

## IMPLODING MUSICAL GENRE

# IMPLODING MUSICAL GENRE

*Locating a Modern phenomenon in Postmodern thought*

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## ABSTRACT

By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term 'musical genre' has been repositioned in popular usage in comparison to its premodern/modern function. Instead of merely classifying pieces according to established formal structures in mainly western art and folk music, it has evolved through modernity and postmodernity into an enormous, complex and highly problematic system, phenomenon or construction seeking not just to fulfil that function, but also seeking stylistically to classify the popular and art music of every culture and era. Using the *Wikipedia* online listing of musical genres as one manifestation of the public usage of the term, one sees entire repertoires, traditions and their sub-categories such as jazz, motown, indie garage and mohabelo placed on non-hierarchical par with formal genres such as symphony, lament, ballad and strathespy.

This paper combines theoretical, researched, and anecdotal information around musical genre's nature and behaviour from a postmodern perspective. It examines the reimagining of musical genre which has characterised the postmodern age, and proposes models for understanding it based on the work of Theodor Adorno, Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard using three very different genres of church music as illustrations.

Finally, in addition to reporting on *Genre Implosion*, a weekly radio show which aired on CFMU 93.3FM throughout the duration of the project, it seeks to locate itself within the concepts of 20<sup>th</sup> century pragmatism underlying it, which make it less about positing 'truths' about musical genre than about encouraging its practical use and application in the flexible and multi-faceted forms inherent to postmodernity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To Marcia, Nate and Simon Dawes, for their humour, tolerance and sacrifices freely lain at the altar of this long-awaited return to academia, and for their support of a new engagement with ideas and issues that have intrigued and occupied the author's musical life. It is an engagement which, among a musical career's worth of engagements, will leave that musical life changed.

## FOREWORD

Three biographical details gave genesis to this project, and may prove useful to the reader.

- 1) I'm naturally irritated by what I judge to be poor grammar and misused vocabulary. As the use of 'genre' to indicate a piece of music's style or history more than its formal or technical characteristics emerged really during my 20-year musical career, I have always noted the departure from the term's prior meaning. Yet, I have always been intrigued by the lexicographer's contention that meaning shifts in language are often indicative less of people being sloppy or poorly-taught than of broader societal changes. In studying postmodern thought I some detail during my M.A. degree the connection was an obvious one to make with the same period in history.
- 2) As a musician active in a wide range of what I now join the rest of the world in calling 'genres' and a keen listener to musicians talking about their work, I have seen genre's problems firsthand. Musicians often harbour some resentment against a system that either oversimplifies their art (as does, for example, "jazz", or even more, "classical music"), or seeks systematic categorization of something that inherently defies such. Listeners on the other hand, while sometimes sharing these objections to the genre system, often express frustration that they know so little about musical genres, and can recognize still less of them in the music they hear.
- 3) My work at Toronto's St. James' Cathedral over the 12-year period from 1999 to 2003 was fundamentally unlike that in any smaller church I know, in that as church to many diverse churches it had to accommodate the music of many ideologies, ethnicities and genres, often within a single service or other event. It was there that I became aware of the emotional and political power that is attached to musical genre.

My decision to 'retrieve' fallen modern-era "postmodern scholars" in studying musical genre is due perhaps foremost to their prominence in my theoretical courses here at Mac, and to the recent broader trend to revisit the many casualties of what was a tortured and convoluted 20th century of philosophical thought. But still more it speaks to my profound belief that the broader philosophical framework: the ideas and attitudes which shape societies at any given time also shape their products and creations. If the 20th century's dismissals of the ideas of Adorno,

McLuhan and Baudrillard have by the 21st century proved too hasty and facile, perhaps those highly individual minds have something to offer in considering 20th century society's creation, "musical genre", itself too often ignored as determining presence in the musical world.

Finally, my decision to position the paper's ideas in a pragmatic context, returning to the foundational premise of music as an organic commodity forced into an imperfect neo-scientific system, mirrors my belief that musical genre serves a very important and practical purpose, but that it must be addressed and understood practically in order to function well. In contrast to the earlier-era scholars whose ideas I've used to address musical genre, I draw principally here on thoughts and perspectives of a current figure, Richard Rorty. While I have sought a flexible, open and intellectual style for this paper in reflection of its postmodern ethos, I have also really sought to locate it somewhere in the real world.

George Bernard Shaw once famously remarked "If a thing is funny, search it carefully for hidden meaning." The power and problematic around musical genre has always struck me as funny, as have the historical dismissal of scholars whose work I, and increasingly the world that dismissed them, find intriguing and useful. My project, then, has ostensibly been an attempt to explore these questions, search them for hidden meaning, and point the way to a continuation of that process of inquiry. Stuart Sim, in his essay *Postmodernism and Philosophy*, characterises Rorty as, "in prototypically pragmatist fashion, less concerned with whether theories are true or false than with whether they are useful and interesting."<sup>1</sup> It is in this spirit that I have undertaken a form of implosion of the problematic system of musical genre; it is this spirit that I offer it in

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<sup>1</sup> Sim, Stuart. "Postmodernism and Philosophy" in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, Second Edition, ed. Stuart Sim. Oxford: Routledge, 2005. p.11

partial fulfilment of the requirements of my M.A., and it is in this spirit that I intend to continue the study.

While much potential exists for further academic work (developing further philosophical models for understanding genre, studying music industry data and dynamics for the indicators they must surely provide, and perhaps most interestingly, positioning historical and ethnomusicological studies in a more *über-genreal* than *micro-genreal* setting, to name but a few areas), I find myself drawn to the public media – print, Internet and public radio in particular. In this regard the Genre Implosion radio show has been an important ‘workshopping’ experience in thinking about bringing this work not to an academic audience, but to a general public one.

Some of the committee that reviewed the proposal stage of this project suggested strongly that I direct my work towards, or at least illustrate it using, a particular musical genre with which I am somewhat intimately acquainted, Church Music. Although the application of these ideas to musical genre is possible in some sense within any genre category (a fact I hope to imply here by periodic brief references to a wide range of musical genres, particularly in the opening chapter), running throughout this study is connective tissue in the form of the compound genre, or as I coin it, *über-genreal*, of Church Music – a choice which seems at once incidental in its finite nature, and appropriate for a body of scholarship which strives strenuously beyond the particular. While I initially resisted the committee’s well-intentioned advice, I now express my gratitude to those dissenting members, not only for their clear intention, which was to ensure that work which already promised to be somewhat broad and far-reaching resided in familiar territory for me, but now still more for the suggestion of a ‘genre’ which is perhaps as



diverse and far-reaching as anything called a 'genre' might be, spanning centuries and cultures and interacting with every nuance of history along the way. On a personal note, my acquiescence to this suggestion ultimately encouraged me to devote a significant amount of time and thought to a rather large corner of the musical world not just well-known, but very dear to me, and one arguably within which genre dynamics and politics play as significant a role as they do anywhere else in the 21<sup>st</sup> century musical world.

This paper's (and in my view, all criticism's) role is to intrigue and illuminate, rather than to coerce or convince.

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## INTRODUCTION

“The Whole is the untrue.”  
- *Theodor W. Adorno* -

“The simulacrum is never what hides the truth –  
it is the truth that hides the fact that there is none.”  
- *Jean Baudrillard* -

“What is truth? ‘Eet ees vhatever upsets zee applecart.’”  
- *H. Marshall McLuhan* -

What is the truth about musical genre? Our postmodern times caution against universal and essentialised versions of truth, but it seems reasonable to base one version of truth on a certain consensus: musical genre is a useful tool, a powerful determinant and a problematic aspect of the musical world of our time.

A recent professional experience brought the power of genre home: the score I composed in 2005 to “Thirteen Hands” by Canadian playwright Carol Shields, a cultural study of sorts into the card game Bridge and the role it has played in North American, middle-class Caucasian women’s lives from 1922 to the present. Shields’ script specifically requests three songs to be composed, two of which (a Gilbert & Sullivan company number, *It’s not a Sin* and a gospel number, *Thirteen Hands*) specify a musical genre as part of the request.

The third song requested by Shields came with no genre specification although the presence throughout of sections marked ‘recitative’ suggested either an operatic treatment or

more likely a quintessentially 'music theatre' form. Two song genres having been so specifically chosen by the playwright seemed to point to the third being just as different again, so neither opera nor 'music theatre' seemed to work, with G & S already present. "That's what we're here for" appears in a scene where four 1950s-era women are seated at the bridge table playing and complaining about woes which range from humorous day-to-day irritations to the grippingly personal fear of aging, all the while encouraging each other to share in this way. Domestic forms of womanhood often meant little social contact, and husband-driven company moves often meant women had few long-term friendships: the bridge table, in Shields' thesis, filled a social void and enhanced women's agency to think and communicate as individuals. As we began to see the bridge table as an entrée into a new and unfamiliar sorority and personal intimacy, a solution to our general dilemma began to materialise.

Why not a *blues number*, not so much for the reason that the characters were 'singing the blues' about aspects of their lives, nor for the predictable 12-bar pattern that provided time and structure for the 'recitative' sections to be delivered, nor for the fact that a cast of fourth-year twenty-something women would know and 'get into' the style. All of these things were factors, but the decision was finally made for a dramaturgical vision for the number which emerged: that we could stage it in such a way that these white, middle-class, middle-century, North American women could begin singing to a very straight and anonymous beat on piano and bass in a singing/speaking style with which they would be familiar, and over the next six minutes be drawn together, as the song added instruments, swung rhythm and general spirit, into the exotic, swinging, and irreverent territory of a musical genre they would likely never have heard let

alone known, as they entered a meaningful communion just as strange to their own lives. The song became a highlight for the cast and of the production. Had the Director and I chosen to set the number in a more conventional way, would the number have worked? Perhaps: but there can no doubt that the various encodings of the blues genre for both the performers and the audiences, and the 'genreal journey' we took the characters on to echo their journey into community, were key to its success.

Musical Genre at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an arbitrarily-formed, highly problematic and little-understood system, phenomenon and/or construction of the musical world – but it has undeniable connotative power which often exceeds that of the very musical compositions it seeks to help us locate in sound, in history, and in a host of other intended and unintended properties. Notwithstanding that individual pieces can still be hugely popular and historically important, it is musical genres, not musical compositions, which hold sway over musical production, musical taste, musical politics and musical signification as we know them.

In this project I examine the current form of the concept of 'musical genre'. In particular I apply the concepts of three of the 20th century's most variously revered and maligned cultural and media theorists, Theodor Adorno, Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard, drawing upon their original texts and the critique of their work. The choice of these three figures stems from three factors: 1) each has a well-known and highly original critique of a 20<sup>th</sup> century western society shaped by the emergence and domination of mass, electronic media; 2) the philosophical framework each provides, which in their various ways permit studying musical genre in new and interesting ways, and 3) the utopian nature of each theorist's sociological project, which in their

unique ways combines harsh criticism of a society formed by and yet straining against Modernity with suggestions of hope and ideas which at least advocate for, and in some ways predict reprieve and recovery from the problematic represented by western society we built in, or inherited from, the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At several points in this project I make a somewhat ambiguous reference to Musical Genre as a “system, phenomenon or construction.” Where only one of this trinity is mentioned it is normally ‘system’, since this best describes the way musical genre functions in musical life; but the other two aspects of genre – a *phenomenon* which ‘emerges’ from musical life, and a *construction* which is more actively created by artists, industry players and listeners – are indispensable to understanding genre formation and production as they impact the musical world. I use the word ‘trinity’ advisedly, and less as any sort of reference to the Christian subject matter treated throughout this project than to the theological nature of the Holy Trinity, which posits Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three distinct aspects of a singular God. It is not so important, in my view, to determine *which* aspect of musical genre is the most or least ‘true’, or to speculate about where one applies more than or less than another in a given situation: it *is*, however, important that all three models be borne in mind in considering musical genre.

Some of the committee that reviewed the proposal stage of this project suggested strongly that I direct my work towards, or at least illustrate it using, a particular musical genre with which I am somewhat intimately acquainted, ‘Church Music’. Although the application of these ideas to musical genre is possible in some sense within any genre category (a fact I hope to imply here by periodic brief references to a wide range of musical genres, particularly in the

opening chapter), running throughout this study is connective tissue in the form of the compound genre, or as I coin it, *über-genreal*, of Church Music – a choice which seems at once incidental in its finite nature, and appropriate for a body of scholarship which strives strenuously beyond the particular. While I initially resisted the committee's well-intentioned advice, I now express my gratitude to those dissenting members, not only for their clear intention, which was to ensure that work which already promised to be somewhat broad and far-reaching resided in familiar territory for me, but now still more for the suggestion of a 'genre' which is perhaps as diverse and far-reaching as anything called a 'genre' might be, spanning centuries and cultures and interacting with every nuance of history along the way. On a personal note, my acquiescence to this suggestion ultimately encouraged me to devote a significant amount of time and thought to a rather large corner of the musical world not just well-known, but very dear to me, and one arguably within which genre dynamics and politics play as significant a role as they do anywhere else in the 21<sup>st</sup> century musical world.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the system, phenomenon or construction of musical genre, and the problematic it presents to the hierarchically-contained pieces of music over which it seems to rule in the musical world today. More particularly it is a study of our current (early 21<sup>st</sup> century) concept of musical genre – an analysis of how it evolved quickly from a simple, arbitrary nominological/typological formation concerned primarily with musical form (and secondarily with instrumentation and usage of pieces) within western classical music into a much larger system more concerned with stylistic, historical and aesthetic content, addressing *entire repertoires* of pieces, and encompassing a musical world containing hundreds of popular, ethno-

cultural, blended and composite categories (and crucially, methodologies of categorisation) which formerly had gone unconsidered.

Each of Chapters 2, 3, and 4 addresses the concept of musical genre as it might have been viewed by a significant critical figure in what is now considered postmodern thought (although only one of them, Baudrillard, has lived to see the term 'postmodern' in wide use). I will state here, and restate again later, that in each case musical genre is an application of the critic's theories he never made himself, and so at best this work must be considered informed (and hopefully, supported) conjecture. Risky though this enterprise may be, all of the theories in question emerged sufficiently ahead of their time, and have been sufficiently influential, to have inspired many such conjectural (and in the case of McLuhan and Adorno, posthumous) applications to phenomena which simply had not yet manifest at the time of the critic's initial work<sup>2</sup>. In each of these chapters for the benefit of readers less familiar with the critic in question I provide a brief introduction to his life, formative influences, and corpus of work.

In Chapter 2 I have sought to locate musical genre within the realm of the work of art, which for Adorno lay upon a dialectical continuum between the universal and the particular, of form and content. Rather than addressing the musical genres upon which Adorno himself commented in his notorious critique of popular culture, and a capitalist-derived commoditised model for cultural production, I have chosen to turn some of his ideas elsewhere, onto a church musical sub-genre he may well never have heard. Church Music is replete with sub-genres which

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<sup>2</sup> As examples: Adorno is of great interest to theorists of "Disneyfication" and "McDonaldisation"; the recent resurgence of interest in McLuhan has by no coincidence paralleled the rise of the Internet he predicted but never saw; Baudrillard's own applications of his idea of simulacra to Disneyland, Egyptian mummies and Watergate have been joined by others' as diverse as computer analysis of art and accountability in Australian school funding.



exhibit many of the properties of simplicity, general sameness, and even a form of fetishism, all of which Adorno felt engendered a 'regression of listening', and thus found subversive of art, and destructive of society. For precisely the reason of circumventing the standard late 20<sup>th</sup> century ghettoising of Adorno's thought as being founded in personal bias against capitalism, Americana and non-canonical musics, I have applied his thoughts where none of those biases can exist.

In Chapter 3, which traces its origins back to a paper I presented at York University in May 2005 entitled "Country Music in Radio Space", I consider musical genre as a form of technological innovation, and thus, a medium under Marshall McLuhan's understanding of media as "Extensions of Man". Using principally the formative theories in *Understanding Media* that launched McLuhan's international celebrity in the late 1960s and the *Laws of Media* published posthumously in 1988, I will track one church musical genre's behaviour as both object and subject at both ends of a 20<sup>th</sup> century wracked with sociological and technological change. The outcome of this part of the study is indicative of the problem McLuhan represented to the scholars of Modernity, and also provides a possible explanation for the resurgence of interest in his ideas that has followed.

In Chapter 4 I apply "simulacrist", "implosionist" and self-styled "theoretical terrorist"<sup>3</sup> Jean Baudrillard's doctrine of simulacra and simulation, and his notion of the implosion of meaning, to musical genre in our time. Following a brief account of the theories to be considered with reference to music in society (a reference Baudrillard himself rarely made), I will follow his example by applying his theoretical concepts to an area of the real postmodern world he has left

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<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. "On Nihilism" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. p. 163

unaddressed in his often severe and yet poignant critique. I attempt to read musical genre in our time as an instance of *simulation*, locating it within the orders of *simulacra* and the *phases of image*, and as a current manifestation of the *implosion of meaning* he claims is underway and unavoidable in postmodern society. Here, the church musical genre case is an appropriative, and less-than-successful transplant of a highly successful genre motivated by the simulacrum it represented to the appropriators.

The concluding chapter first reflects, and invites the reader to reflect upon the experience of developing, pitching, producing, hosting and receiving feedback on a radio show, *Genre Implosion*, which ran weekly on CFMU 93.3FM in Hamilton since November 2005. The weekly process of researching and producing a 30-minute ‘implosion’ of genre by rather self-consciously presenting a huge variety of music suggested by such broadly connecting ideas as ‘introductions’, ‘the low female voice’, ‘musical pictures’, ‘the Trojan horse’, ‘winter’, etc., as well as an online “genre survey” from listeners, returned anecdotal material which is less empirically demonstrative than interesting and useful. Finally, it draws together the study’s components under the mantle of pragmatism which motivated it and underlies it.

This Introduction began with epigraphic quotations from Adorno, Baudrillard and McLuhan about truth: the notion of truth, and questions of its nature and existence, was for them and remains a major preoccupation for all other postmodern thinkers dating back at least as far as Nietzsche, but this is not to say that any of them claimed a monopoly on truth about the concepts they studied. Nor, crucially, is it to imply that this paper is a quest for truth in a philosophical construct intended to be true, but turned false, or at least somewhat misleading.

Rather, it is encouragement for the study of musical genre to follow in the footsteps of other areas of musical scholarship into a realm illuminated by the leading philosophical thinkers of a problematic century in which its current form was cast. Interestingly all three of the thinkers addressed here have suffered dismissal and attack for insights and ideas that have proven “true,” or at least useful, by the passage of time and the course taken by that problematic century. That the 20<sup>th</sup> century could bring about the rise, downfall and retrieval of such concepts as McLuhan’s “Extensions of Man” and Adorno’s “Regression of Listening” is a clue to modernity’s tortured legacy, felt in many ways longer in music into the paradigms post-modernity than in other areas of scholarship. It also suggests that true understanding of many modern constructs like the system of musical genre classification may have to wait still further beyond the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than we find ourselves today.

Stuart Sim sums up the ethos and method behind this project:

Postmodern philosophy in general sees no need for outright confrontation with systems of power, being more concerned to demonstrate how such systems may be made to implode.<sup>4</sup>

Implosion in this sense (we will see Baudrillard’s different but related version in some detail in Chapter 4), is related to another postmodern invention, Derrida’s *deconstruction*, in that it seeks not to attack arguments, but rather asks them (with an astonishing rate of success) to bring about their own downfall. My agenda towards musical genre is not a hostile one: indeed it is an interesting subject, a useful tool, and frankly despite its limitations and problematic nature

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<sup>4</sup> Sim, Stuart. “Postmodernism and Philosophy” in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, Second Edition, ed. Stuart Sim. Oxford: Routledge, 2005. p.10

is so firmly entrenched in musical life as to be virtually unassailable in its present form. Rather, my agenda is to help show some of the cracks brought on by rapid change through the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, to allow inaccurate conceptions of it to implode, and to offer some models for understanding whatever is left.

## Chapter I

# MUSICAL GENRE AT THE START OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> 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:<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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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<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is narrower than when we apply it to the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: it is a purely formal (i.e. 'sonata'), instrumental (i.e. 'string quartet') or applicational (i.e. 'dance music', *tafelmusik*, etc.) system of locating compositions in established structures of Western music. As the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century predicts its subsidiary role to that of 'schools' and other lines of influence in the study of 20<sup>th</sup> century art music; this shift is further compounded by the rise in profile and acceptance in musicological circles of 20<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries seems to arise solely from our failure to consider popular and world musics prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>. 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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<sup>7</sup> 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)<sup>8</sup>, and Samson's theory of "repetition elements,"<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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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<sup>8</sup> See Pascall, Robert. "Genre and the Finale of Brahms' Fourth Symphony" in *Music Analysis* 8/3 (October 1989)

<sup>9</sup> Samson, Jim: 'Genre', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy, online article (accessed 12 November 2005)  
<http://www.grovemusic.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca>.

<sup>10</sup> 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."<sup>11</sup> Understanding that one of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

## 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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<sup>11</sup> 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

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p.374

genres<sup>13</sup> 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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<sup>13</sup> 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](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,<sup>14</sup> and some proposed musical genre analogies

<b>Animals are divided into:</b>	<b>Specific musical analogy to Borge's general problem</b>
(a) belonging to the emperor,	Genre is sometimes specified through some simple fact of association, such as music's ethnicity (i.e. <i>Brazilian</i> ), 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. <i>DNB (drum &amp; bass)</i> ), or time period of composition (i.e. <i>Baroque</i> ), 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. <i>smooth – hard, classic – contemporary, light – heavy</i> ), 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 ( <i>Ranchera</i> =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. <i>Filk</i> , a modern science-fiction oriented music, and <i>Spectralism</i> , a 20 <sup>th</sup> century form originating in France which generates musical forms from waveforms and colours)
(f) fabulous,	Genres are often formed in reference to their predecessors ( <i>new-/neue-, neo-, post-</i> ), 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. <i>horror/death, dirty, cool, free</i> , 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 generals" such as <i>World Music</i> 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. <i>Singer-Songwriter</i> , the Italian <i>Canzone d'autore</i> or the Québécois <i>Chanson</i> ) – 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: <i>Serialism</i> and <i>Pointillism</i> are genres of music that exists only by virtue of how they are created; <i>Program Music</i> and <i>Impressionism</i> , while clearly music rather than 'pictures of music', are genrefied only by their representational status.
(l) <i>et cetera</i> ,	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 <i>Hypnofolkadelia</i> and <i>Progressive Urban Math Folk</i> 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 recognisable terminology... arbitrary titles like <i>slide, house</i> and <i>math</i> and nonsensical names like <i>Skiffle</i> and <i>Hip-hop</i> 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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,<sup>15</sup> 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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<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> 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".

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.<sup>17</sup>

Fabbri suggests, then, that while it may be impossible in the context of the late 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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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<sup>16</sup> Fabbri, Franco. "A Theory of Music Genres: Two Applications" in *Popular Music Perspectives* ed. P. Tagg and D. Horn. Göteborg and Exeter, 1982.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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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<sup>19</sup> 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

21<sup>st</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> century culture is found in an interest in allowing general 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 general 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):

*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).<sup>20</sup>

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;<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Chandler, Daniel. *An Introduction to Genre Theory* (1997), online document (accessed [21 June 2005]), [www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre.html](http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre.html).

<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 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 bhangra* (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':<sup>23</sup> the very act of study makes total accuracy

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<sup>23</sup> 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 “über-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.’<sup>24</sup> 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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<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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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<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> I Corinthians 12:12-13 (New International Version)



## Chapter 2

# MUSICAL GENRE AS ARTWORK

Theodor W. Adorno

- work of art** (n.) 1. A product of the fine arts, especially a painting or sculpture.  
2. Something likened to a fine artistic work, as by reason of beauty or craft

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### Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969): Musician and Marxist

Born on September 11th, 1903 in Frankfurt am Main, Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund (Adorno), was son to a wealthy Jewish wine merchant and an accomplished musician of Italian Catholic descent. He studied philosophy with the neo-Kantian thinker Hans Cornelius and musical composition with Alban Berg. Following the conclusion of his studies he spent two years as a university instructor before being expelled by the Nazis along with other professors and intellectuals either of Jewish heritage or on the political left. Like many others who found themselves in his position during the rise of the Third Reich he turned his father's Jewish surname, 'Wiesengrund', into an unelaborated middle initial and adopted his Italian mother's surname.

He left Germany in the spring of 1934, residing in Oxford, New York City, and southern California until well after the end of the war. He returned to Frankfurt in 1949 to take up a position in the philosophy department, and quickly established himself as a leading German

intellectual, central figure in and eventually Director (1958-1969) of the Institute of Social Research. The Institute had been founded in 1923 as a centre for Marxist scholarship, and had been led by Max Horkheimer since 1930: today it is principally remembered as home to a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers including Horkheimer, Adorno, Walter Benjamin and later, Jürgen Habermas, now identified with the “The Frankfurt School.” Adorno became a leading figure in the “positivism dispute” in German sociology, and a key player in debates about restructuring German universities, and as such found himself regularly attacked by both student activists and their right-wing critics. Matters worsened through the 1960s, and came to a head in April 1969, when three women activists interrupted Adorno’s lecture by surrounding him at the podium, bearing their breasts, simulating caresses, and “attacking” him with flowers. As biographer Martin Jay described it, “Adorno, unnerved and humiliated, left the lecture hall with students mockingly proclaiming that “as an institution, Adorno is dead.” His physical death from a heart attack came four months later on August 6.<sup>27</sup>”

Richard Leppert, in his commentary to Adorno’s 1956 essay *Music, Language and Composition* reaches to the core of the latter’s musical project, for which he remains universally acknowledged: music not simply as autonomous entity, but as cultural practice and medium of human communication.

Adorno is at pains to insist that music is socially meaningful, that it is more than merely a self-referential abstract acoustic phenomenon. Indeed, he assigns profound significance to musical sounds: “They say something, often something humane.” Adorno insists, in a notably Benjaminian phrase, that music has a “theological aspect”; its meanings are “at once distinct and concealed.” Music, in other words, is not the

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<sup>27</sup> account extracted principally from Leppert, Richard. Introduction to *Adorno, Theodor. Essays on Music*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.

aesthetic transliteration of speech. It is something distinctly mystical; at the same time, it is concrete material practice. “It is demythologized prayer, freed from the magic of making anything happen, the human attempt, futile, as always to name itself, not to communicate meanings”.<sup>28</sup>

When Richard Middleton devoted an entire chapter of *Studying Popular Music* to a respectful, detailed and even generally admiring review of one of that music’s most notorious enemies he began:

T.W. Adorno’s polemic against popular music is scathing. It possesses, nevertheless, a striking richness and complexity, demanding to be examined from a variety of viewpoints, notably that of musical production (in relation to general production in capitalist societies), that of musical form (discussed by Adorno in terms of ‘standardization’), and that of musical reception and function (which he sees as nearly totally instrumentalised, in the services of the ruling social interests). At the same time, Adorno argues, rightly, that these aspects are actually indivisible, and that it is essential, therefore, to retain some sense of wholeness of the musical process.<sup>29</sup>

In addressing the challenges Adorno’s project has posed to scholars of popular music, Middleton later quotes Simon Frith in his *Sociology of Rock* to express the former’s severity, and then continues by underlining its crucial nature to serious study.

Adorno’s is the most systematic and the most searing analysis of mass culture, and the most challenging for anyone claiming even a scrap of value for the products that come churning out of the music industry.” The flaws, if they are such, are in the physiognomy of a giant. Anyone wanting to argue the importance of studying popular music has to absorb Adorno in order to go beyond him.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Leppert, Richard. Commentary to “Locating Music: Society, Modernity and the New” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Leppert, R. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002, pp.85-86

<sup>29</sup> Middleton, Richard. “‘It’s all over now’. Popular music and mass culture – Adorno’s Theory” in *Studying Popular Music*. (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), p. 34

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.35

## Adorno's Genre: A Continuum between the Universal and the Particular

Though among the three thinkers of interest to this project Adorno was by far the most interested in music, and also the one who has left a large and highly individual body of commentary on the subject, the phenomenon of musical genre is addressed sparingly. In *Aesthetic Theory* he locates genre in familiar Adornian negative dialectical territory foreshadowing postmodern contexts: "Universals such as genres... are true to the extent that they are subject to a countervailing dynamic."<sup>31</sup> University of Illinois essayist and author Curtis White expands on Adorno's view of genre as 'the universal' at the end of a form of continuum, the other end of which is 'the particular.'

Theodor Adorno's notorious *Dialectic of Enlightenment* consists substantially of the movement between the universal and the particular. In art, the universal is the Law of Genre, a "collective bindingness." On the other side, the particular (or the individual and subjective) represents the theoretically boundless world of human possibility and play (which Adorno attempts to capture through the word "spontaneity"). Art's fundamental concept from the perspective of the particular is autonomy. Art realizes its own concept when it makes itself not through the conventions of the universal (genre: the rules for the proper construction of sonata or sonnet, etc.) but "by virtue of its own elaborations, through its own immanent process." To be sure, these elaborations can only deploy themselves in a context made available by the world of convention; nonetheless, when an artwork is successful, it is in spite of the presence of convention and not because of it. This is why, ultimately, craft has little to do with whether or not a work is a successful piece of art.<sup>32</sup>

As White points out, Adorno believes that a 'successful piece of art' is such because of its embellishments of and departures from a genre or other universal, rather than because of its

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<sup>31</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Christian Lenhardt (London, 1984), p.214 (cited in Hamm)

<sup>32</sup> White, Curtis. *Kid Adorno* in Context No.6 (Dalkey Archive Press, Illinois State University, Normal: 2005). online document (accessed [21 October 2005]) <http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no6/white.html>

conformity to the same. In this way he positions his critique of popular music, which (to simplify considerably) accuses it of being in a sense “all genre and no piece” in contrast to true works which are only incidentally connected to their genre, and whose value lies within creative departures therefrom. In *On Popular Music*, Adorno identifies standardisation as fundamental to popular music (and by implication, not to ‘serious’ music).

A clear judgment concerning the relation of serious music to popular music can be arrived at only by strict attention to the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardisation. The whole structure of popular music is standardised, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardisation. Standardisation extends from the most general features to the most specific ones. Best known is the rule that the chorus consists of thirty-two bars and that the range is limited to one octave and a note... The details themselves are standardised no less than the form, and a whole terminology exists for them such as break, blue chords, dirty notes. Their standardisation, however, is somewhat different from that of the framework. It is not overt like the latter, but hidden behind a veneer of individual ‘effects’ whose prescriptions are handled as the experts’ secret, however open this secret may be to musicians generally. This contrasting character of the standardisation of the whole and part provides a rough, preliminary setting for the effect on the listener.<sup>33</sup>

That effect, Adorno claimed, was a fundamental shift from the way one listened to serious music, and eventually affected not just how the listener received popular music, but all music.

The primary effect of this relation between the framework and the detail is that the listener becomes prone to evince stronger reactions to the part than to the whole. His grasp of the whole does not lie in the living experience of this one concrete piece of music he has followed. The whole is pre-given and pre-accepted, even before the actual experience of the music starts; therefore it is not likely to influence, to any great extent, the reaction to the details, except to give them varying degrees of emphasis.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. with the assistance of Simpson, George, “On Popular Music” (1941), translated by Susan H. Gillespie in *Essays on Music*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002, pp.437-438

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p.439

Also crucial to Adorno are two notions developed in the 1938 essay *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*. Firstly, the idea that popular music as standardised commodity was consumed not so much for music's sake, but for a form of fetish that developed in listeners. First likening the public taste for popular music to the fetish of celebrity, and then tying in the inevitable economic dimension in the capitalist society, Adorno writes:

The world of ... musical life, is one of fetishes. The star principle has become totalitarian... Famous people are not the only stars. Works begin to take on the same role.<sup>35</sup>

Music, with all the attributes of the ethereal and sublime generously accorded it, serves in America today as an advertisement for commodities which one must acquire in order to be able to hear music... The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, Adorno suggests that this fetish character has engendered a “regression of listening”, a dulling of the audio-receptive and cognitive faculties of the listener with implications not just to his or her reception of popular music, but also to ‘serious’ music.

The counterpart to the fetishism of music is a regression of listening... Not only do the listening subjects lose, along with freedom of choice and responsibility, the capacity for conscious perception of music... but they stubbornly reject the possibility of such perception... They are not childlike... they are childish; their primitivism is not that of the undeveloped, but that of the forcibly retarded.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. “On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” (1938), translated by Susan H. Gillespie in *Essays on Music*. Berkely/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002. p.293

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.295

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.303

Tia DeNora has summarised Adorno's posited effects on listeners in terms of mental and intellectual conditioning towards reflexive response and against engaged response, and suggested that it reaches not only beyond popular music to other forms, but indeed beyond into the reception of other audio content.

According to Adorno, [so-called 'false music'] abetted 'darkness and in clarity' in so far as they inculcate reflex responses; they encourage the listener to give into familiar pleasures and patterns. In this gratification is, simultaneously, pacification and, more insidiously yet, the reinforcement of standardization. Through replication (through re-hearing old favourites and generically similar music over time) there is, in other words, an autodidactic reinforcement of honed patterns of response, and thus, a draining away of the capacity for the listener's discernment of difference, in music and elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

Despite that its resemblance to historical objections to dance, drugs, gambling, etc. (and of course the musical genres of jazz, rock 'n roll, heavy metal, and most recently rap and hip-hop) tends to jaundice our reception of it, Adorno's view is a sophisticated and intriguing one which resonates with recent credible theories of "McDonaldisation" and "Disneyfication" which argue how mega-corporations have affected society's sense of taste and general perception of art – this has occasioned an unexpected and vigorous arousal of new interest in Adorno's work.

Having established Adorno's theoretical conception of genre and his views on the standardization of music, we turn to a specific case probably outside of Adorno's experience where they might be applied.

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<sup>38</sup> DeNora, Tia. *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.153

## Anglican Chant, Standardised Church Musical Genre

An exact point for origin Anglican chant, defined by Paul Westermeyer as “harmonized psalm tones with the intonation omitted and semirhythmic cadence formulas added”<sup>39</sup> is unclear, although its lineage can easily be traced, as Mayo suggests, from Gregorian psalm tone singing through early precursors in fauxbourdon (a number of harmonising practices descended from *organum* in which a *cantus firmus* is placed in an inner voice with other parts added below and above, literally creating a ‘false melody’, and in other early sources such as Thomas Morley’s *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practicall Musick* (1597).<sup>40</sup> It entered general use as a form of choir-led congregational psalm-singing in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, just in time to be outlawed along with all other church music under the Puritans and Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell in 1649. Though the monarchy was restored in 1660, and monophonic chanting reinstated, the full retrieval of harmonised Anglican chant was not until years later, when the complete lack of able boy sopranos brought on by two generations having had no musical training was redressed.

Anglican chant must also be understood as a product of the Anglican Reformation, which like its sister movements on the continent indicated to Christians the need to read, know, and sing scripture in their own language, not Latin. It serves principally as a medium for choirs and congregations to chant the words to the 150 Psalms of the Bible and also those of various

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<sup>39</sup> Westermeyer, Paul. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998.

<sup>40</sup> Westermeyer, Paul. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998). p.170: The citation of Morley’s work is Westermeyer’s, who also refers to one of the fauxbourdon practices of harmonising in parallel motion adding only a ‘false bass’ while neglecting to refer to the more common (and now, nearly exclusive) form of *c.f.* in the tenor and added soprano, alto and bass parts in mixed (parallel/contrary) motion.



Canticles associated particularly with the Divine Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer (when sung, known colloquially as Matins and Evensong).

British writer and critic John Mayo identifies Anglican chant as a descendant of Gregorian psalm-tone chanting, both in its structure and derivation from same, and in the continuing need it addresses (like Gregorian psalm tone singing before it) for the flexible accommodation of varying line-lengths:

The very flexible nature of the psalm texts is both part of their beauty and at the same time a problem when it comes to providing musical settings. In the medieval church the psalm verses were sung to a musical formula – an opening little flourish (the ‘intonation’) – a long recitation capable any number of words on a single note and then a closing flourish (the ‘ending’, a cadential formula). Anglican chant is fundamentally an elaboration of this method in four-part harmony.<sup>41</sup>

While the harmonic and textual languages have kept pace with the times, little else has changed about Anglican chant in its four-century history. Formally, most Anglican chants consist of fourteen (or more rarely, seven or *very* rarely, twenty-one) measures, with the majority of the recitation occurring in mm. 1, 4, 8 and 11 with mm. 2-3, 5-7, 9-10 and 12-14 serving as Westermeyer’s “semirhythmic endings.” Double-bar lines printed in both the text and chant separate the *quarters*: typically the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter will end in the dominant key and the 4<sup>th</sup> return to the tonic, creating a tonally closed period of two Psalm verses for each iteration of the chant<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Mayo, John. Liner notes to *Psalms for the Soul*. Naxos Records 8.554823, 1999. Parenthetical terms are my addition: it should be said that both Gregorian and Anglican psalm chanting are usually based on a slightly more complex structure involving intonation and ending and not one but two recitations separated by another (usually half-close) cadential formula called the ‘mediation’. This makes the text covered by the chant two verses, not one.

<sup>42</sup> The seven-measure chants mirroring the earlier Gregorian tones which comprise the entire early repertory cover a single psalm verse per iteration; the rare triple chants cover three verses, resulting in an asymmetrical structure. With the more common double chants, in the case of odd numbers of verses and sectional points where it seems awkward to end on the dominant, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters are repeated to keep the chant ‘in phase’ with the text.

## Example 2 - Early and Modern Psalm texts and Anglican Chants to Psalm 62:1-4.

Version based on King James (1611) English (Coverdale translation):<sup>43</sup>

1. My soul truly waiteth in silence | up-on | God; | | for of him | com-eth | my sal- | va-tion; | |
2. He verily is my strength and | my sal- | va-tion; | | he is my defence, so that I | shall not | great-ly | fall.
3. How long will ye set upon a man, battering him, | all of | you | | like a tottering wall, and | like a | bro-ken fence? | |
4. Their device is only how to put him out whom | God will ^ ex- | alt ; | | their delight is in lies; they give good words with their mouth, but | curse | with their heart.

Version in a more recent translation:<sup>44</sup>

1. For God alone my | soul in | si-lence | waits; | | from | him | comes | my | sal- | vation. | |
2. He alone is my rock and | my sal- | vation, | | my stronghold, so that I shall | not be | great-ly | shaken. | |
3. How long will you assail me to crush me all of | you to- | gether, | | as if you were a leaning | fence, a | top-pling | wall?
4. They seek only to bring me down from my | place of | honour; | | lies | are their | chief de- | light. | |

Henry Smart (1813-1879)



Christopher Dawes (1967-)



- Single and double bar-lines in the text correspond to the same markings in the music. This arrangement of text syllables to the chords and notes of the chant is called 'pointing', and is sometimes published with the chant. Often choirmasters must 'point' chants themselves, and they frequently ask choirs to depart from the given pointing to improve or alter the declamation of the text.
- Theoretically, any Anglican chant tune may be used with any suitably pointed text... in practice Choirmasters select chants they prefer, and/or that are well-known to the choir or congregation which will sing the psalm. Treatments of secular texts such as weather reports and the Sears catalogue occur in lighter contexts. Chant tunes given here are from the usage of St. James' Cathedral, Toronto, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> General Synod Anglican Church of Canada. *The Book of Common Prayer*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1959.

<sup>44</sup> General Synod Anglican Church of Canada. *Book of Alternative Services*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985.

Anglican chant is a musical form without notated rhythm, relying ultimately upon the text to dictate note length and accent: for this reason it enables a great deal of scope for musical expression, but creates an ensemble nightmare when sung by a choir unskilled in this style of chanting or unprepared for a given text-pointing-and-tune combination, and a still greater one when sung by a congregation. Writing in 1967, Erik Routley outlined the challenge presented by this ideal of text rhythm in a world of musical rhythm, and makes clear the preference for choral use which seems to dominate among professional church musicians:

The amount of music one can get into an Anglican chant usually lends itself to the chant's presenting itself to the ear as a composition with an internal rhythm of its own. Since virtually all such chants come from the musical era when the bar line was an accepted convention and regular dance rhythm governed composition, it follows that the ear simply cannot help hearing most chants as rhythmical compositions in minims and semibreves. This contradicts the stress rhythm of the traditional English versions of the psalms, and in order to minimise the conflict between the musical nature of the chant and the free rhythm of the words the discipline of "speech rhythm" has been evolved by choirmasters. This is a discipline so strict and delicate as to be impossible for a generalised congregation to achieve; it involves elasticity of rhythm not only in the allocation of syllables within the recitation but also in the moving part of the melody corresponding to the speech length of the syllables sung... Therefore the Anglican chant is truest to its nature when it is sung by a choir and listened to by the congregation. If there is congregational participation, a certain degree of rhythmical thump is unavoidable.<sup>45</sup>

Anglican chant has been used consistently since the time of the Restoration: chants continue to be written and used in Anglican churches throughout the world. Just as Routley advocated in 1967, despite its origins in the time and ideology of the Reformation it is now sung principally by choirs, rather than congregations. But while the genre's shift from the second

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<sup>45</sup> Routley, Erik. "The Psalms in the Church's Worship" in *Musical Leadership in the Church*. Abingdon Press, 1967, pp.80-81

stream (congregational) form it seems to have been intended to be to the first stream (non-congregational) form it has been for much of its history<sup>46</sup> marked for Routley it becoming “truest to its nature”, it surely also signalled the final departure from a foundational axiom, the provision of a system for English reformed congregations to sing the psalms in their own language.

### **An Adornian Reading of Anglican Chant as ‘Artwork’**

Adorno’s critique of 20<sup>th</sup> century popular music was made in clear apposition to classical music, both of his time (2<sup>nd</sup> Viennese School) and of the Canon (in particular Beethoven). At no time did he address church music as a general category, much less a sub-genre of psalm singing in the Church of England, but it is interesting to compare some of Anglican chant’s common properties with the products of a ‘culture industry’ to which Adorno objected so vehemently.

Even if he might have been a bit warmer towards it idiomatically, Adorno would probably have considered the standardisation of Anglican chant to exceed that of the popular music of his day. Among what must be thousands of published chants, and many more that exist only in the manuscripts of choirmasters, there is virtually no formal variation; and while melody and harmony are open within the customs of whatever era in which a chant is written, very little variation in overall tonal scheme (which is periodic and closed tonally) is evident. The biblical texts are, of course, finite in number (150 Psalms and a perhaps a dozen other assorted Canticles), and nearly any one of them can be used with nearly every chant. The absence of any musically-determined rhythm removes not just from reality, but indeed from conceivability, a primary

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<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of Patrick Kavanaugh’s three “streams” of church music, see Kavanaugh, pp.217-220

musical parameter for variation, and while choirs and choirmasters may have different customs and interpretations which may set one performance apart from another, the usage and sonic signature of the form is unmistakable. To Adorno, the fact that one recognises Anglican chant instantly, before, or indeed in place of recognising a given performance's specific chant or text, betrays the musical fetish character in listening to it. "Familiarity of the piece is a surrogate for the quality ascribed to it. To like it is almost the same thing as to recognize it."<sup>47</sup>

Because the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (as adopted only by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969, but widely influential throughout mainline Christianity) have cast a cloud of doubt over sung church musical forms which are not inherently congregational; because chant's elegance of expression is tied inseparably to the elegance of the text, a property somewhat impoverished by newer translations of scripture; because a revived Catholicism within Anglican worship has prioritised Eucharistic worship over the offices of Matins and Evensong to their near-extinction, and because many newer forms of psalm singing don't have these issues which have assailed chant for the past 50 years to contend with, Anglican chant is now on the margins of church musical usage. While alive and well wherever liturgically conservative congregations retain the sung offices, King James English and nostalgic sentiment, the two generations of pre-Restoration boys who had not sung it are today echoed by (at least) two generations of Anglicans who have never heard it. Anglican chant dwells today in the annals of history, the musical sophisticate, and the CD recording.

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<sup>47</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), translated by Susan H. Gillespie in *Essays on Music*. Berkely/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002. p.288

It is here that again we see a curious echo of the fetishism Adorno ascribed to popular genres in the 1930s: an almost totally standardised musical form whose following is minted on general grounds, rather than that of the individual work. The nostalgia and affection for Anglican chant among choristers and choirmasters is palpable<sup>48</sup>; yet worldwide the services which showcase them draw only handfuls of worshippers. But as an early casualty of liturgical reforms of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the genre symbolises much more than itself... in it is encoded all of the beauty of language, music, dignity and the transcendent some feel have left Anglican worship. England's major Cathedral and University Collegiate Choirs all issue Psalm recordings, and in the 1990s Priory Records ("Britain's Premiere Church Music Label"<sup>49</sup>) created the 12-volume "Psalms of David" Series featuring the choirs of every major Cathedral in Britain. Co-founder and now sole owner of Bedfordshire-based Priory, Neil Collier, in a 1995 interview with the *International Herald Tribune* said of the market for his company's CDs rather frankly, "I make money out of nut cases."<sup>50</sup>

At the heart of Adorno's critique appears to be a sort of 'death of the work of art' or at least a blurring of the line between the individual work and its genre in the realm of popular music. Standardisation both in form and content within a genre obviates the need for listeners to know or even hear individual pieces in order to 'understand' them, like them, and judge them.

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<sup>48</sup> See a website <http://home.golden.net/~malton/Choir/potw.htm>, from Kitchener Ontario, where a choirmaster has made synthesized recordings of Anglican Chant tunes that allow surfers to learn the Soprano, Alto, Tenor or Bass parts online.

<sup>49</sup> This title is, as far as I have been able to determine, self-conferred.

<sup>50</sup> Ipsen, Erik, "Church Music Label draws a Quirky Following" in *International Herald Tribune*, 6 February 1995 (London)

In his reasoning I suggest that sameness in music also made genre and its 'fetish' content, rather than the composition itself, into the "work of art."

Returning finally to Adorno's conception of musical genre as dialectic between things universal to all pieces of a given 'type', and those particular to a given composition, Anglican chant, while it provides abundant opportunities for musical expression of a text in performance, provides the composer very little scope for the kind of departures from general norms which for Adorno defined a successful piece of art. Adorno's notion of "truth-content" purports that artworks have their own inherent meaning or significance (*Gehalt*) by virtue of an internal dialectic between content and form: "Art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless."<sup>51</sup> The latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have not looked kindly upon Adorno's critique of popular music, nor the implied value judgment represented by the "truth-content" of serious music and the deception inherent to the genres of popular music: but as the example of Anglican chant may suggest, his notion of the locational upgrade of 'artwork' from the level of the particular piece to that of the genre seems feasible, and perhaps more broadly applicable.

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. , ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Christian Lenhardt (London, 1984) p.132.

## Chapter 3

# MUSICAL GENRE AS MEDIUM

Marshall McLuhan

**me·di·um** (n) An agency by which something is accomplished, conveyed, or transferred.  
(n.p.) media

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## Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980): Probing Media in Mid-Century

Herbert Marshall McLuhan was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1911 to Scotch-Irish Protestants: his father an insurance salesman descended from a long line of farmers, and his mother a sophisticated well-read elocutionist known and travelled widely in theatre circles. His mother, Elsie Hall McLuhan ensured that both her sons pursued intellectual careers, and that Marshall, the academic star, would be educated abroad. When Marshall was 9 they moved to Winnipeg, where he would attend high school and the University of Manitoba, completing Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English literature by 1933, proceeding on scholarship to Cambridge University in England thereafter. The 1930s literary life at Cambridge (and indeed at Oxford, and in London) was teeming with scholars taking an interest not in the traditional brokers of power, but in the lower orders, the "masses", some as Marxists and some as scholars of what would later be called 'popular culture'. Moreover, there was brewing a resurgence of interest and credibility of Catholicism within the literati, due at least in part to the work of Hilaire Belloc



and G.K. Chesterton. Tom Wolfe has observed the profound impact this unique environment had on McLuhan:

Two of the most brilliant and seemingly cynical of the London literati, W.H. Auden and Evelyn Waugh, converted to Catholicism in this period. Likewise, Marshall McLuhan. He became a convert to the One Church – and to the study of popular culture. Although almost nothing in McLuhan's writing was to be overtly religious, these two passions eventually dovetailed to create McLuhanism.<sup>52</sup>

McLuhan finished at Cambridge in 1942, returning to North America with second Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and a Doctorate in English Literature, teaching at a number of Universities and finally joining the faculty of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. It was here, under the influence of economic historian Harold Innes, that he formulated the basic tenet of McLuhanism, that any great new medium of communication alters the entire outlook of the people who use it.

McLuhan's master stroke, which rocketed him to international celebrity (eventually to be followed by near complete dismissal by academia in the decades which followed) came in 1964: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, from which his most known aphorism "The Medium is the Message" sprang. McLuhan, while accurately predicting the spread of television all over the world and the now-familiar sensory paradigm shift evident in the usurped primacy of the visual print medium by what he called the "audio-tactile" medium of television, he also foresaw the unification of the entire world into a "global village", which in a rare religious reference he saw, at least potentially, as a technologically-enabled manifestation of the body of

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<sup>52</sup> Wolfe, Tom. Introduction to *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews of Marshall McLuhan*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 2003, p. xiii

Christ with all humanity as members. McLuhan's popularity grew astonishingly through the 1960s, but by the mid-1970s an academia which he routinely dismissed as regressive, incompetent and hide-bound to paradigms that were long expired was managing to turn the tables. If "turnabout is fair play", the aloofness and dismissal McLuhan had showered upon the literary and scientific communities that opposed him was fairly turned back upon him, and he died an ingenious, and to the end arrogant, has-been in 1980.

## Extending Humanity: McLuhan and Media

The American Heritage dictionary gives no fewer than fourteen further definitions in ten categories of the word media/medium in addition to that given at the outset of this chapter. Nowhere to be seen among them is that from *Understanding Media*, where McLuhan defined the term considerably more broadly than any of them, and especially than its most popular technological definition, "The form and technology used to communicate information."<sup>53</sup> As the Greek derivation suggests, media are those things which *come between* other things: for example, between an event and a TV news viewer lies the medium of television, and within it are hidden a microphone and camera, transmission apparatus, a concise and hastily-prepared script, reporters, researchers, editors and technicians, and the viewer's receiving set, all of which impact his or her reception of the event.

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<sup>53</sup> Though I (like, it would seem, most others who cite it on the Internet) was not able to track down the origins of this definition, it is one of three (along with computer storage devices like discs and also connection cables used in networking) whose appearance together is so common on Internet documents addressing technology as to justify my crowning it *media's* 'most popular technological definition'. It also has the attraction of covering the more general public's association with communications media such as television, newspapers, etc.

But McLuhan styles all technologies (not simply communication technologies) that 'extend' people, their thoughts, senses, bodies and actions, as media<sup>54</sup>. The shoe can be said to extend the foot (because it allows it to walk farther and more easily on more surfaces than it could bare), just as the amplifier and the radio can be said to extend the ear (since they enable hearing of things too quiet or too distant to be heard by the ear unaided). Cave painting and handwriting extend human thought beyond the usual limits of time and space (allowing a person not in the spatial or temporal presence of the thinker to know his or her thoughts), and as Gutenberg's invention of moveable type in the 15th century gave birth to the mass media it extended human thought *simultaneously to many persons* not in the presence of the thinker. As in the television news example above, media often contain one another: the ear-extending microphone, the eye-extending camera and the judgment-extending reporter exist within the medium of television.

Music, which extends composers' and cultures' thoughts and identities in unique and powerful ways, can be argued itself to be a medium: but to speak in meaningful terms about who or what it extends it must be split into its many historical, geographical, technical (and ultimately, perhaps arbitrary) categories of genre. Jazz and country music, for example, emerged in America at roughly the same time, and are closely tied to the advent of radio: but because they extend differing communities and ideologies (in very broad terms: on one hand, an intriguingly seedy and appealingly easy-going urban black community and on the other, a simple, home and family-

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<sup>54</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). First MIT Press Edition with Introduction by Lewis H. Lapham. (Boston: MIT Press, 1994). p.6

based religious rural white community), they must be viewed as different media for discussions of extension<sup>55</sup>.

Before we turn McLuhan loose on Musical Genre, an understanding of one of his last works *Laws of Media: The New Science* (in progress at the time of his death and published posthumously in 1988), is in order. In what some call an attempt to answer his critics' dismissal of his media theories as insufficiently developed and supported, McLuhan sought to articulate the dynamics of technology change, and to systematise the phenomenon's behaviour by proposing four "laws" of media<sup>56</sup>.

- 1) media *extend* (enhance, amplify),
- 2) media *obsolesce* (do away with things no longer needed or relevant),
- 3) media *retrieve* (restore older actions and ideas usually obsolesced by preceding technologies), and
- 4) media *reverse* (take on the opposite effects of their original extension) when overheated.

Naturally for McLuhan, radio conformed to the laws of media: its *extension* of the global community of listeners was providing access to the entire planet: everybody, everywhere. He suggests that it *retrieved* the trauma and paranoia of a certain tribal ecology lost in the print culture, resulting in such things as hypersensitivity to the dangers of alcohol (giving rise to prohibition), and the racial fear and bigotry that enabled the Nazis to come to power. It *rendered obsolete* wire connections because information no longer needed them in order to be

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<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that in McLuhan extensions achieved through media are not necessarily intended by those they extend: they simply happen as a result of technology's power to transform its users. Urban blacks didn't create jazz, nor rural white folk, country, in any bid to 'conquer America' – rather their identities and ideologies were in a sense extended by means of the proliferation of their music through the media represented by their genres, and of course other media like radio and recordings.

<sup>56</sup> McLuhan, along with son Eric who published LM posthumously, identify the "Laws" not as an underlying theory, but "rather, an heuristic device, a set of four questions" which they called a tetrad.

transmitted, and physical bodies, since proximity was no longer a requirement of voice-to-ear communication. Finally, a medium posing as truth *reversed* into theatre, since disembodied sounds came to represent reality (Orson Welles' Invasion from Mars), and the world reversed into a "talking picture", rather than an actual place<sup>57</sup>.

In *McLuhan in Space* Richard Cavell asserts that space "is the single most consistent concept in McLuhan's vast and eclectic body of work", and argues that readings of McLuhan as simple media or communications theorist have resulted in frustration among scholars who might well otherwise have found the truth and innovation now increasingly accorded McLuhan's work, and more troublingly in his dismissal by many who might find much instructive and intriguing<sup>58</sup>. Cavell cites Carleton Williams, Joseph Frank, Wyndham Lewis and Siegfried Giedion as having had the greatest influence on the development of McLuhan's notions of space, and his book provides a thorough account of these scholars' specific impacts on McLuhan<sup>59</sup>. In McLuhan, *spatial theory*<sup>60</sup> manifested most prominently in the notion of *acoustic space*, by which he referred both to a *physical* area in which sound may be heard, and an *imagined* area within which humans interact by means of sound. Thus, radio broadcasting extended the physical area of music's acoustic space by making it audible to people well beyond its point of origin, and extended the imagined, or to use a more recently fashionable term, *cultural space*, in which it could convey culture, and in turn be influenced by it. According to Elvin Hatch,

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<sup>57</sup> McLuhan, Marshall and McLuhan, Eric. *Laws of Media: The New Science*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). p.172

<sup>58</sup> Cavell, Richard. Preface to *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 2002). pp.xiii, xviii

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp.7-16

<sup>60</sup> Cavell points out that spatial theory is not so much a "theory" as a viewpoint applied to diverse phenomena and concepts when articulated in terms of physical, literal and imagined spaces.

“Culture is the way of life of a people. It consists of conventional patterns of thought and behaviour, including values, beliefs, rules of conduct, political organisation, economic activity, and the like, which are passed on from one generation to the next by learning - and not by biological inheritance.”<sup>61</sup>

Because of the accompanying diversification of the constituent people(s), when the physical and imagined area(s) in which a given culture is active and acted upon change boundaries, contained media can not help but change with them. Moreover, radio’s relocation of musical reception from rural public space (school house, saloon) to urban private space (listener’s home) came loaded with specific environmental baggage, including its removal from the family/group context. As media ecologist Jay Hodgson summarized McLuhan (along with Toronto School of Communication colleagues Innes and Havelock) on the subject, “...the geographic reach of a medium, combined with the sensory privileges it construes, constitutes a ‘communications system’ in its own right... [which is] at once material (a physical environment which exists wherever a medium happens to be) and epistemological (a way of knowing and constituting the world which exists *as* whatever a medium enables its listeners to perceive).”<sup>62</sup>

Hodgson’s remark suggests that we must view a rural music’s migration into urban America as more of a reincarnation than a simple relocation. Music in the living rooms of urban America was a different animal than in the town halls and churches of the south, and with a new

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<sup>61</sup> Hatch, Elvin. “Cultural Space” in *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, ed. Kuper, Jessica and Kuper, Adam and Kegan, Paul. (London: Routledge 1985). p.178

<sup>62</sup> Hodgson, Jay. *Marshall McLuhan, Media Ecology, Muzak and Multinationalism: Charting the Environmental Impact(s) of Broadcast Music*. Paper presented at “Over the Waves” Conference, McMaster University, March 2005. p.2

ecology, listener sensibilities and rituals, cultural and economic Darwinism would compel the species to evolve. Let us now trace that evolution with a particular eye to Christian content.

## Christian Country Music: Case Study of a Genreal Medium

As Patrick Kavanaugh asserts in *The Music of Angels – A Listener's guide to Sacred Music from Chant to Christian Rock*, next to traditional gospel and CCM (Contemporary Christian Music), country music has the greatest Christian content of any popular twentieth-century music<sup>63</sup>. This #3 title can refer not just to explicit Christian textual content and the direct musicological debt it owes to the worship and praise songs of southern Protestantism, but also to the comparative number of actual musicians openly and explicitly professing and living the Christian faith. Unlike gospel and Contemporary Christian Music, Christian Country Music is, Kavanaugh continues,

...primarily found within mainstream secular music... Thus, gospel singers and CCM bands are typically known as Christian artists and would have to cross over into secular music to be appreciated by the masses. Such genres as country, jazz and folk are basically mainstream.

This is somewhat simplistic. There does exist today a genre of music called "Christian Country Music" which arose during country music's popular surge in the 1980s, having its own record labels, artists and professional associations like the Christian Country Music Association

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<sup>63</sup> Kavanaugh, Patrick. *The Music of Angels: A Listener's Guide to Sacred Music from Chant to Christian Rock*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999) p.264

and the Christian Country Network, that like their CCM counterparts make a clear and vigorous distinction between themselves and the secular country music industry. Ultimately, though, the grammatically-created ambiguity over whether one refers to Country Music that happens to be Christian, or Christian Music that happens to have been written in a country style, is of limited use. While some of the literature refers to “Christian Country” as the 1980s genre mentioned above, while using “Country Gospel” to refer to Christian content in the work of otherwise secular artists, record labels, etc..., the terms are used more-or-less interchangeably by musicians and associations on both sides of the sacred/secular fence, and refer primarily whether the music “sounds” more like gospel or country. Since this chapter deals primarily with a radio-induced genre evolution that took place prior long to the 1980s, it is the persistent Christian content of so-called secular country music that I will address.

Country Music as we know it today originated in the values, customs and inherited Anglo-Celtic folk tradition of an impoverished, white, rural, regional and isolated American South. Music pervaded households, workplaces, schools, churches and social gatherings; found in all aspects of life, not only was it intimately infused in the daily lives and the faith of southerners, it also codified and shaped their regional and collective identities, and enshrined their values and beliefs into a common social language.

The changes that befell “rural white southern music”<sup>64</sup> when the south was itself transformed by immigration, industrialization and urbanization are often attributed to the advent

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<sup>64</sup> Lange’s expression, although it should be noted that while it showed African American influence well before it reached white urban America, country music became quickly and easily coded ‘white’ for the benefit both of the majority, ruling rural white population it came to identify and the equally dominant urban white population which adopted it so enthusiastically.



of records and radio, which slipped easily into a society already steeped in music. In the 1920s country music entered *radio space* and, with 1930s syndication, that space and its catchment area ballooned to encompass all of urban America. Predictably, the music itself had to change with the advent of the radio *Barn Dance* phenomenon, and with the establishment of Nashville as its dedicated industrial centre.

Jeffrey J. Lange ties the modernization of “rural white southern” music directly to revolutionary waves of migration and mechanization in an American south that had persisted relatively unchanged from its 19<sup>th</sup> century form well into the 1930s<sup>65</sup>. When first recorded commercially in the early 1920s, the genre which was to become known as country music was similarly unchanged from the original folk-based form that could be heard throughout the rural south. But changes soon emerged, as northern urban-based studios appropriated the style for commercial use, always targeting the lucrative urban consumer market and often, although not exclusively, using urban performers<sup>66</sup>. Shortly after the term “Hill Billies” was coined by Ralph Peer for a band he recorded in 1925, “hillbilly” and later “country” came to describe a distinct genre of white southern music, apart from the broader designation of “folk” which also took in Appalachian balladry, cowboy songs, and the indigenous music of Native Americans and rural blacks.

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<sup>65</sup> Lange, Jeffrey J. ‘Radio Barn Dances, Schoolhouse Shows’ and ‘Hillbilly’ Domestication in *Smile When you call me a Hillbilly: Country Music’s Struggle*. (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p.19

<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that while some of the new shape of country music came from urban performers, Jimmy Rodgers was an important early indigenous southerner to become a leading exponent of the music, and was in particular known for his penchant for singing and playing a variety of musical styles including jazz and blues. He became a model for young southern performers, who were becoming increasingly connected to urban life.

Southern (or “white”) gospel, perhaps the truest ancestor of present-day Christian Country Music, traces its roots back to the shape note and sacred harp singing traditions, and rural revivals and singing schools and conventions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but evolved principally, always parallel to and mostly segregated from “black” gospel, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the mid-1920s Southern Gospel accounted for some 20% of recording releases on the Columbia label<sup>67</sup>, buoyed in no small measure by the reactions against newer and racially othered genres such as jazz and blues.

As important as records were to the “modernization” of country music, radio would have its own, still more important, part to play. The April 1924 launch of *WLS Barn Dance* in Chicago started a trend that turned country music into a national phenomenon, and by 1935 some five thousand stations across the U.S. were featuring the genre. The 1925 launch of *WSM Barn Dance* (later the *Grand Ole Opry*) in Nashville was more indigenously-conceived, targeting a growing rural listenership rather than the urbanites who preoccupied northern stations, and evolving a distinct and proudly southern style. As money became scarce during the Depression, radio quickly supplanted recordings as the dominant medium for the spread of music, since it was cheaper to buy a radio than to amass recording libraries.

How was this home-spun, rural, amateur, folk and formatively Christian idiom impacted by all of this? Both records and high-power transmission radio had the effect of spreading styles and individual artists’ fame quickly across vast spaces and huge numbers of listeners. Lange also quotes historian Robert Coltman, suggesting that after the success of Jimmy Rodgers, performers

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<sup>67</sup> Cusic, Don. *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2002), p.162

seeking to make a living from music would learn styles such as blues and ragtime, and tricks from pop crooners, jazz musicians, gospel singers and even Latin dancers, incorporating these gradually into their own songs<sup>68</sup>. The increasingly urban location was also significant: America's great northern cities contained more and more migrant southern workers nostalgic for home, and a still greater number of northerners attracted to the simple, quaint and honest values coded within old-fashioned society, particularly as the U.S.A. rushed headlong into modernity, war, technology and global economic power. Ironically, while urban America gravitated to rural music's values, another principal effect of the urban presence in the industry came in the lyrical subject matter, where increasingly songs affirming the values of home, family, mother and God gave way to those mirroring the urban "boy-meets-girl" romantic preoccupation of, among others, the crooners<sup>69</sup>.

It would be a mistake to assume that rural America passively accepted the urbanization of its music on the radio waves. As radio came increasingly into play the othering of urban black genres in rural settings also grew. Don Cusic locates this split also in terms of the sacred rural vs. the secular urban, but suggests that a special affinity existed between country and gospel, which shared a rural heritage. Even black gospel, which was becoming more and more coded 'urban' by the rise of the Holiness movement, was highly influential on both white gospel and country.

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<sup>68</sup> Lange, Jeffrey J. 'Radio Barn Dances, Schoolhouse Shows' and 'Hillbilly' Domestication in *Smile When you call me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle*. (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p.26

<sup>69</sup> Lange, Jeffrey J. 'Radio Barn Dances, Schoolhouse Shows' and 'Hillbilly' Domestication in *Smile When you call me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle*. (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p.38

The music that came from urban areas – particularly jazz and rhythm and blues – was deemed “dirty” by the rural audiences, who extolled the virtues of rural living and insisted on “good, clean family entertainment.” This split between the sacred and the secular did not affect country and gospel music at this time: most country performers ‘did’ gospel songs, and most gospel groups included some country or “folk” songs in their repertoire.<sup>70</sup>

Derek Vaillant’s account of radio-age correspondence between rural Wisconsin listeners and their Country Life movement-driven broadcaster, WSA University of Wisconsin, addresses more directly WSA’s privileging of classical music programming over country music than the latter’s pollution by urban musical styles and lyrical ideals: but the sentimental concordance among farmers wary of high falutin’ urban culture is not hard to see. This sentiment was clearly catered to by radio manufacturer Atwater-Kent in an ad in the *Wisconsin Agriculturist* extolling radio’s ability to keep rural families together when it proclaimed “There are no songs like the old songs”, and preyed upon parental fears their young adult children’s moral conduct in the evenings and eventual desertion of the farm for the city when it claimed to “keep the boys and girls home”.<sup>71</sup> The desired retrieval of “true” country music from commercial hillbilly music, what historian Bill C. Malone calls “the barbarian that slithered through the gates of presumed cultural purity”<sup>72</sup> persists in our own day. In a 2003 interview with Laurie Joulie of real country advocacy group “Take Back Country”, Malone, the son of a Texas farmer, nostalgically echoes the sentiments of his forebears on the subject of commercialization:

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<sup>70</sup> Cusic, Don. *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2002), p.172

<sup>71</sup> Vaillant, Derek. “Your voice came in last night... but I thought it sounded a little scared”: Rural Radio Listening and “Talking Back” during the Progressive Era in Wisconsin, 1920-1932’ in *Radio Reader*. Ed. Michelle Hilmes and Jason Loviglio. New York: Routledge, 2002. p.71

<sup>72</sup> Malone, William C. *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin: Country Music and the Southern Working Class*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. p.18

"We heard the radio hillbillies and we thought of them as part of our own family. When we heard the songs we thought they were singing about their own lives... And they cultivated that sense of family... They sounded like we did. They voiced sentiments we agreed with... I'm willing to give the Top 40 people their due, I think there are good musicians but the songs they perform say nothing."<sup>73</sup>

## A McLuhan Reading of Christian Country Music in Radio Space

The "rural white southern music" that predated the 1920s record revolution and the 1930s radio boom was a rough-hewn, amateur musical medium. It was replaced by what is now generally understood to be country music, a highly-polished, eclectic fusion of styles serving a large and growing urban community and also spreading "back to the land" to overtake its precursor. Treating the advent of country radio music as a technological advance, McLuhan might have mapped it to his Laws of Media as follows:

Country radio music *extended* the values of an impoverished and quaintly backward south to northern and urban locations across the USA. In turn American national cultural space was extended to include the south: migrant rural folk working in cities could feel culturally served there while northerners and urbanites co-invested in the wholesomeness and simplicity coded in an indigenous American music.

Those values were neither new nor unknown to the broader population which adopted the music for its own, nor indeed to the urban listeners who had other preoccupations in the 1920s and 30s: country music radio *retrieved* from actual or constructed memory the old-

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<sup>73</sup> Malone, William C. *A Conversation with Bill Malone*, interviewed by Laurie Joulie in *Take Country Back*, 2003. [Interview online]. (accessed [April 9, 2005]) <http://www.takecountryback.com/malone1.htm>. Part I

fashioned (and in certain encodings, *white*) values of home, family and religion seemingly threatened by industrialization, economic depression, technology, war, and (again, in certain encodings) jazz, and other non-white cultural content.

It *obsolesced* several earlier genres including the simpler, rougher form whence it came. Because the expanded market transformed the southern musical genre without changing the attribution to the south, the constituent folk, cowboy, gospel and other Afro-influenced constituent musics (and accompanying ideological content) were relegated to the catchall “American Folk” designation, unknown to the vast northern urban population which innocently accepted the 1930s radio version of country music as an authentic voice of the south. Malone and Oermann reserve their bitterest criticism for Nashville, whose claims to represent country have arguably done more to annihilate it than even radio.<sup>74</sup>

It *reversed* into a romanticized, musically cleaned-up, more popular-styled and celebrity-based form devoted increasingly to the ideas and emotions of urban culture, and ultimately contributed to the near-extinction of the music which had given it birth. This reversal has spawned a counter-movement of retrieval, which has found considerable support three quarters of a century later, in our time, and the role being played in that retrieval by the Christian songs that so characterized the genre prior to its urban migration on radio is of little surprise.

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<sup>74</sup> See Oermann Liner Notes, pp1,2 and Malone Interview, Part 2

## Country Music in 2000: Roots and Revival

History, with its cycles of revolution, counter-revolution, radicals becoming establishment ripe for fresh unseating by new radicals (and so on), is replete with irony. Just as Nashville's noble defense of the "authentic country sound" eventually gave way to the multi-million dollar pop-crossover industry we know today it has sparked yet another McLuhanian reversal in an end-of century revival of interest in the old-time music it sought to protect, but instead drove into obscurity. The soundtrack to the 2000 Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* represents many song styles from mountain music and gospel to delta blues, hobo songs and chain-gang chants now encompassed in the "Old Time" category referred to by the dean of Nashville music writers Robert K. Oermann in his notes to the recording:

"There is another Nashville, with a kind of music so distant from what the city's commercial centre cranks out as to be from a different planet. It thrives in the community's nooks and crannies like a cluster of quietly smiling mountain wildflowers in the shadow of those cultivated hothouse blooms that flaunt their colors [sic] on radio stations from coast to coast... what this seemingly ethnic sound is, is country music. Or at least it was before the infidels of Music Row expropriated the term to describe watered-down pop/rock with greeting-card lyrics."<sup>75</sup>

Of the 19 old-time songs selected by Ethan and Joel Coen for *O Brother, Where art Thou*, six, including "Down to the River to Pray", "I'll Fly Away" and "Angel Band" are authentic southern and black gospel- and otherwise explicitly Christian praise, worship and devotional songs that could have been (and indeed still are) sung in churches, revival meetings and other Christian settings. While four of the remaining could be called purely secular, the other nine

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<sup>75</sup> Oermann, Robert K. Liner notes for soundtrack to *O Brother, Where Art Thou*. Mercury Records compact disc 088 170 069-2, 2000. p.1

(including the four renditions of “I am a man of Constant Sorrow”, “Keep on the Sunny Side” and “Lonesome Valley”) are in a quintessentially country textual genre, in which songs are more about the general hardships of life, but nonetheless contain explicit and obligatory Christian references of trust in God and the hope of salvation.

It is important to understand that I trace the dominance of Christian content in this defining old-time “roots” revival cultural icon not to illustrate the level of Christian content in pre-radio age Country music, for no 20<sup>th</sup> century historical parody could be relied on to demonstrate this definitively. Rather I seek to illustrate the McLuhanian retrieval of that content in the form of the film’s surprise 21<sup>st</sup> century popularity, and of course, that of its soundtrack.

If, as the runaway success of the *O Brother* soundtrack and other cultural developments suggest, there is a revival of older country music underway, the question arises: are the ideals, including Christianity, which helped give country music its first phenomenal success and yet were compromised during its modernization still of interest to country listeners? It is precisely Oermann’s “watered-down pop/rock” derivative format which forms the principal subject of a March 2005 Country Radio Broadcasters Survey of 11,000 P1 listeners (that is, those for whom a country radio station is their favourite) in all age groups and both genders at 13 stations throughout the United States<sup>76</sup>. Besides suggesting that socio-political stereotypes of political conservatism, churchgoing, and family-centredness associated with country listeners are not always borne out in statistics, it suggest that country music retains much of its original encoding.

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<sup>76</sup> This survey, which asked respondents about their vote in the 2004 Presidential Election, their feelings about the Dixie Chicks/Iraq War debate and the Janet Jackson wardrobe incident at the 2004 Super bowl, makes for fascinating reading even outside of its intended audience, advertisers on country radio.



- While only 29% surveyed had children under 13, they felt (87%) they could listen to country with the whole family with confidence in appropriateness for and acceptance by their kids.<sup>77</sup>
- 61% attend religious services at least once a year (39% once/month, 24% once or more/week)<sup>78</sup>
- 89% surveyed described “the country music of today” as the same or better than that of a few years ago. While the study is unconcerned with whether or not that ‘music of today’ reflects “old time” content or shows old-time influence, the number who cite an improvement is roughly the same number as describe a decline in the quality of pop and rock during the same period.<sup>79</sup>
- 61% surveyed said that country music makes a positive contribution to American life.<sup>80</sup>

Later in his 2003 interview for “Take Back Country”, Bill Malone refers to the success of *O Brother* and Grammy nominations for Joe Nichols as a hopeful signs for older country, and later in the same paragraph, to his errant prediction in a 1985 revision of his 1968 book, *Country Music USA*:

I thought that pop juggernauts were just going to engulf music and everybody was going to grasp for the crossover songs. Luckily for all of us the neo-traditionalists keep coming. The Alan Jackson's, Ricky Skaggs', Emmylou Harris' keep bringing it back to something that still sounds country.<sup>81</sup>

McLuhan never commented directly on country music’s migration through radio, and as a Catholic with a clearly expressed love of the Latin Mass and other pre-Second Vatican Council aspects to worship,<sup>82</sup> would be unlikely to have a very high opinion of it. He would have argued that while radio redrew the boundaries of its acoustic space it was no revolution, since the music already existed in the primarily oral tradition of the rural south. Noting, perhaps, that country

<sup>77</sup> Edison Research. *Study of Country Radio's P1 Listeners* [survey conducted by e-mail and presented at Country Radio Seminar 36] Nashville, March 2005. Accessed March 7, 2005, <http://www.crb.org/main>. p.19

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.20

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp.11, 40

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p.21

<sup>81</sup> Malone, William C. *A Conversation with Bill Malone*, interviewed by Laurie Joulie in *Take Country Back*, 2003. [Interview online]. (accessed [April 9, 2005]) <http://www.takecountryback.com/malone1.htm>. Part 2

<sup>82</sup> McLuhan, Marshall. “The Microphone and the Liturgy” in *The Critic*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, Oct./Nov./Dec., 1974, pp. 12-17

music had moved directly from its oral tradition to its aural reincarnation in urban America without passing through the subverting printed page that occasioned the drifting apart of words and music in classical music,<sup>83</sup> he would possibly have hailed radio as the faithful conveyor of the culture this paper argues, perhaps, it was not. Ultimately, though, I believe particularly that, had he lived to see the persistence of interest in country's founding values and forms, he would agree that his revisited and reapplied insights into the extensions of man, his "New Science", provide a useful way of addressing the shifting paradigms of creativity and consciousness, of change and constancy, of culture and commercialism that increasingly frame discourse about music in the age of the broadcast media.

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<sup>83</sup> McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). First MIT Press Edition with Introduction by Lewis H. Lapham. (Boston: MIT Press, 1994). p.281

## Chapter 4

# MUSICAL GENRE AS SIMULACRUM

Jean Baudrillard

sim·u·la·crum (n.) the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.  
(n. pl. sim·u·la·cra)

*Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in Simulacra and Simulation (1981), translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.*

### Jean Baudrillard (1929- ): Economist of Signs

Jean Baudrillard was born in Reims, France in 1929, the grandson of peasants and son of civil servants. According to interviews his role as the first in his family to pursue an advanced education led to a rupture with his parents and his inherited cultural identity. He studied languages, philosophy, sociology and other disciplines and, after early work as a critic and translator of German literature in the early 1960s, became a vocal opponent of American and French involvement in the Vietnam and Algerian wars, allying himself with the French Left. Under the influence of Lefebvre, Barthes and others, Baudrillard lived an intensely intellectual and "revolutionary" life, beginning as a professor at the new Nanterre University in 1966 and, though he was later to break with this stream, he contributed to the Paris uprising of May 1968 and remained intellectually close to the French situationists in their profound distrust of 'culture', and in a tirade against the 'art of the spectacle' that would only grow in the two decades that followed. Baudrillard left Nanterre in 1987, and has remained active in both publishing and teaching. He currently serves on the faculty of the European Graduate School of Media and

Communications Studies, an innovative university program based in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, but also functioning in New York, Dresden, Paris, Los Angeles and online.

Critiquing in the 1960s both classical Marxism for its focus on objects and Capitalism for its preoccupation with signs, his early works already addressed semiology as a vital component of politics and society. In the 1970s he proposed production and simulation as the organizing principles of modern and postmodern societies respectively, offered “symbolic exchange” as an alternative seeking to recast classical Marxism into a form recognizing the more symbolic forms of exchange that both preceded and followed modern, production-based societies. But it was not to be until the 1980s that he trained his eye (and his already well-discharged weaponry) on the culture of the media, and on a postmodern society which had broken as radically with modern times as had modern times with premodern times; he posited a “hyperreal” society organized on the logic of simulation, and facing implosion of meaning, culture, and the social.

## “The Mass”, Simulation and Implosion

To Baudrillard, postmodern societies are organized according to the interplay of images and signs: these *simulations* stand in for the “real”, radically reshaping each individual’s perception of, place, and role in society. As Douglas Kellner recounts,

We are now, Baudrillard claims, in a new era of simulation in which social reproduction (information processing, communication, knowledge industries, etc.) replaces production as the organizing principle of society. In this era, labour is no longer a force of production, but is itself a “sign among signs”. Labour is not primarily productive in this situation, but is a sign of one’s social position, way of life, and mode of servitude... political economy is no longer the foundation, the social determinant, or even a structural “reality” in which other phenomena can be interpreted and explained. Instead

we live in a “hyperreality” of simulations in which images, spectacles, and the play of signs replace the logic of production and class conflict as key constituents of contemporary societies.<sup>84</sup>

To express this in musical terms, consider the status accorded to high society classical music described two generations earlier by Adorno when he addressed a consumer-driven musical America: “The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert.”<sup>85</sup> Or consider the strongly market-driven importance to contemporary high school students that popular music and musical tastes play in defining social groups and even individual identity. Baudrillard’s particular spin on an old phenomenon was that the need for such significations has evolved from, or at least been encouraged by, the collapse of an economically-based class system as a societal determinant.

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), Baudrillard introduced the concept of Simulacra (the ‘signs’ which refer to and often replace the Real in the process of simulation) and identified three “orders” which were to recur as a theme throughout the next decade of his work, and in that of many others to this day:

- 1) **First Order Simulacrum** (“craft”), dating from the Renaissance: an image which is a clear (to those able to distinguish) counterfeit of the Real, intended to replace or stand in for it;
- 2) **Second Order Simulacrum** (“industrial”), dating from the industrial revolution: any one of a series of copies which can be produced subject to market forces. The quality of copy is better than in the 1<sup>st</sup> order, and the proliferation of copies make them the norm rather than the singular exception: yet whether one can (or cares) to distinguish between the Real and the copy the former is understood to exist and be accessible somehow.

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<sup>84</sup> Kellner, Douglas, Introduction to *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1994.

<sup>85</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. “On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” (1938), translated by Susan H. Gillespie in *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. Leppert, R. Berkely/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002, p.295

- 3) **Third Order Simulacrum** (“communication”), that of the postmodern age: The copy precedes and determines the Real. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum, which has destroyed the Real.

Inspired by and quoting a rare reference to music in Baudrillard’s work, “pornography is the quadrophonics of sex,<sup>86</sup>” Mike Gane offers quadraphonic sound as an example of the hyperreality of the third order simulacrum:

...in an air-conditioned room, music in four dimensions, ambient space, a technically perfect reconstitution of music by Bach and Mozart, which in this form has never previously existed, is realised. Such music was never intended for this total ambience, which deprives the listener of all critical perception and the music of all charm. There is a confusion of the real with the multiplication of dimensions. It is an obsession with technical perfectability, thus instead of improvement of the quality of music, these systems constitute its definitive degradation. It is the pornography of music, just as pornography “is the quadrophonics of sex”.<sup>87</sup>

Later, in his 1981 collection *Simulacra and Simulation*, he introduced the related four successive phases of the image (or sign) in simulation, which are often confused with the orders of simulacra,<sup>88</sup> but which I take to refer more directly to aspects of the same sign:

- 1) **First Phase of Simulation:** is the reflection of a profound reality
- 2) **Second Phase of Simulation:** masks and denatures a profound reality
- 3) **Third Phase of Simulation:** masks the *absence* of a profound reality
- 4) **Fourth Phase of Simulation:** has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Baudrillard, Jean: *Seduction* (1979) in translation. (London: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>87</sup> Gane, Mike. *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory*. (London: Routledge, 1991), p.152.

<sup>88</sup> Particularly since Baudrillard added a fourth “viral/fractal” order of simulacra in *La transparence du mal* (1990)

<sup>89</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. “The Precession of Simulacra” in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 1994, p.6

In this connection, consider the image of the musical recording as a simulacrum for live music (whether actually a recording of live music or not is not important):

- 1) **First Phase simulation:** imagine a good recording of an artist's good, live performance: it is not the performance itself, but it reflects it at a later time and (usually) in a different place.
- 2) **Second Phase simulation:** a poor recording of an artist's good performance (or, one supposes a good recording of an artist's poor performance) misrepresents, perhaps by misfortune or by design, the performance and/or the artist's work.
- 3) **Third Phase simulation:** a highly spliced and processed studio recording which portrays a performance that never existed, and perhaps could never exist, but nonetheless poses as one to be compared with and enjoyed as a live recording.
- 4) **Fourth Phase simulation:** an electronically generated recording which never presumes to have been played by human hands, but for which any need for it to have been is also gone, or was never there.

Crucial also to Baudrillard's postmodernity are the notions of "the mass" (the immense and growing expanse of class-leveled, capitalist, sign-chasing humanity, strongly echoing Adorno's view), and "implosion", the rapid collapse of meaning, culture and the social in upon themselves under the aching weight of mass information, and consumption. The implosion of meaning and "mass" are inextricably linked for Baudrillard, who, as a post-Marxist defined the latter in terms more cognoscente, but no less helpless, than did Marx. Writing of the deeply-entrenched binary structures (good/bad, rich/poor, self/other, etc.) which impute meaning to much of language, he wrote:

There is no longer any polarity between the one and the other in the mass [the people]. This is what causes that vacuum and inwardly collapsing effect in all those systems which survive on the distinction of poles [good/bad, true/false, alive/dead, up/down, and especially left/right (in a political sense)]. This is what makes the circulation of meaning in the mass impossible: it is instantaneously dispersed, like atoms in a void.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, translated by Paul Foss, John Johnston, and Paul Patton. (New York: Semiotexte), 1983, p.6

In reference to this passage, University of Texas critical theory Ph.D candidate Alan Taylor elaborated further on Baudrillard's position on "the mass" on his 'Implosion Home Page':

Baudrillard's argument can be said to respond directly to the Marxism he once embraced. Whereas Marx argued that "the mass" was dominated by a "false" ideology that perpetuated its enslavement, Baudrillard suggests that "the mass" already knows that all ideologies are "false." "The mass" wants to be dominated by one false ideology after another. It absorbs ideologies and spectacles ... the Gulf War, the O.J. [Simpson] trial, Rush Limbaugh ... Spectacle after spectacle, ideology after ideology, all "meaning" is dispersed and rendered meaningless in "the mass," not because "the mass" resists bourgeois ideology, but because it consumes it frantically.<sup>91</sup>

Implosion for Baudrillard manifests because of us all, the sentient yet unthinking postmodern society guided by signs at the mercy of capitalism. Baudrillard bemoans the era of simulation, its product, "the mass" and its current and impending consequence, "implosion" in pronouncing the end of reality, a project he pursued most notoriously in his 1991 refutation of the occurrence of the Gulf War, pronouncing its coverage in the media as a third order simulacrum with no referent. Hinting therein at American propagandism, Baudrillard was touching on another important theme, to which he had alluded back in 1983, pointing out the potential for signs to be manipulated by third parties to the simulated and the 'simulatee'.

The era of simulation is inaugurated by the liquidation of all referentials – worse, with their resurrection in the system of signs, a material more malleable than meaning...<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Taylor, Alan, IMPLOSION Home Page. [online document] (accessed [18 July 2005]).  
<http://www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/what.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.2



## Musical Genre as Simulacrum

Any theoretical application of Baudrillard's notions of simulation and implosion to a phenomenon such as musical genre (which he never addressed specifically) must be made within two important contexts: 1) the totality of his theories about society, which he applied broadly to history, events, films, the Centre Pompidou at Beaubourg in Paris, advertising, markets and commodities, holograms, science fiction and even animals;<sup>93</sup> and 2) his career-long focus on the shift from modern thought, life and society to their postmodern successors – a shift which coincides directly with the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century shift in the scope and meaning of the term 'musical genre' referred to earlier. Musical genre, in its newly-reimagined form, resides throughout western urban life and society, but is perhaps most directly viewed in its totality through the music industry's offerings to the public via the media, music journals, Internet download sites, and the many stores pedaling music and writings about it. That the media figure so strongly in the production and perception of musical genre suggests strongly the latter's openness to a Baudrillardian critique.

In 1983, Baudrillard wrote about the onset of implosion under the crushing weight of saturation with meaning in terms of a "law of confusion of categories".

The Law that is imposed on us is the law of confusion of categories. Everything is sexual. Everything is political. Everything is aesthetic. All at once... Each category is generalized to the greatest possible extent, so that it eventually loses all specificity and is reabsorbed by all other categories.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> A selection of essay topics from *Simulacra and Simulation*.

<sup>94</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, translated by Paul Foss, John Johnston, and Paul Patton. (New York: Semiotexte, 1983).

While initially it might seem that over-specificity rather than over-generality cripples the genre system's ability to impute meaning to groupings of music, the difficulty is not that each of the thousands of genre categories carries *too much* meaning, but rather *too little* to convey music's sound or culture. Moreover, hundreds of genre categories, related by name (such as in sub-genres like classic rock, folk rock, easy rock, soft rock) and unrelated by name (like grime, grunge and garage) share much in common (beats, chord structures, lyrical character and subject, etc.). This gives rise to the invisibility and inaccessibility of much music fractured across the genre system (especially when it has landed in genre categories without visibility or financial backing): a problem for artists and producers thus locked away from their potential support base.

Flipping from the perspective of producer to that of the consumer: while few will ever encounter Wikipedia's shocking 1500 genre categories on their way to buy, tune in to, download, hear live or even think about music, many enquiries and decisions must be made *without hearing the music*, and so must be based on an elaborate system of signs including advertising, album/song/band name, performer/composer image, heresay, inherited knowledge or belief, third-party recommendation, etc. None of these can ultimately tell us what we want to know: how does the music sound and will I like it; rather it must be extracted from the regular daily bombardment of so-called "meaning" and constructed into a reality it can never be.

Everywhere one seeks to produce meaning, to make the world signify, to render it visible. We are not, however, in danger of lacking meaning; quite to the contrary, we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us. As more and more things have fallen into the abyss of meaning, they have retained less and less of the charm of appearances.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1988), translated by Bernard & Caroline Schutze, ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Semiotexte, 1988.

With an opening statement “we live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less meaning,” Baudrillard in *The Implosion of Meaning in the Media* argues that information is directly destructive of meaning and signification. He writes:

Rather than producing meaning, [information] exhausts itself in the staging of meaning... A circular arrangement through which one stages the desire of the audience, the antitheatre of communication... It is useless to ask if it is the loss of communication that produces this escalation of the simulacrum, or whether it is the simulacrum that is there first for dissuasive ends... Useless to ask which is the first term, there is none, it is a circular process – that of simulation, that of the hyperreal... More real than real, that is how the real is abolished.<sup>96</sup>

The media, conveying information in various ways designed to stimulate the interests and desires of “the mass,” offer a simulacrum of the third order – a sign referencing audience interest and desire that does not exist inherently, but is rather constructed for them. Proposing the carefully devised and packaged music of mega-pop stars for this reading of musical genre would be the obvious choice here... but consider another: the popular “Roots” or “Old Time” stream of country music. Born in response to the slick, highly-produced and trumped up version of Country music developed by Nashville, it applies simpler instrumental and vocal colours to the new creations of contemporary, often highly-trained urban artists, and encodes them with the turn-of-the-century authenticity of rural self-taught musicians that Nashville once discovered and adapted for nationwide consumption. While the simulacrum of authenticity stands in opposition to Nashville’s decadence, its referent is forgotten, either gone, or living on in the obscurity of the hills. Crucially, for Baudrillard (unlike many Marxist and post-Marxist critics) “the mass” (a term

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<sup>96</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. “The Implosion of Meaning in the Media” in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, pp.80-81

in which he includes himself) knows full well of the contemporality and skill of its artists, and their lack of actual authenticity... It simply doesn't care, or at least doesn't oppose the simulacrum:

A sort of inverse simulation in the masses, in each one of us, corresponds to this simulation of meaning and of communication in which this system encloses us. To this tautology of the system the masses respond with ambivalence, to deterrence they respond with disaffection, or with an always enigmatic belief. Myth exists, but one must guard against thinking that people believe in it: this is the trap of critical thinking that can only be exercised if it presupposes the naïveté and stupidity of the masses.<sup>97</sup>

## Contemporary Christian Music in Service and Simulation

Baudrillard's simulacra present another opportunity to view a musical genre through the lens of postmodern thought: the Simulation represented by Contemporary Christian Music to mainline churches in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. To clarify the subject matter: this is not an examination of CCM as the 20<sup>th</sup> century musical and religious phenomenon it was and remains... it is an examination of that phenomenon's influence on more traditional mainline churches and denominations.

Contemporary Christian Music (known within church circles as Contemporary Worship Music, CWM, when used in public worship), a descendent of earlier gospel forms, emerged in California in the late 1960s, and is normally tied to the "Jesus Movement", a large-scale reconnection with Christianity among young people. John Frame places it as a counter-cultural reaction:

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<sup>97</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.81.

About that time, many young people from the sixties' counterculture professed to believe in Jesus. Convinced of the barrenness of a lifestyle based on drugs, free sex, and radical politics, "hippies" became "Jesus people." Doubtless there were many among them who looked on Jesus as just another "trip." But many became genuine disciples of the Lord.<sup>98</sup>

In the birth of CCM Kavanaugh also cites the rapid rise of Rock 'n Roll, coded strongly as youthful and rebellious, through the 1950s:

The popularity of secular rock had already begun with Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley and dozens of other artists who appeared in the years following World War II. But in the 1960s, the unprecedented popularity of The Beatles accelerated the acceptance of many similar groups. The antiwar, antiestablishment offered abundant material and a willing market. By 1965 rock music was a billion-dollar industry that could not be ignored by the world. Nevertheless, most of it could not be understood, accepted, or appreciated by the Christian Church, whether Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox.<sup>99</sup>

Church attendance had declined through the 1960s, particularly among youth, and with a few exceptions such as Los Angeles' Calvary Chapels, the rise of CCM took place outside of the sanctuary, in the personal and corporate spirituality of youth. As it has made a practice over centuries, the church opposed the development. Don Cusic writes:

The church, accustomed to 200-year-old hymns, often considered the music to be of the Devil, and those involved with street-level Christianity to be cultish and suspect, while the secular culture simply did not want to hear about Jesus through their loudspeakers. Because the major gospel record companies and Christian radio stations generally sided with the conservative churches and Christian bookstores, the result was a stifling of Christian music by the Christian culture itself.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Frame, John E. *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1997), p.5

<sup>99</sup> Kavanaugh, Patrick. *The Music of Angels: A Listener's Guide to Sacred Music from Chant to Christian Rock*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999. p.241

<sup>100</sup> Cusic, Don. *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2002), p.281

One dimension of the Jesus movement and the rise of CCM often overlooked in the literature is that it was perhaps the firstly widely-embraced model for a western Christian faith that did not require an institutional church (a view still more widely-held today), and in this light neither the church's hostile and fearful response to CCM in the 1960s, and the swiftly turning tide to accept it in the 1970s, comes as a surprise. As the artists of CCM became known as true devoted Christians rather than "post-hippies"; as the church recognized CCM's potential to reach young people who were fleeing the church in their millions; and as it also presented itself to parents as a safe, acceptable alternative to more subversive forms of music and lifestyle, the stage was set for the meteoric growth CCM experienced in the 1970s.

In the same manner in which cities tend to take on an overall architectural character representing their periods of most significant growth, so to did the genre of CCM come into its own in a version of 1970s soft rock that of necessity fell somewhere between its youthful, gritty, anti-establishment roots and the huge population (including an already-growing population of senior citizens, the middle-aged parents of the "baby boom" generation, congregations, church authorities and others initially hostile to it) that it was now to serve and satisfy. Frame points out this (to this day, persistent) genreal model, while cautioning against over-generality:

The tunes and musical arrangements tend to reflect a popular style somewhat like the "soft rock" of the early 1970s. It is this style which serves to define CWM in the minds of many, but it would be an exaggeration to say that CWM totally lacks stylistic variety. Even the "soft rock" style permits variation in tempo, major or minor mode, volume, melodic interest, harmonic possibilities, etc. at least as much as more traditional styles of church music.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Frame, John E. *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1997), p.7

Another important boost to the movement came in the rise of Christian fundamentalism in the United States, tied by Cusic to the Presidential election of 1976:

Within Christianity, the fundamentalist counterculture entered the mainstream in 1976 when Jimmy Carter, a “born-again” evangelical, was elected President. This brought an immense amount of media coverage to the evangelical movement in the United States. In a 1976 survey, the Gallup poll found that one out of every three Americans considered themselves a “born-again” Christian; that same year, for the first time since World War II, church attendance increased rather than decreased... America underwent a spiritual awakening, and Christianity that was fundamental in its beliefs, active in its faith, and in touch with the contemporary culture became acceptable.<sup>102</sup>

Of further importance to CCM's growth spurt from 1965 into the 1970s is a movement known as *liturgical renewal*, touched off principally by Pope John XXIII's Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which on an awe-inspiring global level overturned the 16<sup>th</sup> century Tridentine latin mass and introduced the vernacular mass, a new emphasis and priority for congregational singing, and a general openness to the contemporary world in the lives of millions of Christians. Though it affected directly only Roman Catholics (and has still made only limited gains in Orthodox Catholic circles) it could not fail to have repercussions in the mainline Protestant world, creating what Robert Webber describes as “an ecumenical consensus on worship.<sup>103</sup>” Meanwhile, an entirely different liturgical movement (usually and problematically called *contemporary worship*) based on recovering the subjective and experiential side of worship emerged in the Pentecostal, charismatic and praise and worship traditions, drawing congregations into new forms of involvement such as uplifted hands, circles of prayer and times

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<sup>102</sup> Cusic, Don. *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2002), p.280-1

<sup>103</sup> These effects have been felt much more strongly in the Protestant world than in that of Orthodox Catholicism.

of testimony; and offered them new levels of experience through such charismatic rites as the laying on of hands for healing. In musical terms this movement confirmed the piano, guitar, and drums, electronic amplification, effects and tone production (synthesisers) as a new instrumental standard, and evolved a new genre of worship music, the “praise chorus” which became the core sung content of worship services.

As new churches and denominations formed, and Christian artists, record labels, bookstores, television and radio ministries and other manifestations multiplied, traditional mainline churches that had dismissed and attacked CCM when it emerged found themselves in the midst of reforming their worship, and were forced to take another look. Some who took that look tried to adopt the form which was increasingly being practised in newer, thriving and growing churches – nearly all who did met with bitter and even schismatic opposition from those both used to, and otherwise drawn to, more traditional forms of church music.

Robert Webber’s account succinctly describes the main points of the two movements of worship renewal and indicates a convergence which has emerged in mainline churches at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which he says displays a “radical commitment to contemporary relevance”:

During the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two distinct approaches to worship renewal have emerged. First, a Catholic and mainline renewal emphasised the recovery of a theology of worship, the fourfold biblical pattern, and a focus on God’s transcendence. Second, the charismatic and praise and worship movement emphasised an experience of God during worship through an intimate encounter with God’s presence. A convergence began about 1990 to blend these two streams: blended worship is characterised by synthesising substance and relevance, traditional and contemporary forms.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Webber, Robert. *Planning Blended Worship: The Creative Mixture of Old and New*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.



My 14 years' experience as cathedral musician during the advent of so-called 'blended worship' to the Anglican Church of Canada's Toronto diocese, its most populous and diverse, brought me into useful and interesting exposure of the two forms which emerged in all of the mainline denominations: *inter-service* and *intra-service* (both my terms). Intra-service blending occurs when elements of reformed traditional and contemporary worship are incorporated into a single worship service. The more popular option, inter-service blending, is a single church offering separate 'contemporary' and 'traditional' services, the former usually taking place in an early time slot on Sunday mornings (ca. 9-9:30am) and being positioned towards younger people and families, and the latter continuing on in a later time slot (ca. 10:30-11:00am) largely unchanged for decades, and addressing older worshippers and other specifically drawn to it.

The inter-service option offered parishes the advantage of allowing adherents of traditional worship to continue to practice in the way (and usually at the exact time) they have always done, albeit with some reforms such as updated language and minor ritual changes, while offering a target class of younger worshipper a new, earlier, shorter and contemporary-styled service. The other feature of this form of blending was that church musicians unable or unwilling to lead contemporary worship could often be supplemented by extra staff or volunteers who were able and willing. To this class of blending also belongs the related practice of having just one consistent weekly service time, but setting some form of regular monthly pattern of (for example) traditional 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays, contemporary 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays – a mode of variation already known historically throughout the Anglican church in the regular alternation of the Holy Eucharist

with the office of Morning Prayer, and more recently on the more esoteric (but no less significant to many) practice of alternating the use of older language with its newer counterpart.

Intra-service blending, in which the unfamiliar (and to some, abhorrent) CWM was injected into an otherwise traditional worship paradigm, became the principal battleground for what became colloquially known as “Worship Wars.”<sup>105</sup> Bitter debates raged over the appropriateness of the new content and the relevance of the old status quo, liturgical refugees fled their polluted services for more purely traditional ones (often in other churches), and where the intruding material and other reforms were defeated, more progressive-thinking worshippers defected to other churches and even other denominations.

While during my tenure as what some have referred to as ‘diocesan musician’ the Diocese of Toronto was experiencing overall growth, its few all-CWM parishes, its slightly larger number of intra-service blending parishes and its still larger number of inter-service blending parishes could have been described as flourishing. Historians tend to locate this apparent disconnect between reality and both the encoding of CWM and the expressed purpose for its adoption by many mainline churches in a context of the persistence of their traditions:

Some... have integrated charismatic motifs into their worship. Groups with historic liturgical traditions, some Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, for example, have done the same in their services, but these more catholic traditions generally have bumped into

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<sup>105</sup> It should be noted that in the Diocese of Toronto, as in other diocese and denominations, “Worship Wars” were (and continue to be) fought over a wide range of matters pertaining to liturgy including, but not limited to the introduction of CWM. Other flashpoints in the Diocese Toronto from 1991-2003 included old/modern language in scripture, hymn- and prayer-books, a priest’s east- or west-facing celebration of the Eucharist, the ‘exchange of the peace’ among congregants, the introduction of non-CWM musical forms such as those of the Taizé and Iona Communities, architectural modifications to worship spaces, and general spiritual practice considered overt.

their histories when they have sought to use praise choruses with a wholesale embrace. Lutherans bumped into Luther, Presbyterians into Calvin, Methodists into Wesley.<sup>106</sup>

Another view suggests convincingly that CWM can only really serve as the 'great attractor' it has been sought to be when allowed its full strength and context, implying that any partial or tokenistic 'blending' into another musical paradigm is doomed:

Gospel and Christian music function better as magnets than hooks. When the music has sought to reach out to find an audience – to "hook" people, many of them unsuspecting souls who would be caught by "stealth evangelism" – it generally fails. But when the music is allowed to be itself, to stand self-assured and confident, then it is a magnet both for those who love the music already and those outside the field. Gospel and Christian music are powerful attractions when they are allowed to be who they are and do what they do.<sup>107</sup>

In truth, even in those Diocese of Toronto parishes in which CWM is found as the dominant musical form<sup>108</sup> it is always accompanied by traditionally Anglican service forms (and in particular the Holy Eucharist), as opposed to its more conventional setting in the realm of the subjective and the experiential. Where CWM is blended intra-service it is often beset by musicians and congregations having limited comfort and facility with it; and where it is blended inter-service, even where its musical leadership is sound and its following loyal, it remains most often relegated to early-morning and other non-primary churchgoing time slots, providing a systemic limitation to its attractive power, and at least a symbolic 'othering'.

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<sup>106</sup> Westermeyer, Paul. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998, p.315

<sup>107</sup> Cusic, Don. *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2002), p. 383

<sup>108</sup> Notable among these are Holy Trinity (Streetsville), Little Trinity (Regent Park) and Church of the Nativity (Malvern).

Westermeyer is philosophical about the lessons that may have been, or are being learned from the mainline churches' experiments with CWM, but also expresses a touch of fatalism over the century that produced it, and the divisive effect it has had in the ecclesiastical community:

Sometimes this blending has led to healthy discussions about the culture and how to address it, part of a much larger debate about a bifurcated culture. Sometimes it has promoted if not ecumenical cooperation, at least gratefulness for various perspectives and practices. More often, however, the divisive history of the twentieth century was played out again, this time into competitions. Some leaders of the church took their clue from the culture, assumed the bottom line should be the control, and sought to sell their product to the most people as the "tool."... Churches wrote mission statements and tried to "position" themselves where they would get the largest market share, then lined up against one another with power plays."<sup>109</sup>

Whatever factor or factors might explain CWM's limited success in mainline denominations, it would seem that churches of today that have pursued it and other initiatives as 'selling points' for themselves have followed a Baudrillardian simulacrum of CWM's imagined youthful, thriving congregation of the future (eternally drawn by and to the derivative soft rock of the 1970s), taking the place of another 'reality', perhaps one of limited or no potential growth. Yet by Westermeyer there is another simulacrum: a hyperreal signification for "liturgy"<sup>110</sup> based on a capitalist economic model aimed fundamentally at attracting and converting people, replacing its founding identity as "the service of the people to their God". The foundational and entirely separate biblical Christian vocations of worship and evangelism are thus hoped to be fused into one convenient Sunday morning package.

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<sup>109</sup> Westermeyer, Paul. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998, p.318

<sup>110</sup> From the Greek *leitourgi*, "public service", which itself comes from *leitourgos*, "public servant."

Where, if CWM forms these misconceptions as third order simulacra to the mainline churches who seek its magical attractive powers, lie the realities whose (lack of) existence is hidden? Baudrillard would perhaps argue not that mainline churches seeking a musical 'messiah' in CWM are not missing a reality in which they have limited or no potential for growth, but rather a reality in which the matter of whether they grow or not cannot in any sense be determined by music. Likewise, even if church growth could somehow empirically be related to music in any convincing way (which so far it has not been in the context of the mainline churches), the question of in what proportion liturgy succeeds by what it offers to God as worship and what it offers to God as evangelism is still harder to argue, and thus problematic to act upon.

How successfully, then, does musical genre locate itself within Baudrillard's imploding world of simulacra and simulation? As mentioned earlier, these notions have been widely applied by their author and others with much intuitive success, if with questionable rigour and/or provability, and it is not difficult to extend this corporate project of the past two decades, which has so many varied and successful applications, to musical genre. But one thing which I hope not to extend with it is the fatalism hanging over much of Baudrillard's thought, in which context we see a rare biblical paraphrase, of the evangelist Matthew's "He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword."

I am a nihilist. I observe, I accept, I assume, I analyse the second revolution, that of the twentieth century, that of postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier [i.e. modernity's] destruction of appearances. He who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning.... Analysis is itself perhaps the decisive element of the immense process of the freezing over of meaning. The surplus of meaning that theories bring, their competition at the level of meaning is completely secondary in relation to their coalition in the glacial and four-tiered

operation of dissection and transparency. One must be conscious that, no matter how the analysis proceeds, it proceeds towards the freezing over of meaning, it assists in the precession of simulacra and indifferent forms. The desert grows.<sup>111</sup>

Musical genre as signifier is meaning awaiting Baudrillard's 'implosion'. But if meaning is thereby only frozen over rather than destroyed, there may exist yet the hope of a thaw.

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<sup>111</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. "On Nihilism" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, pp.160-161.

## Chapter 6

# POSTMODERNITY and MUSICAL GENRE

post·**mod**·ern·i·sm

(n.) a wide-ranging cultural movement which adopts a sceptical attitude to many of the principles that have underpinned Western thought and social life for the last few centuries.  
(adj. post·**mod**·ern)

- *Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, Ed. Stuart Sim,  
Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2005)

## Genre Implosion: A Radio Experiment on CFMU 93.3FM

In direct reference to this project, *Genre Implosion* is the name I gave to a weekly 30-minute radio show which I developed, pitched and have subsequently written, produced and hosted on CFMU 93.3FM in Hamilton since November 2005, with the specific intent of portraying a wide range of music crossing age, style and genre based on a single programming theme for each show. I deliberately select broad-ranging themes applicable to a wide range of music each week, such as 'introductions', 'endings', 'colour', 'place', 'winter', 'ostinato', 'the high female voice', 'the violin', etc..., and illustrate them across the genre divides within 7-10 minutes of commentary and 20-23 minutes of music. Accompanying the show is a website which I host at [www.genreimplosion.ca](http://www.genreimplosion.ca) where I am chronicling the show process as well as the theoretical work that has gone into this paper.

Conspicuously absent from the show's commentary is any discussion like that found in this paper, on the actual subject of musical genre: indeed, only rarely does it refer to a musical

genre by name, other than in an attempt to locate a selection for the benefit of listeners unfamiliar with it. The implicit message intended by this is genre's problematic nature, its non-necessity to listening and evaluating music according to our tastes and indeed, its impact upon those evaluations and those tastes. Where they exist, references to genre on *Genre Implosion* are designed to communicate an understanding of music's substantial non-musical content, and that content's necessity to *understanding* music – not to *enjoying* it and not to the subjective *imputation of meaning* inherent on some level to all listening. I strive imperfectly in some limited way to excise genre from listeners' reception of music, not by way of suggesting it shouldn't be there, but rather as a fresh perspective that might impact their relationship with music, hopefully moving towards ways of understanding music less constrained by genre than that encouraged by the music industry in general, and conventional radio in particular.

In the same vein, also conspicuously absent from *Genre Implosion's* commentary is any explicit attention to the well-known and popular problem of music not fitting into defined genres, appropriately bemoaned by artists who resent inaccurate categorisation of their music, and increasingly by individuals and groups similarly pigeon holed on the basis of musical genre stereotypes (i.e. African heritage = taste for hip-hop/R&B, etc.). Notwithstanding that in keeping with the show agenda of a limited excision of genre from musical reception I don't address this subject directly, much of the music I select fits into two non-genreal categories of my own invention: those pieces which in some sense typify a musical genre, and those which cross genreal lines or otherwise defy genreal classification.



For the show's theme music, used always at the beginning of each episode to underscore the opening commentary, and usually reprised at the end, I selected *Rain Dance* by U.K. "new age/progressive" (now *there's* a problematic genre name...) band Adiemus and trans-genreal musician Karl Jenkins. From an introduction of eerie rain sticks leading to an ambiguous percussion groove, a quasi-ethnic lyric (which is entirely instrumental, and which despite the implication of some 'African-ness' means nothing in any language) a prominent celtic-sounding flute, symphonic brass section and then the rest of the London Philharmonic, the piece thwarts genre detection, or at least tends to lead one away whenever you think you 'have it'. The band name "Adiemus", by the way, is not actual Latin - it too is entirely made up.

The show disclaimers were important. The 30-minute format, the limitations of my own and CFMU's recording libraries, and my own limited time available to put the show together would never let me discuss any show theme and illustrate it in anything more than a broad, survey context. Even suggesting that any episode was an actual survey of its topic, as I discovered, was going too far, as lively listener feedback often pointed out aspects of a show theme which had gone untreated for reasons of time. While I tried to illustrate musical themes crossing into a wide, balanced and non-ordered or privileged set of genres which spanned an enormous range, there could be no promise to address broad categories like 'classical', 'popular', 'jazz', etc. in any democratic way: there was just no time, nor obviously did all lend themselves equally well to every show theme. The longest track that has appeared on Genre Implosion to date was just over seven minutes (a necessity of the 30-minute show format, and the need to make succinct points in the commentary which listeners could quickly find in the music itself), a

standard which effectively excluded huge parts of the musical repertory. Perhaps most importantly I tried to make it clear that I was sharing a highly subjective set of perceptions of meaning which I hope listeners would find interesting and useful, rather than alleging them to be in any sense universally, uniquely or unequivocally 'true'.

One interesting and unexpected challenge that came of the technical process of recording and editing a collection of such divergent content was that of audio level. The between five and seven musical tracks on each show typically include radio-produced pop, jazz, hip-hop, etc. with equalized (and maximised) levels throughout, traditional folk, classical and world musics recorded at very low, simple levels, and symphonic contemporary and other styled selections containing both extremes. The dilemma that emerged was of how these levels should interact in a non-hierarchical way (i.e. not privileging music designed and produced for radio play over that which was not), and just as interestingly how they should interact with a single host's voice, which would seem unnaturally loud next to soft selections and soft next to loud. While the practicality and the classical format standard of maximising the louds just below peaking levels, and never adjusting the internal balance of any track (i.e. allowing the softs to go as soft as they would, even to the point of near-disappearance) usually prevailed, it couldn't escape my attention that the maximised levels of studio-processed pop tended to be privileged in the overall impression, giving a sense of more sustained force and impact, as compared for example to generally loud symphonic music, of which sudden drops in volume are a defining feature.

The question of the host's voice then led me to wonder what 'genre' of radio host is indicated by a non-genreal show. In the industry standard of format radio, adopting a genreal

format brings with it certain stylistic patterns of DJ practice and assumptions about listener expectations. The alternative (CBC/CFMU, et al.) to this is multi-format radio in which individual shows and their hosts deal mainly with one genreal category or set of categories: in this case while a show's genre may suggest a certain 'type' in DJ practice a broadcaster like the CBC with an all-professional staff will respect these differences while nonetheless ensuring that there is some commonality of 'hosting style' across its offerings (whereas a broadcaster like CFMU using nearly all volunteer hosts will on principle and out of necessity reject this notion). Again – a pragmatic solution dictated that I be my relatively scholarly classical-format self, although it seemed necessary and appropriate to balance my knowledge and opinions with a healthy dose of humour at both my own expense and that of the music comprising the show's "world."

A brief word of reference to the Genre Implosion online survey at [genreimplosion.ca](http://genreimplosion.ca) (see Appendix) will suffice: the device of a listener survey was never expected to (nor did it) attract a large enough sample to be empirically useful; nor was it ever intended to simulate any statistical study of listener/surfer concept or use of musical genre. Indeed, even had it aired on a more widely-heard medium than CFMU's student-run, low-power and Niagara Escarpment-contained station, a show-conception like *Genre Implosion* was unlikely ever to attract a truly broad listener base, requiring a certain level of knowledge of, curiosity about, and engagement with the genre system in order to sustain interest. Rather it was included on the website as a way of allowing listeners to interact with the concept of genre in a direct way the show itself would by definition not provide, and to encourage feedback into the show production by way of 'genre tips' – that is, listeners' conceptions of pieces falling into my own two über-genreal categories: namely those

that *really work* with the genreal system by typifying a category, and those that *really don't*, by defying classification.

Indeed it was the request for these “genre tips” (genre-typifying and genre-defying pieces) that for me returned the most lively and interesting response content. While, as I understand to be true in many surveys, respondents typically tended to leave a few questions/fields blank, these ones – despite being located at the end of the survey (along with the easier “Favourite Genre” question at the beginning) – were completed in 100% of responses.

I provide the following results only as a matter of interest to the reader, rather than as anything more significant about the general musical public.

- Question 8: while predictably (considering the presumably multi-genre-inclined following of a show-concept like GI) no respondent could limit their musical taste to a single genre, most respondents reported just one or two genres as the upper limit to their musical preference. While it should be remembered that the flexibility of scope inherent to the word ‘genre’, this points either to a narrower-than-expected general taste in music or else a tendency to define genres in somewhat broad terms (such as ‘jazz’ and ‘classical’, each of which encompass a great deal of diversity)
- Question 1: The case of respondents referring to the problematic ‘classical’ genre was interesting, and outlined many of the classifying parameters and levels typically used to subdivide it. “Favourite genres” falling under this über-genreal classification referred to by name included ‘classical’, ‘baroque’, ‘baroque French opera’, ‘early music’ and ‘symphonic tone poems’. In the realm of genre tips the largest proportion of respondents chose classical pieces as being able to both to typify a genre and to defy classification (in the latter case, John Cage’s *4’33”* was cited a number of times).
- Question 7: While a significant majority of respondents professed some difficulty in the genreal classification of the music *that they like*, they tended to profess some ease with the classification of music in general. This complex indicator points, at least, to understandably higher stakes (and thus more care in generalisation) in the music that one ‘likes’, and a corresponding greater comfort with simplification of other types.

While listener feedback was very appreciative and pointed to some having experienced an opening out of their understanding and perception of music more independent of genre, *Genre Implosion* was ultimately an exercise in my personal freedom from some of the genre paradigms that have attended my own thought. Some have misconstrued a GI 'message' that "genre doesn't work" or "genre doesn't matter" – indeed it does both. My version, if à la McLuhan there must be a message for this medium, is "genre doesn't define music: it only imitates and mocks it." As the slogan that begins every show runs: "They're your ears: believe them."

## Conclusions: Pragmatism and Postmodernity

In his essay, *Postmodernism and Music*, Derek Scott refers several times to the notion of musical meaning -- most substantially under the heading "Styles as Discursive Codes."

Musical meanings are not labels arbitrarily thrust upon abstract sounds; these sounds and their meanings originate in a social process and achieve their significance within a particular social context. Musical signifiers develop in tandem with society.<sup>112</sup>

Scott argues that meanings accorded to musical sounds are devised and implemented by both the producers and consumers of music. The same could be said of the meaning level represented by musical genre: a piece written with a musical genre in mind, even if it neatly fits that genre for the purposes of the composer, is in no way guaranteed of conforming to or

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<sup>112</sup> Scott, Derek B. "Postmodernism and Music" in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim. (Oxford: Routledge, 2005). p.127

communicating that genre in the ears of a given listener. Semantic disputes that cloud and weaken music's impact break out: some form of mediation seems in order.

In a 1904 lecture, early pragmatist William James recounted a dispute among his friends about a person on the side of a tree opposite to a squirrel. This person ran around the tree in an unsuccessful attempt to catch a glimpse of the squirrel, while the latter fled around the tree trunk, always staying opposite his pursuer and thus evading his sight. The dispute was over whether or not the person 'went around' the squirrel, and the disputers sought James' help in settling the question. James picks up the story:

The resultant metaphysical problem now is this: Does the man go round the squirrel or not? He goes round the tree, sure enough, and the squirrel is on the tree; but does he go round the squirrel? In the unlimited leisure of the wilderness, discussion had been worn threadbare. Every one had taken sides, and was obstinate; and the numbers on both sides were even. Each side, when I appeared therefore appealed to me to make it a majority. Mindful of the scholastic adage that whenever you meet a contradiction you must make a distinction, I immediately sought and found one, as follows: "Which party is right," I said, "depends on what you practically mean by 'going round' the squirrel. If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of him again, obviously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on the right of him, then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go round him, for by the compensating movements the squirrel makes, he keeps his belly turned towards the man all the time, and his back turned away. Make the distinction, and there is no occasion for any further dispute. You are both right and both wrong according as you conceive the verb 'to go round' in one practical fashion or the other."<sup>113</sup>

James then went on to offer his solution as a simple application of a *pragmatic method*, and it is this way of thinking that lies at the heart of pragmatism:

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<sup>113</sup> James, William. "What is Pragmatism?" in *William James: Writings 1902-1920*. online document, (accessed [3 March 2006]) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/james.htm>.

Is the world one or many? – fated or free? – material or spiritual? – here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right.<sup>114</sup>

Even the newcomer to pragmatist philosophy will note the preponderance of the word 'practical' and its derivatives in the above definition, and recognise the pragmatic movement (an American one, which dates from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) as being a non-determinist one based on the principles of practicality, plurality and, well, peace. And while much of this study has been couched in theoretical constructions inherently critical of genre, the pragmatic view seems a constructive one to apply to the subject, which in some ways provides as many questions to postmodernity as postmodernity provides it with answers.

However one chooses to view genre's construction, function and purpose, it exists ultimately because we ask a form of order of the world around us: at times the world obligingly complies with our request – at times, not. Richard Rorty positions our tendency to locate somewhat organic phenomena like musical genre within the paradigm of science by explaining the logical empiricist position that gave rise to a "philosophy of science:"

...since man was a rational animal and science the acme of rationality, science was the *paradigmatic* human activity. What little there was to say about other areas of culture amounted to a wistful hope that some of them (e.g. philosophy) might themselves become more scientific.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> James, William. "What is Pragmatism?" in *William James: Writings 1902-1920*. online document, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/james.htm>. (accessed 3 March 2006)

<sup>115</sup> Rorty, Richard. "Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. p.46

Much of this study has been positioned in terms of a 'natural' phenomenon of musical genre finding itself trapped at the end of modernity in the 'unnatural' world of science. Is musical genre a science, or is it not? I believe that, while it is hard to imagine even the most scientifically-oriented 20<sup>th</sup> century musicologist or music theorist hoping (wistfully or otherwise) that musical genre as a particular "other area of culture" might become more scientific, the axiomatic assumptions of science as scholarly determinant have dictated too much about the genre system of today, and indeed underlie a great deal of current scholarly work. Might, for example, the familiar micro-concentration on individual historical genres and the resulting preponderance of work so intimately engaging specific nuances of music history in fact be created at the expense of any more broadly-conceived investigation of the terrestrial history and trajectories of music as cultural presence and practice?

So, as this study has endeavoured to do, instead of arguing any specific 'nature' of musical genre (i.e. whether musical genre is system, phenomenon or construction) the pragmatist concentrates on its impact upon the world: seeking models of understanding rather than positing any inherent nature. Instead of seeking to argue any form of universality of application of postmodern thought to the totality of musical genre I have sought applications that are instructive and intriguing in a postmodern context. Instead of entering the still-active minefield of the autonomous/textual and the encultured/contextual models of musical study, I have sought more to embrace both (as James did the proponents and opponents of the 'round-the-squirrel' debate) contending that both can be in some sense 'right.'



To carry the pragmatic method to its full consummation... do the studies (or as McLuhan would have preferred, the probes) of musical genre in this paper make any practical difference? If the concepts of Adorno, McLuhan and Baudrillard do indeed map convincingly onto musical genre, and possibly suggest emergent postmodern understandings that better frame genre than those we have inherited from modernity, what have we gained?

An Adornian reading of the relocation of the Anglican chant genre as artwork may help to explain the “nut cases” from which Neil Colliers claims to make his living. McLuhan’s model for the behaviour of media may provide some insight into why the sacred songs of old time country music seemed to effect their own popular retrieval after having been ‘driven back into the hills’ by Nashville and syndicated radio. My reading of contemporary worship music as a Baudrillardian simulacrum in the traditional church musical milieu may account for what appears to have been a certain subversion of reality as its attractive properties failed to materialise for churches who chose to engage it. But even if none of these is “true” (and indeed none is invulnerable to critique), each represents, I would argue, some enrichment of understanding – a more colourful picture of phenomena and events dulled and obscured by history, and by no means a modern-style pronouncement upon the ‘truth’ of that history.

One thing we have not gained from (nor was it ever on the agenda of) this study is any fuller, more factual understanding of any individual musical genre than could be gained from the many more exhaustive musicological studies now filling the bookshelves and journal pages of musical academia. Musicology, and its recent interest in the ‘popular’ musics of the world (and in particular in Europe and North America, where a ‘classical canon’ paradigm has previously

discouraged study into this area) is reaping rich rewards for our understanding not just of those in places and traditions unfamiliar to ourselves, but also of our own places and traditions, and by extension, ourselves. Philosophical accounts and interpretations of reality such as this one carry with them the risk of being more interesting than definitive, more open than concise, more gentle than forceful in their particular version of rational persuasion... but postmodernity has confirmed that they have their place. Turning once more to Rorty, he suggests that rationality can locate within not simple assessments of reasonable 'truth', but within a spirit of inquiry and persuasive arguments rather than legalistic proofs:

On a pragmatist view, rationality is not the exercise of a faculty called "reason" – a faculty which stands in some determinate relation to reality. Nor is it the use of a method. It is *simply* a matter of being open and curious, and of relying on persuasion rather than force.<sup>116</sup>

All three accounts I have proposed deal with a genre's movement or relocation under conditions of change. Arguably, these genreal migrations have the potential to reveal more about the flexible and evolutionary nature of musical genre than older, more static models which might imply that genres are fixed and immutable types consecrated by history. In the case of Anglican chant's shift from a Reformation-devised medium of congregational psalmody into a choral work of art, the change is found within the ultra-standardised genre's service (as Adorno posited concerning the popular music of his time) in the stead of a repertoire of individual pieces. The relocation of this 'artwork' has less to do with production and social control as in Adorno's model than it does, perhaps, with similar migratory phenomena such as jazz's expansion from the

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<sup>116</sup> Rorty, Richard. "Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. p.62

night club into the concert hall. In the case of old-time country religious songs' migration to and subsequent transformation in the urban radio space of the 1930s and the glitter and authentic pretence of Nashville (only to be retrieved in the "roots revival" in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century), the movement is found in the genre's behaviour as a medium after McLuhan, manifesting extension, obsolescence, retrieval, and reversal within its cultural milieu – or more generally, as a dynamic entity both influenced by and profoundly influencing media and the humanity those media seek to extend. In the case of mainline churches' less-than-successful adoption of Contemporary Christian Music for use in otherwise traditional worship, the change reveals evidence of a Baudrillardian simulacrum, in which the desirable signifiers of youthfulness, energy, rebellion and social justice refer to imagined (but non-existent) communities of worshippers, and replace more demonstrable commodities such as the 'real communities' in which churches work and live.

This study has sought within the phenomenon of musical genre patterns of activity and behaviour, and models of understanding posited by some of postmodernism's formative thinkers, in partial tribute to their originators, yes, but more pragmatically in search of a greater understanding of a dimension of musical life whose significance has greatly increased in musical production and reception even as its efficacy has declined under the weight of what I have argued to be an implosive system. It would be my hope that new understandings of musical genre – such as those I propose – may be gained by considering the ideas of Adorno, McLuhan, Baudrillard, might lead to ways of improving its systemic value, or at least discourage its being mistaken for a more scientific device than it is. While genre's process of signification will always be problematic, its referent, music, is a beloved and celebrated presence in the lives of many

people, and a significant tool in constructing individual and communal identity. Music will always 'work', no matter the trouble we experience in classifying it, and the obstacles that process erects in accessing it. Moreover, when the limitations of musical genre in conveying meaning about music are as widely understood as I argue they are experienced, it might be hoped that music's *actual sound* could be foregrounded in its consumption over the many other images and ideas such as criticism attached parasitically to it: not just via the subjectivities of producer and consumer, but more troublingly by mediators such as corporate profits, propaganda, and power politics. "They're your ears: believe them."

Returning one final time to Rorty, and to this paper's opening epigraphic framing in "truth," contemporary pragmatism suggests that while there is a version of absolute truth such as the squirrel-debate protagonists sought, it is based not on reality but on our *understanding of* reality. If postmodernity illuminates some "truth" about musical genre it lies surely in the latter.

The pragmatist wants to derelativise both [ethics and science] affirming that in both we aim at what Williams thinks of as "absolute" truth while denying that this latter notion can be explicated in terms of the notion of "how things really are." The pragmatist does not want to explicate 'true' at all, and sees no point in either the absolute-relative distinction, or in the question of whether questions of appraisal *genuinely* arise. ...the pragmatist sees *no truth* in relativism.<sup>117</sup>

What is the truth about musical genre? Just as Rorty breaks with James' relativist view, if genre is better to serve a postmodern world it too must break with its modern legacy and reach deep into the sound and soul of the music it presumes to represent, just as that music reaches deep into the souls of those who hear it.

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<sup>117</sup> Rorty, Richard. "Is Science a Natural Kind?" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. p.59

## APPENDIX: Genre Implosion on CFMU 93.3FM

### Playlists November 2005 – March 2006

*(N.B. weekly dates without show descriptions represent rebroadcasts)*

#### Wed 9 November 2005 - SHOW I: INTRODUCTIONS

*Introductions often sound very different than the main body of a piece, and yet they've been crucial to attracting listeners into pieces of music since long before the sound byte made us just tend to change the channel. Throughout history they have tended to privilege this role, rather than immediately revealing the piece's main content.*

- trad. arr RAWLINS CROSS: MacPherson's Lament (3:59)  
(from 'Celtic Instrumentals')
- MIKE EVIN: Stay Gritty - 3:30  
(from 'I'll bring the Stereo')
- FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY: Grave-Allegro from String Symphony #2, op.36 (5:16)  
(Gewandhaus Orchester Leipzig/Kurt Masur)
- RICHARD & ROBERT SHERMAN/HOLLY COLE (Trust in me)  
(the Holly Cole Collection, Vol. I)
- BUGGLES: Video killed the radio star (4:09)
- Music 21:54

#### Wed 16 November 2005 - SHOW II: ENDINGS

*Endings have presented challenges to composers and performers, who frequently resort to formulae and clichés – even non-endings like the ubiquitous fade of pop music just to 'make it stop.' Yet, scanning history, we see just as many examples which echo their beginnings and even make radical departures in their closing seconds.*

- MICHAEL BUBLÉ: Fever (3:52)
- JOSSY ABRAMOVITCH: Turkish Circus (4:41)  
(Quartetto Gelato)
- SAMUEL HONG/ANNA GUO: Autumn Moon on a Calm Lake (4:50)  
(Toronto Dunhuang Chamber Ensemble)
- trad. Arr. CLAIRE LYNCH: Children of Abraham (2:56)
- MYCHAEL and JEFF DANNA: The Blood of Cu Chulainn (4:07)  
(from 'A Celtic Romance')
- BUCK 65: Wicked and Weird (3:12)
- Music 20:26

#### Wed 23 November 2005 - SHOW III: RHYTHM

*Central to a piece of music's life, rhythm is both a founding principle, a pervasive pattern of structure and a flexible parameter at the disposal of musicians and composers to make musical points, imbue energy, and finesse the mental connection between a piece and the body of the listener.*

- J.S. BACH: Prelude, BWV 846 from 'Das Wohltemperierte Klavier' (2:07)  
(Ton Koopman, harpsichord)
- AASHID HIMONS: Little Red Rooster (5:09)  
(The Mountain Soul Band, from 'West Virginia Hills')
- CHRISTÓBAL MORALES (c1500-1553): Sanctus (4:44)  
(Hilliard Ensemble, Jan Garbarek, Saxophone)
- DAN LOCKLAIR: Caput Serpentis from 'Constellations' (1:15)  
(George Ritchie, organ; Albert Rometo, percussion)
- FATALA (Guinean drumming ensemble): Yoky (2:03)
- MAURICE RAVEL: Daphnis et Chloe: Opening to Scene I (excerpt 2:30)  
(Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal / Charles Dutoit)

JOHN STAFFORD SMITH: Star Spangled Banner (excerpt 4:50)  
 (Jimmi Hendrix, recorded live at Woodstock)  
 ----- Music 22:08

### Wed 30 November 2005 - SHOW IV: MUSICAL PICTURES

*While the 19<sup>th</sup> century's debates about the merit of depicting explicit pictures, ideas, emotions and stories using music is mostly an oddity of history, the parameter of depiction is an enormous area of study in the musical world, and the efforts of those who create it. Here are a wide range of examples.*

SARAH McLACHLAN: Ice Cream (3:02)  
 (from 'Mirrored Ball')

SPACECRAFT: Hommage to Gaia (conclusion of 'Earthtime Tapestry') (3:19)  
 (Tony Gerber, Giles Reaves, John Rose and Diane Timmons)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY: Quant j'ai ouy le tambourin, from Trois chansons de Charles d'Orlean (1:41)  
 (Trillium Brass, from 'Revecy')

CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD: The Bluebird (3:14)  
 (John Laing Singers, from 'My Love dwelt in a Northern Land')

ANTONIO VIVALDI/THOMAS WILBRANT: Leaves and Lutes from 'Autumn/Winter' (4:26)  
 (from 'The Electric V.', a new perspective on Vivaldi's Four Seasons (1984))

HERBERT HOWELLS: The Polar Bear (from Snapshots, op.30) (2:19)  
 (Maraget Fingerhut, piano)

ROGER LEE: Don't Forget It (5:03)  
 (covered by the Polarity Bears on 'Tip of the Iceberg')

----- Music 23:04

### Wed 7 December 2005 - SHOW V: WINTER

*With winter firmly settling on GI's listening area, this show took last week's concept of depiction from the general to the specific by examining the place the idea of winter held in the creation of a wide range of musical selections.*

JEANETTE GALLANT: Winter's Moon (4:25)  
 (from Winter's Moon (1996))

Norwegian trad. arr ENSEMBLE POLARIS: Heiemo og Nøkken (3:55)  
 (arrangement and performance by Ensemble Polaris on Not much is worse than a troll.)

ANTONIO VIVALDI: Allegro (I from 'Winter' in The Four Seasons) (3:45)  
 (St. Paul Chamber Orchestra under Pinchas Zukerman)

FRANZ SCHUBERT: Erstarrung (Numbness) (3:14)  
 (Russell Braun and Carolyn Maul: Winterreise (Winter's Journey), D.911)

MIKE ELMER: English Winter White (3:22)  
 (recorded by Lyves Daily in 1992)

HUGH LECAINE: Dripsody (2:00)  
 (from the Naxos "Introduction to Canadian Music")

Swedish trad. arr. HEDNINGARNA: Aivoton (3:35)  
 (from Kaksil)

----- Music 24:15

### Wed 14 December 2005 - SHOW VI: COVER ME

*Covering, quotation and parody date back to the very beginning of musical history, and represent a mysterious fusion of one piece of music, complete with associations and context, with the creativity, ideas and assumptions of later composer/performers and their time. Here we investigate the practice as manifest specifically in genres of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

LEONARD COHEN: Hallelujah (4:00)  
 (Patricia O'Callaghan and Robert Kortgaard from "Real Emotional Girl")

MAURICE RAVEL: Rigaudon (from Le Tombeau de Couperin) (3:11)  
 (from Quartetto Gelato Travels the Orient Express")

AMERICAN TRAD. arr. JUNE TABOR: Git a long little doggie (2:49)  
 (from "Tubular Dogs" by Calgary's Mrs. Ackroyd Band)

LEWIS/YOUNG/HENDERSON: Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue (1:35)  
 (Ronald Curtis at the Compton Theatre Organ, Paramount Organ Studios)  
 DJ RON DON: Baby-Shining Star-Rude Bwoy Thug Life (4:57)  
 (from "Dancehall 21 Mix", Part II)  
 FRENCH TRAD. arr. MILLS/DEDRICK: Angels we have heard on high (4:14)  
 (Starscape Singers under Kenneth G. Mills from "The Song – the Heart of Christmas")  
 RODGERS & HART, arr. Aubrey Tadman & Band: I'd Like to Recognize The Tune (2:32)  
 (originally from "Too many Girls", arrangement on Tadman's CD "Stay with me")  
 ----- Music 23:18

**Wed 21 December 2005 - SHOW VII: TAKE ME THERE - The notion of Place in Music**

*Picking up once again the notion of depiction in music we survey various evocations of places familiar and exotic, and consider how composers have used music to take themselves and us to places real and imaginary.*

OSCAR PETERSON: Place St-Henri (3:55)  
 (Oscar Peterson Trio from "Canadiana Suite")  
 (unknown) Night of Naval Port (2:51)  
 (from "Meeting at Yurt, Music Album of Century", a Chinese light music collection)  
 JOHN WILLIAMS: Mos Eisley Spaceport (2:16)  
 (London Symphony Orchestra from the score to "Star Wars: A New Hope")  
 ESTRELLA MORENTE: Pilgrims (Buleria) (3:23)  
 (Spanish song from "My Songs and a Poem")  
 trad. arr. Paddy Moloney: Come by the Hills (4:15)  
 (sung by Rita McNeil on "Fire in the Kitchen")  
 LENNON/McCARTNEY: Strawberry Fields (5:26)  
 (from "The Beatles Gregorian Album (Liverpool Manuscripts)")  
 HATCH/PETULA CLARK: Downtown (3:04)  
 (as employed on the soundtrack for '32 Short Films about Glenn Gould')  
 ----- Music 25:16

**Wed 4 January 2006 - SHOW VIII: LEFTOVERS ON THE 11th DAY OF CHRISTMAS**

*With a bit of distance between us and the familiar musical avalanche of Christmas, we clean up a few leftovers ... not a cynical survey of perhaps the music industry's biggest bandwagon, but a look into some odd examples you may have missed.*

Spiritual arr. ROLAND CARTER: Mary had a Baby (4:25)  
 Nathaniel Dett Chorale / Melissa Davis, soloist; Joe Sealy, piano; Brainerd Blyden-Taylor, conductor  
 trad. arr. HOWARD LOPEZ: Rocking King W. (4:10)  
 (Music and Mistetoe by the Howard Lopez Orchestra, Christmas "gift" of a local Real Estate Agent)  
 various, arr. PETER GRAHAM: Shining Star (3:26)  
 (Canadian Staff Band of the Salvation Army on "Christmas Presence")  
 The BEACH BOYS: Little Saint Nick (1:57)  
 (from 'Ultimate Christmas', 1963)  
 Sarah HARMER: Greeting Card Aisle (4:32)  
 (from "All of Our Names" (2000))  
 Charl  lie COUTURE: Christmas Wrapping (5:16)  
 (The Waitresses, from the album of the same name)  
 ----- Music 23:46

**Wed 11 January 2006 - SHOW IX: OSTINATO: TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?**

*If you think a simple, relentless (or as the Italian word says literally, 'obstinate') figure is slim as foundational material for a piece of music, you're not alone... but how widely can you define the idea, and what have music's creators and genres done with it?*

J.S. BACH: Crucifixus from "Mass in B minor" (3:11)  
 (The Sixteen under the direction of Harry Christophers)  
 LORETTO REID & BRIAN TAHENY: Leon's Waltz (3:51)  
 (from "The Golden Dawn")

BELA BARTOK: Intermezzo from Concerto for Orchestra (4:02)  
 (Chicago Symphony conducted by Pierre Boulez)  
 LITTLE RICHARD: Good Golly Miss Molly (2:09)  
 DICK KOOMANS: Basso Ostinato (7:07)  
 (Paul Ayres at the organ of St. Peter's Church, Ealing (London, UK))  
 SWOLLEN MEMBERS: Steppin Through (2:45)  
 (from 'Monsters in the Closet')  
 ----- Music 23:05

**Wed 18 January 2006 - SHOW X: THE TROJAN HORSE - When a renegade instrument affects genre**

*Instrumentation is a powerful signifier for musical genre – but sometimes an unexpected 'stowaway' creeps in where you might not have been expecting it, affecting your perception of it, and often your general categorisation of it.*

RAWLINS CROSS: O Neil's March/The Haughs of Cromdale (3:14)  
 (from 'Celtic Instrumentals')  
 MODESTE MUSSORGSKY arr. Maurice Ravel: "The Old Castle" from 'Pictures at an Exhibition' (4:57)  
 (Dallas Symphony under the direction of Eduardo Mata)  
 VITAL INFORMATION: Cranial #6 Mata Hari (2:47)  
 (Steve Smith, Tom Coster, Baron Browne, Frak Gambale) from "Show 'em where you live"  
 JEAN-BAPTISTE LULLY arr. Kevin Mallon: Air pour les matelots jouans des Trompettes marines (2:24)  
 (Aradia Ensemble from 'Lully: Ballet Music for the Sun King')  
 WILLIS/BELOLO/MORALI: Y.M.C.A. (3:42)  
 (The Village People, title track from Y.M.C.A. (1978))  
 ANON 14th Century arr. Hilliard Ensemble/Garbarek: Credo in unum Deum (4:34)  
 (15th century mass movement with improvised saxophone descant, from "Officium (1994)")  
 J.S. BACH arr. Brouwer/Mulder/Elsen: Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565 (3:43)  
 (from KAJEM Play Bach)  
 ----- Music 25:21

**Wed 25 January 2006 - SHOW XI: COLOUR IN COMPOSITION**

*We explore conceptions of colour in compositions – whether you experience synaesthesia, the literal 'sight' of colours from listening to music or not, they are in the titles for the reason of giving you associations to attach to what you hear.*

ANDREW GILPIN: Blue Grass and Green Sky (3:23)  
 (Ebony & Ivory (Andrew Gilpin, keyboards and Fred Jacobowitz, clarinet))  
 arr. JOHN JACOB NILES: My Little Black Star (2:55)  
 (Alan Gasser, tenor with Becca Whitla, piano)  
 MIKE ELMER: Deep, Dark and Grey (3:22)  
 (Lyves Daily: Mike Elmer, Brad Monk, Chris Ridout and Chris Dawes)  
 JIMMIE RODGERS: Last Blue Yodel (Yodelin' my way back home) (2:33)  
 (from "Last Blue Yodel" (Women make a fool out of me, after his death of TB in 1933))  
 ANDREA KUZMICH: Kooz Blooz (3:59)  
 (Andrea Kuzmich with Mark Hundevad, drums; Dafyd Hughes, piano; Chris Banks, bass)  
 LOUIS LOUIGUY/EDITH PIAF: La Vie en Rose from "Les Chemins de l'amour" (3:23)  
 (Jean Stilwell with Robert Kortgaard, piano; Joaquin Valdepenas and Mark Promane, clarniets)  
 STEVE MACKINNON: Red Cardinal from 'Another Day' (2:57)  
 (Molly Johnson with Colleen Allen, clarinet; Andrew Craig, piano; Mike Downes, bass and Mark McLean, drums)  
 ----- Music 22:32

**Wed 8 February 2006 - SHOW XII: THE VOICE, Part I (the high, clear female voice)**

*We begin a four-part series tracking the four traditional voice ranges (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) as manifest in music throughout history with an examination of the pervasive high woman's voice, with its associations of innocence, childhood and more.*

MYCHAEL DANNA: The Love of Heaven (4:08)  
 (Sara Clancy from 'A Celtic Romance')  
 BEV & ROB FOSTER: A Dad like you, arr. Bev Foster and Carmon Barry (1:56)



(Josee Foster, vocal with Bev Foster, piano and keyboards from 'Trustpoints')  
 CLAUDIN DE SERMISY: Jouisissance vous donneray, 1536 (2:08)  
 (Meredith Hall, soprano, David Klausner, recorder and Terry McKenna, lute (Toronto Consort))  
 trad. American: Down to the River to Pray (2:53)  
 (Alison Krauss with the choir of First Baptist Church, White House, TN)  
 LEONARD COHEN: Hallelujah (4:00)  
 (Patricia O'Callaghan, soprano with Robert Kortgaard, piano from 'Real Emotional Girl')  
 trad. Armenian: Oor ess mayr eem (Where are you, O Mother) (3:14)  
 (Isabel Bayrakdarian with orchestra conducted by Raffi Armenian)  
 BJORK: Aurora (4:30)  
 (from the 'Vespertine' album)  
 ----- Music 22:49

### Wed 15 February 2006 - SHOW XIII: THE VOICE Part II (the low, rich female voice)

*Lower voices tend to connote age, authority and wisdom, but have also variously represented villainhood and other dangers, including sexual. In part two of our voice types series we find angels, mothers, whores and even supernatural figures encoded with the richness of the alto voice.*

FELIX MENDELSSOHN: O Rest in the Lord (from ELIJAH, op.70) (2:53)  
 (Patricia Bardon with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment)  
 trad. Columbian arr. Totó la Momposina (y sus tambores): Mapale (2:33)  
 (from 'La Candela Viva' (Real World Records, 1993))  
 KOKO TAYLOR with MIGHTY JOE YOUNG: Voodoo Woman (3:47)  
 (from the 'Rough Guide to American Roots' compilation (2003))  
 JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH: 'Wer Sünde tut, der ist vom Teufel' from Cantata BWV 54 (2:57)  
 (Andreas Scholl, countertenor/Orchestre du Collegium Vocale, Philippe Herreweghe, dir.)  
 trad. Irish arr. LAURA SMITH/PADDY MALONE: My Bonnie lies over the ocean (4:21)  
 (arrangement of a traditional air for the 1998 "Fire in the Kitchen" celtic compilation)  
 BILLY AUSTIN/LOUIS JORDAN: Is you is or is you ain't my baby? (4:57)  
 (sung by Diana Krall and her band on 'Only Trust your heart' (1995))  
 ----- Music 21:28

### Wed 22 February 2006 - SHOW XIV: THE VIOLIN

*Taking a one-week break from voice types, a GI instrumental showcase: the Violin. Besides tracking many familiar archetypical incarnations of the violin we see a few unexpected appearances, such as the allure of the habanera and the exhilaration of fusion.*

trad. Irish arr. LEAHY: Medley: Madame Bonaparte / Devil's Dream / Mason's Apron (4:14)  
 (performed by Leahy on the 1998 'Fire in the Kitchen' compilation)  
 William LAWES: Fantasy from Consort Set a 5 in C major (2:22)  
 (Rose Consort of Viols with Timothy Roberts, organ)  
 Sportpalastwaltzer arr. S. Translateur: Wiener Praterleben (3:53)  
 (Maastricht Salon Orchestra from "Serenata")  
 trad. American arr. Hartford: I am a Man of Constant Sorrow (2:34)  
 (recorded for the soundtrack of "O Brother, Where art Thou" (2000))  
 Maurice RAVEL: Piece en forme de habanera (2:56)  
 (Augustin Dumay, violin and Maria Joao Pires, Deutsche Grammophon 445-880-2)  
 Jean-Luc PONTY: Question with no answer (3:28)  
 The MAHAVISHRU ORCHESTRA: Open Country Joy (3:53)  
 ----- Music 23:47

### Wed 1 March 2006 - SHOW XV: THE VOICE, Part III (The low male voice)

*Returning to voice types we look into various roles given the low male voice, from the traditional authority figures and villains of opera, to the related father figures of country music, the attitude-songs of punk and the overtly sexual Barry White...*

W.A. MOZART: O Isis und Isiris (from Die Zauberflöte) (2:50)

(Paul Grindlay, bass-baritone; Kathleen van Mourik, piano)  
 trad. (Carter Family) Will the Circle be Unbroken (4:19)  
 (Ashid Himons with the Mountain Soul Band on 'West Virginia Hills')  
 BARRY WHITE: I'm Gonna Love you just a little more, baby (3:59)  
 (1994 Polygram release "All-Time Greatest Hits")  
 RAZ, DWA, TRZY: I Tak Warto Zyc (And it's worth it to live like that) (4:14)  
 (Polish band from Various Artists 'Ethno Punk around the World with Attitude'...)  
 RICHARD RODGERS & LORENZ HART: My Funny Valentine (2:29)  
 (Frank Sinatra, recorded in Los Angeles in 1953 for 'Songs for Young Lovers')  
 trad. arr. Ralf Hamm, Markus Staab, Claus Zundel: Tor-Cheney-Nahana (Winter Ceremony) (3:45)  
 (Sacred Spirit from 'Chants and Dances of the Native Americans')  
 ----- Music 21:36

### Wed 8 March 2006 - SHOW XVI: THE VOICE, Part IV (The high male voice)

*Completing our tetrad of voice types we survey the high male voice in its many incarnations, from the ambiguous countertenor as Holy Spirit in Bach's cantatas through the ultra-heroics of opera, the androgyny of modern-era pop and interestingly, the appropriation of the high voice as technique within genres of low voice.*

GIACOMO PUCCINI: Nessun Dorma from "Turandot" (3:06)  
 (Andrea Bocelli, Moscow Radio Symphony/Mladimir Fedoseyev)  
 J.S. BACH: Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn (2:18)  
 (from 'Christ lag in Todesbanden, BWV 4, Peter Schreier, Bach-Ensemble/Helmuth Rilling)  
 YOUSOU N'DOUR: Medina (3:21)  
 (from Yousou N'Dour - contemporary Senegalese band)  
 J. LIEBER and M. STROLLER: Yakety Yak (1:48)  
 (from 'The Coasters', 1958)  
 SHAWN DESMAN: Shook (3:32)  
 (from 'Shawn Desman', 2002)  
 NICKELBACK: Someday (3:27)  
 (from 'The Long Road' album, 2003)  
 DEXY'S MIDNIGHT RUNNERS: Come on Eileen (4:06)  
 (from 1982)  
 ----- Music 21:38

### Wed 22 March 2006 - SHOW XVII: SMALL ENSEMBLES, Part I (the solo instrument)

*A series begins today examining small ensembles according to number of performers, beginning with the smallest possible ensemble – the soloist. From ancient chant to modern classical and popular musics the soloist connotes not just solitude, but an implied intimacy between the listener and the performer, even when that performer sits far away at the organ console.*

Ambrosian Chant: Omnes Patriarchae (1:24)  
 (Manuela Schenale, the In dulci jubilo singers under Albert Turco)  
 American Southern traditional: O Death (3:21)  
 (performed by Mountain Gospel artist Ralph Stanley)  
 trad. Chinese: Flowers on the Brocade (2:08)  
 (performed by Ting Hong, Zheng (Toronto Dunhuang Ensemble))  
 trad. Venezuelan: Waltz (1:27)  
 (performed by Mike Whitla, guitar)  
 JOHN BUCKLEY: First movement from "Sonata for Solo Horn" (3:45)  
 (performer unknown, 1995 release of the Contemporary Music Centre of Ireland)  
 J.S. BACH: Prelude & Fugue, E, BWV 854 (2:42)  
 (performed by Ton Koopman, harpsichord, 1983)  
 BILLY JOEL: Air (Dublinesque) (3:46)  
 (performed by Richard Joo, 2001)  
 BOELLMANN: Toccata (Suite Gothique) (3:59)  
 (Keith S. Toth at the organ of Brick Presbyterian Church, New York)  
 ----- Music 22:32

**Wed 29 March 2006 - SHOW XVIII: SMALL ENSEMBLES, Part II (the duo)**

*In contrast to his or her implied intimacy with the solo performer, the listener becomes spectator/voyeur of this intimacy in others when a second performer is added. As an added dimension we begin to see hierarchical relationships such as that of soloist/accompanist, leader/sideman, composer/collaborator that affect our understanding and reception of music.*

- trad. Latvian arr. AURI: Es Redežu Jurina (1:40)  
 (from 'Beyond the River', 1993)  
 MAURICE RAVEL: Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Faure (2:23)  
 (Augustin Duamy, violin, Maria Joao Pires, piano)  
 MUDDY WATERS: I Feel like Going Home (3:07)  
 (from 'Country Blues')  
 JOHN LAING: Christopher Smart from 'Three Profiles' (1:24)  
 (text by John Ferns; Janet Obermeyer, soprano; John Laing, piano)  
 MYRON ROBERTS: Dialogue from 'Five for Organ and Marimba' (2:25)  
 (George Ritchie, organ; Albert Rometo, percussionist)  
 GIUSEPPE VERDI arr. Alfred Lebeau: Dies Irae (Messa da Requiem) (2:25)  
 (Matteo Galli, Harmonium; Francesco Attesti, piano)  
 JOHN B. SEBASTIAN: I had a dream (2:41)  
 (recorded live at Woodstock, 1969)  
 LATOUCHE/MOROSO: A Lazy Afternoon (3:43)  
 (Guido Basso, flugelhorn; Doug Riley, Hammond C3 organ)  
 -----Music 21:54

**Wed 5 April 2006 - SHOW XIX: SMALL ENSEMBLES, Part III (the trio)**

*The trio is stuck somewhere betwixt and between the simplicity and intimacy of smaller groups and the power, scope and complexity of larger groups: yet it defines genres of informal choral singing, jazz and folk, and further disturbs notions of hierarchy which seemed so simple in the duo...*

- JOE LIGGINS: The Honey Dripper (2:24)  
 (Oscar Peterson Trio (with Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen) from 'Night Train' (1962))  
 JOHN ISHAM: When Celia was Learning on the Spinnet (2:17)  
 (from 'Alchemy' by the MadriGals: Trish O'Reilley, Abby Zotz, Denise Norman)  
 J.S. BACH: Canonus Perpetuus from 'Musikalisches Opfer' (2:36)  
 (Janet See, flute; John Holloway, violin; Japp ter Linden, 'cello; Davitt Moroney, harpsichord)  
 JOSE MIGUEL MARQUEZ and ROBERTO MARQUEZ: Chiluanos (2:31)  
 (the Chilean folk trio 'Illapu' on guitar, harp and flute)  
 KYP HARNESS: Houdini in Reverse (2:58)  
 (Kyp Harness, Dave Pedliham, Dale Morningstar guitar, bass, drums, and all singing vocals)  
 JIMMIE RODGERS: Standing on the Corner (Blue Yodel #9) (2:39)  
 (Jimmie Rodgers with Lillian Rodgers, piano; Louis Armstrong, trumpet)  
 HOSSAM RAMZY: Fallahi (2:58)  
 (Egyptian drumming trio)  
 IGOR STRAVINSKY, arr Timporg Trio: Marsch, Walzer & Polka (4:05)  
 (Timporg Trio: Markus Kuhnig & Wolfgang Sieber, organ duo; Christoph Kobelt, percussion)  
 ----- Music 22:48

**Wed 12 April 2006 - SHOW XX: THE PIANO**

*Another GI instrumental showcase, Show 20 tackles (or more realistically, begins to tackle) the piano, which despite its relative youth has perhaps the largest repertoire and cross-genreal profile in the world. Equally at home in classical and popular musics it bridges one of the notoriously unbridgeable genreal divides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

- BILLY JOEL: Waltz #3 "For Lola" (3:28)  
 (Richard Joo, piano from "Fantasies and Delusions", 2001)  
 GERSHWIN arr Marshall: Improvisation on "Fascinating Rhythm" (2:28)  
 (Wayne Marshall: 'A Gershwin Songbook')  
 SCHOENBERG: Leicht, zart from Six Little Pieces for Piano, op.19 (1:26)

(Glenn Gould, piano (as featured in Francois Girard's '32 Short Films about Glenn Gould'))  
FRANCIS POULENC: Prélude (Modéré) from Sonata for Piano four hands (2:38)  
(John & Anne-Marie Egan "Two pianos at the Twin Towers", St. Joseph's College, Rensselaer, Indiana)  
CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS: Allegro Scherzando from Concerto #2 in G minor, Op.22 (6:02)  
(Idil Biret, piano; London Philharmonia Orchestra under James Loughran)  
DOUG RILEY: Peace Dance (6:22)  
(Doug Riley on 'Freedom' (Duke Street))  
----- Music 22:24

**Wed 19 April 2006 - SHOW XXI: SMALL ENSEMBLES, Part IV (the quartet)**

*Moving up to four performers, the quartet conveys to both performers and listeners the true sense of a group, and broadens the scope to the point of offering multiple choices for melody/accompaniment, harmonic/soloistic, and corresponding greater textural possibilities. It also defines a number of new ensemble types: the string quartet, the basic rock 'n roll band to name two.*

KENNETH RICHARD: Arc de Triomphe Two Step (3:16)  
(performed by Beausoleil (violin, accordion, guitar, autoharp))  
CHUCK BERRY: Maybelline (2:24)  
(recorded 1955)  
MAURICE RAVEL: Assez vif: très rythmé (from String Quartet in F) (6:08)  
(performed by the Britten String Quartet)  
ANON. (Codex Calixtinus) Benedicamus trope: Vox nostra resonat (1:35)  
(performed by Anonymous 4 on 'Miracles of Santiago')  
FRITZ KREISLER arr. Solomon: Tambourin Chinois ('Chinese Drum') (4:14)  
(performed by Quartetto Gelato on 'Quartetto Gelato Travels the Orient Express')  
STEVE SMITH, TOM COSTER, BARON BROWNE: Time Tunnel (5:37)  
(performed by Vital Information (above plus Frank Gambale) on "Come on In")  
----- Music 22:52

## Genre Implosion Listener Survey

Help Genre Implosion study Musical Genre!

Fill out this form, answering questions about your own musical tastes and behaviour. The survey takes no more than 3 minutes, but if you don't have time skip to the end and suggest one or two pieces of music you know as follows:

- a piece (song, composition) that for you perfectly typifies a musical genre, and
- a piece (song, composition) that in some way defies genre classification.

Your responses will help GI understand the role of musical genre in shaping our musical world. All information submitted to Genre Implosion remains confidential, and will in no way be attributed in the project findings.

- 1) What is your favourite musical genre?
- 2) What do you like about it?
- 3) What defines this musical genre for you?
- 4) What are its musical characteristics (why it sounds like this musical genre and not some other)?
- 5) What are its non-musical characteristics (other than the music itself... e.g. subject of lyrics, use or application, image of artists, production quality)
- 6) Rate the sources you use to hear or buy music of this genre, numbering from 1 (best) to 6 (poorest)

Live  
 CD/DVD store  
 radio station or programme  
 music TV station or program (Much Music, MTV, Variety special)  
 movies with scores in this genre (i.e. Soul: The Commitments; Classic 50s: American Graffiti)  
 Internet download site  
 Podcast

7) Agree or Disagree:

The music I like defies general classification.  
Agree    Disagree    Not that simple  
I like different musical genres for different moods/activities.  
Agree    Disagree    Not that simple  
I can easily classify most music I hear into genres.  
Agree    Disagree    Not that simple

8) Describe your taste in music:

I could name more than ten musical genres I REALLY like.  
I could name five musical genres I REALLY like.  
I only REALLY like a couple of musical genres  
The one I specified above is the only one I REALLY like.

9) Describe your tendency to experiment:

very experimental - I go out of my way to hear new types of music.  
somewhat experimental - I occasionally try unfamiliar types of music.  
not very experimental - I rarely go beyond familiar tastes.  
not experimental - why bother? I stick with what I like.

10) Describe your experience with trying new music

I usually have a good idea I'm going to like or dislike something before hearing it.  
I'm often unexpectedly attracted to (repulsed by) music I thought I would dislike (like).  
When I try new musical genres I rarely have strong feelings (positive or negative).  
N/A (I don't really try new musical genres).

11) Name a piece (song, composition) that for you perfectly typifies a musical genre of your choice.

12) Name a piece (song, composition) that in some way defies genre classification.

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