media help structure the ways that music shapes historical memory. It would be interesting to see what this issue looks like when read through the work on phonography and recorded sound by Jacques Attali, Friedrich Kittler, and Evan Eisenberg.¹⁵ At the center of Pablo Palomino's article on Nina Sibirteva stand issues of transcultural and transnational circulation of music, and these might be pushed further through the work of David Novak, Ana María Ochoa Gautier, and Timothy Taylor.¹⁶ Michael O'Malley's meticulous analysis of the recording career of guitarist Eddie Lang raises many rich issues, leading me to think about the work of Louise Meintjes on the recording studio, Lisa Gitelman on how race gets encoded in music, and Alexander Weheliye and Kodwo Eshun on the utopian (Afrofuturist) possibilities of sound recording as an alternative to what O'Malley calls "the minstrel cycle."¹⁷ Panagiota Anagnostou's work on rebetika, national identity, and the value of generic designations calls to mind the recent work of Morgan Luker and Gavin Steingo (not to mention the articles by Schmidt and O'Malley in this issue).¹⁸ Finally, James Millward's expansive article on the sitar evokes everything from Frantz Fanon's anticolonial work on radio to Amanda Weidman's scholarship on sound, music, and difference in colonial India to Richard Leppert's critical historicization of images of musical instruments.¹⁹

In closing, I wish to add my voice to James Millward's call, in the first section of his article, to challenge historians' general avoidance of music. Indeed, historians' engagement with music has grown since the pioneering work of Levine and Genovese in the 1970s, but that growth has been fitful and uneven. As a whole, the articles in this issue demonstrate that music is a constitutive element of who we are as historical subjects and important not just on the level of individual pleasure ("auditory cheesecake," in psychologist Steven Pinker's memorable phrase) but as part of the social and cultural relations that bind us together.²⁰ If Levine and Genovese apprehended the communicative and affective power of music, the articles in this issue demonstrate how historians' engagement with music has developed, namely, with an emphasis on the ways that the production and circulation of music are embedded in complex economic structures. This sensitivity to the imbrication of music in economic relations runs through much of the best recent work in this area, and as these articles show, it opens up avenues for new ways of thinking through older analytical categories, such as technology, media, memory, and space. The more that historians recognize that music can be a powerful interpretive tool, the

greater the potential is to hear the echoes of the past as resonant and meaningful.

Endnotes

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1. The dissertation grew into my book *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).
2. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1976); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977); Jeffrey H. Jackson and Stanley C. Pelkey, eds., "Introduction," in *Music and History: Bridging the Disciplines*, ed. Jeffrey H. Jackson and Stanley C. Pelkey (Jackson, MS, 2005), vii–xvii.
3. Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC, 2010); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago, 2009); Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (New York, 2013); Matthew B. Karush, *Musicians in Transit: Argentina and the Globalization of Popular Music* (Durham, NC, 2017); John W. Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879–1934* (Norman, OK, 2009); Troutman, *Kikā Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016); and Hiromu Nagahara, *Tokyo Boogie-Woogie: Japan's Pop Era and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, MA, 2017). Other work by scholars trained in history includes Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham, NC, 2007); Alex Sayf Cummings, *Democracy of Sound: Music Piracy and the Remaking of American Copyright in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2013); Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015); David Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015); Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Eric Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music* (Chicago, 2014); Burton W. Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (Urbana, IL, 1992); Douglas H. Daniels, *Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester "Pres" Young* (Boston, 2002); Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, NC, 2003); Jackson and Pelkey, *Music and History*; Celeste Day Moore, "Race in Translation: Producing, Performing, and Selling African-American Music in Greater France, 1944–74" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014); Samir Meghelli, "Between New York and Paris: Hip Hop and the Transnational Politics of Race, Culture, and Citizenship" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012).
4. See, e.g., William Weber, "Learned and General Musical Taste in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* 89 (1980): 58–85; Weber, "La Musique Ancienne in the Waning of the Ancien Régime," *The Journal of Modern History* 56, no. 1 (1984): 58–88; George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana, IL, 1994); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, 1994); James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA, 1995); Lewis A. Erenberg, *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago, 1998). See also Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914: A Social History* (Manchester, UK, 1987).

5. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT, 1998). See also Christopher Small, "Musicking: A Ritual in Social Space" (lecture delivered at the University of Melbourne, 1995), accessed May 10, 2018, <http://www.musekids.org/musicking.html>.
6. Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York, 2016).
7. Lucien Febvre, "Psychologie et histoire," in *Encyclopédie française*, vol. 8, *La vie mentale* (Paris, 1938); Febvre, "Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois? La sensibilité et l'histoire," *Annales d'histoire sociale* 3 (1941); both articles reprinted in Febvre, *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (New York, 1973); Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA, 1986); Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, European Perspectives (New York, 1998); Corbin, *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses* (Cambridge, UK, 1995). See also Alain Corbin, *Historien du sensible: Entretiens avec Gilles Heuré* (Paris, 2000); Sima Godfrey, "Alain Corbin: Making Sense of French History," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (2002): 381.
8. See, e.g., David Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto, 1991); Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (New York, 1993); David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (New York, 2014).
9. Mark M. Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 841–58. For other journals with features on the history of the senses, see, e.g., "The Senses in American History: A Round Table," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (September 2008); "The Senses in History," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (April 2011); "The Senses," *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (December 2012). Peter Monaghan, "Studying History, with Feeling," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 18, 2012, <https://www-chronicle-com.udel.idm.oclc.org/article/Studying-History-With-Feeling/132253>.
10. The two book series are published by the University of Illinois Press (started 2011) and Berg (2014).
11. For special issues on sound, see "Sound Politics," *Radical History Review* 121 (January 2015); "The Politics of Recorded Sound," *Social Text* 102 (2010); "Auditory History" *The Public Historian* 37, no. 4 (November 2015); "Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011); "The Sense of Sound," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22, no. 2–3 (2011); "Cultural Brokers and the Making of Global Soundscapes, 1880s to 1930s," *Itinerario* 41, no. 2 (2017); "Sound/Thinking," *parallax* 23, no. 3 (2017); "Sound Studies: New Technologies and Music," *Social Studies of Science* 34, no. 5 (October 2004); "Sound," Part I, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 42, no. 1 (2009); "Sound," Part II, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 42, no. 2 (2009); "Sound and Vision: Intermediality and American Music," *European Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 4 (2017). For journals, see *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, established 2015; *Journal of Sonic Studies*, established 2011.
12. Edgard Varèse, "The Liberation of Sound," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (New York, 2004), 20; Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York, 2012), 2.

13. Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*; Clare Corbould, "Streets, Sounds and Identity in Interwar Harlem," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (July 2007): 859–94; Derek Vaillant, "Peddling Noise: Contesting the Civic Soundscape of Chicago, 1890–1913," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 96, no. 3 (October 2003): 257–87; John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York, 2003); Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* (New York, 2011). Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).
14. Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930–1950* (New York, 2016); Allison McCracken, *Real Men Don't Sing: Crooning in American Culture* (Durham, NC, 2015).
15. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN, 1985); Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA, 1999); Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT, 2005).
16. David Novak, *Japanese: Music at the Edge of Circulation* (Durham, NC, 2013); Ana Maíra Ochoa Gautier, "Sonic Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America," *Social Identities* 12, no. 6 (November 2006): 803–25; Timothy D. Taylor, *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present* (Chicago, 2015).
17. Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham, NC, 2003); Lisa Gitelman, "Reading Music, Reading Records, Reading Race: Musical Copyright and the U.S. Copyright Act of 1909," *Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 265–90; Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC, 2005); Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London, 1998).
18. Morgan James Luker, *The Tango Machine: Musical Culture in the Age of Expediency* (Chicago, 2016); Gavin Steingo, "Musical Economies of the Elusive Metropolis," in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, ed. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Durham, NC, 2016), 246–66.
19. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York, 1993); Amanda Weidman, "Echo and Anthem: Representing Sound, Music, and Difference in Two Colonial Modern Novels," in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, ed. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Durham, NC, 2016), 314–33; Richard D. Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology, and Socio-cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1988); Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley, CA, 1993).
20. Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York, 1997), 524.