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Thinking About Music

27 October 2023

Racial Marginalization in Musicology: Blacksound and Phantom Genealogy

In a society where culture and history are deeply intertwined with the representation of race, gender, sexuality, and identity, the concept of Blacksound emerges as a critical element in the understanding of musicology. This essay delves into the intricacies of Blacksound, offering insight into its historical significance and the perpetuation of racial stereotypes. As we unravel the layers of this concept, we will also examine the complicity of musicology in sustaining cultural patterns that have often overlooked and downplayed black people's significance in shaping the course of American popular music. To illustrate the complexities of this exploration, we will examine the critical insights of two musicologists, Matthew Morrison and Nina Sun Eidsheim as they explore the connection between culture and history with the representation of difference. Similarly, the cultural assumptions that influence society as a whole are also evident in academic writings about it.

Blacksound, as described by Musicologist Matthew D. Morrison, is "...a way of uncovering the political implications of embodying, making, and commercializing popular music in the United States, from its origins in blackface to the present" (Morrison 2019: 783). Along with the rise of Blacksound in the United States came the rise of issues regarding intellectual property and copyright law, politics, and racial identity. Morrison is clear in mentioning that Blacksound is not actual authentic music created by black people, but is instead the projected "Other" that white people take on when performing racism or consuming actual music created by

black people. By taking on this "Other" persona, it allowed white people to convince that they were merely consuming this media as a mockery and were denying any actual enjoyment of the music and media created by black people. This appropriation, performance, and monetization of black people led to issues with copyright. The commercialization of Blacksound through blackface minstrelsy and other forms of entertainment led to the exploitation of black artists, who were often denied recognition and compensation for their creative contributions.

> Performance was not protected under copyright law until 1897; dramatic works, which might have included music, were not protected under copyright law until 1856, and sheet music outside of a dramatic performance was not deemed copyrightable until 1831. Meanwhile, mostly white music industrialists capitalized upon the (unrecognized) intellectual performance property of black Americans, both in and out of blackface, throughout the nineteenth century.
> (Morrison 2019: 793)

This exploitation continued to marginalize black voices within the music industry, a pattern that has had long-lasting effects on the history of American popular music. Not only did this dilute the integrity and very identity of black people, but it also reinforced damaging stereotypes, perpetuated racial inequalities, and obscured the authentic contributions of black artists in the fabric of American popular music.

Phantom genealogy is a concept that refers to the ways in which black singers in the American opera industry have been historically marginalized and excluded from mainstream recognition. This exclusion has been perpetuated through a variety of means, including the use of racial stereotypes, limited performance opportunities, and a lack of representation in the industry. As a result, black singers have had to navigate a complex web of social and cultural expectations in order to succeed in the industry. For example:

> Typically, villainous roles are composed for basses and sometimes baritones, while the hero and romantic lead characters are written for tenors. Therefore the careers of tenors like [George] Shirley are at a double disadvantage due to the typecasting of their voice type.
> (Eidsheim 2018: 67)

The typecasting of roles in the Opera not only applied to voice ranges, but it also applied to race and performance. For black people to make it in the music industry, it meant to go along or put up with the existent systems put in place to discredit their voices. Eidsheim describes the public's reaction to a performance by Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, a freed slave.

> The dissonance felt by many members of the public when confronted with the unfamiliar sight and sound of a black person singing classical music was too much to overcome. On the one hand, the solution for which many reached, it seems, was to categorize these performances as minstrel shows rather than artistic experiences, attempting to deny that African American voices were suitable for classical music qua classical music. (Eidsheim 2018: 70)

The intersection of opera and minstrelsy became known as black opera and can be uncovered through the knowledge of phantom genealogy.

Phantom genealogy also highlights the ways in which black singers have been forced to navigate a system that values a particular type of vocal performance, one that is often associated with whiteness and European classical music. Despite these challenges, black singers have made significant contributions to the American operatic timbre, and their voices continue to shape the industry today. By exploring the concert of phantom genealogy, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which race, music, and performance intersect in American opera.

The three networks in phantom genealogy demonstrate how blackface and musicology exclude people of color. The first network in the Actor-Network-Theory is the existing musical culture that exists as a result of connections and related actions. For Blacksound, this is the roots of which it emerged through racist forms of entertainment such as minstrelsy and blackface. The second network is the foundation that supports the first network. For Blacksound, this consists of the racist ideologies and pre-existing notions that white individuals held toward black people. These ideologies often justified the consumption of such forms of entertainment and contributed to a culture where black voices and contributions were undervalued and viewed with disgust.

The third network represents a constant feedback loop that reinforces the work of the first two networks. (Nina Sun Eidsheim 2018: 64-67).

In conclusion, minstrelsy, blackface, and black opera demonstrate how the consumption of such media led to a cycle of "typecasting" of stereotypes. Black voices and black forms of art became "othered" and stripped from their own culture, appropriated by white people, and marginalized. This led to a skewed view of musicology, as musicology became concerned with preserving classical musical traditions which at the time were predominantly white. Furthermore, it led to a lack of diverse perspectives, which have been complicit in underrepresenting black voices in American popular music and opera.

Bibliography

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