

WM10

CSW
update

CELEBRATING
25 YEARS!



Writing about Music

**A SPECIAL ISSUE EDITED BY
ALEXANDRA APOLLONI,
NINA SUN EIDSHEIM, AND
JILL ROGERS**



Listen While You Read

SOMETHING WEIRD AND WONDERFUL emerged at the very end of “Reverberating Undergrounds: The Sounds of Queer Sociability” panel. After more than an hour of presentations that were thoughtful and thought-provoking but made of words, words, words, Professor Mitchell Morris, Department of Musicology, clicked a button on a laptop and the voice of Poly Styrene filled the room: “Some people say little girls should be seen and not heard. But I say, Oh Bondage! Up Yours!” Yet, I can only type the lyric that she blared. I cannot type the music or describe it in a way that will allow you to experience the joy of its dissonant fury—if you haven’t heard the song before. Further, it’s joy that I feel when I hear it. Your response

to the drill-bit juggernaut of Lora Logic’s saxophone may perhaps differ.

And that is why writing about music is hard. Those of us who want to think about music and share our thoughts are continually fumbling for ways to use words to express the sensations and the feelings and the ideas in our bodies when we listen to music. It is easier—or at least a more straightforward task—to trace the queer history of the song “Frankie and Johnny,” list off the subsequent chart success of bands that played at Coachella in 1999, or document the time signatures of Led Zeppelin’s “The Crunge.” Talking about how those shifting time signatures can creep you

out is trickier. And that’s where this special issue of *CSW Update* begins: writing about music. Listen as you read. Your ear might catch some snatches of the music within the lines of type.

–Brenda Johnson-Grau

Note: “Reverberating Undergrounds: The Sounds of Queer Sociability” panel on April 8, 2010, was part of the “Homosexualities, from Antiquity to the Present: Worlds, Subjections, Visibilities” series. Organized by Professor Joseph Bristow, Department of English, the seminar is a year-long Mellon-funded Sawyer seminar that concentrates on approaches to the study of same-sex desire from antiquity to the present.

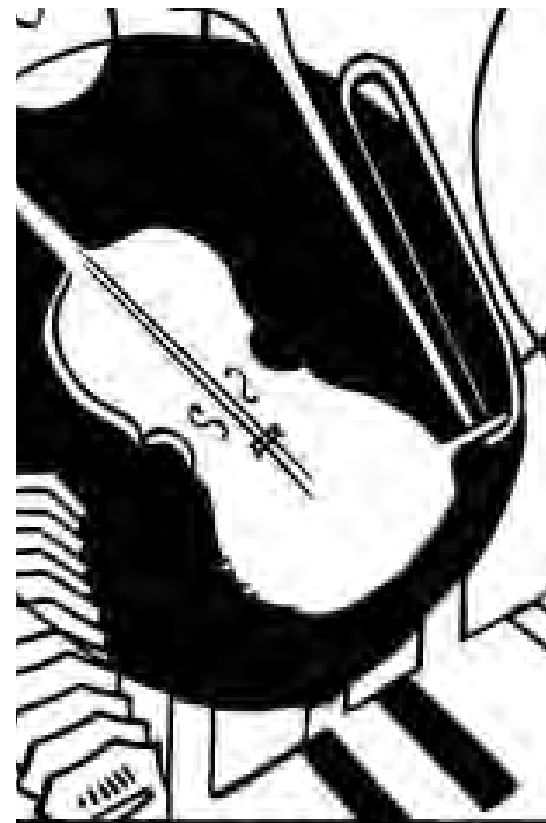
Writing About Music

SINGING, PLAYING, LISTENING, COMPOSING:

all performative acts, informed by and constructing gender. Writing, too, is an act of performance, and writing about music is thus doubly performatively inflected. How, though, can we develop a vocabulary for writing about music that acknowledges and self-consciously participates in this performativity? How are our readings of these performances constructed in gendered terms? What might such performances communicate, and—perhaps more importantly—which realities does the written word exclude or encourage? While we experience music personally and corporeally, our stories about these experiences have frequently remained unvoiced. Nagging

questions thus persist: are there ways of translating our wide varieties of musical experience onto the page, and how are these experiences informed by and constructed in terms of gender?

The authors who are featured in this special issue of CSW Update have grappled with this question in innovative ways. They have suggested new questions and have demonstrated how deeply personal a relationship with music can be. **Lorena Alvarado** uses music to speak of memory, and to complicate performances of masculinity, affect, and alcoholism, constructing a contradictory father-daughter relationship. **Alexandra Apolloni** articulates how podcasting has provided her with a





vibrantly sonorous modality of writing that is not only about music, but is itself musical. **Anne LeBaron** shares her experience as a twentieth and twenty-first century American female composer; her story suggests that we lack a conceptual framework through which to comprehend writing and other forms of creative expression beyond gendered terms. **Kristin Norderval** ponders the dilemma in which many musicians find themselves when it becomes necessary to communicate in language that which, perhaps, only music can communicate. **Elizabeth Morgan** addresses the ways in which her embodied experiences as a performer necessarily inform her writing about musical performance, and allow her to better imagine, and thus more precisely write, the voices of women musicians of the Georgian era. **Jocelyn Thomas** presents a

call to action for feminist hip-hop scholars. She sees a potential for agency in gangster rap, demanding that scholars acknowledge the politics of anger which allow hip-hop to function as a site for transformative self-fashioning. **Mandy-Suzanne Wong** questions the professed objectivity of scholarship, and both demonstrates and theorizes the performance acts present equally in scholarship and in fantasy fiction. Despite their differences, what each of these authors undeniably demonstrates is that writing about music is writing about oneself, and that through these acts of writing, we perform new possibilities of sonic engagement.

–*Alexandra Apolloni,
Nina Sun Eidsheim, and Jill Rogers*

Los Angeles, February, 2010



LESSONS FROM THE FATHER

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO. The *mercadito* in East L.A. There is a maze of shops and restaurants inside this former synagogue. A singer performs with a mariachi band for restaurant patrons. His voice is imposing and appealing: unrequited love, tears, and alcohol deluge his voice. He channels a championing misery, failure, and defeat (also perceived as emotional triumph and moral superiority) that the songs of lyricist José Alfredo Jiménez instilled into the popular imaginary of my father's generation. Many praise José Alfredo's genius; this performance confirms the complex authorship of his work. What I saw that night was the image of a nation, what I heard was the *dueño*, the "owner," ("whether you like it or not") of a disdaining woman.

I recoiled in my seat...

Now. At home, he finds the songs of that same masterful lyricist ("*quieras o no, yo soy tu dueño...*") in his daughter's voice. He is generously drunk and ripe for this song. These songs, with the signs of the *borracho*, *tequila*, *vino*, *cantina*, *cantinerero*, and so on, induce the performance of inebriation, of the sentimental man that is still macho (no, *what* induces the performance of inebriation, how does it develop a dependence to perform?). The singing drunk is interpolated. No longer a singer, but a writer, I listen in, from the kitchen's periphery, to this doubly drunken moment. The dependence of alcohol has not erased this refuge, this vocal cove of protection for him.

Excuse me, I was just leaving, I don't want to bother anyone, but I heard you sing that song... that is a beautiful song, and I want to sing it with you... disculpame...

<i>Quise allar el olvido</i>	I wanted to forget
<i>Al estilo Jalisco</i>	Jalisco style,
<i>Pero aquellos mariachis, y</i>	But those mariachis and
<i>aque! tequila,</i>	those tequilas
<i>Me hicieron llorar</i>	Made me cry

—
This is pure passion...

...

Why the simple answers?

...

Beneath these images that circulate political economies of affect, emotion, manhood, heartbreak, is the obscure romantization of drunken performances in Mexican popular culture. The presence of alcohol (literal or figurative) is, there, imperative to the successful *des-ahogo* of heartbreak. *Des-ahogo* is an ironic term,

literally “un-drowning,” precisely evocative of the very drowning in alcohol. This is a tracing of the body that performs the pleasurable *des-ahogos* sustained and enhanced by intoxication, but also a dis-ease in witnessing, analyzing and learning within this framework. How does the body develop a dependence to perform emotion in this way, what induces the performance of inebriation?

Alcoholism and analysis instill a similar vice for (re)interpretations of (re)orientations. They both entail a physical/textual trail of danger/violence. Thus, one can reify certain cultural practices while drinking, arguing, writing and erasing. This is where the singing drunk and the analytical writer meet, where they overlap. And I, the latter, coming from a genealogy of intoxication accompanied by song, ask myself the question again: why do you desire to drink when you sing these songs? Vice versa?

How does this alcoholism become attached to cultural phenomena and not merely a psychological/physical dependence? How is the *sentimiento* underlined with sound, with tears? I recoil in my seat—I was already uncomfortable with this witnessing, this participating, this gendered colonization.

The myth of the *charro*, that image of horsemanship and masculinity, informs my

hearing, as a woman, of my father’s song. The *charro* is the valiant image of law and (dis)order, often representative of Mexican national identity, erasing ethnic and class difference. Before the Mexican revolution, *charros* dominated the landscape of wealth in the country. Afterward, their material belongings were largely lost. Not so their semiotic power. Song was essential to maintaining this. *Charro* and popular song wedded in the 1930s, and film consummated their union and initiated a collective yearning among viewers and listeners. In addition to the associations with power and nation, romanticism thinly veiled with drunkenness became an additional layer of the *charro*, often a vocal one. The gendered colonization expires in the breath of his voice singing about her rejection, her absence, her faults. But with the most seductive voice. On stage, the fist was not needed as much as this voice.

As a listener, I am impelled to continue. As a woman, I continue to recoil in my seat. Memories of those singers fully attired in *charro* costume in films return. How they begin to confess their mishaps to the *cantinero* with a bottle in hand, and an endless request for more: *que me sirvan, de una vez, pa’ todo el ano* [might as well let them serve me [drinks] until the end of the

year]. The request is timeless, sentencing. The cantina metaphor is transplanted into any space. The scenario repeats (but also changes)...

Far from the production of such scenes, or perhaps closer to them than I’d like to imagine, that *charro* still arrives fifteen years later, clad in different, casual attire this time, ready to sing his confession, bottle in one hand, interpolated by song we had already begun. The scenario now has the backdrop of this Angelino metropolis with enough chimerical and literal cantinas, enough reasons where and why to drink.

In a historical stupor, he performs “Ella” but *ella* cannot recoil in her seat anymore. Instead, I find a space in the performance and affect it through the analysis of this writing, which will continue to spill across many, many pages, Jalisco style.

REFERENCES

- Najera-Ramirez, Olga. “Engendering Nationalisms: Identity, discourse and the Mexican Charro.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 67:1 (Jan 1994): 1–14.
- Savigliano, Marta. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Westview Press: Boulder, 1995.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press: Durham, 2003.

On sound AS WRITING

So often, I find myself at a loss for words when I'm writing about music, when I'm trying to turn what I hear into language. To write about music, to turn music into words on paper, is to intervene fundamentally with how those sounds mean. It is an act that both attributes meaning—the writer's meanings, the reader's meanings—to music, but also risks precluding other meanings. Translating music and sounds into words, trying to verbally represent music, feels like an act of power, one that I'm extremely uneasy about, and so I try to leave spaces in my words, to leave room for slippages, to allow other stories room to emerge from the gaps between my words. More and more, though, I find that I can't find that space on the page. With writing failing me, I've turned back to sound as a way of lifting words off of the page and sending them spinning into the air. I started making podcasts simply as a way of translating my academic work into

a popular medium. This project, however, took off in unexpected directions, as sound became not just my object of study, and not just a medium for sharing words and information, but an integral part of the work itself, a vital mode of writing that allowed me to not only talk about music but talk with music.

I can put my voice on record, alongside the music. I can let music twist in and out and around and through my words. I'm trying to use sound itself to write about music, to transform my writing into a medium that is built upon the bodily utterances of voices, that can be experienced corporeally, through the ear, through touch, through vibrations and reverberations. I want to transform my writing into music that is about music, but that is also about so much more: I want it to tell stories and invite stories by carving out spaces in sound and silence, spaces that echo with music's multiplicity of meanings.

Down the Rabbit-Hole of Innovation

A thousand things advance; nine hundred and ninety-nine retreat; that is progress.

—Henri Frédéric Amiel, Swiss poet and philosopher (1821–1881)

BY ANNE LEBARON

At the height of her compositional powers, a livid Ruth Crawford Seeger wrote of encountering discrimination. The tone of her prose echoes composer and musicologist Wilfrid Meller's depiction of the "angry wit" expressed in her String Quartet. Eighty years ago, the young composer found herself barred from a meeting in which the New York Musicological Society was founded—despite her explicit request to be in attendance, despite the fact that its principal organizer, Charles Seeger, was her teacher (and would soon become her future husband), and despite the fact that

she was lodging in the very home in which the meeting took place (that of music patron Blanche Walton). Although she was permitted to sit in the next room, she was excluded from the sharing of information that, by nature of the subject matter, had a direct bearing on her creative interests. Her reaction to this situation, as entered in her diary on February 22, 1930:

The musicologists meet. It is decided that I may sit in the next room and hear [Joseph] Yasser talk about his new supra scale. Then when I come out for this purpose, I find someone has closed the doors. Blanche is irate, so am I. "Men are selfish," says Blanche.

"You just have to accept the fact." Perhaps, I wonder, their selfishness is one reason why they accomplish more than women... I walk past the closed door to my room, and when I pass I turn my head toward the closed door and quietly but forcibly say, "Damn you," then go on in my room and read Yasser's article. Later, my chair close to the door, I hear some of the discussion.¹

Perhaps the tension exuding from parts of Ruth Crawford's String Quartet, written the following year, was foreshadowed

1. Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memoirs, Memories, Music* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986), 196.

There is a persistent assumption that women composers have not contributed to innovations in the field of music composition. This assumption results from the absence of a framework that would allow us to conceive, as a society, of women composers as originators, pioneers, and explorers whose contributions are deemed significant for music culture.

by the taut tone of dismay in her diary entry—the entry itself being performative, documenting her reaction to the refusal of her friends, colleagues, and future husband to allow her participation in this meeting. Her words communicate to future readers her palpable frustration at being treated as less than equal. Exclusionary strategies, whether consciously or unconsciously manifested, continue to undermine the acceptance of transformative contributions from women composers and other women in music.

Musical notation and the art of writing represent systems of communication realized through graphic means. The act of composing music, a form of writing, most often employs a universally accepted language (or more individualistic forms of graphic notation). Both systems preserve and disseminate ways of thinking and creating. That is, they are repositories of and conduits for information. Such repositories are not objective or neutral: they mirror societal ideologies, and are interpreted through the dominant values of those societies.

There is a persistent assumption that women composers have not contributed

to innovations in the field of music composition. This assumption results from the absence of a framework that would allow us to conceive, as a society, of women composers as originators, pioneers, and explorers whose contributions are deemed significant for music culture. This deficiency leads to an unwillingness to consider composition in non-gendered terms, and is therefore a testament to the way in which work is construed on gendered terms. As illustration, I offer the following personal anecdote and a subsequent exploration of the ramifications set in motion by a seemingly innocuous yet ultimately unsettling remark. By providing a description of the contextual environment, this anecdote will be all the more meaningful.

Since 2001, a suburb in the northern edges of Los Angeles County, eponymous with a type of orange and with that orange's namesake, the third largest city in Spain, has been my home. In Valencia, cultural stimulation across disciplines abounds at CalArts, where I teach. Directly south, the vast metropolis of Los Angeles, studded with vibrant pockets of art and music, represents one of the richest

and most dynamic smorgasbords of contemporary arts in the U.S.—despite the paltry funding for musical and other art forms in a city that revolves around filmmaking. As an active composer and academic working within this milieu, I'm increasingly disturbed, and distressed, by the generally unbalanced representation of women composers in large venues, festivals, smaller concert series, and the like. Clearly, we're in full retreat, in the midst of one or more of Amiel's nine hundred and ninety-nine regressions. Progress? In one of the most sociologically and musically experimental states in the union: glacial, if not abysmal.

This combination of circumstances, resulting in what can only be called 'exclusionary programming,' became painfully evident during the 2009–2010 concert season in Los Angeles. The most glaring example: the lack of programming of women composers' works in the ambitious and highly praised Left Coast / West Coast Festival. (The LA Philharmonic was the principal venue, and I don't believe the appearance by Pauline Oliveros in a duo concert, at another venue, sufficiently addresses the

gaping void here.) There are other cases as well. The legendary Monday Evening Concert series, piggybacking on the celebration of Western composers, opened its first concert of 2010 with "Mostly Californian"—and yes, not mostly male, all male. The kick-off sentence on the MEC website for this concert, "California has always attracted innovators," plays right into the theme of my inquiry—or at least, frolics on the margins. In productions mounted by Long Beach Opera, you'll find plenty of women actively performing, but no female opera composers. Likewise, year after year at Jacaranda, a critically acclaimed new music "series of adventures," one finds no women composers to applaud (although I've been informed that this will soon no longer be the case). Yet another example, this time a residency program: the Young American Composer-in-Residence Program—devoid of any young women composers. Several more modest concert series in Southern California are also found wanting in a balanced representation of composers. Why are the individuals affiliated with these organizations—curators / programmers / directors / sponsors / supporters (of both genders)—so seemingly oblivious to dozens

of women composers residing in the state of California or, for that matter, to hundreds living in the US and beyond? Are such oversights simply accidental? The same might be said in reference to the inadequate representation of African American composers on festivals and concert series celebrating contemporary music.

Granted, there are exceptions, far and wide, to this ostrich-like state of affairs. And this brings me to a comment made by the director of a local contemporary music group, an ensemble distinguished by an unusually consistent record of presenting works by women. In a brief conversation, as I complimented him on the track record of his ensemble, he graciously thanked me. Then, in the next breath, he pointed out that "no woman composer had, in fact, ever been an innovator." This assertion left me stunned. Upon reflection—for, like an earworm (a portion of music that becomes stuck in one's head), my friend's declaration firmly planted itself into my consciousness—I believe the message underlying such a proclamation is embedded in a pervasive mindset: although music by women deserves to be heard,

women have yet to “prove themselves” by scaling new heights. What if the real message lurking behind the articulated façade is: “My conditioning doesn’t allow me to imagine that women composers might be capable of originating new styles and techniques.”

I find the validity of an allegation claiming that women composers have not distinguished themselves as innovators (an exclusionary assertion insinuating that women therefore lack the ability to play a significant role in the development of music) to be without merit. Indeed, why does innovation get construed in gendered terms? Before going further, a working definition of innovation, as it relates to the ideas in this essay, is in order. Innovation, derived from “novus” (new) and “novare” (to renew), implies “better,” “cooler,” “hipper”. According to Leonard B. Meyer in *Style And Music: Theory, History, And Ideology*, innovation is “devising new strategies.” I would expand the definition, as it relates to music, to include the “contribution of new stylistic features,” especially features that other composers take note of and incorporate into their own works. Meyer goes on to

make this penetrating observation: “The cultural climate can either encourage or discourage innovation.” Even more astutely, Linda McDowell scrutinizes the far broader implications of the often insidious consequences resulting from everyday remarks and routine conclusions concerning gender: “The significance of uncovering the ways in which commonplace assumptions about gender structure the very nature of thought, of knowledge itself, is huge. It means that rethinking gender divisions requires nothing less than the reconstruction of Western knowledge itself: perhaps an even larger task than overturning of structural inequalities between men and women. But one, of course, depends on the other.”²

Complacently engaging in habitual ways of thought, and contentedly taking refuge in the familiar, leads to the unfortunate preservation of a predominant ideology at the expense of other worldviews. Instead, why not routinely question received wisdom, and attentively observe, deconstruct, and re-examine tacit

2. Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 13.

beliefs? As McDowell suggests, we need to expand our questions from the particular to the overarching. So, do we ultimately have the framework to consider women's stylistic contributions as innovations; to view women themselves as being capable of offering up new musical vocabulary, sonorities, configurations that would push music to new horizons?

Ruth Crawford Seeger's *String Quartet*, sporting a number of experimental techniques, is celebrated as a “stunning masterpiece.”³ The oft-cited third movement, a “sound mass” composition, was built on the wholly original concept of a structural heterophony of dynamics. By assigning a clearly defined system of rhythmic patterns to crescendos and diminuendos in each instrument, she achieved a seamlessly undulating accumulation of sound, ahead of its time by about thirty years. According to Wilfred Mellers, “Its tensity and angry wit voice protest not merely or mainly against inequable and iniquitous social systems but also against the frustrations inherent in living, especially as a woman in a

3. Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land* (New York: Oxford University Press), xv.

man-made industrial technocracy.”⁴ Her work made an impression on Edgard Varèse, and influenced composers such as György Ligeti, John Cage, James Tenney, and Elliott Carter. In her landmark biography, Judith Tick points out that Gilbert Chase, in the second edition of *America’s Music*, “confidently established Ruth Crawford as an important innovator.”⁵ A more recent influential work by a composer who has blazed her way into uncharted territories should be mentioned: Kaija Saariaho’s striking and evocative *Nymphea*. Written for string quartet with live electronic processing, *Nymphea* moves innovation into the realm of psychoacoustically-manipulated textures. With her wildly successful first opera, *L’amour de loin*, where she merges penetrating dramatic insight with uniquely forged methods of handling microtones and an alchemical skill with timbre, she has set a high benchmark for twenty-first century opera.

These are only two examples of many illustrating technical and stylistic

4. Mellers, xv.

5. Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), 355.

innovations by woman composers. Meanwhile, attention must also be directed to the burgeoning current generation of women composers who also perform, often integrating technology into their work. Vaporizing boundaries among art venues, classical music presenters, and clubs, these women have established indelible, unshakable, and unmistakable identities as composer / performers, exquisitely original as soloists but also stunning in their collaborative ventures: Pamela Z, Mari Kimura, Miya Masaoka, Marina Rosenfeld. Their predecessors are luminaries such as Pauline Oliveros, Charlotte Moorman, Yoko Ono, Diamanda Galas, Meredith Monk, Laurie Anderson, Annea Lockwood, the late Marianne Amacher, and the somewhat younger Shelly Hirsch, LaDonna Smith, Laetitia Sonami, and Ikue Mori. In the great majority of cases, the performative, stylistic, and technological breakthroughs of all these women remain underrepresented as innovations, further perpetuating the problematic premise that is the focus of this paper. Such clear evidence of transformative contributions by women leads me to hypothesize that

perhaps the term “innovation” in music is construed in masculine terms, and that women’s work is not given space within the confines of such a gendered construct. If we can become more attuned to the ways in which the definition of innovation (and related offshoots, such as stylistic contributions) gets constructed in the discourse, perhaps we can advance to the place where women are also recognized for their contributions to innovative discoveries in music.

I’m grateful to my friend for his seemingly innocuous and commonplace observation, as it initiated this examination of a widely held, pervasive, even viral belief that deserves to be derailed. Such a revision in our unspoken and unexamined agreement with long-held beliefs may well be underway, albeit gathering steam too slowly to observe with the naked eye. The clarion call has been sounding for decades, and prying apart ossified concepts will help steer us toward that “thousandth thing” that propels us forward into true progress.

WRITING (ABOUT) MUSIC

BY KRISTIN NORDERVAL

WHEN I'M LISTENING TO BACH—one of my favorite composers—how do I describe it? I have often told friends that the opening of “Wachet Auf, ruft uns die Stimme” always makes me smile and quickens my step. The dotted rhythms, the upward sweep of the alternating scalar passages of strings and oboes, the rising triads and long tones at the entry of the choir soaring over the repetitive rhythmic motion of the orchestra, the ornate melodic turns and quirky

harmonic shifts all work together to shift my mood and my body rhythms.

These are descriptions of instrumentation, and of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic details that I respond to, but this doesn't necessarily convey to a lay reader what I'm trying to get across. It certainly doesn't convey what the piece actually sounds like, and it relies on knowledge of music terminology, if not a previous knowledge of Bach, to make sense of it.

The words convey so much less of the music and my experience of listening to it, than a simple visual observation of the change in my physicality while listening to it would convey. I think about this when I watch people on the subway listening to music through earphones. I get more of a sense of the music they are listening to by their body responses than references to genre, instrumentation or rhythmic and melodic details would give me.

As musicians however, we need to use language to speak and write about what we do. Composers especially have to use language (written or spoken), musical notation and/or graphics to convey information to other musicians about how to perform our music. So how do we who are writers of music, write or speak about our own music? One would think we might be accustomed to it and easily able to convey with language a sense of its essence. And yet, trying to describe our own music is surprisingly difficult. We are dependent on the reader's previous listening experience and knowledge of references and context.

I was reminded of this recently while in the process of writing an article on the influence of Cathy Berberian on American singer-composers. I had had conversations with four fellow singer-composers in New York (Pamela Z, Joan

La Barbara, Theo Bleckman and Susan Botti). I was struck by the ways that my colleagues answered the question "How would you describe your music to someone who doesn't know it?" They described their work, sometimes hesitantly, sometimes fluently, but always using references to something else either in the field of music or in other arts. It became clear that what a listener or reader would understand, would depend on what that someone did know. Whether they knew the vocabulary of the field, or didn't know the field at all, would make a great deal of difference.

Pamela Z described her work as that of a particular subset of composers that she identified as "composer-performers who work with voice and electronics, using real-time processing"—a subset defined by the instrumentation or tools used, even though the aesthetic

characteristics of that group might be very divergent. Theo Bleckman and Joan La Barbara referred to musical genres to describe their work: "based in jazz, non-classical" and "contemporary classical composer, abstract." La Barbara, Susan Botti, and Pamela Z referred to their musical roots. Pamela Z referenced her beginnings as a singer-songwriter; Susan Botti spoke about her background in free jazz and theater improvisation; and Joan La Barbara referred to her beginnings as an avant-garde singer of works by other composers. These genre references create a context of inferred elements for those who know the field, (instrumentation, harmonic language, vocal style, technique, and timbre), but they don't describe the music.

Delving more deeply into the characteristics of their work, each of these composers continued with a

language of intention and attraction:
they described what they love—or love
to do.:

I love found text. Just as I like making sound with found objects, I like picking up text that came from somewhere—instructions, ingredients... I love repetition... looping has had a major role in my work.

I'm always looking for connection. Accessibility is important to me. I try to see where I can find holes in my bubble....I like to find ways of making music that is not so insular.

I like textures. I like creating layers of sound... an orchestra of voices. I will often create a sonic atmosphere that is a foundation over which live musicians perform.

Theater informs my music in both form and presentation. I like to write for particular events and particular performers—for a violinist, not a violin.

The adjectives used to describe their own voices brought in additional aural references: “ethereal,” “Sarah Vaughan register,” “bel canto to extended vocal techniques,” and “voice as an instrument... sometimes a percussion instrument, sometimes a string instrument, sometimes a reed.” References to other composers were used either as a comparison (similar to) or as a contrast (not like so and so), and references to artists from other fields highlighted interest in other aspects of the creative process, from conceptual art and self exploration (Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman) to theatrical vision (Robert Wilson, Pina Bausch).

Again, these are reference points that give fields of association, but they still don't describe what the essence of the music is. Is it perhaps better to ask what the music does to a listener? All four composers talked about the effects

they wished to have on their audience: “connected,” “reflective of human emotion,” and “communicating on a pre-verbal level.”

The language we have to describe music is woefully inadequate. It doesn't capture the richness or the individuality of a particular work or composer's style. It doesn't capture the essence of what it is that draws a listener in or what causes the pulse to quicken. Perhaps Susan Botti's initial response to my question of how to describe her music was the wisest: “I wouldn't answer that question! I would say listen to the music.”

BODILY Writing

by Elizabeth Morgan

MY BACKGROUND as a performer shapes how I write about music. I came to musicology after receiving my undergraduate and master's degrees in piano performance at The Juilliard School. When I started graduate school in the Department of Musicology at UCLA, I gravitated toward studying issues related to performance, topics such as virtuosity and performance practice. Meanwhile, I noticed that the campus abounded with scholars whose interest in performance had inspired them to experiment in their writing, figures such as Sue-Ellen Case, Elisabeth Le Guin, Susan Leigh Foster, and Susan McClary. Common to their work is the absence of a boundary between their identities as

performers and their identities as scholars; their understanding of the performing body spurs them to perform in their writing. Perhaps Susan Leigh Foster says it best: "I am a body writing. I am a bodily writing."^{*}

I, too, am interested in bringing a physical sensibility into my writing on music, one that reflects the material at hand and which renders my academic prose personal and compelling. One of the best ways I've found to do this is through experimenting with narrative voice. When I write about keyboard music, for instance, I use the first person. I have a

^{*}Susan Leigh Foster, "An Introduction to Moving Bodies," *Choreographing History*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3.

personal connection to piano music, from years of playing and interpreting, and I want to communicate that relationship to my reader. My connection is not only emotional, but physical too. As a pianist, I am always subject to the temperament of this particular mass of flesh and bones, with its weak fourth fingers, thick webbing, and meaty fingertips. My physical experience playing a piece shapes my understanding of that work. For instance, I had a particularly tough time learning Chopin's first etude in college, and so I think of the work as agitated and neurotic, connecting its emotional affect to my own frustration trying to learn it. My perspective comes, in part, from being true to my bodily

presence, and so my writing reflects that; I use the first person, I draw on anecdotes about hours in the practice room and Band-Aids on my thumbs, I describe stretches and physical contortions that relate to my hands. To do this in the third person would seem as strange as writing this essay about the pianist and musicologist Elizabeth Morgan, instead of about ME.

One of the challenges to writing from an overtly personal perspective is historicity. Chopin wrote the C Major etude for his hands, not for mine. He composed the work for a mid-nineteenth-century Pleyel piano, not a twentieth-century Steinway. Maybe the stretches that I find so maddening in that piece were easy for him, with his hands, on his instrument. Sometimes, bodily knowledge and personal experience seem like particularly unstable forms of historical knowledge. Yet they also have the potential to provide windows into fact when nothing else can. I found this to be particularly true as I did research for my dissertation, which examined music making among female amateurs in late eighteenth-

and early nineteenth-century England. As I traveled from archive to archive, reading diaries and letters of Georgian-era women and looking at their collections of sheet music, I couldn't stop lamenting the fact that the voices of so many historical women had been lost. For every diary I read, how many had disappeared? I decided that the best tool for filling in voids in historical knowledge was imagination. In each chapter of my dissertation, I included some original, non-academic prose, written in the style of a late-Georgian or Regency woman. I composed a letter from a young girl to her mother, a short story about a dinner party and the music making that followed, and several diary entries documenting a girl's piano practicing. I also used my imagination as I interpreted the musical works that women of the time performed; I continually explained how different physical and interpretive decisions, such as choice of fingering and tempo, could transform the meaning of a piece of music in performance. My original fiction and musical interpretations served an academic purpose, but they also reflected

the nature of my historical subject. Women of the Georgian and Regency eras avidly read fiction. They loved stories, and I had benefited from stories about them; novels were one of my most important sources of information in uncovering details of their lives. So it was only natural that I should tell stories in my project.

While none of the topics that I am researching presently calls for quite so dramatic a departure from norms of academic writing, I remain tied to the notion of story telling that I explored in my dissertation. Crafting narratives is something that both performers and musicologists do daily. We look at musical works and make sense of them, drawing on what we see, hear, and feel. This is not to say that we don't deal in fact. We do. But imagination and interpretation are crucial components of how we make those facts come to life. By infusing my academic prose with the kinds of creative decisions that I might make as I learn a Chopin etude at the piano, I hope that I serve my subjects truthfully and convey their essence vividly in prose.

by Jocelyn Thomas

Gangster Rap, Writing, and the Liberatory Power of Anger

I GREW UP with rap music as one of the background noises of my life—visiting my cousins in the north side of Houston and listening to them mix and DJ the family house party, but I wasn't too big a fan. In fact, soul, R&B and 60s rock (though not what we often figure as such because I was in love with the sound of "Blackness"—real and appropriated—that bled through Southern rock and Jimi Hendrix and everything Janis Joplin touched) were a much more visceral soundtrack of my childhood.

But this isn't the story I'm trying to tell. Here is where it picks back up. My parents had been divorced for four or five years and

I was in middle school. The few friends I had managed to collect in elementary school had disappeared as the cliques of fashionable and nerdy started to form. I, of course, had a set that I rolled with—ALBRIGHT HISTORICAL SOCIETY, STAND UP!—but it was a new thing: I was trying on being one of the "gifted and talented" kids instead of a kid who was perpetually in trouble.

My middle school angst was uniquely (to me at least) punctuated by a deep love for a gangster rapper from New York. His name was DMX and he was from a place called Yonkers which I had never heard of in my geography classes but sounded a lot like the

Black ghetto of pain, poverty, and alcoholism that seemed to follow my family regardless of what neighborhood we ran to.

DMX and the portrayal of the violent, emotional, and profane narratives that defined his first two mainstream albums (I didn't know about the mix tape game yet) *It's Dark and Hell Is Hot* (1998) and *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood* (1998) gave voice to a darkness that lived repressed under the surface of my chest. I revisit DMX now, after years of struggling with depression, and it all makes sense. I remember back when my mother would ask me what drew me to this dark, imposing man whose album covers featured him drenched in pools of blood

...it was exactly the disruption of the cool invulnerable self that rap is so often conflated with and that DMX's early projects explore...

with his hands clasped together in prayer. And all I could respond was to tell her that I thought his blending of the secular and the religious was something deeper than people were giving him credit for—which I still feel today, even as I grow disenchanted with his behavior off the stage.

But another truth is, that for me—a self-identified Black bisexual feminist—it was exactly the disruption of the cool invulnerable self that rap is so often conflated with and that DMX's early projects explore (the screams and sonic crying that explode from the speakers when you turn the volume up to LISTEN TO MY PAIN DAMMIT level), that made him what he was for me—a space of solace

that simultaneously expressed and invoked my deepest feelings of almost overwhelming anger, sadness, and frustration. It is this access to excessive emotion and "the dark stuff" that keeps me writing in/on rap music. Someone else can write about the racial uplift of the so-called conscious rappers and their return to the West-African griot tradition of community building and activism through storytelling. It is important work and even relevant to the work that I do, but it is just not the story I want to tell. You see, it is this excessive, pornographic display of emotion and bodies and vulnerability that, to me, is at the heart of why we, as feminists, must engage the work of rap music. It gives us a space to talk about

these things, particularly as Black people, particularly those of us who call ourselves women, particularly those of us who identify with a femme gender—because it is that pornographic excess that we are not meant to hold, not meant to wield, and definitely not meant to speak.

The "feminist" location of rap music is, for me, in the representation and ownership of the subject's anger and physicality. Reclaiming these emotions from the work done by racist stereotypes of Black bucks, Jezebels, and Sapphires and into the bodies of youth steeped in (in)visible and (in)articulated racist, classist, sexist, projects meant to mold us into good brown subjects instead

This is why I write on rap not as an example of pathologized Black misogyny and homophobia—as if we had the market cornered on these two oppressions—but instead on its liberatory politics of anger.

of unruly angry Black ones. As I see it, the definition of socially conscious rap in the current formations of scholarship on hip-hop is given only to certain kinds of performance politics. These performance politics follow extremely heteronormative lines, still privilege hypermasculine gender presentation, and fit into highly proscribed narratives of what political consciousness is supposed to look like—often leaving out the majority of artists within the musical culture they are attempting to assess. I want to delve into the world of those artists and into those aspects of a musical culture that has supported my voice in the ways that I needed.

This is why I write. This is why I write on rap. This is why I write on rap not as an example of pathologized Black misogyny and homophobia—as if we had the market cornered on these two oppressions—but instead on its liberatory politics of anger. I am not interested in the question of whether the use of the words “bitch” or “ho” make rap music culture (a *whole* culture) regressively misogynistic. Not because I know “they ain’t talking about me,” but because I know where the anger in the use of such terms comes from. I know what it is like to recapitulate that anger in my own speech and embodiment. The politics of anger are something that has

been policed out of all the “good” feminist scholarship these days or at least it seems like all our Black queer feminist rages are turning back on our own Black bodies. And I’m writing about this music that the markets call “gangster rap” because I want to take back the rage, take it and mix it up, and create something just as dark, just as scary, and just as pissed off.

THE GLAMMOGR AND THE PRESENT INQUIRY

The raven got into the upstairs drawing room through one of the ornate windows. He cawed a couple of Runes and thus became an elegant young man wearing a doublet. Since he was alone, he lit the fireplace by waving a hand at it. He sat down in a chair, exasperated with the world at large.


Composing fantasy fiction necessarily alters the perspective from which an author considers experience. The following discussion centers on the experience of music, and how said experience may be approached by analysis.

A trying evening it had been indeed. Having stabbed the queen's consort and become that sycophantic individual, Lord Shade the Glammogr—who could take any form he chose,

even when it belonged to someone else—was supposed to persuade Her Majesty to instigate a war with Spain. That was the contract. But the woman refused to make a move, and Lord Shade had no desire to actually participate in wars; they were too time-consuming, not to mention messy.

All forms of writing may be considered performances, as the present inquiry aims to demonstrate.

It was becoming tiresome to have to say, "It was like that all along, Your Majesty," every time he lit the fireplace, just because the Royal Sow did not believe in Magic. To assuage his temper, Lord Shade thought he'd have some music. Of course he had no need of an instrument or the court musicians. He simply wiggled his fingers.



All forms of writing may be considered performances, as the present inquiry aims to demonstrate.

Writing about music obliges one to craft a musical experience. Thus, presented in writing, the experience of music is not that of the author-as-listener but of the author-as-author, where the latter makes record of an experience which she has constructed in order to make a point. Hence a written description of John Cage's 4'33" is not equivalent to the experience of 4'33" in a concert hall. One may write "silence," but one cannot write silence. Rather, the construction in writing of a musical experience ("silence, with some creaking of chairs") is the composition and performance of said musical experience. Even as musicological writing must describe and criticize compositions and performances and experiences of other writers, description and criticism are themselves

performance and composition when they constitute musicological writing.

The Glammogr felt the Magic when he summoned it, felt it with a sense that was neither corporeal nor quite telepathic. The Magic came from behind the other mundane elements. It surrounded the air, rose up from underneath the very same. Being scientifically inclined, Lord Shade understood Magic as a substance comprised of infinitesimal yet quantifiable particles. Magical effects were the results of interactions, at the behest of the Wizard's indomitable will, between Magical particles and the equally infinitesimal particles that comprised his soul. Making music was but a matter of persuading the Magical particles to interact with

One may write “silence,” but one cannot write silence.



the sonic particles latent in the air, such that they would vibrate and produce sounds in the manner dictated by the particles in his soul. To Lord Shade, though lesser minds would have been quite confounded, all this was obvious. It was as self-evident as the air beneath his raven’s wings when he rode updrafts through the clouds. For with that extra sense in the tips of his fingers and the lobes of his ears, the depths of his mind and the very core of his heart, Lord Shade the Glammogr felt the movements of those particles – and more than that: he knew them.

Writing fantasy fiction requires wondering, above all else. The fantasy author crafts not the untrue, but what could be true and, for the characters in the story, what is in fact true. For the author, this crafting is a question. The writer’s craft

is wondering what could be. Writers of musicology speculate similarly: What could music be in various contexts, from various points of view? The crafting of the musicological piece of writing is therefore also a questioning. Here note that the musicologist answers her own inquiries not as instrumentalists and composers would answer them, because the musicologist must respond to wonderment with the written word. Words inquire and may claim confusion outright: these are among the functions of words. Therefore in writing, wonderment itself is an appropriate response to musicological wondering, since writing may perpetuate musicological wonderment. The same applies to propositions made by the fantasy story.

Lord Shade could even close his eyes as he located the sonic particles, enchanted them



As such, written wonderings of musicology cannot utter value judgments or Absolute Truth. If they could, then writing would not be craft.

to make them move, and let their movement resonate within him. In his eagerness to escape the trivialities of the court, he bombarded himself with sounds and self-expressions made corpuscular and microscopic. Sounds, brought to life by Magic, ricocheted against blood droplets on their way through his body, shifted the elements of his spirit. The Glammogr opened his eyes.

As such, written wonderings of musicology cannot utter value judgments or Absolute Truth. If they could, then writing would not be craft. Written statements of possibility, fantastic or musicological, should take advantage of that humility.

It came to him, reclining in his favorite chair: Magic and sound were movable by and against the soul. Music and enchantment were related by more than analogy. What insidious power might

sonic particles possess, therefore? What power, that was more than emotional? For example, might some resourceful Wizard galvanize musical particles against the queen's obstinate soul, altering its configuration and with it her opinion of Spain? Music, after all, had Her Majesty's ear as Magic never would. And Lord Shade was renowned for his resourcefulness.

Fantasy-fictional and musicological writing are performance-acts that involve the crafting of experiences to various ends. Wonder drives both kinds of writing, which present possibilities unavailable to other points of view. The aim of the writer is hence in all cases to wonder, thus to question, to think beyond.

The Glammogr rose from his chair. He had experiments to perform.

Lorena Alvarado is a graduate student in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA. She is currently completing her dissertation, "Corporealities of Feeling," while listening to Chavela Vargas and Amir Benayoun. She loves Pessoa's poetry and is interested in the histories of Huntington Park, where she hails from.

A doctoral student in Musicology at UCLA **Alexandra Apolloni** holds degrees in Music and Women's Studies from Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada. She has presented work on topics that include Amy Winehouse's hair, spirituality in feminist punk, rock-and-roll camps for girls, and voice and fatness in the music of the Gossip. She is currently researching girl R&B vocalists from the UK.

Nina Sun Eidsheim is on the faculty of the Department on Musicology at UCLA. As a scholar and performer, she is particularly interested in the performative aspects of the production, perception, and reception of vocal timbre. She is currently preparing a book manuscript tentatively titled "Musicology in the Flesh: An Essay on Voice, Body, and Emotion."

Widely recognized for her work in instrumental, electronic, and performance

realms, composer **Anne LeBaron** has earned numerous awards and prizes, including a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, the Alpert Award in the Arts, a Fulbright Fellowship, a Rockefeller MAP Fund Award, and a Cultural Exchange International Grant from the LA Department of Cultural Affairs. She teaches at the California Institute of the Arts.

Elizabeth Morgan received a PhD in musicology from UCLA in 2009 and holds two degrees in piano performance from Juilliard. She received CSW's Mary Wollstonecraft Dissertation Award in 2009. She has taught music history at UCLA and UC Santa Cruz and has performed as a pianist throughout the US and Western Europe. She lives in San Francisco.

Kristin Norderval is a singer, composer and improviser who specializes in new music for voice, and has a special interest in electronics, interactive technology and interdisciplinary performance. She has recorded for Aurora, CRI, Deep Listening, Eurydice, Koch International, and New World Records. more info at www.myspace.com/kristinnorderval

Jillian Rogers is a PhD student in the Department on Musicology at UCLA. Her scholarly interests center around issues of

gender, sexuality, and subjectivity in twentieth-century musics. She is particularly interested in answering questions about how music, in its various embodied practices, accomplishes emotional work. Jill enjoys knitting socks, drinking tea, and hiking in her spare time.

Currently a Eugene Cota-Robles Fellow, **Jocelyn Thomas** is a first-year doctoral student in the Department of Women's Studies at UCLA. She received her B.A. from Smith College with a major in Afro-American Studies. Her research interests include queers of color performance theory, Black women's music history, femme studies, gender theory, queer historiography, and hip-hop studies.

Mandy-Suzanne Wong was born in Bermuda. She is a PhD candidate in the Department of Musicology at UCLA, where she writes on the aesthetics of experimental music. She has authored several fantasy stories and three novels, and she is at work on a fourth. She is the biographer and confidante of Lord Shade the Glammogr, who operates under assumed names in multiple worlds.

UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN

DIRECTOR	<i>Kathleen McHugh</i> PROFESSOR, ENGLISH AND CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	<i>April de Stefano, PhD</i>
MANAGING EDITOR	<i>Brenda Johnson-Grau</i>
ADMINISTRATIVE ANALYST	<i>Jessie Babiarz</i>
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT	<i>Patricija Petrač</i>
STUDENT ASSISTANTS	<i>Jaimie Baron, Sarah Cho, Chelsey Crowley, Libby Dierker, Hao Dieu, Andrey Gordienko, Erin Hill, Jackie Hunt, Angelica Lai, Susan McKibben, Sadie Menchen, Alfonso Orozco, Monica Peña, Dayo Spencer-Walters, and Wenpeng Zou</i>
CAMPUS ADDRESS	1500 Public Affairs Building 722203
MAILING ADDRESS	UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN Box 957222 Los Angeles, CA 90095-7222
PHONE/FAX	310 825 0590 / 310 825 0456
EMAIL	csw@csw.ucla.edu cswpubs@csw.ucla.edu

CSW Update is the newsletter of the UCLA Center for the Study of Women. It is published monthly during the academic year. UCLA faculty, staff, and students are welcome to submit articles for inclusion. If you have questions, please email the publications staff at cswpubs@women.ucla.edu

EDITOR/DESIGNER

Brenda Johnson-Grau

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Jaimie Baron, Sarah Cho, Libby Dierker, Hao Dieu, Sadie Menchen, and Wenpeng Zou