MUSIC
A Social Experience

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CHAPTER GOALS

- To introduce music as a social and scientific object of study.
- To introduce various ways of understanding music.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- What is music?
- How many kinds of music can you name? How do you generally listen to music? What do you think about when you listen?

"Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without."

—Confucius
(ca. 551 BCE to 479 BCE)

Introduction

Ninety-three-year-old Veva Campbell slumps wordlessly in her wheelchair. A victim of Alzheimer’s disease, she has not spoken, walked, fed herself, or recognized friends and family for over two years. This afternoon, her granddaughter, an out-of-town musician, comes to visit. There is nothing to say or do, so she pulls out her violin and begins to play. Miraculously, Mrs. Campbell sits up and begins singing along to the traditional hymns and old-time songs she recognizes from her youth. When the music stops, Mrs. Campbell retreats back into silence.

Our story is not apocryphal. Mrs. Campbell was the coauthor’s grandmother. And this demonstration of music’s power, remarkable as it may be, is not an isolated example. All over the world music unites and heals, transforms and inspires. This appears to have been the case since the beginning of civilization.

Music and the Brain

The foundation of musical experience resides deep within the mind. Medical science is just beginning to document these complexities. We know, for example, that severe stutterers, even those unable to get out single spoken words, can sometimes perfectly sing entire sentences. We know that by setting instructions to song, sufferers of autism can learn to execute sequential tasks otherwise far beyond their reach. And we know that when medication fails, those with the neuropsychiatric disorder Tourette syndrome can successfully use drum circles to calm their tics.

There is much to learn. Scientists cannot explain the case of Tony Cicoria, a middle-aged physician who, after being struck by lightning, suddenly developed a passion and gift for playing the piano and composing. Nor can they explain the case of Clive Wearing, a British amnesia victim who, despite being able to remember just a few seconds into the past, can still play the piano, read music, and even direct choral rehearsals.

The human brain seems to be programmed for song. So fundamental is the human capacity for music that it may have evolved even before speech. Physiologists have shown that a mother’s lullaby does double duty by lowering a child’s arousal levels while simultaneously increasing the child’s ability to focus attention. Music therapists have found that listening to music induces the release of pleasure-producing endorphins that both lower blood pressure and ease the sensation of physical pain. Social scientists believe that music, by bringing people together to perform and listen, may have provided an early model for social cooperation, cohesion, and even reproductive success. If this is correct, then music would seem to be a fundamental building block in the development of culture.

Attentive listening is good for the brain. It helps us organize our thinking, give shape to our consciousness, and focus our ideas. These phenomena seem to happen for a variety of reasons and in a number of ways. Our involuntary nervous system—including heart rate, brain waves, and other basic bodily functions—automatically entrains to the sounds we hear. We also respond to music’s emotional qualities. Lovely melodies softly played relax us, whereas beating drums and searing trumpets excite us. A favorite song recalls times gone by, whereas the sounds of a national anthem invite us to reflect upon our identity.

Music helps structure the analytical mind. Psychological studies suggest that musical training improves one’s organizational skills and can even
DID YOU KNOW?

EARS, BRAIN, AND FINGERS

The auditory cortex, which grows with musical training, can be up to 130 percent larger in musicians than in nonmusicians. Brains grow when challenged with physical tasks as well. The part of the brain that governs a violinist’s left-hand fingers will be larger than the part that governs the right-hand fingers. Presumably, Jimi Hendrix, who played the guitar “backwards,” would have shown more brain growth for the right-hand fingers.

The human brain, highlighting the auditory cortex.

have a positive effect on IQ. Indeed, scientists hypothesize that while performing, musicians are actually engaged in high-powered brain calisthenics. These skills transfer to other areas of life.

Clearly, active musical experience affects consciousness in profound ways. But what does this mean for you? What if you do not play music, sing, or dance? Research shows that one need not perform to reap music’s benefits. Simply engaging in active listening is enough to set the brain in high gear. And the best part of all this is that the effects of listening skills are cumulative. The better you learn to listen today, the more listening techniques you will have available tomorrow.

Music and Culture

Societies, both ancient and modern, have recognized music’s transformative agency. Indeed, Greek mythology tells us that music had power over death itself. When Orpheus’s beloved wife Eurydice died and passed into the underworld, he followed. Empowered by the irresistible strains of his lyre, Orpheus swayed the will of the gods; Eurydice was thus allowed to return to the land of the living. The idea of music’s regenerative power remains relevant today. As was witnessed worldwide in the remarkable concerts following the tragedy of 9/11, music making often signifies a return to life.

Cultures around the world have stories about the power of music. For the Temiar people of Malaysia in Southeast Asia, shamans heal with songs received from spirit guides. In the American Southwest, Hopi mythology tells of the primordial beings Tawa and Spider Woman, who sat together and sang humanity into existence. The rhythmic dance of the Hindu deity Shiva is said to animate the universe. mysearchlab 1.1

The preceding paragraph opened with the word “cultures,” as if its meaning were obvious. In fact, “culture” is a difficult concept to pin down. Anthropologists and sociologists have developed hundreds of definitions. Still useful today is one from British anthropologist Edward Tylor who in 1874 defined culture as a “complex whole” that includes a people’s acquired knowledge and beliefs, arts and morals, laws and customs. All people everywhere have culture, said Tylor, but cultures differ significantly from each other.

Tylor saw culture as relatively static. Today, however, we understand that culture is fluid and adaptable. Culture involves material,
social, and intellectual aspects of life. It is a people's way of living in the world.

- Material aspects include the things we use and how we use them.
- Social aspects include the way people interact with one another and go about organizing their communities.
- Intellectual aspects include the self-generated webs of meaning within which individuals and groups of people live their lives.

Drawing cultural boundaries is often a matter of perspective. It is easy to think of the previously mentioned Malaysian Temiar as culturally separate from the North American Hopi and separate from the Hindus of India. But what about the differences in worldview between a child raised in New York City and another raised on a Montana cattle ranch? Or what about differences in worldview between American Catholics and American Protestant evangelicals? Might these examples constitute different cultures? Perhaps yes, if their religious ideologies sufficiently impact fundamental understandings of the world.

There are micro cultures as well. Consider, for example, a large corporation such as Sony BMG Music Entertainment. Top executives live in a very different world from the company's general desk-bound workforce and from the company's contracted musicians, such as Alicia Keys or the band AC/DC.

What might constitute a musical culture? Perhaps it is a group of people who share particular values that are reflected in the way they make, hear, and use music. In North America, for example, the music industry divides itself for marketing purposes into specific genres—Top Forty, bluegrass, jazz, world music, classical, blues, zydeco, country and western, hip-hop, and many more. These designations offer commercial boundaries. Do they also represent distinct musical cultures?

Cultural identities are flexible and constantly negotiated. In today's society, people often move from one cultural circle to another as they pass through adolescence, go to college, learn new languages, enter the workforce, travel, or get married. Some people will use music to reinforce their identities or to form stronger links to their cultural heritage. Teenagers, however, often use music to break free of cultural expectations. For teens, listening habits often represent an expression of individuality and independence.

As you progress through this text, think about the ideas presented here. Which musical compositions are used to wield power? To persuade? To soothe? How do these works fit into the artists' cultural milieus? And finally, how might considering music from the composers' or performers' social perspectives enhance your understanding of the world and your own listening choices?

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**MUSIC AND THE MIND**

Some cultures fear music's power; others dress it in mysticism. There's good reason for this. Music activates the same chemical reactions in the brain as food, sex, and addictive drugs. Listeners really do "get high" from music. Thousands of scientific studies have been undertaken in an attempt to understand music's remarkable impact on human consciousness.

**mysearchlab 1.2**

**Classifying Music**

There are endless ways to classify music, from very broad categories to very specific ones. For example, you and a friend might have many of the same tunes on your MP3 players but organize them under very different systems. The following text presents one common categorization system. Look carefully at the three sections. Do they make sense to you? Can you see any problem areas?

**World Music**

World music usually refers to local or regional music traditions that are (1) transmitted orally/aurally and (2) noncommercial in their everyday usage. World music is generally categorized by both geographic region (such as Africa, Asia, India, Eastern Europe) and ethnic origin (Tejano, Celtic, Afro-Cuban). American "folk" music, for example, might be considered one type of "world" music in that the term generally refers to noncommercial orally transmitted music of British Isles heritage.
Popular Music
Popular music is distinguished by the fact that it (1) is closely associated with the music industry, (2) is distributed through the mass media, and (3) generally appeals to a wide audience (though its attraction can be short-lived).

Western Art Music
Western art music (often called “classical music”) refers to a specific body of works composed mostly by Europeans and peoples of the European diaspora from the Medieval Period to the present. Because of its long history, the music is stylistically diverse; in general, however, we can say the music’s distinguishing feature is that it is composed by individuals and notated. Scholars divide Western art music into the following six historical periods. mysearchlab 1.3

The Medieval Period (ca. 400–1430)
The Medieval Period refers to European history from the fifth-century collapse of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Renaissance (ca. 1430). The Catholic church dominated the social order during this time; Latin was the language of the learned.

This period saw the development of Western musical notation, which was used in music composed for the church and the nobility. Early church music was called plainchant, a single free-flowing melodic line. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, church musicians began to add newly composed lines above and below the original chant. This experimentation led to the development of new genres, both sacred and secular, in two, three, and four parts. Music of the nobility consisted of secular songs in local dialects, such as the chansons of the French troubadours and trouvéres. Like plainsong, these love songs consisted of a single melodic line, but they had clear melodic and textural repetitions not found in chant.

The Renaissance Period (ca. 1430–1600)
The “Renaissance” was characterized by a renewed interest in the writings, philosophies, and art of ancient Greece and Rome. Renaissance music was characterized by complex intertwining melodies. Most of the music that survives is choral; instrumental music was often improvised. Although chant remained the most commonly performed church music, lavish multivoiced settings of the Catholic Mass were written for specific occasions.

During the fifteenth century, the dominant secular genre was the French chanson, now usually for three voices. A variety of national secular styles later developed, such as the madrigal in Italy and England.

German music thrived during the Protestant Reformation, in part because Martin Luther (1483–1546) believed that music was essential to worship. Many of the tunes (called chorales) written during the Reformation form the basis for modern-day hymns.

The Baroque Period (ca. 1600–1750)
The term “Baroque” refers to the highly ornamented complexity of the period’s art and architecture. A feature that unifies Baroque music is the use of a continuous bass line, called basso continuo.

At the end of the sixteenth century, Italian humanists became interested in reviving the emotive power of ancient Greek drama, which led to the invention of opera, one of the era’s most important developments.

Though incredibly popular, operas were banned during the season of Lent. Entertainment-hungry Baroque audiences found solace in oratorio, a sacred dramatic (though unstaged) genre. Today, the most well-known Baroque oratorio is G. F. Handel’s Messiah (1741).

Many new instrumental genres arose in the Baroque period, including the suite (a collection of pieces based on courtly dances), the sonata (a work for either an unaccompanied soloist or for a solo instrument with basso continuo), and the concerto (a composition for soloist(s) and orchestra).

The Classical Period (ca. 1750–1820)
Classical period music emphasized clarity, symmetry, and formal balance—features reminiscent of the architectural ideals of Classical Greece, from which the period gets its name. Composers relied on contrasting melodies and tonal areas to delineate formal sections.

New instrumental genres—the symphony and string quartet—became concert staples. Performance gradually moved from private to public spheres as a growing middle class made its economic power felt. There were many gifted composers in the Classical Period, but history has canonized three in particular: Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), Wolfgang
Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827). Because these composers have enjoyed continuous popularity since their own lifetimes, all Western art music became known as “classical,” though in its strictest sense the term applies only to this period of music history.

**The Romantic Period (ca. 1820–1900)**
The Romantic Period coincided with the nineteenth-century rise of industrialization and the West’s world colonization. Spurred by rising interest in individual experience, music was infused with emotional intensity; virtuoso performers dazzled audiences with their technical abilities and bravura.

To meet these expressive demands, composers explored new sounds, textures, and harmonies. Orchestras grew in size. The symphony remained a concert staple, but new genres also developed, including the symphonic poem, which characterized musical themes from visual art and literature. Folk melodies and rhythms were often incorporated as composers colored their music with national or ethnic identities.

**The Twentieth-Century Period (1900 to the Present)**
The twentieth century saw remarkable changes in technology, medicine, and lifestyle—from our first electrical grids, to a man on the moon, to the World Wide Web. Unlike earlier periods, twentieth-century art music comprised a number of disparate, even conflicting, aesthetic movements. Perhaps the strongest unifying force throughout this period was the quick response to social change, whether coming from war, new technologies, or shifting values and beliefs.

Approaching the cusp of 1900, French painters and musicians developed an artistic style called Impressionism, which focused on atmosphere and mood. Shimmering colors characterized the style’s painting; composers achieved similar effects with innovative tonalities and instrumental textures.

In the century’s first decades, Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) and his students developed a new style of composition that reflected the aesthetics of Expressionism, a movement that sought to explore the reaches of the unconscious mind. Musical expressionism led to the abandonment of the major-minor scale system as composers explored atonality, music without a tonal center.

In the 1950s and 1960s composers experimented with electronic instruments like the theremin and synthesizer. Tape recorders were used to manipulate electronic, industrial, and natural sounds.

American composer John Cage (1912–1992) was music’s greatest iconoclast. Cage’s most famous composition is 4’33”, in which the performer does nothing at all. Ambient noise—breathing and coughing, buzzing lights, and ventilation systems—provide the “music.”

Perhaps the most popular style of later twentieth-century art music was minimalism, a reaction against the complexities of the intellectual music of the avant-garde, which came to the fore following World War II. Minimalism is characterized by harmonic consonance, steady pulse, and the slow, hypnotic transformation of musical phrases.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

**MUSIC’S NEGATIVE EFFECTS: TURN DOWN THE VOLUME!**

Repeated exposure to loud sounds can affect our health and psychological well-being. Loud sounds cause hearing loss. They also raise blood pressure, cause heart disease, increase the breathing rate, disturb digestion, and even contribute to low birth weight, birth defects, and premature birth.

Volume levels are measured in decibels (dB). Sounds louder than 80 dB are considered dangerous; those louder than 120 will cause pain and perhaps even permanent hearing loss. In the fall of 2007, students at Johns Hopkins University were given an assignment to calibrate noise levels in their environment. Surprisingly, they found that the highest noise levels were neither on a busy highway during rush hour nor at a symphony orchestra concert. Instead, the highest dB levels came from listening to music with earbuds. These levels often far exceeded the danger point.
QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Why do you enjoy some musical styles more than others?
- A national anthem is one obvious way in which people use music to express identity. What are some additional examples?
- The media often talk about different American cultures. What are some of them?
- Is all music associated with culture?

CONCLUSION

In this first chapter we have discussed ways in which music has a fundamental role in physiology, consciousness, and social identity. In the two chapters that complete our music fundamentals section, we introduce basic theoretical concepts and terminology that will give us the tools to analyze and discuss musical components and forms. After that, we will shift our focus to the role music plays in social experience. Our examples are wide ranging. They are drawn from around the world and across centuries of time. This makes for striking juxtapositions. For example, by organizing our study according to broad social categories—such as love and war, ethnicity, gender, politics, and religion—we are able to place music from the distant past alongside music of today. These pairings demonstrate connections between time and place that are not always apparent using chronological and monocultural approaches to understanding musical experience.

Finally, although we study a collection of wonderful music, this text is not primarily concerned with identifying and teaching an era’s or society’s greatest “masterpieces” or most popular works. Instead, we strive to give you tools for listening and for understanding music’s place within the human experience. With these skills, the world will become your playlist.