Chapter 1

MUSICAL GENRE AT THE
START OF THE 21ˢᵗ CENTURY

gen·re   (n.) A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.

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Locating Musical Genre

In his excellent online *Introduction to Genre Theory,* Dr. Daniel Chandler of the University of Aberystwyth, Wales frames the conventional understanding of genre and quotes television scholar Robert Allen in summary of the core problem of "genreal" definition:[5]

> The word *genre* comes from the French (and originally Latin) word for 'kind' or 'class'. The term is widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of 'text'. Robert Allen notes that "for most of its 2,000 years, genre study has been primarily nominological and typological in function. That is to say, it has taken as its principal task the division of the world of literature into types and the naming of those types - much as the botanist divides the realm of flora into varieties of plants". As will be seen, however, the analogy with biological classification into *genus* and *species* misleadingly suggests a 'scientific' process.[6]

While Chandler invokes the graphocentric term 'text' (with an apologetic footnote) as the commodity classified by the typologically-based system of genre, the passage above relates

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[5] In reflection of the complex and intersubjective nature of musical genre, throughout this paper and my larger project I employ the made-up adjective 'genreal' to refer to classifications of the system/phenomenon/construction under consideration in preference to 'generic' (which evokes the commercial reductionist agenda known in the food, pharmaceutical and musical industries) and 'general' (which seems too broad in other applications).
[6] Chandler, Daniel. An Introduction to Genre Theory (1997), online document (accessed [21 June 2005]). http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre.html.

clearly and easily to all sorts of art and beyond. Genre classification in any discipline is a process superficially resembling an objectified science, but one which is highly arbitrary and controversial, replete with problems of language and subjectivity, and as we shall see in the musical realm, is straining under its recent paradigm shift.

The scope of 'genre' as we apply it to the music of the 18th and 19th centuries is narrower than when we apply it to the music of the 20th century: it is a purely formal (i.e. 'sonata'), instrumentational (i.e. 'string quartet') or applicational (i.e. 'dance music', *tafelmusik*, etc.) system of locating compositions in established structures of Western music. As the 19th century progresses, artistic freedom and experimentation cause music to stretch and strain against these established categories, and the designation becomes less and less useful. The decline of genre's usefulness as we consider progressively the art music of the middle and latter 19th century predicts its subsidiary role to that of 'schools' and other lines of influence in the study of 20th century art music; this shift is further compounded by the rise in profile and acceptance in musicological circles of 20th century popular styles and world musics with formal and other paradigms that break almost completely with those foundational to the earlier genre system.

The reader could be forgiven at this point for believing that our differing uses of the term 'musical genre' in considering the music of the 18th and 20th centuries seems to arise solely from our failure to consider popular and world musics prior to the 20th century, and our more recent correction of that omission and the resulting vastly expanded quantity of music needing consideration. But there is a further and crucial piece to the puzzle to be found in the 20th

century's towering legacy of modernity, and the thought systems which have necessarily followed it, as postmodernity.

The Great Genreal Paradigm Shift

In the latter half of the 20th century, as the science of musicology flourished and began to engage the totality of western popular and every species of global music, a new approach to the understanding of genre was already long overdue. In the 'Genre' article in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Jim Samson describes the old and new as complementary approaches to the understanding of musical genre, the older definition stressing classical typology, and the newer (dating from the 1960s) stressing aesthetic experience. He explains the emergence of the latter in terms of a newer tendency to problematise the relation between artworks and their reception[7]. Under this latter view, genre refers more generally to the conventions and expectations affecting a piece of music, drawing context and consumer into an equation that previously had involved only the composer, the composition, and their forebears.

Charles Hamm, in the preamble to his 1993 article *Genre, Performance and Ideology in the Early Songs of Irving Berlin* recounts Jeffrey Kallberg's notion of a "generic contract" in which a composer positions his or her work within a genreal framework through choice of title, metre, musical gesture, etc., implicitly promising that it will conform to at least some of the conventions associated with a genre. In response, the listener receives the work in a way somehow

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[7] Samson, Jim: 'Genre', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (accessed [12 November 2005]), http://www.grovemusic.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca

conditioned by the genreal association. Crucially, a work's genreal association(s) compel neither the composer nor the listener to be bound exclusively by all or by any particular convention or expectation associated therewith: there is rather an understanding which establishes a relationship within which composer, listener and musical work abide. Likewise, in citing both Pascall's "fundamental and unalienable" categories of generic difference (not just its diachronic structure, but also its performance site and forces, and expressive code)[8], and Samson's theory of "repetition elements,"[9] he reinforces that the material which defines genre goes well beyond the technical content into the realms of context, function, and community validation.

Hamm goes on, however, to point out a weakness in these models of genre, taking Kallberg, Pascall and Samson to task:

> Underlying most musicological writing on genre is the assumption that both composer
> and listener have a technical understanding of the genre in question, and a knowledge of
> the relevant social and historical issues, equal to that of the scholar.[10]

The implicit assumption of any such shared set of significations and body of meaning is as obvious as the problem it creates, not simply in the case of the listener untrained in, or unaware of the technical and socio-historical aspects of a piece of music, but also in the case of any otherwise musically-literate listener whose subjectivity fails to provide the raw material for the communicative relationship genre is designed to serve. Hamm, while declining to comment on the validity of any assumption of shared semiology between composer and listener, declares that

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[8] See Pascall, Robert. "Genre and the Finale of Brahms' Fourth Symphony" in *Music Analysis 8/3* (October 1989)
[9] Samson, Jim: 'Genre', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy, online article (accessed 12 November 2005)
http://www.grovemusic.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca.
[10] Hamm, Charles. "Genre, Performance and Ideology in the Early Songs of Irving Berlin" in Putting Popular Music in its Place. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.372

it is "…of limited use in dealing with genre in popular music."[11]   Understanding that one of the 20th century's principal legacies to genre is the incorporation of popular musics into a system which had previously excluded them, it is easy to see where Hamm would suggest things have gone awry. In his study of over 200 songs of Irving Berlin dated from 1907 to 1914 he:

> …soon found that a given song could be perceived as belonging to two or more genres, or as lying between several of them. It also became clear that genre was defined more importantly by a song's intended and received meaning than by its compositional style and structure, and that two factors previously disregarded in the literature could be crucial in defining meaning, and therefore genre – the identity of a song's protagonist, and performance style.[12]

Shifted, and Still Shaking

Following the philosophical shift from nominological/typological genre into the reasonable but still-problematic world of composer/listener contracts and communication, as the 20th century waned and the 21st waxed, the meaning of the term "musical genre" also changed very practically out of a need to categorize an exploding array of musical 'product' in the record store, broadcast media, and Internet music site. Whereas once, "genre" served only to locate compositions within established structures of what is now called classical music, it now must position not just compositions, but musical styles, artists and communities within intersecting continua of time, place, history and style that are, by definition, limitless. It seems little wonder that at the time of this paper *Wikipedia's* exhaustive (albeit anarchical) online listing of music

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[11] Hamm, Charles. "Genre, Performance and Ideology in the Early Songs of Irving Berlin" in Putting Popular Music in its Place. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. p. 372
[12] Ibid. p.374

genres[13] contained over 1500 categories: *Crunk* (a southern U.S. brand of hip-hop), *Crust Punk* (a fusion of British metal and punk), and *Csárdás* (a Hungarian folk dance) appear consecutively in the alphabetic listing, immediately following *Crossover Music*, a 'genre' whose only defining characteristic appears to be that it is not one (but rather two or more).

Along with the challenges associated with referring to more and more particles, the genre 'system' has the problem of not being able to define those categories by any consistent method. One postmodern critic, Jorge Louis Borges provided a parody of genre (left column below) which Marjorie Perloff quoted in her editorial preamble to *Postmodern Genres*. It should be noted again here that there is nothing inherently *wrong* with genre's scattered 'methodology' in conveying meaning about music – rather that there are inherent problems. Here to point out the range of specifying methods parodied by Borge I provide his listing (Ex. 1), along with some proposed analogies in the system of musical genre, the overriding problem with both being the complete lack of the consistent derivation or structural formation suggested by any scientific model. Just as Borge's humorous list of animal categorisations is in no way intended to be exhaustive, my analogies are mere responses to the problems hinted at as they apply to musical genre, and not in any sense comprehensive of the wide-ranging and anarchical set of formational principles and practices in play in the system as we now know it.

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[13] Wikipedia contributors, "List of music genres," *Wikipedia.* online article (accessed [20 October 2005]) http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_music_genres&oldid=24583498. The Wikipedia listing, formed from users' contributions which it makes no attempt to systematise, contains both traditional formal genres like cantata and foxtrot and the more culturally/stylistically-based known in more recent times and associated with popular styles, such as soka and grunge. While it is neither definitive nor reliable in any academic sense, it is an ideal site for the investigation of the genre problematic in music.

Ex. 1 **Jorge Louis Borge's parody of genre,[14] and some proposed musical genre analogies**

Animals are divided into:	Specific musical analogy to Borge's genreal problem
(a) belonging to the emperor,	Genre is sometimes specified through some simple fact of association, such as music's ethnicity (i.e. *Brazilian*), thereby dividing pieces of music sharing many (even most or all) musical characteristics on the basis of being the 'property' of different ethnic groups, traditions, or nationalities.
(b) the embalmed,	Genre sometimes privileges a body of pieces' single shared characteristic such as instrumentation (i.e. *DNB (drum & bass)*), or time period of composition (i.e. *Baroque*), ignoring formal, stylistic and cultural content that may be useful in understanding it.
(c) tame,	Genre qualifiers often suggest a location at one end or the other of a continuum (i.e. *smooth – hard, classic – contemporary, light – heavy*), when pieces more generally fall somewhere along that continuum, or share characteristics of both ends.
(d) suckling pigs,	A genre can be made as specific as desired by whoever coins its term (*Ranchera*=pop mariachi from 1950s film soundtracks), describing only a very small amount of music.
(e) sirens,	In addition to being 'realised' from musical practice, genres can be constructed from mythology or imagination (i.e. *Filk*, a modern science-fiction oriented music, and *Spectralism*, a 20th century form originating in France which generates musical forms from waveforms and colours)
(f) fabulous,	Genres are often formed in reference to their predecessors (*new-/neue-, neo-, post-*), assuming knowledge of those precursors in order to interpret them, and using that knowledge to position them over the former as an innovation, advance or improvement.
(g) stray dogs,	Some genre qualifiers specify attitude as well as (or even in replacement for) a sound (i.e. *horror/death, dirty, cool, free*, etc.) suggesting ideologies which must accompany performer/composer and listener.
(h) included in the present classification,	Some genres have not yet been formed or specified, presumably some never will, therefore "über genreals" such as *World Music* exist in order to encompass anything excluded from a classification system (in this case the classical and popular music of Europe and North America)
(i) frenzied,	Genres can be defined according to their originator(s) (i.e. *Singer-Songwriter*, the Italian *Canzone d'autore* or the Québecois *Chanson*) – in this way a genre of artist becomes a genre of music.
(j) innumerable,	Genres may encompass any number of diverse pieces of music so long as the collective title applies universally in some sense, and does not rule out any piece's inclusion. In this category of names belongs the ubiquitous 'Popular'.
(k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush,	Borge suggests that one category of animals is 'pictures of animals drawn in a very specific way: *Serialism* and *Pointillism* are genres of music that exists only by virtue of how they are created; *Program Music* and *Impressionism*, while clearly music rather than 'pictures of music', are genrified only by their representational status.
(l) *et cetera*,	Where there exists the classified there exists also the unclassified: Borge implies here that animals not specifically classified herein are indeed classifiable… this is an implication of the musical genre system as well, evidenced by the common practice of the creation of categories like *Hypnofolkadelia* and *Progressive Urban Math Folk* where existing categories fail to classify adequately.
(m) having just broken the water pitcher,	Genre titles are not always constructed in reference to musical or otherwise in any way recogniseable terminology… arbitrary titles like *slide, house* and *math* and nonsensical names like *Skiffle* and *Hip-hop* underline music's ability to impute meaning to words, in addition to the reverse process inherent to the construction of genre.
(n) that from a long way off look like flies.	Borge reminds that genre construction is based on individual knowledge – no genre title is invoked or received without the influence of individual perception, and of the individual's working knowledge of its referent.

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[14] Quoted in Hamm, Charles. "Genre, Performance and Ideology in the Early Songs of Irving Berlin" in *Putting Popular Music in its Place*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.371

The point here is not only that musical genre classifications are arrived at in a variety of uncoordinated ways, but also that they are in no way mutually exclusive terms that can totally and exactly describe all music in the way that a set of names like triangle, square, pentagon and so on can classify all regular polygons. At best, most genre categories are constructions of *properties* that someone has identified in (often their own) music. Even classifiers like ethnicity which seem fairly sound and clear are tainted by the factors of immigration and influence, to say nothing of by the ears of the listener which may easily attach their own associations.

The difference between the historical and contemporary conceptions of musical genre is a subtle but important one. At its core nothing has changed… it remains a system for classifying musical compositions based on their properties. But two factors have altered that process of classification forever: the amount and diversity of music being accommodated, and the properties being considered. In 1950 most North Americans knew about classical and jazz music, and that they were different: but no one would have used the word 'genre' to say what was different. For even those who may have resisted the entrenched social structures which placed classical and jazz in racially, economically and intellectually polarised areas of discourse, 'genre' could be used to distinguish a jazz ballad from a jazz waltz, a piano sonata from a piano concerto, possibly even a jazz ballad from a piano "Ballade"... - but in no way did the term refer to the larger musical, cultural and connotive identities which together defined each form, as it does today.

Crucially, genre has become preoccupied increasingly with stylistically proposed content rather than analytically demonstrable content. While it is irrefutable that there exist pieces in a genre called "jazz waltz", the 21st century popular 'genre system' will likely assign pieces in that

formal category to the broad "jazz" genre, or if specified further it will generally be by type of jazz – "classic jazz", "cool jazz", "fusion jazz" and so on – rather than according to genre's earlier tendency to specify by, for example, the formal/metrical content which originated in the waltz dance form. While the term 'genre' can be argued to fulfill basically the same function in music as it always has, what has changed seems to be the nature of the question it seeks to answer, "What kind of piece is it?" gives way to "What kind of music is it?"

Led by the music industry which, as it is still doing today, spent the 20th century searching out, developing and shaping consumer markets for every type of music, the academic disciplines concerned with the study of music have now spent a two decade period (usually thought to have begun in 1985 with Joseph Kerman's *Contemplating Music*) incorporating the formerly fringe-study of world and ethnic musics and the forbidden study of popular musics into a project of re-imagining music as cultural commodity, signifier and social operator, to the consternation and at the significant expense of proponents of its more traditional treatment as a body of autonomous works of art. Coupled with this broadening of musical genre's classifying responsibilities is the gradual replacement of a tree-style conception of genre in western classical music which begins with music's elementary separation into binaries such as sacred/secular and vocal/instrumental and then further subdivides them according to form, use and other criteria,[15] with an emergent conception of genre resembling a theory of related sets which grow and intersect under the influence of a complex set of social and historical factors.

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[15] to follow arbitrarily a sacred vocal category, the division might be into chant and polyphony, then into the systematic divisions of Gregorian/Ambrosian/Ursulinian, etc., then into music for the Mass and the Divine Office, then into the Ordinary and Propers, etc… or it might reserve the division of chant and polyphony for a lower level, retaining the association of, for example, a Mozart *Sanctus* with one of Perotin.

In the latter vein, Franco Fabbri's *Theory of Musical Genres* defines a musical genre as "a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially acceptable rules.[16]" Fabbri's model addresses the problem of excessive broadness (to which he admits) by following not the Wikipedia model of genre categorisation (which simply collects terms which refer to any somehow-similar body of musical pieces), but rather by considering *against what* a genre is being defined:

> Excessive broadness is a defect … of my own definition of genre: it allows me to call "genre" any set of genres, and therefore some which usually go under other names: musical systems, ethnic music, even "terrestrial music" (a union of all the types of musical production and consumption on this planet) or "galactic".
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> The only solution I have found to this problem is to decide each time whether a certain set of musical events is being considered in relation to other opposing sets in which case I will call it a genre – or in relation to its sub-sets – in which case I will call it a system. In any case this defect is preferable to the opposite risk, that is, not recognising as a genre something which is considered as such by millions of people.[17]

Fabbri suggests, then, that while it may be impossible in the context of the late 20th century to specify any comprehensive and fully systematised version of the genre system, as may have been defensible (if problematic) in earlier periods, that an imperfect solution relating some pairs of genres as parallel and others as hierarchical is possible.[18] Beyond the familiar problem of specifying what constitutes a genre's "musical events," he makes special reference to the notion of "social acceptability" that is key to his definition:

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[16] Fabbri, Franco. "A Theory of Music Genres: Two Applications" in *Popular Music Perspectives* ed. P. Tagg and D. Horn. Göteborg and Exeter, 1982.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Fabbri offers a number of forms of the Italian vocal form *canzone* as parallel to each other, while also admitting them to be sub-genres to such designations as 'Italian vocal music', 'Italian music' and even the 'terrestrial music' mentioned above.

> I have not imposed limits on the community whose agreement forms the basis for the definition of a genre: its extension is not a problem (the decision to study Verdi's melodrama or political songs of the 1972 student movement in Milan State University will depend on individual interests) neither is its composition. A genre which amalgamates complicated relations between composers, performers, audience, critics and organisers, each with their own particular rules, may be no more worthy of attention and analysis than a genre based on an arbitrary agreement between twelve journalists and a record producer, who all include it in musical events apparently heterogenous according to obscure idiosyncratic rules.[19]

Later I will refer to the consideration of the question of how many (or how few) *pieces* are required to define a genre: Fabbri refers here to what I see as the more important question of how many people, or what 'social consensus' is required to do the same. Clearly the scholar of political song in the 1972 student movement in Milan State University 'needs' only her or himself (and perhaps an Academic committee) to consecrate a very specific genre for musicological study, but Fabbri implies that this project is not so far removed from that of the popular musical mega-attraction (for example, the "Three Tenors") addressed by every music critic in consultation (or worse) with that ensemble's management, and presumed to cross genres according to a populist ideological definition. To review the Wikipedia listing referenced above is to confront not only one's own limited knowledge of the musical world, nor only the subjective and anarchical nature of musical genre in popular conception, but the vast array of social communities and constructions necessary to sustain so detailed and broad-reaching a system of semiology, which is made useful perhaps only by the fact that no single person needs to know the entire system of referents.

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[19] Fabbri, Franco. "A Theory of Music Genres: Two Applications" in *Popular Music Perspectives* ed. P. Tagg and D. Horn. Göteborg and Exeter, 1982. p.54

21st century redefined "musical genre" is constructed according to perceived content, instantly building subjective judgment into what at least superficially resembles an objectified science. It evolves, diffuses and changes under the influence of cultural, technological, economic, artistic and other factors. Beyond strict evolution it tends further to subdivide along lines of era, association, impression and location ("cool", "hot", "early", "late", "classic", "easy", "Motown", etc.) and even exclusively industrial criteria ("alternative", "garage", "independent") which are still more difficult to express in terms clearly audible in the music. In this way an organising device with at least a potential function of enhancing access to and understanding of music succumbs to its exclusive nature: while seeking to lead the seeker to music of his or her taste based on known categories, it also leads him or her *directly past* a great deal of music, perhaps likely to appeal, but alas never to be experienced. Musical genre's effect, and some argue its economic purpose, is not broadening access to music, but rather containing, or at least channelling it.

A further connection between redefined musical genre and its late 20th century culture is found in an interest in allowing genreal identity to be perceived immediately, and by a wide spectrum of listener, within the proverbial sound bytes of postmodern media culture. Defining a piece of music as lying within the formal genres of, say, "piano theme and variations" or "symphonic sonata allegro" requires extended listening (to say nothing of a degree of knowledge of these forms). "Classical" is a much easier and quicker genre title to attach to both for the listener unable or unlikely to hear the entire piece; even "rock ballad" asks of the listener a certain vocabulary and a critical period of recognitive listening that cannot be assumed in the

case of, say, the average Internet song-seeker's exposure to the 30 second promotional fragment

of a downloadable track.

Returning to Chandler's *Introduction to Genre Theory*, we find film theorist Robert

Stam's four pitfalls of applying genreal labels proposed:

> Defining genres may not initially seem particularly problematic but it should already be
> apparent that it is a theoretical minefield. Robert Stam identifies four key problems with
> generic labels (in relation to film):
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> *extension* (the breadth or narrowness of labels);
> *normativism* (having preconceived ideas of criteria for genre membership);
> *monolithic definitions* (as if an item belonged to only one genre);
> *biologism* (a kind of essentialism in which genres are seen as evolving through a
> standardized life cycle).[20]

These four problems may be illustrated as follows in terms of musical genre:

1) *extension* may be found in the breadth of the "classical" and "world" genres and the
   narrowness of any number of hybrid and one-band genres like "hypnofolkadelia" and so-
   called "Presleyan music";
2) *normativism* may be seen in the CRTC's dated division of broadcast music into two
   categories, "Popular" (breaking down into Pop/rock/dance, Country, Acoustic and Easy
   listening) and "Special Interest" (breaking down into Concert (Classical), Folk, World beat,
   Jazz/Blues and Non-classic religious);
3) *monolithic definitions* are evident in the need most commercial retail outlets have for every
   musical recording, book, etc. to fall uniquely and easily into a single one of only a few
   categories;[21] and
4) *biologism* in the tree structures on download sites that try to specify genre categories
   through simple and artificial lines of evolution are sadly one of the best attempts to
   systematize what Chandler rightly noted at the outset of this paper only misleadingly
   resembles a scientific process.

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[20] Chandler, Daniel. An Introduction to Genre Theory (1997), online document (accessed [21 June 2005]), www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre.html.
[21] One early respondent to the Genre Implosion Radio Show online survey (see Appendix) recounted the experience pitching new music to the Chapters/Indigo retail chain: "It is not new age, nor is it classical, nor is it pop. It is uniquely its own thing. To get into the music.ca website at Chapters I had to pick a genre. Inspirational may have been the closest, but there were only 9 or 10 to choose from. I had to have one for their system to work. So we picked NEW AGE. I feel this so doesn't represent what I'm trying to do. It will be an eye catcher for some and a turn off for others."

As though bloated beyond its capacity to contain this expanded meaning, musical genre is losing its original ability to differentiate types of composition within a musical idiom. While in dictionaries and academic usage genre remains loyal to this historical role, in common parlance genre is now more concerned with distinguishing types of *music*, not types of *piece*. How many diverse recognisable forms might be contained within, say, the Ambient genre, with its vast palette of electronic, recorded and sampled sounds and its freedom from radio-broadcast constricting uses such as dance? Or how few within, say, the nihilist Death Metal and Horror Punk genres? The answer is that it doesn't matter: we tend to accept newer genres as the complete packages they are marketed to be, even if we are accustomed to spurning acid jazz for classic, if we idolize Bach and loathe Boulez. If we love Britney Spears this year and Nellie Furtado the next it is probably for them, rather than for any personal category of song.

Locating genre in postmodern thought is at base no different than locating any other concept or structure minted during the centuries before. While postmodernity relies upon modernity to define itself, it seeks to explode mythologies created in what were once normal courses of thought, while opening discourse into areas always present, but ignored or suppressed. As Hamm puts it,

> The construction of taxonomies based on close textual analysis occupied many scholars
> of the modern era, while postmodern criticism has tended to deconstruct the process of
> genre construction itself – that is, to ask why the exercise is undertaken, not how – or to
> emphasise the flexibility and overlap of genres.[22]

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[22] Hamm, Charles. "Genre, Performance and Ideology in the Early Songs of Irving Berlin" in *Putting Popular Music in its Place*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.372

'Why genre construction is undertaken' is something which has not changed: the Enlightenment Project's successful crusade for rationality, despite the shift to a postmodern belief system in philosophical circles, continues to hold sway in many aspects of Western thought, including the deep-seated need to systematise phenomena such as musical genre that are inherently organic in character. As Hamm suggests it received short shrift at the hands of modern scholars, and merits our full attention: but merely ignoring the problem of how genre is formed belongs to a familiar postmodern 'genre' of scholarship, which to its credit concerns itself with discovering new why's where such questions have previously gone unposed – but which to its fault may ignore many of the deep problems of modernity while seeking to implode others.

Church Music: A Case for Über-Genreal Status

In one early conversation with my supervisor I was presented with the interesting question "how many pieces of music do you need to have a genre?" Our basic feeling was three: that one exhibiting no instance of shared musical or cultural property with any other piece didn't merit 'genrehood', and that having just two pieces sharing form and/or content also seemed insufficient (to say nothing of having dire implications to genre's use as a classification system for millions of pieces!). While the question of why three, whether or not that number was somehow related in our judgments to the concept of the 'tiebreaker' or scientific experimental control (constructions of rhetoric and science) is unclear and unimportant, but it led me to ask a question more crucial to my work: "how many, and covering what level or nature of difference, can comprise a musical genre?" Or put another way, *how little* shared form or content between

pieces is permissible to call two - or two thousand - pieces part of the same genre? Much is made in popular discourse, as well as this study about the over-specific nature of a musical genre system in which *New Wave of British Heavy Metal* (NWOBHM, a mid-to-late 1970s heavy metal from the U.K.), and *Fusion banghra* (the Punjabi *bhangra* combined with rock and roll, reggae, hip-hop, reggae and funk) are accepted categorisations. On the flip side of this characteristic is the over-generality of the ubiquitous and widely-employed terms 'popular music', 'classical music', 'world music', etc. that very flexibly encompass many constituent identifiable forms (themselves easily called genres in their own right).

Referring back Hamm's remark about postmodern scholarship and Chandler's citation of Robert Allen at this chapter's outset, consider for a moment *why* the organic phenomenon of musical genre is cast in a setting so reminiscent of zoology, when it seems to lend itself so poorly to a taxonomical structure. Indeed, the application to genre of the 'zoo' paradigm, which suggests that animals may be studied as autonomous organisms by forcibly removing them from their natural habitat (a trauma which must always result in behavioural and physiological changes) has just as dire implications for music as for fauna: we begin to shape music the moment we begin to classify it, since our categories impact both its production and reception. In this way, even if it could boast some more exact or at least systematic methodological structure the genre system contains its own 'uncertainty principle:'[23] the very act of study makes total accuracy

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[23] According to Einstein's 'uncertainty principle' in quantum physics it is impossible to know both the position and trajectory of any particle, as our investigative processes necessitate bombarding that particle with other particles, and this interaction changes the investigated particle's movements. In analogy to communication, it is impossible for any author to describe events in history without them being changed by both the author's and the reader's subjective positions… addressing either quantum physics or history, the means of investigation acts upon and alters the object being addressed.

impossible. We construct musical genre out of our modern fascination for science, and in a manner largely governed by same.

In considering a musical genre called "Church Music" one addresses as diverse a genreal signifier as those listed above: one containing music that spans millennia, nations, ideologies and technologies as though they didn't exist as the dividers the sometimes represent. Yet while one could argue its genreal problematic in the same breath as that of the similarly over-general "popular", "classical" and "world" musics, it is also possible to argue for its genrehood on the basis of these widely employed (and not unuseful, albeit limited in specificity) genreal designations. If Church Music can exist in a very flexible postmodern sense as an intersection of subsets of classical, world, popular and other musics, its uniting factor is one of its use and founding purpose, which is the proclamation, celebration, practice and propagation of the Christian faith. Because these activities have existed for so many centuries and in so many distinct cultural milieu, "Church Music" could be considered in a sense *über-genreal*, as one might consider a genre of "Dance Music" to include ancient tribal chants, passepieds, romantic-era ballet, waltz, the jitterbug and electronic body music (EBM, also known as industrial dance).

But herein lies the problem of modern scientised musical genre: why arbitrarily call a set of music sharing one set of properties a genre and another sharing another "uber-genreal?" The answer lies within recent models for musical study, which have privileged first the direct autonomous study of musical text (analysis), and more recently the ethno-cultural context that can be discerned (ethnomusicology), as determinant and organisational criteria, leaving the critical element of purpose and practice at best subject to the other two, and at worst, ignored.

In a 1996 address to the Catholic Theological Union, Professor David Tracy of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago identified what he considered to be the "three great separations of modern Western culture" as that of 'feeling and thought', that of 'form and content', and that of 'theory and practice.[24]' If redressing these separations, which Tracy noted "modernity has bequeathed and postmodernity is happily undoing" is key to any postmodern belief system for scholars, we can take some comfort in the knowledge that the ethno-cultural determinant is addressing the divide between theory and practice, and that newer understandings of musical analysis are healing the rift between form and content. The split between thought and feeling however, which allows us to *feel* that a genre like 'popular' has a musical meaning while admitting it cannot, or to *feel* faith in a God when presented with evidence seemingly contradictory of that God's existence, remains largely uncharted territory in a postmodern scholarship somewhat tolerant of author subjectivity but still deeply suspicious of opinion and conjecture.

Understanding, then, that like postmodernism itself, any *über-genreal* conception already relies completely upon modern constructions for self-definition, this study will nonetheless adopt this mode of address to Church Music. Church Music, as a *über-genre* of music, a genre of liturgical practice or indeed a genre of the expression of faith by human composers, performers and worshippers will be those musical forms and activities intended to praise, glorify, thank and adore the God of the Christian faith for that God's gifts of creation and salvation. There is

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[24] Tracy, David. "Traditions of Spiritual Practice and the Practice of Theology." Address at Catholic Theological Union (Chicago, 1996) cited in Foley, Edward "Training Church Musicians: What are the appropriate methods?" in *Musicians for the Churches: Reflections on Vocation and Formation*, ed. Fassler, Margaret E. (Hartford: Yale Institute of Sacred Music, 2001)

something highly symbolic of this *über-genreal* model for Church Music as the song of a church which knows no barriers of time, language and nationality, and only those imposed by ecclesiastical doctrine and tradition, which vary widely as do the Christians who practice it. Indeed a Church Music not governed by the lines that so effectively divide secular music recalls the timeless paradigm of the church as other to society, as standing in opposition to social orders with which it must nonetheless interact, both within itself and without.

Whether postmodern thought considers an Anglican response to the problem of Reformation-era Psalmody turned choral artwork, a mainstream American transformation of a conservative rural form of Calvinist music turned loose on a modern world through radio, or a modern but thoroughly aged church's uneasy welcome of Contemporary Christian Music, the complex folk/pop construction of the young Christians of the 1970s, it considers a phenomenally rich repository of human creation, devotion and evolution in common faith and service, as unified in purpose as it is diverse in form. At its base, faith is about thinking and feeling reconciled in a way that is problematic to much of postmodernity, contributing in no small measure to the current difficult age for the church, which rests upon many of the modern constructions postmodernity seeks to undermine.[25]   It could nonetheless be argued that it is here that postmodernism can perhaps most successfully study genre in a way that as Tracy put it 'happily undoes' the legacy of modernity: and here enters the notion of 'implosion.'

The explanation of the nature of a compound but unified body of Christ in Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth provides a model for a musical *über-genre* called "Church

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[25] Anderson, Pamela Sue. "Postmodernism and Religion" in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim. Oxford: Routledge, 2005, p.45

Music." If the motivation and praxis of the musical expression of this body is the cultural tie that binds every piece penned, performed, published or portrayed in its name, we cannot but consider them as on a very deep and meaningful level, one.

> The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.[26]

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[26] 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (New International Version)