

Introduction

Definitions and Directions

This book chronicles a collection of “encounters” between disability and music. More precisely, it describes myriad ways in which disability identity is defined within musical institutions, whose often venerable and rigid attitudes, customs, and practices endow them with the status of largely autonomous cultural systems. Because music is so frequently deemed an extraordinary ability, its juxtapositions with disability are complex and reveal not only the ways in which disability is understood and treated across cultures but also the nature of both identity and social organization.

The unifying theme that guides these encounters between music and disability is a theory of “social confluence.” This theory argues that in contemporary globalized society, in which the pace and density of human contact are increased by the profusion and power of information technology, the fundamental unit of identity is social confluence—that is, the role in which an individual finds herself at any given time. This role is subject to redefinition at a moment’s notice, as soon as one proceeds to the next encounter. The theory differs radically from those of other times and places in which the focal unit of social organization has been, variously, the nation-state, the ethnic group, the nuclear

or extended family, or the individual, each regarded as a fundamentally stable category.

My idea of social confluence arose from personal experience. In 2000, I had neurosurgery on my neck to alleviate extreme upper-body pain and restore function to my right arm and hand. In terms of physical recovery, the results were largely but by no means wholly successful. At the same time, the issues surrounding my return to work (as Professor of Music at the University of Minnesota, where I have taught since 1979) were complex, frustrating, and anxiety provoking.

During this return to work, I learned that my disability status was defined in radically different ways depending on the social, cultural, and institutional context of the moment. The theory of social confluence was thus born on a day when my disability identity morphed several times over, depending on with whom I was interacting. What made this seem all the more remarkable was how little I actually had to travel to undergo these identity transformations. Every change in the way I was perceived took place within a single workplace, albeit a very large and complex one, whose various administrative units saw the same person from very different perspectives.

On that day, I realized that my attorney took the view that, according to Minnesota Workers' Compensation law, I was "permanently partially disabled" (a view ultimately vindicated after three-and-a-half years of litigation). In interpreting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (amended in 2008), the university's Office of Disability Services determined that I was not disabled in a manner that legally mandated workplace accommodations. However, for reasons that were never explained to me, Disability Services nonetheless decided to provide me with a great deal of adaptive office equipment despite denying any obligation or the apparent need to do so. The task of refitting my office was then assigned to the Department of Environmental Health and Safety, which clearly seemed to trust its own expertise about my body over mine and provided me with equipment I mostly either abandoned eventually or never used at all. Health and Safety's equipment prescriptions were quite different from those of my hand surgeon, an amateur musician and a physician of extraordinary empathy who would later operate on both my hands.

These health-and-disability professionals had widely divergent views of my disability status, ranging from able-bodied to moderately disabled—that is, fully able to return to work with relatively modest accommodations. The operative position of the university regarding my condition, as dictated by Disability Services, was that there was no obligation under the ADA to accommodate me, but that I would be accommodated nonetheless, a view that seemed at once perhaps enlightened but also un-reassuring, lest I ever require additional “favors” that were neither my rights nor the university’s obligations. But the most extreme verdict on my body’s abilities came from the standards of my own field, music, and in particular classical music, the idiom that is pervasive in academia. This judgment was never explicitly rendered, but such a declaration was also unnecessary, the rules regulating classical music as a cultural system so well understood by those of us in its community that little if any enforcement is ever required. (Only relatively recently have many of these principles been articulated, by such scholars as Henry Kingsbury [1988], Bruno Nettl [1995], and Christopher Small [1996, 1998].)

To perform classical music at a professional level requires physical technique that is at once highly developed and highly standardized. Through standardization, it is possible to compose, for example, a symphony, knowing that the training and acumen of every professional orchestra is so similar that the work can be confidently disseminated for performance to such ensembles worldwide because they are all capable of playing it. On a more intimate and human scale, to compose a work for the generic baritone voice is a very different matter from writing a song for Bob Dylan. There are many skilled classical baritones who could reliably replicate a work composed for that generalized vocal quality, but there is only one Dylan, a singer exceptional in his abilities, limitations, and idiosyncrasies. Classical composers rarely, if ever, write to such individual specifications as might include not only a quirky voice but also a disabled body.

The unhealed nerve damage in my right arm and hand rendered it unfit for professional classical music performance. From that standpoint—within the “social confluence” of classical music performance—I became totally disabled and in fact incapacitated. It was most fortunate that my work never actually demanded that sort of musical athleticism. As a

classical musician, I was and remain primarily a composer. I do perform frequently, mainly on guitar and other fretted stringed instruments, but almost entirely my own works, whose technical demands I can obviously control, and in idioms that transcend classical conventions in many ways. I am able technically to do some things other players find utterly daunting (mostly featuring my highly developed left hand), while having great difficulty with certain technical “basics.” (I have this in common with jazz guitar legend Django Reinhardt, discussed in Chapter 2.) But my own good fortune to have escaped damage to my career through work-related injury did not keep me from being painfully aware that I had performing colleagues who had sustained illness and trauma that, though of minor consequence in other fields, were devastating in classical music. *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, the journal of the Performing Arts Medicine Association, is replete with such cases. If my career was not so much a victim of the rules of classical technique as have been those of some of my friends, classical music is nonetheless my professional world and I am moved and angered by its harshness. The realization of this extreme appraisal of my disability status came to me on the same day as all the encounters and judgments I have just described. Through all of them, the theory of social confluence was born.

Thus, like almost everyone in disability studies (DS), I became interested in the field through personal experience. I came to DS relatively late in my career via this work-related injury. This physical *impairment*, though painful and limiting, has proved to be less trouble than return-to-work issues and litigation, the kinds of difficulties DS refers to as socially constructed *disability*. In short, through these experiences I learned DS’s social model of disability—that disability is a social construction roughly analogous to race or gender and that the root of disability oppression lies far more in its socialization than in embodied impairment—literally on the job. As a lifelong activist in a variety of causes, my experience with disability led me to shift emphasis. I found the work of DS scholars immediately engaging and have never looked back.

I was the first, and for a long time the only, musical academic or professional musician in the Society for Disability Studies. Initially it was hard to imagine a field more difficult than music from which to contribute to this highly interdisciplinary enterprise. The new challenge of a *tabula rasa* was that of limiting my focus: the potential avenues of inves-

tigation were just too vast. Soon, though, it also became clear that “ready-to-use” sources in musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory were nearly nonexistent. I began exploring the literatures of many fields, including film, theater, literature, folklore, history, law, industrial relations, anthropology, medicine, and mass and online popular media.

Because my primary professional training and much of my professional activity are in practical music making—composition and performance—and because I have long also been involved in ethnomusicology, my version of DS in music has concerned mostly the lived experience of musicians and their representation in media such as film, rather than in repertoire and other forms of musical text. Newer arrivals to the field are more repertoire oriented than I, but whatever becomes of music DS, my socially contexted work feels not only right for the moment, but as if I am doing good. I doubt I would get that feeling if I were to devote a monograph to seeking out the disabled voice in a canonic composer whose cultural system of conservatories and concert halls is largely inaccessible to those to whom this book is a tribute.

As a field thoroughly wedded to activism, DS is also attached to personal narrative. At least for now, DS in music should be like DS in every discipline, deeply concerned with exposing the travails of disabled lives in the interest of advancing their betterment.

One challenge in establishing the legitimacy of a new field such as DS in music is demonstrating its importance within and beyond its parent fields. The ubiquity of both music and disability generates such great potential influence for their intersection. Thus, this book considers not only the insights music and disability bring to each other but also the value of their mutual reflection for the illumination of larger cultural concerns.

The intersection of music and disability demonstrates that not only culturally manifest disability but also embodied impairment are socially constructed. This shared quality of social construction, which departs from the “orthodox” social model of disability, has implications for related social model theories of race, gender, and sexuality. It leads to critiques of identity politics and area studies as well as their dependence on human characteristics that are generally recognized as essential and embodied. The foundation of this critique is a thought experiment testing the hypothesis that an affinity for music is as essential, embodied,

and marginalized as those qualities that define “Otherness” as being both emblematic and mandatory for the “areas” that populate academic area studies.

I cannot overemphasize that I mean no assault on social model theory or area studies, only a thickening or enrichment of their respective plots. I also make no claim of absolute innovation except for the new, helpful perspective of music and disability. One of the moral imperatives of DS is the lesson that dependence is not a defining element of disability status. Rather, interdependence is perhaps *the* defining feature of civilization. One of the most ennobling facets of DS is that this philosophy of interdependence is mirrored in the working methods of the field, which is so thoroughly interdisciplinary that the symbiosis of its scholars is a given and a must. Another virtue of DS is its devotion to pragmatism. As a music maker who only recently came also to pursue research intensely not so much by accident as by injury, I find in DS a potential antidote to the excesses of jargon and other conceits that limit the social effectiveness of much of cultural studies (if indeed social good is really the goal of such obtuse enterprises).

As a working musician, I am often rankled by the many scholarly writings about music by nonmusicians. In much the same way, people with disabilities (PWDs) are angered by the considerable control that “ABs”—the (temporarily) able-bodied—exert on their destinies through domination of the discourse and material resources associated with disability. Nonmusician authors tend to write, literally, “about” music, in the sense that *about* means *around*. They write about music’s environment: lyrics, fashion, economies—things they likely understand better than they do aesthetically organized sound. Inspired by the slogan of DS and the disability rights movement, “Nothing about us without us,” I have come to appreciate how imperative it is that musicians, like PWDs (often one and the same, particularly, of course, in this book) control discourse that so largely controls their lives. It is also through DS that I have developed my theories of musicality—the affinity for music—as embodied. I am deeply grateful.

The theoretical component of this book serves as preparation for several utterly pragmatic applications of disability theory to musical lives. I am frequently queried as to the nature of DS in music. Among

my colleagues in DS, the curiosity is more fascination and delight than skepticism. Among my colleagues in music, it is quite the opposite. For the benefit of my disciplinary colleagues, it is largely from the perspective of a practicing musician that I demonstrate the unique applicability of DS to practical problem solving in music and music education. The development of a theory of music and disability requires a good deal of exposition.

Methodological Forbears and Forebodings

The largely medicalized literatures in music therapy and special education in music are well established. However, apart from my own publications and those of Joseph Straus (2006, 2008) and Neil Lerner and Straus (2006), there is little extant published music research that employs social model theory as its foundation. (There are also a considerable number of emerging scholars in this field, many of those whose work has been nurtured by Straus. I will briefly discuss a conference on this scholarship in Chapter 5.) This is not intended as a rebuke of music therapy, only a distinction. Rehabilitative and medical fields, for which problems are primarily pathological and solutions primarily treatment, are, as Simi Linton states, “not disability studies” (1998, 132–156). Few in DS would deny the value of—and indeed in many cases the need for—these fields, though many would hope for a reciprocal recognition of social model values. And Ju Gosling’s observation (Gosling and Hunter 2009) that both medical and social model thinking are found throughout society is of paramount importance. In particular, she stresses that those in the medical and rehabilitative fields can and, at times, do think and practice socially. This, I would add, must be encouraged, not dismissed, by DS scholars.

I have found particularly valuable the writings of ethnomusicologists Bruno Nettl and Henry Kingsbury and music educator Christopher Small. All have studied organizational systems within Western classical music, including how they function not so much within culture but *as* culture—that is, as autonomies with their own hierarchies, rules, and rituals. For me, the value of their research is less that their topic is Western

classical music per se than that what they say about musicians as communities is inescapably compelling because their subject is familiar rather than “exotic.”

I have also benefited greatly from the work of ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin (1993), who writes about many kinds of music. His work often references globalization—specifically, the degree to which musical communities transcend spatial boundaries through travel, immigration, diasporic consciousness, mass communications, and the Internet. My theory of social confluence, for which I claim only an increment of credit, builds on the work of Slobin and his methodological forbears, notably anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996). It does so through my observation that the individual identities constituting such communities are capable of morphing almost instantaneously and that increasingly they are becoming the fundamental unit of social organization in globalized, technologized society through innovations like Facebook and Twitter. The intersection of music and disability is an excellent window through which to witness this phenomenon.

What all the scholars referenced here share is a redefinition of communities and cultures in which physical and temporal proximity have only limited bearing. That *Worlds of Music* (Titon and Fujie 2005) is a prominent ethnomusicology textbook is hardly coincidence. This rethinking of musical community is an outgrowth of and wholly consistent with ethnomusicology’s parent discipline, cultural anthropology.

For me, among the traditional academic music disciplines, ethnomusicology has by far provided the richest resources of both theory and documentation. (I differ in this from music theorist Straus and musicologist Lerner.) Because my interest is more in musicians, musical institutions, and musical human rights for PWDs, ethnomusicology is a more natural fit than more repertoire-based disciplines. But ethnomusicology cannot provide a theoretical or methodological platform for the study of disability issues in music. A major reason for this book and my other scholarship (Lubet 2009) is that DS is increasingly a field unto itself in which music plays a unique role.

Despite serious introspection, efforts at course correction, and the handful of works in which Westerners investigate Western art music, ethnomusicology remains a field much characterized by its colonial

legacy of power imbalance between relatively privileged scholar and disadvantaged “informants” (Jackson 2006; Wong 2006). Privilege accompanies the usual embodied demographics—white, male, and straight—though, as Wong says, being an ethnomusicologist can make one “the Other” in the larger context of musical academia.

In a prominent book on “medical ethnomusicology” (Koen 2008) that in many ways is meritorious on its own terms, no form of disability appears in its index. At more than 550 pages, the book claims profound interdisciplinarity, including “historical musicology, ethnomusicology, medical, cognitive, and applied ethnomusicology, systematic musicology, music cognition, music therapy, music psychology, neuroscience of music, biomusicology, music education, music performance, and dance” (Koen, Barz, and Brummel-Smith 2008), but there is no mention of DS, musical or otherwise. Thus, to the aforementioned power imbalances must be added that of doctor and patient and even an implicit assertion that the medical ethnomusicologist must be exceptionally able-bodied. Working in Malaysia, Marina Roseman (2006, 37) reports that “of course, there are the ethnographer’s on-the-ground difficulties of trying to keep out of a tiger’s jaws.” Clearly, the field in *fieldwork* is no place for a disabled scholar to assume an authoritative voice. By contrast, Michael Bakan and his colleagues’ work on the ethnomusicology of autism (Bakan 2009; Bakan, Koen, Bakan et al. 2008; Bakan, Koen, Kobylarz et al. 2008) moves toward the liberatory goal of empowering the autistic subject.

Though DS in music gains only oppositional energy from medical ethnomusicology, my theory of social confluence benefits greatly from more foundational ethnomusicological scholarship. From Nettl, Kingsbury, and Small, it derives its sense of musical institutions as cultural systems and, in particular, its critique of Western classical music. It builds on Slobin’s and Appadurai’s theories of group identity formation, to argue for an even more fragmented sense of being as the fundamental unit of social organization. Finally, it takes inspiration from ethnomusicologists of color such as Wong and Jackson, to critique not only musical academia in general (per Nettl, Kingsbury, and Small) but ethnomusicology in particular, finding that they fail to give authoritative voice to the underprivileged.

Music, Disability, and Social Organization

Simply rendered, the theory of social confluence states that modern society does not consist of stable, intact units of identity known as individual human beings but rather of people whose identities morph constantly with changing circumstances or contexts. Such change and the demand for flexibility it requires for both material and psychological survival are much in evidence in the lives of musicians. As only one example of the very different conditions of musical and extramusical cultural systems that might exist side by side and affect the life of a single individual in various ways even during the course of a single day, consider that Western classical musicians—particularly orchestral players—expect, even demand, an autocratic conductor and a similarly authoritative musical score, the latter regarded as the definitive texted representation of the composer's intentions. These same musicians who insist on a professional environment of musical totalitarianism typically find similarly dictatorial conditions in other realms of their lives—even in relations between orchestral management and members—as intolerable as would anyone who enjoys the rights and privileges of representative government. Thus, these musicians' daily existence involves enormous feats of "culture switching" that are internalized to be utterly spontaneous, natural and intuitive. This is an *idée fixe* for ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl. Music's sense of community can certainly loom large for its practitioners, in no small part because we often claim the identity of musician when quite young. (Kingsbury uses the anthropological term *cultural system* instead of *music*.) Community, however, does not necessarily always imply hospitality or warmth, particularly in the competitive environments music often fosters.

How to Read This Book

This book was written with two audiences in mind. Obviously it is directed to readers interested in disability and music. To the best of my ability, I have kept it a jargon-free zone, eschewing the idiosyncratic language of music theory and leaving out examples in musical notation. I am, of course, knowledgeable in these, but I refuse to permit the occult lore of my field to serve as a barrier to matters I can illuminate

for a broad audience, including those many PWDs whom music education has shunned. I also hope that those who might otherwise find my topic obscure will concur that the intersection of music and disability yields something provocative and valuable in the theory of social confluence.

The theory of social confluence begot this project. Convinced by my own experience that the intersection of music and disability was an extraordinary site from which to observe radical transformations of identity, I compiled five “encounters,” each with something unique to contribute to both the theory of social confluence and to our understanding of music and disability. I hope both to contribute to DS and to demonstrate DS’s value to large conversations about identity and culture.

As examples and tests of the theory of social confluence, the chapters increase in difficulty. To facilitate understanding, they are previewed together here.

Chapter 1 deals with one-handed classical pianism, arguably the most familiar instance of physical disability in music. My concern is less with amputee pianism (Lerner 2006, 75–89; Sacks 2008, 284–287) than with hand-injured pianists (Sacks 2008, 289–300), whose disability status is more fluid. Several such artists are discussed, but the nature of classical music as a cultural system renders their situation essentially generic. Such a pianist is placed in a wide variety of social confluences, where his (they are all male) disability status is shown to vary radically. Like Lerner, I demonstrate that, in classical music, institutionalized one-handed pianism matters more than individual one-handed pianists.

Chapter 2 discusses physical disability and jazz, in particular those impairments that actually influence the artist’s performance style. Particular attention is paid to guitarist Django Reinhardt, pianist Horace Parlan, and vocalist “Little” Jimmy Scott. The nature of jazz, African American, and improvisatory performance traditions is compared to that of Western classical music, as discussed in Chapter 1. The protocols of the former are shown to accommodate individual impairments far better, even allowing for unique approaches to virtuosity, thus providing an apt model for full participation of musicians with disabilities.

In Chapter 3, the question is asked whether a largely autonomous “Blind Culture” analogous to Deaf Culture can or does exist. The

principal example is the all-female, mostly Muslim Blind Orchestra of Cairo. The question is complex, the answer a provisional yes. Questions of whether such a culture intersects with gender and religion receive focused attention for the first time. Western classical music is shown, in this context, to have a liberatory impact on these disabled women's lives, quite different from that shown in Chapter 1.

Chapter 4's theme is religious law, both Islamic and Jewish. For each legal system, a different question is asked, each of which presents a more challenging test to the theory of social confluence. With regard to Islamic Sharia law, specifically its practice under the Afghan Taliban as a government and later an insurgency that spread to Pakistan, I demonstrate how musicality, generally regarded as a talent or hyperability—and which I argue is as innate as gender identity or sexuality—became a disability. The section on Jewish law (Halacha) concerns *kol isha*, the doctrine that forbids an adult male from listening to the singing of any adult female other than his own wife. I argue that the law disables women by preventing them from singing in many circumstances, but that the impaired parties are the men, sexual predators regarded by some scholars as the reason for this and other limitations on women's activities.

Chapter 5 addresses the “language disability” of international (mostly Asian and female) music students in the United States. The unique intricacy of this example owes to what the field of neurolinguistics recognizes as the near impossibility for adults to acquire fluency in a foreign language. The fact that this difficulty is embodied and universal calls into question its status as an impairment, even though it is considered a disability in the unsympathetic environs of American higher music education. In this context, disability is enmeshed with gender, race, language difference, and diaspora, an intersection whose navigation makes for an appropriate conclusion to a book about complex encounters.

That disability can be so wholly a matter of social perception and prejudice should be proof positive that DS and disability rights should be everyone's concern. It is conventional wisdom in our field that anyone who lives long enough will eventually become disabled. However, as I hope you will learn in these pages, neither a long life nor an impairment is necessarily a prerequisite to acquiring disability status. And depending on the social confluence of the moment, that attribution might change completely in the blink of a blind eye.

In 2008, during the writing of this book, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was amended. I was thus faced with determining how to treat the many references to the original ADA that had already been written. Rather than simply revising these passages to reflect the changes in the amended statute, I decided that it was better to supplement them with information about the new law. The original ADA was landmark legislation, not only for the United States, but also for the world. Its history, however, was largely that of having its effectiveness much attenuated by the rulings of the appellate and Supreme Courts. This rolling back of gains in disability rights by conservative courts is what inspired the passage of the amendments. Though there is much enthusiasm for the improvements in the law, as I write this in late 2009 it is simply too early to tell how the amended act will be enforced and whether new rulings by the high courts will impede its effectiveness. In that context, it seemed best to treat the ADA both before and after amendment.