

Introduction

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Why do you want to study music? Do you perhaps dream of spending three or four years developing advanced performing skills on one or more instruments, learning a little about the history of music and its theory on the side, and emerging from the experience with a degree certificate? That might seem an attractive enough idea, and most university music departments these days will offer you a range of performing possibilities alongside the more traditional academic courses. But as the teaching of humanities (of which academic music is a part) in the modern university becomes less a focus for the rigorous intellectual scrutiny of the history and artefacts of civilizations, and more a site for the development of competencies for the post-university workplace, you (and especially your parents) will rightly ask what practical use such study might be in the contemporary world. Studying the practice and history of music seems on the face of it too narrowly focused to be of much use to anyone but an aspiring school music teacher, an orchestral musician, or a music journalist – and there are far fewer jobs in those areas than there are music graduates. Fortunately, however, a music degree offers a more genuinely useful training for graduate life than might at first be imagined.

Like other humanities disciplines, but perhaps more so than any other, musicology (as study of music is generally called in the UK; the US splits this into “musicology,” broadly meaning music’s historical and cultural contexts, and “music theory,” the study of music’s structural and pitch organization) provides a breadth of training in transferable skills that will make you particularly valuable to other professions as a music graduate. The richness of music study is owed to its multidisciplinary focus: that is to say, studying musicology involves learning and applying methods and insights from many distinct disciplines.

Like literature students (in English or foreign languages, ancient or modern, sacred or secular), as a music student you will deal extensively with texts, and develop refined skills in interrogating them. In the case of music the text may be anything from a musical score to critical writings on a composer or musical tradition. Music students learn to establish historical, social, and wide-ranging intellectual contexts for the texts they examine, and to make interpretative decisions about how to evaluate them. They acquire fundamental research skills and learn to maximize our natural tendency to enquire into the unexpected and unknown.

At the same time you will learn, of course, to hone your writing and oral skills to a range of particular applications. All of these tools would serve just as well for further advanced study in any humanities subject, as also for the synthesis and original interpretation of a number of legal documents or government reports. Your contextual understanding (historical, literary, religious, ethnological, etc.) and critical acumen will, therefore, be enlarged not simply for the use they serve in understanding and communicating about music, but for their own sakes.

Work with musical notation lends study of music a distinctive edge over other humanities disciplines. The manipulation of its often complex symbolic systems, together with the elaborate theories that have been developed (over the course of millennia) to enable discussion, will encourage you to develop analytical skills of a kind more often associated with mathematics and the natural sciences – disciplines that indeed exercise a strong influence on parts of the discipline, as some of the following chapters will show.

Experience of ensemble performance, and in some cases fieldwork, most obviously develops social skills, but it also calls on entrepreneurial abilities and effective techniques of time management. It will widen your experience and understanding of other people and other societies, with their protean traditions of intellectual, religious, scientific, and musical life. Other creative work, for instance in compositional technique, will develop your creative potential and further stimulate the intellectual urge – already alive if you are considering or starting a music degree – to explore and originate ideas. Composition in today’s musical world ranges from traditional orchestral, instrumental, and vocal composition for public performance through the composition of music for film to the creative synergies of the rock or pop recording studio; it seems so very varied that again you might imagine the skills learned through any aspect of it would be limited in application. Yet common to all these approaches to musical production is their heavy and increasing dependence on technology and on the practicalities of the music business: this makes learning compositional technique yet another way that you will engage with perhaps surprising contemporary issues, in this case technological and economic.

In the chapters that follow, we hope to convey something of this exciting diversity of approaches to a single subject. What follows is a very brief summary of their contents. You may find it useful to browse the “chapter preview” and “key issues” sections of chapters that seem particularly interesting before you plunge into them. Each chapter also has a clear summary at the end, along with some discussion topics for you to think about, and lists of references cited and of further reading, should you want to explore certain aspects in more detail.

Part 1, “Disciplines,” will give you an insight into the principal broad approaches to the question of what music is and where it fits in to our common and personal life and history. In chapter 1 Jim Samson explores the question of

what is meant by music history, and explains why musicologists study it, before in chapter 2 Rachel Beckles Willson discusses the range of possibilities for analyzing the musical texts themselves; together they will give you a taste of the foundational components of most music degrees. Katharine Ellis's chapter on the sociology of music shifts the emphasis to the social networks surrounding music, and the way that our judgments of musical value reflect social situations, while in chapter 4 John Rink turns the focus back on to the psychological experience of music by individuals, adding a further dimension to the way we construct musical sense and meaning, and giving an insight into the feeling you probably already have that music has a way of getting to you somehow. The more abstract question of what music is, and how it relates to the self and to the world, is given a historical introduction and exploration by Andrew Bowie in chapter 5.

Having introduced you to the ways that musicologists think and write about music, Part 2, "Approaches to repertoire," gets down to what kinds of music are written and thought about. You may be surprised to hear how much academics have learned about some kinds of music. The section begins with an exploration by Henry Stobart of the various musics of the world that are not part of the Western art-music tradition (the music you will find cordoned off in its own section in record shops), showing through case studies how different musical repertoires shape and respond to people's understanding of the world. A similarly "alien" tradition is the focus of chapter 7 by Stephen Rose, which looks at the history of "early music," its relation to established belief systems like Christianity, and the ways in which we try to draw this music into our present, through historically informed performance and other means. Chapters 8 to 12 examine particular genres or styles of musical composition. David Charlton's chapter on opera explores its history and its relevance to today's society, drawing out the ways that music theater can convey political and ethical messages. Erik Levi's chapter on concert music is a guide through the vast repertoire of Western art music that is likely to form the largest component of your degree in one way or another; it examines the complementary roles of musical and social changes in the development of musical institutions and media. In chapter 10, Andrew Bowie considers jazz alongside other forms of music and asks how the style relates to academic disciplines and to the role of technology in modernity. The section closes with two kinds of music that some of you may particularly be wondering about in a university context: popular and film music. In her chapter on popular music, Elizabeth Eva Leach works with the problem of defining popular music and studying it as part of musicology, examining issues in production and reception. Closing the section, Julie Brown's chapter on music in film and television charts the development of music on screen, and explores the expressive effects of music on the total experience of these mixed art forms.

Part 3 concerns "Music in practice," something with which most (but not all) music students are familiar; you may find it stimulating to see how

musicologists think about music practice in a more concentrated way than you might have done already. It opens with Tina K. Ramnarine's chapter on musical performance itself, which explores the social contexts and political dimensions of performance, and examines the role of the personal – even the bodily – in aspects of performance. Chapter 14, by Julian Johnson, situates composition in the study of music, emphasizing its practical basis in the imagination, manipulation, and appropriate fashioning of materials for specific ends. The background to modern compositional practice is expanded by Brian Lock in chapter 15 on music technology, which offers an introduction to the technical means by which musicians nowadays produce and disseminate their music: this may be of particular interest if you are drawn to studio recording and the technologies employed in film composition. The book is rounded off by Nicholas Cook's exploration of the economics and business of music, a world you may seek to enter at some stage. It begins by showing how economics and music have traditionally been intertwined before outlining the contemporary music business and assessing the future of the industry in the digital age.

Overall we intend the book to suggest that studying music will encourage you to make interdisciplinary connections and cross-references between these many different approaches. We hope to demonstrate at least some of the richness of this subject of study and the purely intellectual rewards you will gain from being a student within it.

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Excerpt
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Part 1

Disciplines

1 Music history

JIM SAMSON

Chapter preview

This chapter asks what we mean by music history and why we study it. It considers some of the different kinds of history that can be, and have been, written, ranging from the stylistic history of musical works to the social history of how those works came to be written. It looks at the different strategies demanded by the study of music in different periods, in different places, and for different audiences. It looks at some of the tools, methods, and sources historians use to learn about musical practices in the past, and it considers some of the conventional categories they employ in order to create an order in history. They often refer to musical “traditions,” for example, and they invoke period terms such as “Baroque” and “Classical.” The chapter also addresses some of the overt and hidden agendas found in different types of historical writing, it queries whether some aspects of music history have been neglected in favor of others at different times, and it asks how much we can learn by considering the reception of music through the centuries. It further considers how the study of music history is supported by, and may in turn illuminate, some of the other categories of musical study discussed in this book.

Key issues

- How can we do historical justice to works of music, given that they are part of our present?
- Is music history shaped primarily by composers and scores, or by the cultural conditions which demanded and/or enabled musical performances?
- What kinds of evidence can we use to construct histories of oral traditions?
- What is a “fact” of music history (Dahlhaus 1983)? How do historians create a network of stories around their particular interpretations of these so-called facts?
- How useful is it to divide music history into geographical regions (including nations) and into temporal periods?

- What do music histories tell us about the time and place of their provenance? How might we rewrite music history for today's world?

Art versus history

Think about the differences between a history of music and a general history: let us say a history of Reformation England, or a history of the American Revolution. We could make a list of such differences, but I just want to draw your attention to one of particular importance. Among the principal objects of study in a music history are musical works. We might take Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony (No. 3) as our example. Now the "Eroica" was composed at a particular time and in a particular place; we can assign to it a fairly precise completion date (summer of 1803). Despite this, it cannot quite be consigned to "the past." On the contrary, as you surely know from your own experience, the "Eroica" is still very much an active, living part of our present. The same could not be said of political events, nor even of more long-term socio-economic transformations. These have their repercussions, of course, and they often play a major role in shaping later political and social realities, but of themselves they belong clearly to "the past," as "events" of greater or lesser duration.

This difference has major implications for our understanding of music history, or indeed of the history of any art. If the work is really part of our present, it is rather difficult to do historical justice to it; hard, in other words, to see how the work "for today" can be related to the work "in its time." All history is concerned with a dialogue between now (the present) and then (the past). One of the main reasons we study it in the first place is because "then" can maybe inform us about "now." This is a bit more complicated than it might seem. History is written in the present, but even in general histories it is hard to say quite where the past ends and the present begins. I hope you can see that in art histories the dialogue between the two is even more complicated. And actually, if you really are interested in the qualities of the "Eroica" as a work – a work "for today" – you might learn more by examining it analytically rather than historically (see chapter 2 on this). That is the real point of my subtitle "Art versus history." It highlights one of the reasons why it is not always very easy to decide how best to make history out of musical works.

On the other hand it is rather easier to see how we can make history out of the **reception** of musical works. Not only is the "Eroica" alive and well amongst us today; it was no less alive and well in early twentieth-century Paris, in mid-nineteenth-century Leipzig, and of course in the Vienna of Beethoven's own lifetime, though, importantly, it tended to mean rather different things in each of these cases. We might say that it exerted a different kind of power in each of those "thens." You can trace how the "Eroica" threaded its way through different social and cultural formations, attaching itself to them in

different ways, adapting its own semblance and in the process changing theirs. In a word, you can note how it was heard “with different ears” at different times and in different places. In his monograph on the work, Thomas Sipe outlines some of the stages in this process of reception (Sipe 1998). I have tried to present these side-by-side (inevitably at some cost to the subtlety of Sipe’s argument) in Box 1.1, but it is important to realize that responses of this kind are not created afresh by each generation; the earlier categories of response linger on in later periods.

Now there is nothing particularly new about looking at how music was received, but modern reception histories, many of them really quite specialized, do tend to raise some larger questions. They often suggest – explicitly or implicitly – that contemporary readings (the reception of the “Eroica” by audiences of Beethoven’s time) have no particular privilege, and that the meaning of the work is something that unfolds and develops throughout its subsequent reception right down to the present. You might want to think about that issue, as it is rather central to historical study and throws up a number of related questions that I will just leave hanging. Is a reception history of the “Eroica” really about changes in musical taste and the social factors that influence those changes (in which case music history arguably collapses into social history), or can it reveal something about the work itself? And what is it, anyway, that elevates a work like the “Eroica” to the status of a masterwork, a component of the **canon**? Is the answer to this last question to be found exclusively in qualities of the work itself, to be revealed perhaps by analysis? Or is it in part ideological? In other words, is the canon largely a construction by people who exercise cultural power? And if that is the case, do we need to ask ourselves why certain groups (women, for example) and regions (Greece, for example) have been excluded from, or marginalized by, music histories?

Box 1.1 Beethoven’s “Eroica”: some patterns of reception

- Revolutionary propaganda. The dedication to Napoleon Bonaparte and the subsequent withdrawal of that dedication, together with the association of its finale with Prometheus, inevitably associates the work with an “Age of Revolution”
- Programmatic interpretations. Growing from the above, we have early nineteenth-century accounts based on battlefield imagery, links with Homeric and Virgilian epic, and portraits of Bonaparte
- Psychological interpretations. These stem mainly from the later nineteenth century, and are usually biographical readings, stressing Beethoven’s putative German nationalism, his “clairvoyant” insight, his victory over adversity (deafness), and so on
- Structural and historical interpretations. These include twentieth-century analytical approaches designed to demonstrate the “unity” of the work through motive or harmony, as well as accounts that seek to recover its original historical meanings

Stylistic or social history?

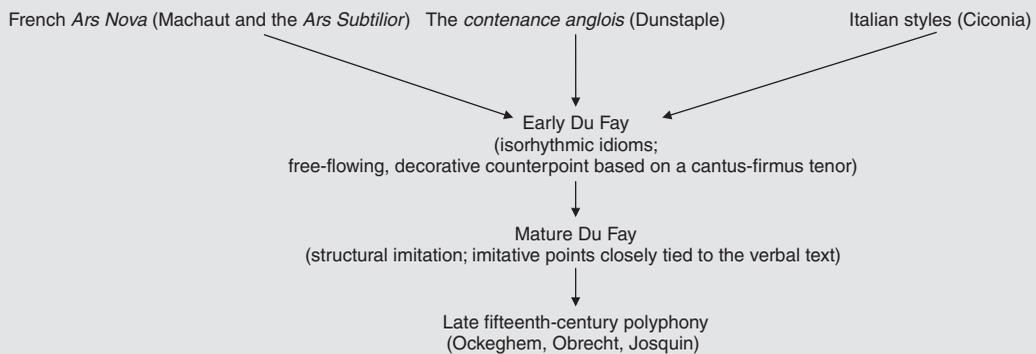
Historical questions look very different from the kinds of analytical questions that will be discussed in chapter 2. Given a common object of study, analysts

might ask: “how does it function in musical terms?,” whereas historians would be more likely to ask: “where does it come from?,” or “what made it possible?,” or perhaps “how did it shape later developments?” If we stick for the time being with musical works as primary documents of a music history, then we might ask those historical questions from two rather different perspectives. The first would address purely musical, or stylistic, influences, while the second would look at the shaping role of social, political, and intellectual contexts.

Let us take a step back in time from our Beethoven example and consider the works of Guillaume Du Fay from the early Renaissance period (in music history, roughly the first half of the fifteenth century) as a collective case study. We might answer our historical questions here by discussing Du Fay’s indebtedness to major predecessors and contemporaries. Such historical trajectories might then be extended to embrace evolutionary developments within his output, allowing for differences of idiom between sacred and secular, and between mass and motet, and perhaps also for an individuality of idiom we might not immediately associate with music before Du Fay. And we might go on to note that Du Fay’s mature idiom functioned in its turn as a principal model for later fifteenth-century composers. Now all of these answers are based on comparisons of musical **style**. We locate Du Fay within a narrative that reaches back to the fourteenth-century *Ars Nova* and forward to Josquin des Prez (born c.1450–5). He becomes a pivotal figure, in other words, in the transition from medieval to Renaissance music, though we need to be rather careful about reading this story as a kind of “progress,” and therefore labeling Du Fay as a “progressive” figure. He was that in one sense, but maybe the term “progressive” has taken on some modern meanings that would not have been appropriate in the fifteenth century (we should be careful anyway about assuming that music history describes a progression from simple to complex forms and materials). See Box 1.2 for a very rough indication of the kind of stylistic history I mean here.

Of course we might equally find answers to our questions by considering the context in which Du Fay worked. Many factors would come into play here.

Box 1.2 Patterns of stylistic history



There are the constraints imposed, and the opportunities afforded, by the liturgy (Du Fay was a church composer employed for much of his life as a papal singer: many early “composers” were in fact employed principally as performing musicians). There are the specific demands made by particular patrons (he was also a court composer working at various times at the Savoy court) and particular commemorative occasions (court weddings, deaths, rededications of churches, and ceremonial occasions of other kinds). There are the contrasted ambiances of different cultural centers (Renaissance Florence as against Burgundian Cambrai). And there are the effects of a wider climate of ideas (the strengthening individualism we associate with an age of humanism, for example). This is what I meant when I referred to “the shaping role of social, political, and intellectual contexts” at the beginning of this section. We are evoking here a rather different perspective on Du Fay’s music, revealing in effect how musical styles respond to social imperatives. But we should note all the same that this perspective still places musical works right at the center of our story. These days musicologists sometimes speak of a **work concept** to describe this foregrounding of musical works (Goehr 1992), and you will encounter that term elsewhere in this volume. It is discussed in chapter 11, for example, and there is it contrasted with alternative ways of thinking about how we might begin to define what music actually is. These alternative readings naturally have a bearing on how we construe the subject-matter of a music history, and I want to reflect a bit more on them now. Have a look at Dahlhaus’s question in the fourth of our key issues above. What, indeed, is a “fact” of music history? There is more than one kind of answer.

It is worth reminding ourselves, obvious though this may seem, that music is a performing art, and that its history includes the history of music-making as a cultural practice. The subject-matter of a music history, then, might include all the many and varied practices involved in making music, promoting music, listening to music, and thinking about music. Performance, teaching, and manufacturing sites and professions would form the heart of this story, but in the later stages of music history, taste-creating institutions such as journals and publishing houses, and eventually broadcasting and recording companies, would enter the narrative as important subplots. This all adds up to what we might call a “social history” of music (see chapter 3 for further commentary on this), as distinct from the stylistic history illustrated in Box 1.2, a move that parallels that found in some general history away from study of kings and queens and towards “ordinary people.” The primary concern of a “social history of music” would be with the role that music played in people’s lives, so it would not be unduly interested in questions of aesthetic value (Chartier 1988). Contrast that with a history based on musical works, which is more likely to reinforce our sense of that canon of masterpieces I referred to earlier. Indeed these two histories can rather easily tend in opposing directions, separating out the “popular” repertory that engaged most of the people most of the time and the “significant” repertory that