

# Lecture 2.2 Music and Musicking

**MUS 20 Exploring the Musical Mind**

**Summer Session II 2025**

Instructor: Jingwei Liu | August 7, 2025

# Music and Musicking

## Musicking Prelude by Christopher Small

- Music is not a thing but an activity, something that people do.
- The habit of thinking in abstractions, of taking from an action what appears to be its essence and of giving that essence a name, is probably as old as language; it is useful in the conceptualizing of our world but it has its dangers.
- The *privilege* of Western classical music above all other musics is a strange and contradictory phenomenon. On the one hand, it is claimed to be an intellectual and spiritual achievement that is unique in the world's music cultures; on the other hand, it appeals to only a very tiny minority of people – classical records account for only 3% of all record sales.

# The Musical Human

## Chapter 8: Endgames

- Western music splits away from the musical mainstream at the same time that *Western science* really takes off, and it acquires three of science's characteristics: a liking for big names, an experimental method and a sense of historical progress. Foundational for all these traits was an obsession with preserving music in notation.
- Because of Western music's unique fixation with writing notes down in scores, it is the only musical superpower with a fully recorded history.
- On the other hand, what makes Western music history so troubling is that it is really a history of scores, not of people, albeit the scores are notionally attached to 'big names' such as Handel, Mozart and Brahms.

# Music and Musicking

## Musicking Prelude by Christopher Small

- The presumed autonomous “thingness” of *works of music* is only part of the prevailing modern philosophy of art in general. What is valued is not the action of art, not the act of creating, and even less that of perceiving and responding, but the created art object itself.
- The fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works, but in action, in what people do. It is only by understanding what people do as they take part in a musical act that we can hope to understand its nature and the function it fulfills in human life.

# Music and Musicking

## **Corollary for “the idea that musical meaning resides uniquely in music objects”**

1. Musical performance plays no part in the creative process.
2. A musical performance is thought of as a one-way system of communication, running from composer to individual listener through the medium of the performer.
3. No performance can possibly be better than the work that is being performed.
4. Each musical work is autonomous – it exists without necessary reference to any occasion, any ritual, or any particular set of religious, political, or social beliefs.

# Music and Musicking

## Definitions of Musicking

- The present participle, the gerund, of the verb to *music*.
- “To perform” or “to make” music.
- To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (composing), or by dancing.
- Musicking is an activity in which all those present are involved and for whose nature and quality, success or failure, everyone presents bear some responsibility.
- *What does it mean when this performance (of this work) takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants? What’s really going on **here**?* (Embodiment)

# Musicality

## Defining Ethnomusicology by Timothy Rice

- *Musical ability, or musicality*, to an ethnomusicologist, refers to the capacity of humans to create, perform, organize cognitively, react both emotionally and physically to, and interpret the meaning of man-made sounds.
- The definition assumes that all humans, not just those we call musicians, are musical to some degree, and that *musicality* (the capacity to make and make sense of music) defines our humanity and provides one of the touchstones of human experience.
- Musical thinking and doing may be as important to our human being in the world as is our ability to speak and to understand speech. Ethnomusicologists would claim *we need music to be fully human*.

# Ethnomusicology

## Defining Ethnomusicology by Timothy Rice

- Ethnomusicology is the study of all of the world's music.
- Under certain circumstances, a “simple” “folk” song may have more human value than a “complex” symphony.
- The study of the music of all the world's people is a path to understanding human beings.
- Ethnomusicology might be defined as the study (logos) of the music (mousikē) of groups of people (ethnos), especially those sharing a common language and culture—ethnic groups in other words.