

Graduate Music History/Musicology Diagnostic Exam **Overview, Take-Home Response, & Study Guide**

Purpose

Unlike a music history exam that requires you to recall and recite dates and factoids, the overall purpose of this exam is to assess independent critical thinking and written communication skills, as well as your ability to synthesize and assess information and draw substantive conclusions about music and culture. The exam will help us direct you toward resources and supports that will facilitate your success in academic coursework. It will also provide valuable information for faculty, allowing us to develop effective and rewarding learning experiences in our musicology courses that address individual student needs.

Part I: Reading Response (to be prepared and submitted before diagnostic exam)

Berger, Karol. "The Ends of Music History, or: The Old Masters in the Supermarket of Cultures." *Journal of Musicology* 32, no. 2(2014): 186-198.

Over the summer, please read and respond to the article cited above (included in your welcome letter) in a short essay of approximately 500 words. Please email your response as an electronic document (PDF, Word, Pages, etc.) to James Maiello at james.maiello@umanitoba.ca by 4:00 p.m. on September 1, 2022.

Your response may take any number of forms, from a critical assessment of Berger's essay as a whole to an exploration of one or some of the issues raised in the article. Don't worry, there's no single "right answer." The primary criteria for success in this part of the exam are the following: 1. Evidence of a clear understanding of Berger's article; 2. Active, deep engagement with the ideas presented; Evidence of creative, critical thinking; 3. Clear, cogent writing that appropriate in style, structure, and mechanics for graduate-level academic work.

Part II: Listening Response

During the diagnostic exam, you will compare and contrast two pieces of music in a short essay of 300-400 words. The exam administrator will play audio recordings of the music, and you will be provided with a score or other appropriate written musical notation for reference. Your response might address a variety of topics, including genre, style, and other musical features, socio-cultural context, issues of performance practice and reception, and so on. This is not a listening identification quiz; you are not required to identify the specific pieces of music.

Part III: Topical Essay

During the diagnostic exam, you will respond to one of the following topical prompts in a short essay of approximately 400-600 words. You can choose any one of these topics and prepare an outline and/or some notes over the summer. These prompts are intentionally open-ended to allow you to draw on your individual knowledge, experiences, and interests, as well as to provide an opportunity to assess your proficiency at constructing cohesive and focused lines of inquiry independently. Although you will write the essay in the exam, you may prepare 1 page of reference material (2-sides of a letter or A4 size sheet of paper) to bring into the exam with you (e.g. essay outline, other reference information, etc.).

Genre: Explain the concept of genre. Why is this an important concept? In what ways may genre shape one's experience or knowledge of music? Illustrate your response with an example drawn from any kind of music.

Music and Community: Among its many possible social purposes, music may act as a kind of bonding agent which helps establish, strengthen, or sustain all manner of communities. Discuss an example you have learned about in your previous music history or musicology studies.

Music, Gender, and Sexuality: Music, gender, and sexuality intersect in a number of ways. Not only can musical discourse be shaped by gender and sexuality, but sexuality and gender identity can be portrayed, represented, performed, and created through music. Examine these concepts using two contrasting examples.

Music, Race, and Class: As in the previous question on music, gender, and sexuality, music, race, and class intersect in many ways. Race and class can be portrayed, represented, performed, and created through music, and musical discourse can be shaped by race and class. Choose two contrasting examples to examine these concepts.

Musical Borrowing: From medieval and Renaissance *contrafacta* and 18th-century quodlibets to sampling, cover songs, and jazz standards, histories of music are rife with examples of borrowing. Compare and contrast two disparate examples of this phenomenon. You might choose pieces from different time periods, for example, or works from different styles or musical traditions. The most important criteria are that they are different in significant ways and that they allow you to explore the idea of musical borrowing. Consider addressing issues of authorship and homage, meaning, compositional techniques, and so on.

Preparation

We don't envision you spending your summer preparing furiously for this diagnostic exam, and we don't intend for you to stress out about writing the response for the Berger article or outlining your other essay. To prepare for this exam, we recommend that you review the course materials for the music history and musicology courses you completed as an undergraduate student, and we're always in favour of you doing some background reading on musicological topics of special interest or relevance for you. Don't feel compelled to limit yourself to the Western art music tradition. For example, if you've studied or have expertise in jazz, popular music, or various global music traditions, we're excited to see how that is reflected in your intellectual approach.

As you prepare for the exam, please don't hesitate to direct any questions to James Maiello at james.maiello@umanitoba.ca. Below you will find a selected bibliography of standard textbooks that may be useful in your review. Any of these survey texts will provide a solid overview of its subject, and you likely have one or more of these from your undergraduate work. Again, though, the focus of this diagnostic assessment is not on memorization and recall of data, but rather on critical thinking and effective communication.

Selected Surveys of Western Music History

Bonds, Mark Evan. *History of Music in Western Culture*, 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2013.

Burkholder, J. Peter, et al. *A History of Western Music*, 10th ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2018.
Seaton, Douglass. *Ideas and Styles in the Western Musical Tradition*, 2nd ed. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2007.

Stolba, K. Marie. *The Development of Western Music*, 3rd ed. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1998.

Taruskin, Richard and Christopher Gibbs. *Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Selected Surveys of Jazz History

DeVeaux, Scott Knowles and Gary Giddins. *Jazz*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2009.

Gioia, Ted. *The History of Jazz*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Gridley, Mark C. *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2009.

Tirro, Frank. *Jazz : A History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1993.

Selected Surveys of Popular Music

Charlton, Katherine. *Rock Music Styles: A History*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

Covach, John Rudolph. *What's That Sound?: An Introduction to Rock and Its History*. 2nd ed., W. W. Norton, 2009.

Garofalo, Reebee. *Rockin' out : Popular Music in the USA*. Upper Saddle River, NJ : Pearson, 2011.

Starr, Larry, and Christopher Alan Waterman. *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Selected Global Music Surveys

Fletcher, Peter. *World Musics in Context: A Comprehensive Survey of the World's Major Musical Cultures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Miller, Terry E., and Andrew C. Shahriari. *World Music: A Global Journey*. 2nd ed., Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2008.

Titon, Jeff Todd. *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples*. Belmont, CA: Schirmer Cengage Learning, 2009.



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The Ends of Music History, or: The Old Masters in the Supermarket of Cultures

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The Ends of Music History, or: The Old Masters in the Supermarket of Cultures

KAROL BERGER

For Richard Taruskin,
the canonic musicologist

The Muse of history is gentle, learned, and unassuming, but when neglected and deserted, she takes her revenge: she blinds those who scorn her [. . .]. We learn history not in order to know how to behave or how to succeed, but to know who we are.

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—Leszek Kołakowski, “The Idolatry of Politics” [1986]

It was one of the least attractive features of various twentieth-century politburos, whether in Moscow, Berlin, or Darmstadt, to claim to know the direction of the supposedly inexorable march of history. Let’s not imitate them. What is the future of music scholarship? We do not know. All we can know is the sort of future we would find desirable. But an attempt to think about the future should probably begin with an attempt to understand the present. In any case, my concern here will not be musicology as a whole, including music theory and ethnomusicology, and not even music history as a whole, including the history of popular music, but rather my own sub-discipline—the history of art music, the branch of music history that considers Western art music to be its central focus.

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I

What then is art music; what are its essential features? Consider first its products. All music practices produce sound events that can be heard in real time. Art music, in addition to such ephemeral events that, once sounded, remain only in memory if at all, also produces works, musical objects that remain “even afterwards, when the craftsman [their maker] is dead,” as Nicolaus Listenius naively but adequately put it already in 1537.¹ *The practice of art music does not dispense with ephemeral events but it is the enduring work that is its characteristic product.*

Until the development of various means of mechanical reproduction of music in the past century (means such as the player piano, the gramophone, the tape recorder, and the computer), the indispensable tool that enabled craftsmen to produce works was musical notation. The use of notation split the makers of music into two frequently overlapping classes, the composers and the performers. *If the work is the characteristic product of art music, its characteristic maker is the composer; the performer, whose role is to transform the work into an event, is the mediator between the composer and the user of music.* Ever since the advent of mechanical reproduction, some composers have intermittently dreamt of dispensing with mediation by performers, but to date notation has retained its position as the main tool of the makers of works. As of today, more than a century since mechanical reproduction became possible and a good half century since its tools became quite advanced, I am aware of only one artistically significant composer, Conlon Nancarrow, whose oeuvre depends centrally on mechanical reproduction rather than notation; ironically, his chosen tool, the player piano, is among the most antiquated and least sophisticated. Predictions that mechanical reproduction is on the verge of replacing notation seem to me far too confident. In any case, even if these predictions were to come to pass, this would not spell the end of art music: even then the practice of producing enduring works might continue.

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What is the aim of this practice? Since the late eighteenth century, theorists of art have insisted that artistic practices are autonomous, that they pursue internal purposes, rather than serving external aims: a work of art is made for its own sake, rather than merely for the purpose of exalting its maker, or user, serving the community, or worshipping the community's god. The idea of artistic autonomy and the closely related notion of disinterested aesthetic contemplation have been much derided lately and are indeed easy to reduce to absurdities. If one insists

¹ “[P]ost se etiam, artifice mortuo.” Nicolaus Listenius, *Musica* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1537), ch. 1.

on taking them in the absolute sense, they seem to exclude from the domain of art most of what has long been taken for art. Bach's cantatas, for instance, or the convivial pleasure one takes in playing string quartets come to mind. But they were not meant to be taken in the absolute sense. Autonomy and its counterpart, heteronomy or functionality, are relative notions. **There is no such thing as purely autonomous or purely functional music. Autonomy and functionality coexist and vary by degree.** An obviously functional work, such as a polyphonic mass, may show a degree of artistic elaboration that goes far beyond what is required by its function; it is on this functionally superfluous artistic supplement that its relative autonomy is based. And it is this supplement that justifies a component of disinterested aesthetic contemplation in the attention it commands. *A work of art is at once functional and autonomous, but it is its relative autonomy that underwrites its specifically artistic character.*

Both the functional and the autonomous aspects of the work are relevant to an understanding of the aims it is expected to meet and the criteria by which its success in attaining these aims is evaluated. On the side of autonomy, one wants the work to exhibit a certain degree of sonic and structural interest and complexity; on the functional side, one demands interest and complexity of the spiritual content embodied in these sounds and structures regardless of whether this content expresses the values of the composer or his patron, whether it is consonant with the beliefs of the community for which the work was created or challenges them. *A significant work, in short, meets the criteria of material and formal interest, as well as expressive depth.*

The most significant works in the tradition of art music, the ones showing in exemplary fashion the capabilities of this practice, constitute its canon.² Like any enduring social practice, the tradition of art music develops a canon of such significant works, consisting of particularly successful and exemplary instances embodying the standards of excellence that govern this practice. The content and shape of the canon are inherently unstable because each genuinely new achievement within the practice may subtly reconfigure its principles, bringing neglected aspects of the past out of the shadows and relegating its previously emphasized aspects to the background. (If you think that at the end of the last century, for instance, the most significant composer was Helmut Lachenmann, you will tell a story of twentieth-century music that gives prominence to Schoenberg, Webern, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Luigi Nono. But if you think that

² The understanding of the notion of the canon presented here is more fully developed in my "Fünf Thesen zum Kanon. Versuch einer konzeptuellen Klärung," Klaus Pietschmann and Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann, eds., *Der Kanon der Musik: Theorie und Geschichte. Ein Handbuch* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2013), 47-53, from which the following two paragraphs have been adapted.

the composer who really mattered late in the century was György Ligeti, your story will make much more room for Debussy, early Stravinsky, and Bartók.) The only stable fact is the existence of the canon itself: canon is a normative concept; it enables us to distinguish the more successful instances of a practice from the less successful ones, and as long as the practice involves the pursuit of excellence it cannot dispense with a canon.

The canon makes it possible to write a narrative history of the tradition of art music. If a practice left nothing but an unsorted archive of instances behind, it would be possible to write its chronicle but not its narrative history. A chronicle, let us recall, orders the relevant events in a chronological order, one thing after another; a narrative history shows how these events are related, one thing because of another. An archive can be the subject matter of a chronicle; a canon makes possible the writing of a narrative history.

The most essential features of art music, therefore, are that its main products are enduring works made by composers and transformed for the benefit of their users into ephemeral events by performers. This duality of work and event is the most fundamental ontological characteristic of art music. The criteria of excellence these products are expected to meet are two-fold: first, the interest of the musical material and its form; and, second, the depth of the expression or meaning embodied in this material and form. Here again we encounter a characteristic duality: neither a purely material-formal object nor a purely spiritual content, art music aspires to embody a significant content in an interesting material form.

The chronological scope of art music has been much debated. Some scholars insist that a social practice is not fully in place until it has reached a theoretical self-awareness. Since the theory of art music reaches maturity only in the late eighteenth century with the development of the notion of aesthetic autonomy, these scholars argue, art music itself cannot be dated much earlier than around 1800. Opponents take a less restrictive view, pointing out that a practice can successfully go forward without a fully articulated theory. Indeed, as early as the sixteenth century Nikolaus Listenius formulated an embryonic notion of the music work and the practice of making such works can, of course, be documented much earlier.³ Regardless of which side one takes in this

³ For a penetrating recent discussion of the central issues involved in this debate, see Laurenz Lütteken, "The Work Concept," forthcoming in *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also Reinhard Strohm, "'Opus': An Aspect of the Early History of the Musical Work-Concept," in Tomasz Jeż, ed., *Complexus effectuum musicologiae. Studia Mirosłavo Perz septuagenario dedicata* (Cracow: Rabid, 2003), 309-319; reprinted in Rainer

debate, it is remarkable how easy it has been for music historians of the past two centuries to apply the assumptions of their own art music culture to the increasingly distant past, extending the canon of great composers backward from the Viennese classics to include Bach, Monteverdi, Josquin, and others. As for the extension of the practice in space, suffice it to say that, whereas no one today takes seriously the earlier pretensions of art music to universality, the practice has proven highly exportable, spreading from its West and Central European origins to Russia, the Americas, Japan, and lately China: hardly universal but not exactly parochial either.

Have we now reached “the end of music history”? An end of music history, it seems, would be reached only if the canon of art music stopped growing; all else constitutes fairly inconsequential twists and turns of academic fashion. There was a brief moment roughly in the third quarter of the past century when one might have been justified in fearing that such an end was at hand—that the tradition of art music was running aground, stuck in the twin quicksands of self-absorbed, formalist avant-gardism and simplistic, politically motivated populism—and that the vitality and creativity now resided in Anglo-American and soon global popular music. Even then this pessimism was hardly justified, since significant music continued to be written on both sides of the elitist-populist divide: think of the work of Messiaen, or of Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s *Die Soldaten*, on the one hand, and of Shostakovich’s string quartets, or Britten’s operas, on the other.

But this moment is now long past. Something truly astonishing and unpredictable happened in the last quarter of the century. Several composers, all of fairly advanced age, came forward with a series of masterpieces that made the late twentieth century one of the great ages of art music. (Among the fine arts, it is probably only architecture that experienced a similar burst of creative vitality at that time.) Between 1981 when he was sixty-eight and 1992 when he was seventy-nine, Witold Lutosławski created his Third and Fourth Symphonies, extending the symphonic canon and revitalizing the ideal of large-scale formal perfection by reinventing the classical form in terms of refined orchestral-harmonic color. Between 1985 when he was sixty-two and 2001 when he was seventy-eight, Ligeti composed three sets of piano etudes, poems blending anarchic slapstick and mechanical terror that constitute the most significant extension of the piano repertoire since Debussy and join Chopin’s and Debussy’s etudes at the pinnacle of the genre. In 1975, György Kurtág, then forty-nine, began his series of piano “Games”, later enriched by the

Kleinertz, Christoph Flamm und Wolf Frobenius, eds., *Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance: Festschrift für Klaus-Jürgen Sachs zum 80. Geburtstag* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2010), 205-17.

string “Signs, Games, and Messages” and numerous other miniatures. He created an intimate minimalist diary that breathed new life into the idea of private *Hausmusik*, and reinvented the romantic fragment as if he were a new Schumann, but a Schumann who has read Samuel Beckett and heard Anton Webern. It was a great age of music and an age of old masters, a development all the more impressive and unexpected given that these three masters were fully aware that they were composing after the end of their world.

A historiography that focuses on social trends rather than individual achievements has a hard time noticing such developments. You cannot notice them if you have acquired the habit of reducing individuals to their collective identities, of forcing the label “female” on the subtle and unique Kaija Saariaho (to meet the needs of contemporary American academics), or pigeonhole the equally subtle and unique Kurtág as “Central-European intellectual” (so that the relevance of what he has to say to American academics can be safely dismissed, as if a view from nowhere were available to us). With such labels the artists’ individual voices are stifled, so that those of the academics can resound all the louder.

In his admirable history of twentieth-century music, Hermann Danuser proposed to divide the composers of the post-war period into three broad classes: the traditionalists, the modernists, and the avant-garde.⁴ It is readily apparent that the classification depends on how a composer understands his place in music history, and it parallels the most basic political options of the past century and more: traditionalists or conservatives want to preserve whatever permanent order they can from the ravages of incessant change; modernists or progressives want to improve on the existing order; the revolutionary avant-garde wants to abolish the present to make room for an entirely different future. If the experimental avant-garde (in the third quarter of the century most prominently represented by John Cage and some of Karlheinz Stockhausen) wants not so much to extend the art music tradition but rather invent a new kind of music altogether, our three old masters are clearly not experimentalists. That they are not traditionalists or populists (in the vein of John Adams or Thomas Adès) is obvious; neither are they traditionalists of the postmodern observance, delighting in poly-stylistic allusion and the blending of art and popular gestures. Since these composers avoid traditional idioms, the label of elitist modernists would fit them best, but this too is uncomfortable because unlike some classic modernists, they are not searching for the next thing, the next necessary step that music

⁴ Hermann Danuser, *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts, Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*, vol. 7 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1992), 285-99.

history is predetermined to take. But then twentieth-century musical modernism came in two flavors, only one of them wedded to the idea of necessary historical progress: next to Schoenberg and the leading lights of Darmstadt, there were also Debussy, early Stravinsky, Bartók, Messiaen and others who did not pretend to be taking the next predetermined step. Let's call our three old masters non-progressive modernists. All three see themselves simply as working within the art music tradition and unpredictably adding to its riches, rather than extending it in one necessary and predictable direction. Lutosławski is not ashamed to say, "I owe a great deal to the Viennese classics. Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven have taught me important things about classical form and about large-form in general [...]. There is a very strong desire in me for a closed large-form, and no-one brought it to such perfection as the Viennese classics."⁵ He clearly does not mean to suggest that he wants to write neo-classical or post-modern symphonies. Similarly, Ligeti says, "I feel that to revert to the great tradition of the past is tantamount to taking refuge in 'safe' music. There is another way of continuing the work of the great masters of the past, composing at the same level as represented, say, by the late Beethoven sonatas, but in a new language, a new style."⁶ And finally, when an interviewer asks, "What is the difference between your music and that of the classics from Haydn to Bartók?" Kurtág answers, "It is not different in any way. It is not different but I am less talented than they were. I do what I can. I wish it could be as good."⁷

Joseph Brodsky once said that he did not seek the applause of his contemporaries, but rather the approval of his predecessors. Seeking the approval of the old old masters, the new old masters draft new projects of imagination, new, unprecedented, and inimitable forms of beauty, new and completely individual modulations of sensibility and ways of being in the world. They introduce new ways in which to register the enchantment and the horror over what is, as well as the longing for what should be, and these are the only things that truly matter when it comes to art, the only things that really make history. The talk of the "end of music history" is a cheap narrative device, akin to the announcements that the history of the novel came to an end with Joyce (an announcement that Nabokov, Thomas Bernhard, and W. G. Sebald seem not to have heard), a narrative device we should stop using, since it offers no clear benefits and only dubious and thin satisfactions.

⁵ *Lutosławski Profile: Witold Lutosławski in Conversation with Bálint András Varga* (London: Chester/Hansen, 1976), 15.

⁶ *György Ligeti in Conversation with Péter Várnai, Josef Häusler, Claude Samuel, and Himself* (London: Eulenburg, 1983), 32.

⁷ Bálint András Varga, ed., *György Kurtág: Three Interviews and Ligeti Homages* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 47.

The history of art music, the branch of musicology that is centrally concerned with Western art music, has a clear disciplinary identity but no clear disciplinary limits, which may sound like a paradox. On the one hand, the identity of the discipline is provided by the object it studies: any historical inquiry that concerns itself with art music belongs therefore to music history. But, on the other hand, it is impossible to predict in advance which questions and problems will come up in our pursuit of this discipline. This depends on something quite unpredictable, our ingenuity and imagination. The purpose of our enterprise is to understand or interpret art music, to provide its tradition with self-awareness. To interpret anything at all, we must place it within a context and show what sort of connections (whether causal or functional) the interpreted object has with this context. But the range of contexts that might prove illuminating cannot be delimited in advance; it is only by trial and error that we find out what works. The future of a discipline like ours cannot be predicted because it is not a discipline devoted to a systematic answering of a few questions known to all scholars in advance. An imaginative leap demonstrating the relevance of a previously unexplored context is always possible and desirable.

What distinguishes the newer from the older music history is that we now more broadly recognize that the range of contexts that might prove illuminating is in principle unlimited. The other important difference is that where our predecessors took it for granted that contexts are introduced to illuminate the music and not the reverse, we no longer care what is illuminated, provided something does, and are ready to recognize the legitimacy of inquiries that use music to illuminate something else. Emblematic for this change of mind is that although as recently as 1977 it was self-evident to Carl Dahlhaus that we want “a history whose subject matter is indeed art and not biographical or social contingencies,” by 2005 Richard Taruskin in the introduction to *The Oxford History of Western Music* makes light of this desire. (To be sure, he does so only in the introduction, because the main body of the book by and large obeys Dahlhaus’s desideratum, as seems inevitable in a comprehensive survey).⁸ Be that as it may, we are today quite ready to recognize as members of our guild those who use music to illuminate “biographical or social contingencies” and much else, rather than the reverse.

⁸ Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 17; original as *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* (Cologne: Gerig, 1977). Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xxvii.

But specifically, what is it that we try to understand and interpret when we study art music? We examine individual actions and the products of these actions, performed by various individual agents involved in art-musical practices: music makers (composers and performers), users (listeners), and all sorts of intermediaries and enablers (patrons, impresarios, publishers, critics, theorists, and historians). We subject these actions and products to close internal analysis, and we contextualize them by asking for their significance—to the original makers and users of music, to subsequent audiences, and to ourselves. But since we can make sense of these individual actions only when we see them against the background of the relevant social practices of the time, we also study these practices themselves: we ask for the aims pursued by those involved in the practice, the means at their disposal, and the institutional framework within which their activities take place. **A social practice is the language in which an individual action is a specific utterance; we want to understand not only the utterance, but also the grammar of the language in which it is made.**

Here, again, the horizon of the discipline has been remarkably broadened in recent decades. We no longer see composers, let alone canonic composers, as the sole protagonists of art music history and their works as the only objects worthy of study. To be sure, there are still some dinosaurs out there who, like me, are interested primarily in canonic masterpieces, but for the time being the exciting action is clearly elsewhere. We have been paying increasing attention to music users, and not only the original ones. Studies of patronage and reception have been among early important steps beyond the view that identified music history with the history of composition. More recently, we also have begun to pay attention to performers. Capturing the event- rather than the work-aspect of the musical object is now the Holy Grail of performance studies. We have been scrutinizing the minds and bodies of musicians and their listeners, trying to recapture the patterns of behavior that shaped their actions as well as the mental categories that shaped their self-understanding. Lastly, we have begun to look beyond individual actions to the underlying social practices, examining their aims, means, and supporting institutions.

In short, it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that composers and their works are no longer central to the enterprise of the history of art music; they are still crucial and are likely to remain so, given the very nature of art music. It is hard to imagine a music history without a canon of significant works. But the current state of the discipline is characterized foremost by its recent expansion into the areas beyond the canon and even beyond composition; we now recognize performers as co-creators of music and listeners as co-creators of its significance.

While the expansion of the scope of the discipline that took place in the last quarter of the past century is undoubtedly a good thing in itself, what ultimately matters in scholarship as in art is achievement and not programmatic intention. **The late twentieth century seems to me a great age of music history, just as it was a great age of music composition and for the same reason: the period has produced masterpieces.** One example on which we all can probably agree is Richard Taruskin's monumental 1996 study of Stravinsky's Russian period, which is likely to be read a hundred and fifty years from now the way we still read today Otto Jahn on Mozart or Philipp Spitta on Bach.⁹ Like these earlier studies, Taruskin's is likewise unabashedly centered on a canonic composer and devotes the most space to a thorough and many-sided examination of his most canonic works.

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Given this recent flourishing of both art music composition and music history, the predictions of the end of music history seem premature. But I do not want to leave the pessimists among my readers without food for thought. I acknowledge that two dangers currently threaten if not the existence of art music history, then at least its continued flourishing. **One of these dangers is our inability to notice historical developments that matter when we are blinded by thinking in terms of group identities.** It is not that group identities do not matter. We all possess multiple identities of this sort that define in part who we are. But only in part: Schubert certainly belonged to the middle-class culture that developed in Vienna in the wake of Napoleon's defeat, but there were many underemployed, educated, middle-class males in Biedermeier Vienna, and only one of them was Schubert. Instead of reducing him to a representative of a broad social category, we need to capture his uniqueness in the interplay between his social and individual identities. The reductionist habit has implications reaching far beyond our immediate concerns. If you reduce individuals to their collective identities and stop seeing them as individuals, they become interchangeable and hence expendable.

But it is the second, more specifically cultural, danger that is particularly worrisome. The danger comes neither from censorship nor from the dictatorship of academic serialists: these are issues from the past. Rather, it comes from the unfortunate confluence of two recent trends: We are drowning in the flood of ever new products of what, whether you like

⁹ Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

Theodor Adorno or not, can only be called the music entertainment industry; at the same time, we are paralyzed by our inability and unwillingness to discriminate.

We are humanists, and no human product is too trivial to deserve our scholarly attention, we think. Moreover, since all such products always embody human desires and aspirations, we fear rightly that to discriminate among them is to discriminate among people. We are reluctant to use such terms as masterpiece or trash, even when these terms pertain to individual products, not their genres. (Just as art music does not have a monopoly on masterpieces, popular music does not have one on trash.) And we are most reluctant to distinguish art from entertainment, the former a mirror in which we can see better who we are, the latter an amusement allowing us some respite from ourselves. Ironically, all this fastidiousness does not prevent us from teaching legacy students at elitist institutions or from discriminating when it comes to hiring and promoting colleagues. *The danger is that if we do not recover and exercise our capacity for judgment, we shall suffocate under the mountains of trash that, worse than carbon dioxide, pollute our cultural environment, and we might end up not only with post-literate music, but also with post-literate universities.* To be sure, the spectacle of the New Philistines congratulating themselves on their iconoclastic credentials just as the old ones did (remember Nikolai Chernyshevsky) is amusing, but the amusement should not blind us to the potential for damage. Our refusal to evaluate, our implicit endorsement of all that trash, is today's form of *la trahison des clercs* and this betrayal of the intellectuals, rather than censorship or dogmatic dictatorship, is the main danger we face now.

It should be clear, by the way, that, unlike Adorno, I do not think that there is anything terribly troubling about the production of all that trash; what troubles me is the utmost seriousness with which this production is received, especially by academics, and it troubles me because precious resources that can be used to generate valuable knowledge are wasted on trivia. There is plenty of money to be made in the entertainment industry and it is only natural that people who stand to profit promote their products at the expense of all competition. But it is not the task of intellectuals to help them peddle their wares. *We do not have available many forms of cultural discourse – forms such as music, art, philosophy, and religion – that would allow us seriously to reflect on who we are. A society that trades these few for entertainment is foolish and its intellectuals are irresponsible.*

The reluctance to discriminate has resulted in the tragic-comic absurdity of a liberal arts educational system in which our students may graduate from our best universities and colleges without having read a line of Plato or Virgil, lest we, their teachers, be thought partial to the dreaded Dead White Males. And yet, discriminate we must, since our deans, at once

frugal and eager to make their mark as promoters of cutting-edge research, always answer our urgent pleas for a specialist in Brazilian disco, in music for Scandinavian computer games, or in early cases of hexachordal combinatoriality west of the Rocky Mountains, with the same dreary answer: "Sure, your medievalist is about to retire; replace him with someone dealing with these new and fascinating subjects." Needless to say, we do need and want to expand the areas of inquiry pursued in our music departments. Even those of us interested only in art music realize that in order to do justice to a Ligeti, we need to talk to a colleague interested in the American experimental tradition (because of Ligeti's fascination with Nancarrow) and another who knows something about Central African rhythm (a prominent influence on Ligeti's Etudes). The problem arises only when such an expansion is achieved at the cost of shrinking the pool of scholars dealing directly with the art music tradition. This tradition is an ever-evolving, ever-reconfiguring whole, and we can never know when a currently less fashionable area will suddenly gain new relevance: fail to replace your medievalist, and suddenly Ligeti's fascination with the *ars subtilior* (also evident in the Etudes), or Kurtág's with Guillaume de Machaut, becomes opaque.

Our problem, in short, is how to expand beyond the confines of Western art music history without sacrificing a reasonably comprehensive coverage of the latter and without losing the unique quality of a discipline built around the skills of musical literacy (such as reading and writing, textual criticism, or close analysis—skills not available in other departments), not to mention the ability to read foreign languages and a willingness to read scholarly literature in those languages (a habit some of us seem to have been neglecting of late, being ready to embrace world music but, when it comes to musicology, parochially convinced of the superiority of home-grown products). The problem does not allow an easy, formulaic solution: we will simply have to muddle through and devise *ad hoc* solutions as we go along. All of this is no ground for excessive pessimism. As long as we have a large number of diverse institutions of higher learning, each with a fairly diverse and autonomous music faculty, there is a good chance that at any given time at least some departments will get the balance right. *There is no ground for excessive pessimism, then, provided our universities remain, at least to a certain extent, places where both professors and students spend time on a leisurely pursuit of, and pleasure in, learning, not only on make-believe social reform or on assiduous imparting and acquiring of pre-professional skills in preparation for the rigors of the market.*

My personal hope is that, in devising such a balance, we shall keep in mind that, at our Humboldtian universities, we are not only scholars, but also teachers, that our undergraduates spend only four years in our company, and that each time they take a course introducing them to the

profound significance of *The Sims*, it may be at the expense of taking a course that might help them understand Dante. In other words, since we must discriminate anyway, let us discriminate wisely.

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ABSTRACT

This article begins with a description of the essential features and current state of the social practice called art music, concluding that as recently as the late twentieth century it was in excellent shape, as documented by a series of canonic masterpieces. I continue with an outline of the principal questions pursued by, and the current state of, music history, demonstrating that it too was flourishing in the same period, producing work of enduring worth. In conclusion, I consider the main dangers that currently threaten a successful cultivation of music history. These include our inability to notice historical developments that really matter when we are blinded by thinking in terms of group identities, and the unfortunate confluence of two recent cultural trends: the flood of ever new products of the music (or entertainment) industry, combined with our inability and unwillingness to discriminate.

Keywords: Art music, canon, discrimination, entertainment industry, musicology