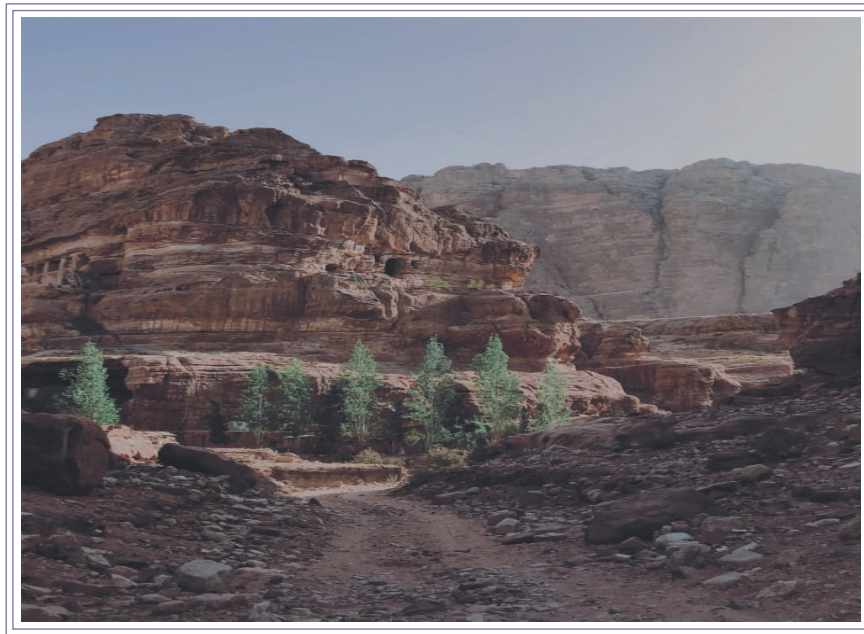


The UCLA Undergraduate Department of Musicology presents

# MUSE

*An Undergraduate Music Studies Journal*



## Vol. 4, No. 1

***White Heather Club:  
A Twentieth-Century Taste of  
the Highlands***

*Lauren Park*

**Gender Nonconformity in  
Punk: A Close Analysis of  
YUNGBLUD's Album *weird!***

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**Twin Suns and Spiral Galaxies:  
the Role of Extended Technique  
and Augenmusik in the Music of  
George Crumb**

*Sven Joseph*

2023

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## A Note from the Editor

Ashley Dao

*Adapted from the introduction to the 4th Annual MUSE Conference*

It is my honor and pleasure to present the fourth volume of *MUSE, An Undergraduate Music Studies Journal* here at UCLA. My deepest thanks goes to our authors, editors, and marketing team, who have worked tirelessly and with especial finesse to make music scholarship more accessible for undergraduates, as well as cultivate inter-institutional support networks for young scholars across the world. For those who might not be familiar with our organization, *MUSE* is the first undergraduate journal for music studies at UCLA, and sprouted from the “Writing About Music” course taught in 2020 by Professor Emerita Elisabeth Le Guin—whose first-rate pedagogy led to four (out of five) publication contributions by non-music or musicology majors (see Vol. 1, No. 1). Her support, care, virtue, and kind-heartedness has since resulted in three Editors-in-Chief—who have led the publication of five journal issues (23 authors!)—and several cohorts of undergraduate editors and marketing strategists across an assortment of majors.

Henceforth, we have opened up our submissions to undergraduates and recently-graduated undergraduates all over the world, and our members’ majors have ranged from Musicology, Ethnomusicology, Music Performance, Music Education, Music History & Industry, and Global Jazz Studies to English, Communications, Global Studies, Psychology, Neuroscience, Computer Science, Linguistics, Biology, and much more. From the editorial process to our paper selections, we aim to be cutting-edge, self-reflexive, empathetic, supportive, inclusive, and interdisciplinary; our diverse membership and the varied disciplinary backgrounds of our published authors have greatly inspired and informed the growth of our journal while paving the path for lasting friendships, superior mentorship, and innovative collaborations.

To introduce this volume, I would like to individually thank and celebrate the wonderful team here at *MUSE*, with whom I have grown so much as Editor-in-Chief: our Review Editor, Austin Nguyen; our Technical Editors, Maria Alexandrescu, Jennifer Alvarez, Elena Flauto, Selina Shitong Li, and Sihui Lin; and our Marketing Team, Jennifer Alvarez, Jenny Choi, Selina Shitong Li, Madison Starr, and Aden Tezolmez. I am so grateful to have had your support, dedication, attentiveness, fervent curiosity, and friendship throughout the making of this volume. My gratitude also goes out to my predecessor, former Editor-in-Chief June W. Clark, for welcoming me into *MUSE* during my first year at UCLA, entrusting me with the journal, and supporting us from the east coast.

To our gifted authors, we send our sincere thanks for submitting your wonderful papers, presenting your valuable research at our annual conference, and being such fantastic collaborators during the editorial-publication processes! We are so excited to follow your blossoming careers and creative journeys both within and beyond music studies. Of course, we must profoundly thank our superb faculty, staff, and students at The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music, whose neverending dedication and support will continue to invigorate generations of journal staff, conferences, publications, and innovations to come.

Thank you!

# White Heather Club: A Twentieth-Century Taste of the Highlands

Lauren Park

From 1958 to 1968, British viewers enjoyed nights of traditional Scottish dance and song with kilt-donning host Andy Stewart on British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) *White Heather Club*.<sup>1</sup> A Scottish variety show filmed in Glasgow, *White Heather Club* adapted the ceilidh—a traditional gathering in Gaelic Scotland and Ireland of family and friends sharing stories, songs, and dances—for contemporary times by featuring a cast of dancers and musicians in weekly thirty-minute episodes.<sup>2</sup> Producer Iain MacFayden began the show to fill the 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. slot on BBC television, and episodes initially broadcasted in Scotland only. Surprisingly, one-third of Scottish viewers watched regularly, and to increase revenue, BBC began airing episodes throughout the United Kingdom in April 1961.<sup>3</sup> The show saw tremendous popularity and drew in more than ten million viewers for its 1961 New Year's Eve episode.<sup>4</sup>

*White Heather Club* has left a lingering legacy, though a complicated one. In 1991, nearly thirty years after the show's end, BBC produced a cast reunion episode, which began by surveying people in the streets of Scotland about the show. Two interviewees who appeared to be around seventy years old remembered *White Heather Club* fondly, with one saying that he “liked Scottish dance music.” On the contrary, two college-aged students grinned when asked about the show and said that it was “before their time,” and the show's name prompted giggles from other young adults.<sup>5</sup> Discussion about the show continues today; in 2021, Richard Walker, a columnist for the Scottish newspaper *The National*, wrote that he was “appalled” at *White Heather Club* as a teenager, as it was one of many representations of Scotland that seemed “embarrassingly stuck in the past.”<sup>6</sup> One reader, saddened to hear about Walker's negative view of the show, wrote that his “memories [were] the opposite.”<sup>7</sup> This paper will elaborate on these varying perceptions of the show, in part because they point to its enduring significance in Scottish and, more broadly, British culture.

Both the success of *White Heather Club* and the conflicting reactions to it raise questions about the show's appeal, impact, and purpose. While some appreciated the show's representation of Scottish traditions like music and dance, others criticized it as outdated and stereotypical, contrary to the show's claims to authenticity. In this paper, I examine how the show could have appealed to audiences and what kind of representation of Scotland it provided—a flat caricature or a more nuanced portrayal.<sup>8</sup> For my analysis, I turn to episodes from June 1959, May 1960, and October 1960, the only full episodes available on YouTube. I then describe the political and cultural impacts of past representations of Scotland and relate them to the show. Through this exploration, I demonstrate that *White Heather Club* was successful because it relied on established stereotypes about Scotland to mark itself as distinctively “Scottish.” Within this framework of supposedly Scottish culture, the show first immersed the audience in fun and community. Second, and more importantly, it channeled nostalgia and pride associated with a Scottish national identity to evoke sentimentality among viewers. The show's essentialist notion of the characteristics that define being Scottish—qualities that comprise what I term “Scottishness”—overlooked contemporary

1 *White Heather Club* derived its name from the white heather flower, a signature plant of Scotland. “The Symbolism of White Heather in Scotland,” Darach Social Croft, <https://darachcroft.com/news/the-symbolism-of-white-heather-in-scotland/>; Stephen Harris, “The White Heather Club,” Andy Stewart: An Illustrated Record, <https://andystewart.info/the-white-heather-club/>.

2 Margaret Bennett, “Céilidh,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05249>.

3 Harris, “White Heather Club.”

4 *White Heather Club*, “1991 Reunion,” produced by May Miller, aired 1991, on BBC Scotland, [https://youtu.be/M\\_fTDGOHITE](https://youtu.be/M_fTDGOHITE), 1:49-1:57.

5 “1991 Reunion,” 0:18-0:43.

6 Richard Walker, “Richard Walker: How Celtic Connections helped to shape my politics,” *The National* (Glasgow), January 21, 2021, <https://www.thenational.scot/news/19026366.richard-walker-celebrating-culture-can-beat-scottish-kringe/>.

7 “I grew up with trad music and The White Heather Club never made me cringe,” *The National* (Glasgow), January 22, 2021, <https://www.thenational.scot/news/19029796.many-trad-musicians-virtually-unheard/>.

8 Of the 285 episodes produced, six remain in the archives. “1991 Reunion,” 2:21-2:25.

popular culture and marked Scotland as stuck in the past.<sup>9</sup> Both historically and in the present, the tendency to mythologize Scotland, or create an idealized but often condescending portrayal, has served Scots in cultivating a national identity different from a more generic affiliation with Britain. At the same time, British monarchs in England have promoted such myths to justify their rule over Scotland. Using *White Heather Club* as an example, this paper will highlight how stereotypical representations can serve myriad purposes, including both a defensive nationalism and a more offensive imperialism.

## Historical Context

*White Heather Club*'s appeal could reflect its participation in a broader cultural and political movement of twentieth-century Scottish nationalism. Calls for Scottish independence in the last century trace their roots to a complicated history of Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. In 1707, the Acts of Union unified the previously separate kingdoms of Scotland and England into the single state of Great Britain, which would conquer more territories to become the United Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> This incorporation of Scotland into the British monarchy prompted Scottish resistance, most notably the Jacobite rebellions—a series of uprisings from 1715 to 1745 that the monarchy eventually crushed.<sup>11</sup> Long after the Jacobite uprisings, tension between Scotland and the British government continued into the twentieth century. The first devolution referendum of 1979, which called for Scottish legislative powers separate from the British Parliament in London, failed. In 1997, a second devolution referendum finally succeeded in creating a Scottish Parliament.<sup>12</sup> While devolution did not grant Scotland political independence from Britain, the creation of a legislative body in Scotland distinct from the British Parliament reflected Scots' desire to exercise governmental powers on a local level, which could have drawn from notions of a separate Scottish identity.

Both referendums coincided with Scots' growing interest in their national culture in the twentieth century, exemplified by the growth in popularity of folk music and literature. This resurgence built upon earlier initiatives aimed at preserving folk traditions, or culture native to Scotland, such as the founding of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society in 1923 with the goal of preserving traditional Scottish country dance.<sup>13</sup> After World War II, this interest grew into a "folk revival," a period of immense popularity of folk music especially in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Musicians collected traditional ballads, and throughout the century, large numbers of record shops and magazines centering around folk music emerged, seen in the case of the British magazine *Living Tradition* (founded in 1993).<sup>15</sup> Traditional Scottish country dance captivated Scots, as demonstrated by the success of *White Heather Club* accordion player Sir Jimmy Shand (1908-2000), who performed this dance music.<sup>16</sup> The same impetus for the assertion of Scottish identity in music drove the "Scottish Renaissance" in literature, a renewal of

9 I acknowledge that no single characterization of a nation can represent all members of a national community and their experiences, and my use of the vague term "Scottishness," a flattening of a complicated national identity, alludes to the essentialism that the show employed. I use the term "nation" to describe a group of people who believe that they share certain characteristics, usually cultural, ethnic, and linguistic, and thus warrant belonging to a distinct national community. Following this definition, I employ the phrases "Scottish national identity" or simply "Scottish identity" to capture people's belief that they are Scottish and belong to a national community of Scots. With my paper's focus on music, dance, and literature, I focus on the notion of a Scottish national identity stemming from a unique culture that differentiates Scotland from other nations.

10 Following Michael Gardiner's *Modern Scottish Culture*, I distinguish a state from a nation, using "state" to refer to "a government exerting sovereign powers over its citizens, making decisions which directly concern their international presence." As Gardiner explains on page 13, most nations today, like France, Germany, and Nigeria, are also states. Scotland and England are exceptions as nations, not states, who belong to the state of the United Kingdom, which includes the territory of Great Britain (Scotland, England, and Wales) and Northern Ireland. For more discussion of nations and states in context of British history, see: "What is Scotland?", in *Modern Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 9-25.

11 "Jacobite Risings," National Army Museum, <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/Jacobites>; Gardiner, *Modern Scottish Culture*, 14. The Jacobites protested the removal of King James II and VII of England and Scotland, who came from the Scottish House of Stuarts, from the British throne, and they sought to return the British monarchy to the Stuarts and overthrow the ruling Hanovers. The son of James II and VII led his supporters in the last Jacobite rebellion in 1745, which the British crushed.

12 Gardiner, 17-19.

13 Defining Scottish country dance is difficult, as the tradition includes many dances of various origins (not just Scottish but also English, French, and Irish) that have changed over time. *Grove Music* defines country dance as a "lively" dance that began in seventeenth-century England. The RSCDS specifies that Scottish country dance, the Scottish version of this genre of dance, traces its roots to eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century balls and describes three types of Scottish country dance based on their rhythms: the Jig, Reel, and Strathspey. In 1923, the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) formed to "practise [sic] and preserve Country Dances, as danced in Scotland." The RSCDS followed the example of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, which formed in 1911, reflecting renewed interest in traditional song and dance in England after World War I. Pauline Norton, "Country dance," *Grove Music Online*, 2013; "What is Scottish Country Dance & Music?", Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, <https://rscds.org/learn/what-scottish-country-dance-music>; "History," Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, <https://www.rscds.org/about/history>; Gardiner, 198.

14 Gardiner, 198.

15 Gardiner, 199.

16 Ibid.



“confidence in Scottish culture” that prompted authors to write in the Scots dialect instead of Standard English.<sup>17</sup> Proudly-Scottish music and literature participated in a popular culture of Scottish “protest,” which fueled the devolution campaigns of 1979 and 1997.<sup>18</sup> The campaigns’ demands for political separation was a culmination of how Scotland embraced its folk culture throughout the twentieth century. Born out of the same folk movement in 1958, *White Heather Club* participated in twentieth-century Scotland’s cultural assertion of its national identity.

## Fun and Community in *White Heather Club*

Before exploring how *White Heather Club* could have served broader political goals such as the Scottish devolution referendums, we can begin by analyzing how it entertained audiences. Like other variety shows, *White Heather Club* engaged viewers and provided cheerful fun, but, perhaps more uniquely, it associated these positive qualities with “Scottishness” through its premise as a traditional Scottish show. From the beginning of each episode, viewers felt like participants in the show. Against a black screen, the opening text, “BBC Television in Scotland invites you to ‘White Heather Club,’” directly requested the audience’s presence.<sup>19</sup> A lively jig that became known as *White Heather Club*’s theme song played over audible cheering and whistles, hinting at the party inside the club.<sup>20</sup> The brisk jig’s instrumentation of accordions, fiddles, percussion, and bass is typical of Scottish country dance and other dances that people think of as belonging to a “traditional” or “folk” genre. Since the nineteenth century, “folk” qualities have been tied to supposedly primitive and older cultures, this jig’s instrumentation transported people to the past.<sup>21</sup> Through the sound of the opening number, the show tied itself to the “folk,” thus associating itself with related ideas of old times, simplicity, and tradition.

As the music continued, the camera moved viewers through doors opened by a saluting doorman, creating the feeling of entering the physical space of the show. They then followed the music to enter White Heather Club. Men in kilts and button-down shirts and women in flared dresses jumped and twirled in complex formations, exercising the group coordination typical characteristic of jigs and other Scottish country dances.<sup>22</sup> Immediately, the kilts, with their quintessentially Scottish pattern of tartan, marked the show as Scottish.<sup>23</sup> Working with the “folk” instrumentation of the jig, the dancers’ whoops of joy and hopping, and the social nature of the group dance, the kilts communicated a connection between Scottish culture, age-old tradition, lively fun, and community. Once viewers were inside the club, the camera took them to host Andy Stewart, who greeted them with his standard line, “Hello, good evening, and welcome once again to the White Heather Club.”<sup>24</sup>

Beyond welcoming audiences into the club community, the show gave viewers great fun through jokes, tying the sense of being Scottish to charming humor. Each episode followed a similar order of events: Stewart introduced a song or dance and usually inserted a witty comment while making small talk with the performers. In the June 1959 episode, Stewart followed his opening greeting by describing the reel, a brisk dance with Scottish origins that opened the show.<sup>25</sup> Smiling, Stewart explained that “it’s called an eightsome reel because usually eight

17 Gardiner, 149-51.

18 Gardiner, 199.

19 The October 1960 episode begins slightly differently, with Stewart singing the theme song, “Come in, come in, it’s nice to see you,” as viewers read the text “BBC Television in Scotland presents *White Heather Club*” against a tartan background. *White Heather Club*, October 10, 1960 episode, produced by Iain MacFayden, aired October 10, 1960, on BBC Scotland, [https://youtu.be/Y9MoA\\_rFsPw](https://youtu.be/Y9MoA_rFsPw), 0:02-0:06; *White Heather Club*, May 31, 1960 episode, produced by Iain MacFayden, aired May 31, 1960, on BBC Scotland, [https://youtu.be/\\_G3m3Onapa8](https://youtu.be/_G3m3Onapa8), 0:00 to 1:37.

20 The jig is a dance characterized by its vigorous hopping and fast tempo. Margaret Dean-Smith, “Jig,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

21 For a discussion of associations between the “folk,” “tradition,” and the past, see Matthew Gelbart’s *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music,”* where he discusses how notions of folk music as separate from art music and part of a more primitive and older culture emerged in the nineteenth century. Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2-13.

22 Viewers watched the coordination between dancers, which emphasized a sense of community and communicated the show’s ties to “tradition” through associations between social dances and older times.

23 Kilts themselves are a reinvented tradition. The kilt was primarily a Highland dress in the north of Scotland, and after the Jacobite Rebellions, the British monarchy outlawed the Highland kilt, only to take up the kilt again later. When King George IV visited Scotland in 1822, organizers of his visit, notably Sir Walter Scott, ordered both Lowland and Highland Scots to wear kilts of mostly invented tartans (not age-old clan symbols, contrary to popular belief), ignoring how the Lowland elite had abandoned the dress. See the later section “Past Representations of Scotland” for more discussion of this. Richard J. Finlay, “Queen Victoria and the Cult of the Scottish Monarchy,” in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, ed. Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 212.

24 Reflecting how viewers felt involved in the show, people believed that White Heather Club was an actual club, and they sent letters addressed to “White Heather Club, Scotland” (not a physical location) with song requests. Harris, “The White Heather Club,” *White Heather Club*, June 2, 1959 episode, 1:23 to 1:26.

25 This reel is in simple quadruple meter; groups of four beats grounded the music, with each beat broken into fast eighth notes. Here, the dancers moved in

people dance it,” and the obvious statement prompted chuckles from himself and the dancers sitting behind him.<sup>26</sup> Similar jokes—combined with cheerful dances and markers of “Scottishness” and tradition such as the kilts and country dance instrumentation—demonstrated that the club members formed a happy, Scottish community to which the audience belonged.<sup>27</sup>

Stewart ended each episode by, once again, directly engaging viewers. The concluding number emphasized values of community, all within a Scottish framework. After the last act, he bid the audience “Good night, good luck” and transitioned to singing the rest of his goodbye with the show’s guests. The song’s lyrics began, “Haste ye back, we loue [love] you dearly, call again, you’re welcome here.”<sup>28</sup> These good wishes emphasized the audience’s membership in the club and invited them back the next week. The lyrics floated over a sweet-sounding soaring waltz; its moderate tempo added a solemn air to the mood and allowed the audience to ponder the meaning of each word. In the line, “May the path o’er which you wander be to you a joy each day,” an ascending octave accompanied the words “a joy,” and the sonically striking melodic leap underscored that the show members wished for viewers’ happiness.

Compelling visuals heightened the song’s message, as seen in the May 1960 and June 1959 episodes. After Stewart finished singing, the camera panned out, showing him joining the dancers in waltzing to the melody. Viewers saw all of the show’s members participating in the final dance, with couples gliding across the room, musicians playing their instruments, and other guests watching. The group nature of this dance, along with thoughtful and compassionate lyrics that were enhanced by the music, enveloped viewers in *White Heather Club*’s community and drew them to the show’s welcoming environment. The show provided audiences with an image of simpler times, lively entertainment, and caring community, all while displaying kilts, dresses of tartan, and sonic signifiers of Scottishness and the folk. These symbols communicated that simplicity, fun, and sincere relationships occurred in a Scottish context, thus associating such appealing characteristics with Scottish culture.

## Scottish-y Sentimentality

*White Heather Club* continued appealing to viewers by embracing a Scottish national identity. The show defined this identity as created by shared historical events and culture, and by recalling these experiences, it prompted viewers to feel heightened emotions, or sentimentality. Thus, the show was presented in a way that evoked nostalgia, sadness, and pride in audience members. The show’s very premise as a traditional *ceilidh*, a gathering of communal song and dance, and costumes made of tartan, a pattern closely associated with Scotland, immediately reminded viewers of a Scottish culture distinct from other cultures. Indeed, Andy Stewart’s kilt was a conscious and effective choice. In his first appearance as host in 1958, Stewart wore a conventional suit and tie; however, in the subsequent episodes, he transitioned to a kilt and maintained this attire thereafter. Emboldened by its initial success, the show began to embrace its more suggestive markers of belonging to a Scottish national community and being Scottish, what I have called “Scottishness.”<sup>29</sup> The combination of women’s tartan dresses and the men’s kilts could, and no doubt did, tap into images of Highlanders in pre-industrial wilderness and Scottish Jacobite soldiers fighting nobly against the English in the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the symbolic *ceilidh* premise and costumes of *White Heather Club*, the show’s acts themselves

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groups of eight and alternated between spinning in a circle while holding hands and dancing in pairs in a fixed spot. At the conclusion of each musical phrase, they cheered with joy, and they enthusiastically applauded once the song finished.

26 *White Heather Club*, June 2, 1959 episode, 1:27 to 1:32.

27 We see another typical witty line from Stewart in the June 1959 episode when he attempted to guess the next song by the Scottish Alistair McHarg and posited, “Eh, the Chinese eating song, written on rice paper,” which prompted boisterous laughter from the guests on screen. Other examples of joyful dances include the Gay Gordons dance in the May 31, 1960 episode. Gay Gordons are a type of Scottish country dance that follow a brisk march tune in simple duple or quadruple meter. In the episode, the dancers grouped in pairs and danced the same steps that involved hopping and twirling. *White Heather Club*, June 2, 1959 episode, 8:48 to 8:51; *White Heather Club*, May 31, 1960 episode, 28:35–29:43; “Gay Gordons,” Scottish Country Dancing Dictionary, <https://www.scottish-country-dancing-dictionary.com/dance-crib/gay-gordons.html>.

28 *White Heather Club*, June 2, 1959 episode, 23:23 to 23:46.

29 Harris, “The White Heather Club.”

30 As Margaret Munro explains, “tartan was, and is, recognised [sic] as a Scottish signifier.” Margaret Munro, “Tartan Comics and Comic Tartanry,” in *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History, and Myth*, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 182.



projected a Scotland marked by historical struggle to stir emotions in viewers. According to Stewart, the show primarily presented eighteenth and nineteenth-century ballads, many of them written by the famous Scottish poet Robert Burns.<sup>31</sup> To make viewers feel sorrowful but also proud and nostalgic, these songs often mentioned historical Scottish struggles for independence, namely the eighteenth-century Jacobite uprisings against the British monarchy. In the June 1959 episode, Stewart introduced a “song of the Forty-Five Rebellion” and sang the Scottish folk song “Hey Johnnie Cope” about the last Jacobite revolt in 1745.<sup>32</sup> This reference to the 1745 rebellion, infamous for the British troops’ ruthless suppression of the Jacobites, prompted the audience to remember Scottish history. In recalling Scottish sacrifice for independence from the British monarchy, viewers could have mourned the loss in these struggles. Simultaneously, they could have taken pride in these brave acts of resistance and even longed for a past where values of bravery and sacrifice drove people to act.

In the October 1960 episode, too, Stewart introduced songs of war to make audiences feel sentimental. At the end of the episode, a solo accordion played “The Battle is O’er,” a traditional pipe melody.<sup>33</sup> Slow and unornamented, the solemn melody, moving mostly stepwise except for an ascending major sixth, unfolded over artificial sounds of blowing wind, which evoked images of a lone bagpiper in open fields. Strobe lights formed an X-shaped cross against the solid background and reminded viewers of the Scottish flag, blue with a white Saint Andrew’s cross. Stewart then walked onto the stage with his head bowed before beginning to sing lyrics over the repeating melody, some of which included:

I return to the fields of glory  
Where the green grass and flowers grow  
And the wind softly sings the story,  
Of the brave lads of long ago.  
March no more my soldier laddie  
There is peace where there once was war...  
Where the cool waters gently flow.  
And the gray mist is sadly weeping.<sup>34</sup>

The lyrics encouraged viewers to long for the green hills and misty skies of northern Scotland, or the Highlands, and the now beautiful landscape of the former battlefield heightened the heartache of the soldier’s return. “The Battle is O’er” stood alongside the *White Heather Club* theme song in Andy Stewart’s EP “Andy Sings,” which remained in the UK top twenty charts from 1961 to 1962.<sup>35</sup> In the comments of “The Battle’s O’er” on YouTube, one listener writes, “So proud to be Scottish when I hear Andy Stewart songs dedicated to Scottish soldiers,” and another comments, “Why do I miss a place I’ve never been to?” Others pay tribute to their family and friends who fought in the World Wars and other wars. Such comments demonstrate that the song prompts feelings of mourning and pride tied to the sacrifice of noble Scottish soldiers.<sup>36</sup> Through references to Scottish resistance and landscape, albeit only its northern region, combined with an identifiable but stereotypical dress of the kilt, *White Heather Club* asserted its Scottishness through a limited portrayal of Scottish culture. The show then evoked emotions tied to such an identity, especially nostalgia for a past characterized by the Scottish Highlands and struggles for worthy causes.

31 Many of these ballads come from the “bothy ballad” tradition, which are nineteenth century songs by Scottish farmworkers (“bothies”). Harris, “The White Heather Club.”

32 “Hey Johnnie Cope,” Scots Language Centre: Centre for the Scots Leid, <https://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/431>; *White Heather Club*, June 2, 1959 episode, 1:35 to 1:37.

33 “Is Famous Song Source of ‘When the Battle’s O’er’?”, *Piping Press*, June 7, 2016, <https://pipingpress.com/2016/06/07/is-famous-song-source-of-when-the-battles-oer/>.

34 *White Heather Club*, October 10, 1960 episode, 19:27 to 22:33, [https://youtu.be/Y9MoA\\_rFsPw](https://youtu.be/Y9MoA_rFsPw).

35 Stephen Harris, “Andy Stewart Discography,” Andy Stewart: An Illustrated Record, <https://andystewart.info/1960-1962/>.

36 Andy Stewart, “The Battle’s O’er,” released on YouTube in 2012, music video, 3:07, [https://youtu.be/0nz\\_aU2AhLs](https://youtu.be/0nz_aU2AhLs).

## Self-Conscious Authenticity

While the show's cultural and historical references to Scotland developed its identity as uniquely Scottish, its music and visual presentation raised questions about the authenticity of *White Heather Club*'s depiction of Scotland. In the 1991 reunion episode, Stewart explained that the show appealed to viewers with authentic traditional Scottish music. He recalled:

We became aware that we had an enormous heritage of traditional Scottish songs that people had never put on in theatres commercially before and the White Heather Club used these songs as the backbone of its material. We didn't sing any Harry Lauder songs for example. We broke away from all that and put onstage what had been regarded as totally non-commercial.<sup>37</sup>

In underscoring that the show presented "traditional Scottish songs," Stewart claimed that *White Heather Club* authentically depicted Scottish culture. He differentiated the show from previous stereotypical, inaccurate portrayals of Scotland by artists like Harry Lauder (1870-1950). A Scottish singer and comedian in the early twentieth century, Lauder toured the world singing his compositions, including "I Love a Lassie." Lauder based his identity on all that people associate with Scotland. Besides filling his songs with Scottish words like "bonnie" and "lassie," he dressed in a kilt, sporran, and tam, beginning the international commercialization of the tartan image in the 1900s. Lauder also traveled with a band of bagpipers and took publicity photos in front of mountains and lochs.<sup>38</sup> Stewart spoke negatively of Lauder's representation of Scotland, viewing it as exploiting Scottish tradition for profit. Stewart did not mention, though, that he performed songs by Lauder like "That's the Reason Noo [sic] I wear the Kilt," whose lyrics describe a Scottish man's wife stealing money from his "troosers."<sup>39</sup> *White Heather Club*, while certainly presenting older, traditional Scottish music including "The Battle's O'er," also featured contemporary commercial songs. The brandings of Lauder and *White Heather Club* both relied on projecting a flat, homogenous Scottish tradition equipped with images of jolly and sentimental Scots in tartan and kilts, but Stewart's emphasis on authenticity misleadingly suggested that the show presented a realistic image of Scotland.<sup>40</sup>

Discussions of *White Heather Club* interrogate this notion of its authenticity. Trevor Royle calls the show a "sanitised [sic] ceilidh."<sup>41</sup> With professional dancers in costumes and seamless transitions between acts, the show starkly contrasted with the reality of most social dances, where people learn new dances and stumble over each other's feet. A defender of the show in *The National* acknowledges that it was a "bit over the top," but that any "liberties taken" were "artistic licence [sic]."<sup>42</sup> This freedom for creators to reinterpret Scottish tradition for the show, whether that meant singing contemporary songs or presenting a refined version of *ceilidh*, implies that *White Heather Club* was a deliberately constructed portrayal of Scotland.<sup>43</sup>

As Richard Walker explained in *The National*, the show and other dated portrayals of Scotland were far removed from "the wildly exciting world of rock 'n' roll" and "a generation caught up in the so-called sexual revolution."<sup>44</sup> *White Heather Club* hermetically sealed off the country's embrace of contemporary pop culture,

37 Harris, "The White Heather Club"; *White Heather Club*, "1991 Reunion," 20:16-20:55.

38 Munro, "Tartan Comics and Comic Tartanry," 183.

39 *White Heather Club*, October 10, 1960 episode, 4:08-6:37; "That's the Reason Noo I Wear the Kilt," SecondHandSongs, <https://secondhandsongs.com/work/168753/all>.

40 James Urquhart, a guest on *White Heather Club*, says that audiences enjoyed the show's "type of straightforward Scottish music," and "it was always very, very sincerely presented." Certainly, the creators may have sincerely portrayed Scottish dance, but this does not equate to entirely realistic portrayals. *White Heather Club*, "1991 Reunion," 18:38-18:50.

41 Trevor Royle, "From David Stewart to Andy Stewart: The Invention and Re-Invention of the Scottish Soldier," in *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History, and Myth*, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 48.

42 "I grew up with trad music."

43 Indeed, Andy Stewart trained and worked as an actor before hosting the *White Heather Club*, and he and the guests planned and wrote each episode in advance. In the "1991 Reunion" episode, singer Joe Gordon explains, "The way that things were presented, the production was really tight, it was really punchy." Harris, "White Heather Club"; *White Heather Club*, "1991 Reunion," 18:28-18:32.

44 Walker, "How Celtic Connections."

the experience of rock music, and other trends taken up by its younger generation much like in other European countries. Media and culture scholar Mark Percival adds that Scottish rock musicians saw the show as “entirely fabricated for the amusement of an ill-informed national UK mainstream audience.”<sup>45</sup> Creators of the show intentionally painted Scottish culture as stuck in the past, as demonstrated by Andy Stewart’s choice to wear a kilt and his performance of Harry Lauder songs that relied on kitsch ideas of Scottish dress, speech, and nature to achieve commercial success. Their strategies appealed to a broader UK audience perfectly comfortable with a condescending folkish caricature of its Scottish neighbors. Scottish literature scholar Alan Riach explains that people remember *White Heather Club* precisely because it “accorded with the ‘recognisable discourses’ of Scottish national identity so smoothly.”<sup>46</sup> The show promoted already familiar ideas about Scottish culture, some like references to historical events rooted in reality and others more fictional, and remained in people’s memories by confirming these existing beliefs. Borrowing both from tradition and commercial culture targeting global audiences, *White Heather Club* was equally as authentic as it was inauthentic, potentially serving different goals through its complex representation of Scotland.

## Past Representations of Scotland

An overview of historical representations of Scotland reveals how *White Heather Club* stands in an established tradition of romanticizing Scotland. Throughout history, different beliefs about Scotland that only partially reflect reality have enjoyed popularity. Historians Colin Kidd and James Coleman describe one myth that emerged in the eighteenth century, which reduced Scotland to its ancient past and portrayed Scotland as having reached its peak or golden age in the third century.<sup>47</sup> Kidd and Coleman call this myth the “Ossian Phenomenon” in reference to Scottish poet James Macpherson’s *The Tales of Ossian*. Beginning in 1761, Macpherson began publishing ancient Celtic epics that he claimed to have obtained from the original source material of Ossian, a blind bard of the third century.<sup>48</sup> Later, scholars found that Macpherson fabricated many of his sources, but the Ossianic poems enjoyed widespread popularity across Europe and provided an “idealized” and “sentimentalized” vision of Scotland’s past that emphasized “heroic ideals, noble behavior, and feeling.”<sup>49</sup> Macpherson’s portrayal cemented in popular imagination an ancient Scotland that operated on heroism, noble causes, and heightened emotions. *White Heather Club* then adopted Macpherson’s characterizations of Scotland by making references to courageous Jacobites in “Hey Johnnie Cope,” which describes the 1745 Rebellion, and general Scottish struggle in “The Battle’s O’er,” which prompted viewers to remember their Scottish ancestors who fought in various wars.<sup>50</sup> By omitting popular culture such as rock music that had captivated Scotland, just like other nations, the show constructed an archaic representation of Scotland and confirmed historical assumptions about the nation.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, another view of Scotland had surfaced that fueled discussions of identity for Scotland and Britain as a whole. Kidd and Coleman call this myth the “Romantic discovery of the Highlands,” which tied Scotland to its northern landscape in the eighteenth century, and *White Heather Club* recycled these ideas.<sup>51</sup> As seen in “The Battle’s O’er,” the show depicted Scotland as an un-industrialized land of

45 J. Mark Percival, “Rock, Pop, and Tartan,” in *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History and Myth*, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 199.

46 Alan Riach, “Tartanry and its Discontents: The Idea of Popular Scottishness,” in *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History, and Myth*, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 125.

47 Colin Kidd and James Coleman, “Mythical Scotland,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, ed. T.M. Devine and Jenny Wormald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67.

48 By turning to an ancient text of Scotland, Macpherson appealed to a Europe engulfed in Romantic nationalism in the nineteenth century. As musicologist Richard Taruskin describes, German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) theorized that a nation’s true essence lay in its folk languages and cultures, and his ideas encouraged nations to return to their ancient, or primitive, people as the true source of their identities. *Ossian* helped Scots to define their nationhood with their ancient past and emerged as “one of the canonical Ur-texts” of folk-oriented nationalism. Its influence extended into the nineteenth century, inspiring Finland, Poland, and other nations in their nationalist quests. Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 121-23; Kidd and Coleman, “Mythical Scotland,” 67-69; James Porter, *Beyond Fingal’s Cave: Ossian in the Musical Imagination*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2019), xiii.

49 Kidd and Coleman, 67; Porter, *Beyond Fingal’s Cave*, xiii.

50 Macpherson’s portrayal cemented an ancient Scotland in popular imagination, inspiring Schubert and Brahms to set *Ossian*’s words to songs and Mendelssohn to paint the epics’ setting in “The Hebrides” overture. Porter, *Beyond Fingal’s Cave*, xiii-xiv.

51 Kidd and Coleman, 70.

green hills and lochs, and this image drew from the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century romanticization of the Scottish Highlands. Before the late eighteenth century, the English had previously viewed the Highlands as “too rugged and wild,” but the Romantic movement’s search for the sublime in nature oriented the English toward the Highlands.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the rapid industrialization of England beginning in the nineteenth century led them to desire a natural Scotland free from the pollution and vices of modernity.<sup>53</sup> British Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901) held a special affinity for Scotland that operated on the Romantic Highland myth, and the English public indulged in this romanticization of Scotland when reading Victoria’s published journals that described her frequent travels to Scotland. In 1848, Victoria wrote that Scottish “scenery is so beautiful,” and “all the men and women, as well as the children look very healthy.”<sup>54</sup> Her delight at seeing “beautiful” and “healthy” Scottish nature and people could have reflected the threat of widespread illness and urbanization that plagued England. In the nineteenth century, English citizens absorbed this image of the Highlands that ignored the industrialization of other parts of Scotland, not to mention its generally inhospitable weather. *White Heather Club* continued feeding the image of a natural Scotland to its audiences in the twentieth century.

In addition to providing the English with an escape from modernization, the Romantic Highland myth served the British monarchy in justifying rule over Scotland while simultaneously helping Scots to define a national identity that would resist British colonialism. By analyzing how the eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands promoted two opposing political goals—a Scottish nationalism and a British imperialism—we can understand better why *White Heather Club*’s adoption of the flexible image elicited both positive and negative reactions.

The British monarchy drew on notions of Jacobite rebels coming from the Highlands to harness the image of the Jacobite soldier and justify Scotland’s place in the British Empire. Between the 1820s and 1840s, Scottish anti-English sentiment reached a peak following the British monarchy’s new agricultural laws that caused widespread famine in Scotland and Ireland.<sup>55</sup> To legitimize Scotland’s place in the British Empire, British monarchs in England began emphasizing their connection to Scottish rulers, such as the Stuarts who led the Jacobite cause.<sup>56</sup> The English suppression of the Jacobite rebellions in 1746 allowed the English to safely establish ties with Scotland and enjoy a “sentimental Jacobitism,” which romanticized Jacobite soldiers for their noble sacrifices.<sup>57</sup> In 1822, King George IV donned the previously outlawed Highland kilt when visiting Scotland, suggesting his kinship with kilt-wearing Jacobite soldiers.<sup>58</sup> His appropriation of the image of brave Jacobites erased the history of violent strife between the British monarchy and Scotland and supported the monarchy’s rule over Scotland.

*White Heather Club*, in a similar fashion, could have seen popularity among British audiences because it constructed a sense of closeness between Scotland and England, also erasing the historic violence between the two nations. In 1961 and 1962, *White Heather Club* host Andy Stewart sang and danced at Windsor Castle and in Royal Variety Performance shows for the Queen Mother and Queen Elizabeth II, demonstrating the British monarchy’s continuing embrace of Scottish culture.<sup>59</sup> In context of the British Empire’s loss of such colonies as India, Ghana, and Singapore throughout the twentieth century, the show could have proved useful to the British monarchy. *White Heather Club* depicted for the British a slightly exotic Scotland, a nation with a different culture that nevertheless remained part of the United Kingdom, which could have soothed the ache of the dismantling of the great British Empire.

*White Heather Club* continued the nineteenth-century Romantic Highland myth’s support of British colonialism by providing British monarchs with an exoticized and anachronistic image of Scotland, reminding them of Scotland’s place in the United Kingdom. At the same time, the show could have drawn from a different use of

52 Ibid.

53 Finlay, “Queen Victoria and the Cult of the Scottish Monarchy,” 217.

54 Victoria’s journal entries about Scotland written in 1842 were published as *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* in 1868. Victoria said to her children’s governess that “‘Scotch air, Scotch people, Scotch hills, Scotch rivers, Scotch woods are all preferable to those of any other nation in the world.’” Ibid.

55 Finlay, 213.

56 Finlay, 215 and 219.

57 Kidd and Coleman, 70.

58 George IV’s niece Queen Victoria later emphasized her direct lineage from the very Stuart-supporting Jacobites that her predecessors had fought a century earlier. Victoria wore Stuart family tartans with her husband Prince Albert and purchased Balmoral estate in 1852, which serves as the royal family’s Scottish residence today. Finlay, 211-19.

59 Stephen Harris, “The Glasgow Empire,” Andy Stewart: An Illustrated Record, <https://andystewart.info/the-glasgow-empire/>.



the Romantic Highland myth. In the nineteenth century, Scots themselves promoted the image of the Highland soldier to assert a Scottish cultural identity distinct from England and cope with the British monarchy's domination of Scotland. In the mid-nineteenth century, the number of Scotland's Volunteer units, groups of part-time amateur soldiers, grew thanks to the addition of new Highland units.<sup>60</sup> The popularity of the Highland Volunteer force operated on the romanticized imagination of the Highland soldier, which had emerged from tales of brave Jacobite fighters and the idea of Highlanders as "noble savages."<sup>61</sup> These groups displayed distinctive Highland markers including "kilts, tartan trews, ostrich feathers, ornate sporrans and pipe bands," and they attracted men from all over Scotland.<sup>62</sup> As historian Trevor Royle explains, while the units' over-the-top uniforms did not entirely reflect tradition, they enjoyed popularity because they resisted "the creeping anglicization of Scottish urban life."<sup>63</sup> For Scots concerned with the erasure of a Scottish way of life by English influence, joining the Highland units and wearing such dress became representative of a "self-conscious nationalism."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, *White Heather Club's* descriptions of the Highlands and Jacobite soldiers, along with its kilts and tartan costumes, could have allowed Scottish viewers to reassert national pride in context of Scotland's calls for separate legal powers from Britain in the second half of the twentieth century.

## Return to *White Heather Club*

Throughout history, Scots have been reduced to a caricature of timeless noble soldiers of the Highlands—but not just by outsiders. Scots themselves, to preserve a distinctive cultural identity in the face of British imperial conquest and control, took up these persistent images, perhaps explaining the popular appeal of *White Heather Club*. Branding itself as authentically Scottish, the show borrowed heavily from established myths about Scotland. References to Scottish military struggle invoked the image of Jacobite soldiers used by Scots and Queen Victoria in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The kilts and tartan, signifiers of Scottishness abroad, highlighted the ideas of romanticized Scotland that lay implicit in the show, such as the Highland landscape that the songs described.<sup>65</sup>

We are left wondering, then, what purpose *White Heather Club's* adherence to essentialized images of Scotland could have served. Both Scots and the British monarchy have used Scottish myths to promote a national identity during times of nation and empire-building and encroaching foreign influences. The show could have been a response to similar desires to define a national culture. During the increasing erosion of the British Empire's stability and relevancy around the globe, the show could have supported the British monarchy by serving as a reminder of Scotland's enduring place in the United Kingdom. Andy Stewart's performances for the Queen Mother and Queen Elizabeth II recalled King George IV's appropriation of the Highlander kilt to suggest a closeness between the monarchy and Scotland, thus justifying rule over Scotland. Simultaneously, in the context of Scotland cultivating national pride and seeking political separation from the British government, *White Heather Club* allowed Scots to define their own cultural identity that was distinct from the rest of the United Kingdom, just like nineteenth-century Scots reappropriated the image of the Highland soldier to assert Scottish nationalism.

While the era that gave birth to *White Heather Club* has passed, its legacy of portraying Scottish culture lives on in YouTube videos that mark only the most recent popular manifestation of Scottish nation-building in

60 Royle, "From David Stewart to Andy Stewart," 51.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Other developments in Scottish culture represent Scots' efforts to remember the past when confronted with modernity. Sir Walter Scott's historical novels reminded readers of the Jacobite causes and other historical events, helping to preserve a Scottish identity. Ibid.; Finlay, "Queen Victoria," 214.

64 Additionally, the units' perceived ties to the past comforted people amidst changes like the elimination of traditional Highland military systems and the Highland Clearances, which removed tenants from land to make room for livestock. But while allowing Scots to maintain cultural independence from England, the Highland soldier also participated in the British monarchy's narrative of its closeness with Scotland. In 1881, Queen Victoria stood among 40,000 volunteer Scottish soldiers, and she later decorated Scottish soldiers at Balmoral Castle, which communicated a special bond between her and her Highland regiments. The British monarchy promoted the image of the Highland soldier to define the role of Scottish soldiers as loyal servants of the British monarchy. At the same time, Scots looking to resist English takeover of their culture valorized the Highland units as an assertion of Scottish identity. The romanticization of Scotland served Scots and non-Scots alike, showing the flexibility of these myths. Royle, 51-2; Finlay, 220.

65 Munro, 182-83



the context of empire. Stereotypes of Scotland have influenced political rhetoric, music, and literature throughout history, and we must contextualize these representations to examine how they have proved useful to both Scots and non-Scots. Thanks to cultural projects like *White Heather Club*, the bond between Scotland and England endures, even if politically fragile. Most recent manifestations of this closeness between the two nations have filled the news in 2022, from Kate Middleton wearing tartan in Boston to Queen Elizabeth II's casket carried out of Balmoral Castle with the strains of bagpiping that accompanied her as she passed to the other side.<sup>66</sup> The only question remaining is how we can enjoy such invocations of Scottishness today while acknowledging the various agendas they may serve.

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<sup>66</sup> Lauren Said-Moorhouse and Christian Edwards, "The piper who woke the Queen up every morning plays her to rest," *CNN*, September 19, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/19/uk/queen-piper-funeral-westminster-gbr-intl-scli/index.html>; Sarah Spellings, "The Princess of Wales Wears Tartan for Her First Engagement in Boston," *Vogue*, November 30, 2022, <https://www.vogue.com/article/kate-middleton-boston-tartan-dress>.

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# Identification with the Machine: Disco's Electronization and Evolution with Black and Erotic Movements of the 1970

Natalie Tavares

## Introduction

It was May of 1977 when Donna Summer and Giorgio Moroder released “I Feel Love” via Casablanca Records. 12-inch vinyls, new to the late 70s generation, functioned as the precipice of the DJ's efficiency. Rather than spinning one record for a single track, a DJ could purchase a 12-inch extended version of a single and create around ten minutes of dance floor euphoria, allowing the discotheque to become a site of bodily transformation.

The single marked a realm of new beginnings for disco. “I Feel Love” portrays a distinct mechanization of disco music, as the element of “humanness” in music was removed. Disco, known for its regulated beats, steadily drew from soul, funk, and R&B. However, with the introduction of synthesizers, emphasized in “I Feel Love,” disco propelled music forward, aiming to create “perfect” music that offered an imagined reality that did not exist before mechanized elements of disco—such as digital recordings and synthesizers—were popularized. In disco music, perfection is achieved through rigid beat regulation, while in in-person experiences, perfection is a transformative phenomenon that occurs when dancers drive beyond themselves into ecstasy due to the juxtaposition of the synthetic and the real.

Disco challenges its roots of “natural” funk with raw, humanistic imperfections, making room for something more synthesized and, to an extent, artificial. “I Feel Love” expresses the epitome of this shift, with its synthetic elements at the core focus of the song. The shift from organic live music into mechanized synthetic music redefines previously-defined Black and electronic musical styles, allowing for a freedom from the confines of the natural. Disco rearranges the context of music-listening to be self-transformative, stressing the importance of collective participation in music, rather than a focus on individualized skills which is present in rock music.<sup>1</sup> The focus was no longer a rock god, but rather the disco dancers. Dance floor participation evolved from a leisurely experience into a transformative one, translating outside of just the dance floor and into the surrounding socio-political environment. It is through collective participation in disco music that Black, gay, and sexual liberation movements coincided to usurp tradition.

I rely on two historians, Alice Echols and Peter Shapiro, for their interpretations on the evolution of disco music framed through different lenses. Echols discusses how disco allowed people to ditch predictable social scripts; for example, “Black musicians and producers experimented with lavish, sophisticated arrangements that didn't always sound recognizably ‘Black,’ and which became the foundation of disco.”<sup>2</sup> Shapiro's work argues that “disco fostered an identification with the machine that can be read as an attempt to free gay men from the tyranny of the natural which dismisses homosexuality as an aberration, as a freak of nature.”<sup>3</sup> Both Echols's exploration of identity politics and Shapiro's association of disco with gay liberation reinforce my argument that disco music, through its movement into the mechanical and synthetic, marks an evolution in valuing “authenticity” as

1 Gillian Frank, “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007): 281.

2 Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), XXV.

3 Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 102.

it was previously understood.

In this examination of late 1970s culture and disco music, I will describe how disco innovators, notably, Donna Summer, framed environments for the existence of gay sexual liberation as a recognized, validated, and public experience through her popularization of electronicized disco music. Through the creation of a disco network, sexual liberation reaches a new level of importance. The recognition of disco as a tool for liberation is particularly noticeable when cultural critic Richard Dyer, in 1979, coined the term “whole-body eroticism” as an experience exclusive to listening to disco music. Disco music, through its incorporation of electronic components, makes music more artificial and less predictable. Disco differed from “typical Black music” styles, predictable music patterns, and narrowly focused listening experiences in order to offer participants the opportunity to redefine their identities.

## Disco Beginnings

Disco is a breakaway from tradition, an embrace and revelation in the synthetic. In addition to its musical differences, it lacked the capital and cultural prestige that rock music carried, further distinguishing these cultural communities. Alice Echols, author of *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, describes disco as rock’s antithesis, being “nothing short of an assault on the rules of rock music.”<sup>4</sup> While rock music functioned as a loud and unapologetic “revolution” in the 1960s, disco’s entrance into the mainstream was severely covert.<sup>5</sup>

Before the popularization of the discotheque in the 1970s,<sup>6</sup> musical listening experiences had been limited to either attending live performances at concert halls or listening to phonographs at home. Discotheques, where DJs “spun” recorded music, were foundational in the creation of a new kind of musical listening experience. With the centerpiece no longer being the performers on stage, the musical focus shifted from the narcissism of the stage to the exploration of the dance floor and the bodies within it, where the listeners could act in communion with a “shared surrender to the beat.”<sup>7</sup>

Disco was at first not a definable genre, and the element of the disco “experience” is what sold records. Discotheque goers would hear music in clubs, subscribe to disco’s mantra, and buy records for their own at-home experience. Disco draws from dancing, sexuality, and community and infuses that energy into its musicality like never before, “reducing pop’s ‘moon-June-spoon’ to a series of orgasmic moans and coos and translating decades worth of coquettish, flirty, ambiguous lyrics into a single mantra,” writes Peter Shapiro, author of *The Secret History of Disco*.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand the revelatory aspects of disco music and its contributions to sexual liberation, it is important to understand the musical roots of disco and how it translates into discotheques with newfound technological advances.

## Foundations

While it pulled from a variety of different genres (such as funk, Motown, and R&B) and technologies as early as the late 1800s, disco’s foundation relied on contemporary 1970s technology—i.e., clubs and clubgoers—to realize its full potential. Barry White’s Love Unlimited Orchestra’s “Love’s Theme,” the first disco track to become a number one pop hit (prior to WPIX’s institution), would not have ever had radio play if it weren’t for its popularization in clubs first.<sup>9</sup>

Motown, a style of R&B popularized in the late 1950s and 1960s, is one of the main influences in the evolution of disco music. Disco’s standardized meter and 4/4 (or four-on-the-floor) time signature is what makes it so

4 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, XXIV.

5 As is true with many predominantly Black and or gay institutions, beginning with Harlem clubs in the early 1920s. Kevin Mumford writes, “The more visible and accessible a Harlem club became, it seems, the more heterosexual its patrons.

6 Discotheque is etymologically defined as a library of records, but we understand it as a physical site or club.

7 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, XIX.

8 Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 64.

9 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, XIX.



compelling and danceable, and also what makes the beat feel mechanized. Philadelphia orchestra MFSB is often credited with “turning the beat around” and creating the disco beat<sup>10</sup>. Eddie Kendricks’s 1972 “Girl You Need a Change of Mind” drew upon classic Motown musical characteristics such as 4/4 time and a gospel break—an element that later became known as a “disco break”<sup>11</sup> because it was used so widely in disco music.<sup>12</sup>

While disco would often utilize recognizable Motown elements, much of disco’s differentiation came from how Philadelphia soul players altered specific qualities, such as the drumming pattern and the bass line. Drummer Earl Young is often credited with inverting Motown’s usual rhythm<sup>13</sup> by accenting the off-beats using an open hi-hat,<sup>14</sup> an element that became quintessential to disco’s sound. Bassist Ronnie Baker wrapped a rubber band around his bass strings at the bridge to reach a sound that “not only anchored but propelled the music forward.”<sup>15</sup> These techniques, coupled with producer Thom Bell’s engineering of “the lush instrumentation of disco,”<sup>16</sup> help situate disco as a landmark in a lineage of similar genres.

While it is true that disco and funk have many differences, such as the fact that disco much prefers the 4/4 time signature, they are not antagonists. Rather, they “[rub] up against each other on the dance floor, on the radio, and in the recording studio.”<sup>17</sup> Other artists who helped to bridge the gap between R&B/funk/soul and disco are Sly and the Family Stone and George Clinton, who presided over the bands Funkadelic and Parliament. This “overlap” in funk and disco present in Sly’s single “One Nation Under a Groove” largely appealed to Black communities, and topped the R&B charts for six weeks in 1978.

Notably, many of disco’s predecessors were made up of primarily Black musicians and producers, though it was not uncommon for disco music to appeal to white audiences.<sup>18</sup> Many regard the shift from Motown to disco as “a take off of Motown, only more sophisticated,” said Vince Montana, vibraphonist of MFSB, and “funk with a bow-tie,” said Fred Wesley, arranger and trombonist for James Brown. This so-called sophistication represents the contention between authentic “Black music” and what was deemed acceptable to white audiences. This point of separation was important in the assessment of the authenticity of disco music as “real” music. The following section examines the contribution of Black musicians to disco and their subsequent encounters with authenticity. Disco is a transformative phenomenon, offering many communities, including the Black community, the opportunity to reformulate how their identities may have been previously defined.

## *Blackness and Disco*

Through its sonic evolutions that coincide with societal revolutions, disco on the dancefloor creates a sanctuary where the distinction between the synthetic and real ceases to matter. Whether or not disco arises as a result of an aversion to traditional music is not the question I attempt to answer; rather, I propose that by partaking in the creation and consumption of disco music, one has the opportunity to transform their identity in a revelatory way.

James Brown was a largely pivotal figure in bringing rhythm to the center of disco. Echols describes his 1965 hit “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” as “hijacked soul music taken deep into the territory of the rhythmic,”<sup>19</sup> helping to shape the future of music where “rhythm elements became the song,” according to music journalist Robert Palmer.<sup>20</sup> Brown used techniques such as speeding up tracks and lengthening them, which contributed to

10 Ibid, 16.

11 The disco break describes a point in a song in which the music intensifies and lingers at a peak. Oftentimes, DJs would intensify and elongate this peak so as to keep dancers dancing.

12 Ibid, 15.

13 Ibid, 17.

14 Also called the “sibilant cymbal.” Shapiro, *The Secret History of Disco*, 88.

15 Ibid.

16 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 17.

17 Ibid, 23.

18 In discotheque clubs like the Tenth Floor and the Flamingo, DJs were often the only people of color in the otherwise all-white space. See Shapiro, *The Secret History of Disco*, 59-61.

19 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 17.

20 Robert Palmer, “James Brown,” in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*, edited by Jim Miller (New York: Random House, 1980), 140.

the popularization of early elements of electronicized disco. While Brown helped to formulate many early disco elements, his music was often seen as “too raw and too ‘Black’ for disco audiences,” Echols points out. “Black music” was soulful and unadorned, and movement away from it was seen as pretentious, inauthentic even. Music historian Brian Ward pointed out that with the rise of disco music, Black Americans were “dancing to keep from crying.”<sup>21</sup> The association with “Black music” and the projection of struggle made deterring from the “traditional style” seem as if musicians had “fallen victim to the seductions of the white, bourgeois mainstream.”<sup>22</sup>

Instead of approaching genre as an essentializing confirmation or negation of a musician’s racial identity, I position disco as an opportunity for musicians to reformulate what Blackness in music is often associated with, such as more traditional ideas of natural funk, soulfulness, and projections of struggle. The association of Blackness with “natural” staccatoed funk music and whiteness with sophisticated instrumentation is an association that aims to limit “Black music” to raw imperfections. While the mechanical beat of disco is considered synthetic due to 1970s digital technology, its aim for precision arises from some of the earliest African-American music.

The “clean” rhythms of popular disco music are not anomalies of African-American popular music, but rather rooted in its history. The standardized meter and mechanical beats of disco can be traced back to the late nineteenth century in New Orleans’s Congo Square. Much of disco’s rhythmic cohesion can be attributed to the second line<sup>23</sup> tradition, where rigidity and perfect syncopation are rewarded with the crowd following the second line as it “takes” them.<sup>24</sup> “Marching band music is at the root of dance music’s proximity to mechanization,” writes Shapiro, due to much of musical life in America having been founded in physical proximity to railroads.<sup>25</sup> With the combination of marching bands in post Civil and Spanish-American War New Orleans and the presence of railroad work, it is no surprise that these early disco rhythms were founded by the “imitation of the locomotive.”<sup>26</sup>

Disco, by foundation, is rigid: its “perfect” nature stems from its regulation in beats. This rigidity is rooted in Black music history, which is also often historically recognized for its explicit sexuality.<sup>27</sup> The introduction of disco’s synthesization, however, depersonalized the erotic feel of Black music’s typical rhythm. Disco pioneers such as Donna Summer’s vocals were often regarded as “icy,” and “inflectionless,” “cooling” music from its “hot” origins, bringing into question its “realness” as music itself—especially as “real” Black music. The mechanized instrumentation of disco music brings into question the authentic sexual nature of disco, as it differs largely from heteronormative depictions of sexuality, in rock and roll, jazz, and blues. Through its interrogation of authenticity, disco music became an opportunity to recalibrate what the audience defined as “Black music” and how new sounds can formulate new political ideologies focused on sexual liberation.

Sylvester’s “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)” is credited for “interrogating the African American musical tradition” and for “asking what ‘realness’ is supposed to mean to gay Black men who...were forced to hide their true identity for most of their lives,” writes Shapiro.<sup>28</sup> This contention is what drives disco music forward, and also what holds it back; the fact that gay men are positioned as already “synthetic” by performing “unnaturally” drives the need for validation of an identity that is seen as “plastic.” Disco is a revelation in the plastic: the pleasure in the juxtaposition of the synthetic and the real.

Disco’s significance comes from its revelrous nature and the freedom provided to the listener. In the forthcoming sections, I will argue that this freedom found on the dance floor and the experience of gay sexual liberation are products of the synthesized, automated beat that made disco stand out from other musical genres. Donna Summer’s significance in the world of disco music proves that what often binds the singer liberates the dancer:

21 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 28.

22 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 25.

23 A tradition in parades wherein people follow the “first line” of the parade, typically containing a brass band, in order to dance and engage with the community.

24 Shapiro, *The Secret History of Disco*, 82.

25 Ibid, 83.

26 Ibid

27 In 1920s Harlem, Jazz not only denoted Black music, but often meant sexual intercourse. See Kevin J. Mumford, “Homosex Changes: Race, Cultural Geography, and the Emergence of the Gay,” *America Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1996): 407.

28 Shapiro, *The Secret History of Disco*, 87.

her manipulated persona and mechanized musical elements offer the listener an escape from reality. By exploring the mechanization of disco music and the networking of gay sexual liberation, we will be able to understand that liberation is a product of how the disco diva fuses mechanical elements of music and lived bodily experience to make reality a transformative phenomenon.

## Donna Summer

Donna Summer began collaborating with Giorgio Moroder and producer Pete Bellote in 1974. It was not long before one of Summer's demo tapes evolved into "Love to Love You Baby," the single that fast-tracked her career to success and established her status as a major contender in the greatest disco performers, also marking Moroder as the "King of Disco." Many refer to Summer as the "Queen of Disco," though she was never awarded for such a title.<sup>29</sup>

Alongside Moroder, she was creating evolutions in pop music. They are regarded as revolutionary with the development of the disco sound, specifically with the introduction of orgasmic moans and lush, sexual instrumentation. "Love to Love You Baby" pushes sexiness to the center of popular music unlike any predecessor. Surely, other artists had not shied away from sexiness in mainstream music.<sup>30</sup> In 1976, Summer was inspired by "Je T'aime, Moi Non Plus," by Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin which was released in 1969.<sup>31</sup> "Je T'aime" was re-released in London in 1975, and it became a hit. The re-release inspired Moroder and Summer to make a single even "hotter." Much like the explorations that were taking place on the dance floor, Summer's work emphasized boundlessness.

Summer's lyrics and musicality pursued sexual freedom as much as her persona did. When recording "Love to Love You Baby," Summer recounts getting into the mood by shutting off the lights, laying on the floor, and "pretending to talk to [her] boyfriend when [they're] alone."<sup>32</sup> These and similar behaviors evolved into the creation of a character that was quintessential and rather inescapable. Had "Love to Love You Baby" not been her first success, perhaps Summer would not be so inherently tied to her sex-goddess pedestal. While the image was "kind of narrow... [i]t was for the record, it was what sold the record," she recounts in 2003.<sup>33</sup> Because Summer's music was popularized within club-dancing experiences, her partly imagined "synthetic" image contributed to her commercial success. Club dancers could not see Summer; rather, they were forced to appreciate the imagined persona that was created as a result of her recorded music. The receipt of their part-reality, part-fictional image of her demonstrates cultural excitement for freely-moving dance floor identities that transcend the physical world. The enthusiasm for a disco-sex goddess was both overwhelming and unprecedented, and was welcomed into social circles with great demand. Decades of hyper-masculinized sexuality with cock-rock gods came to an end in the 1970s when Summer would bring to the center the importance of feminine pleasure.

## Sexual Freedom

Donna Summer's music did not exist in singularity during the sexual revolution of the 1970s—rather it was a part of an ecosystem of feminist art and literature that focused on centering sexual knowledge and female pleasure. Lyrics, such as "do it to me again and again / you put me in such an awful spin, a spin," echo the subjects of articles such as "What Women Want!," which only began being published in the 1970s. This decade brought a new realm of self-help manuals such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, written by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective in 1970. Kate Millet's 1970 *Sexual Politics* brought theory into a movement that was beginning to take hold in the minds of women. 1973 brought Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden* and Erica Jong's 1973 *Fear of*

29 Gloria Gaynor received the first and only Grammy for Best Disco Recording in 1980.

30 While Echols poses Marvin Gaye and Issac Hayes' work as precursors to Summer and Moroder's work that "push the boundaries of respectability," Echols specifically cites Sylvia Robinson's 1973 "Pillow Talk" as a pioneer of orgasmic gasps and moans that are present in "Love to Love You Baby."

31 Donna Summer, "Loudspeaker," interview by Lance Loud, Interview Magazine, January 1976.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

*Flying*, and in 1976, Shere Hite's *The Hite Report* made the list of bestsellers—all which detailed the freedom to express pleasure and sexuality.

As more works began detailing female pleasure, Summer's subsequent work and involvement in disco only emphasized the culture that was excited to free the reins of sexuality from its three-minute-missionary jail cell. A revolutionary catalyst at the time, "Love to Love You Baby" would prove tame compared to Summer's subsequent works, such as in 1979's *Bad Girls*, perhaps her most successful commercial work to date. While the album includes dance floor hits such as "Hot Stuff" and "I Feel Love," the entire album is unabashedly sexual, with song titles ranging from "All Through the Night" to "Dim All the Lights." *Bad Girls* is the epitome of the 1970s sexual revolution, a full embrace of sexual liberation. The feminist notions of disco arise not only in the titles of songs and the straightforward sexual lyrics, but also in the musicality of the genre itself. Cultural critics began to notice this, and Richard Dyer denotes that "the very sound of disco was, in contrast to most European-derived music, sonically open-ended, (or 'anti-teleological') and therefore anti-phallic."<sup>34</sup>

While traditional pop-rock and British-invasion rock relies heavily on completion, patterns, and the fulfillment of an expectation (think verse-chorus form), disco explores sonic open-endedness. A song may begin by following a pattern, and then draw out the chorus for seven minutes, teasing out its completion as opposed to delivering it. In this comparison, Richard Dyer, in *In Defense of Disco*, relates the phallicity of music to its teleology,<sup>35</sup> which disco lacks. Much of music uses AABA musical structures, where opening melodic phrases are returned to at the end of the song, providing the listener with a feeling of "anchoring."<sup>36</sup> Disco, however, with its typically long breaks and endlessly repeated phrases that "drive beyond" themselves, allows for an escape from the confines of popular songs into ecstasy.<sup>37</sup> Without the expectation and completion of AABA song patterns, disco welcomes the exploration of pleasure and encourages sexual freedom. Dyer uses the term "whole-body eroticism" to describe this phenomenon that disco creates, an eroticism that is not phallically centered but felt throughout the whole body.<sup>38</sup>

Summer's embrace of sexual freedom was critiqued at large, often about her plasticity. The Rolling Stone's Stephen Holder labeled her as "an inflatable sex machine as insatiable as she is helpless."<sup>39</sup> With the height of Motown in the 1960s, female singers were "groomed to walk the tightrope of being sexually desirable yet respectable," and the shift in the 1970s caused great discomfort. "James Brown might have sung about being a sex machine, but actually embodying one was a step too far," writes Peter Shapiro.<sup>40</sup>

The enthusiastic receipt of Summer's music was a product of the partly imagined, or "synthetic" image that was created as a result of club experiences, wherein the disco diva was removed from dancing experiences. This creation of synthetic imagery assists in the creation of an alternative identity within the dancer—one where they can experience whole-body eroticism, savoring anti-teleological musical patterns that drive beyond themselves and into points of ecstasy within discotheque dancing scenarios.

Summer delivered a revelation in sexual revolution through her exploration of anti-teleological sexuality in songwriting and performance. Her art reveled in pleasure and set parameters for the future, both in a revolutionary and musical sense. By understanding the history of electronic music and its journey into validity as a musical genre, we can come to fully appreciate the contributions of Summer and Moroder into a decade that was ready to embrace future gay sexual liberation.

## Electronic Music

While the lyrical and sonic content of disco music reflected concurrent socio-political changes, the journey

<sup>34</sup> Richard Dyer, "In Defense of Disco," *Gay Left* 8, Summer (1979).

<sup>35</sup> Teleology is defined as the philosophical notion that things have purposes that guide them to fulfillment.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

<sup>39</sup> Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 21-22.

<sup>40</sup> Shapiro, *The Secret History of Disco*, 102.



of those changes is rooted in electronic music's journey into validity. The introduction of electronic music into popular culture transformed how electronic music was viewed, from a masculine-warfare-dominated genre into one of the greatest tools for mechanically-erotic music. The role of the producer in popular electronic music in the late 1970s exacerbates the notion that men are in "control" of popular music and women are the "controlled," but the history behind the popularization of electronic music actually contrasts this notion.

Before it was viewed as dance music, electronic music was explicitly tied to warfare—through their similar developmental timeline as well as the terminology used to describe them. For example, "DJs 'battle,' a producer 'triggers' a sample with a 'controller,' 'executes' a programming 'command,' types 'bang' to send a signal, and tries to prevent a 'crash.'"<sup>41</sup> Therefore, "the very act of making electronic music thus unfolds with reference to high-tech combat, shot through with symbols of violent confrontation and domination," concludes Rodgers, author of *Pink Noises*.<sup>42</sup>

Electronic instruments, such as the theremin created by Leon Theremin, have been around since 1920, but electronic music was not introduced into popular culture as electronic dance music until the late 1970s. The roots of electronic music and its introduction into popular culture depended on the revolutionary technology of the theremin and the synthesizer.<sup>43</sup> The theremin was popularized by Clara Rockmore, whose public performances "helped to establish electronic and experimental music as a viable art form in the public imagination."<sup>44</sup> Early use of electronic music was critiqued by comparing elements to live music, with the *Times* writing in 1947 that Rockmore "achieved tonal agility comparable to that of a singer, and a living tone-quality." The public strived to separate electronic music from actual "music," and applauded electronic works only when they reached the live-seeming validity of acoustic musical styles.<sup>45</sup>

The associations made about electronic music complicate the fabric of electronic-disco music, which embraces sexual freedom, offers identity expansion, and essentially provides a space for gay sexual liberation. Electronic music's root themes of confrontation, violence, and domination complicate the evolution and electronization of disco music and bring to mind the role of the DJ, the producer, and the singer in the creation of popular disco music. After all, it is a DJ's job to "control" the dance floor by "entrancing" the crowd. The electronization of disco music has the potential to reverse associations of electronic music with its negative connotations of dominance. Instead, disco reclaims dominance by controlling its dancers and simultaneously liberating them, creating a space where boundaries surrounding sexuality and identity as they were once known no longer exist.

## *Synth and Eroticism*

The development and popularization of the synthesizer as a tool for the creation of popular music, while an unlikely feat, is a major reason why disco music has the sonic capability to create a space where dancers can drive beyond themselves, reaching newfound liberation. A once solely sci-fi, strictly-business instrument would become one of the lushest and sexiest tools for mechanically erotic music.

The Moog Synthesizer was invented in 1964 and popularized upon the release of musician Wendy Carlos's 1968 album *Switched on Bach*, which changed the synthesizer's status as an untouchable, science-fiction associated instrument, "representing social, scientific, political, and aesthetic rupture," writes Roshanak Kheshti, author of *Wendy Carlos's Switched-On Bach*.<sup>46</sup> By using an instrument for enjoyment rather than something the government deemed necessary, *Switched on Bach* "is a sound sign of the times that exists at the sonic borderland between fiction and reality." Carlos's identification with the machine, by calling herself "Original Synth," "reveals through juxtaposition that origins are synthetic...myths made real for the purposes of rationalizing the

41 Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 7.

42 Ibid.

43 The theremin is an instrument that consists of two metal antennae wherein the theremin operator can control the instrument's pitch and volume with their hand's proximity to the antennae.

44 Ibid.

45 Gerald Warburg, "Novelty Feature at the Stadium," *New York Times*, 1947, quoted in Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 9.

46 Roshanak Kheshti, *Wendy Carlos's Switched-On Bach*, 33 ⅓, vol. 141 (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2019), 16.



present.”<sup>1</sup>

By the time Giorgio Moroder was creating music with Moog Synthesizers, it was 1972. Prior, few producers had ever tied aspects of “corporeal pleasure” or “sexual gratification” to synthesized music, according to Peter Shapiro.<sup>2</sup> Shapiro uses the term “mechano-eroticism” to describe Summer and Moroder’s 1977 work, perfectly describing the fascination with machinery, electronics and “the decade’s obsession with the detachment of anonymous sex.”<sup>3</sup> Aletti wrote in January of 1977 that “they [Summer, Moroder, and producer Pete Bellotte] established the expansive, invigorating format, the deliciously orgasmic rise and fall of the music.”<sup>4</sup> In April of 1977, Vince Aletti, weekly writer for *Record World* magazine, wrote about Steve Bender’s “The Final Thing,” claiming the sound is “pure Summer.” It is at this point just a month prior to Summer’s “I Feel Love” that “pure” Summer is inexplicably and inherently code for explicitness in pleasure. The innovations of Moroder and Summer help bring the synthesizer into popular culture, firmly establishing its synthetic roots with sexiness.

## *The Cyborg*

Conceptually, Summer and Moroder’s work acts as a fusion of two concepts that were hardly ever popularized before: the synth used as a driver for dance, and sexuality as the driving force behind the song. Summer and Moroder’s contributions to the music realm illuminate electronically manipulated, robotic processes, challenging music’s dependence on solely human-generated sounds. Works such as “I Feel Love” beg the question of what the line is between machine and human, between raw sexuality and fabricated beats. In this collaboration, Summer acts more like a cyborg than a solely-human performer.

Donna Haraway in her 1985 essay, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” proposes the idea of a “cyborg” as the “condensed image of both imagination and material reality.”<sup>5</sup> Through the conjoined centers, there is possibility for transformation. The cyborg, according to Haraway, insists upon the pleasure of the confusion of boundaries between fiction and reality (with the definition of fiction being both literal and symbolic). In *Wendy Carlos’s Switched-On Bach*, Kheshti writes, “For Haraway, the cyborg is what remained after so many dreams deferred: world wars, hydrogen bombs, and the broken promises of liberal democracy.”<sup>6</sup> The politics of the cyborg are “speculative and imaginary rather than false, foreshadowing and anticipating a near future in which it is in fact no longer fictional.”<sup>7</sup> Through the identification with the machine, it is possible to not only rationalize the present but create one that was part-imagined. Mechanized musical elements into disco combined with the absence of live performance fuse two ideas that had previously not been recognizable in music. The performer took on the role of a “robotic” persona, or a cyborg. The performing body is removed from the listener’s experience, and instead, they can grow to appreciate a newfound eroticism within synthetic elements.

Disco is the pleasure in the blurred lines between fiction and reality, between the synthetic and the organic. “I Feel Love” draws on the concept of the cyborg because the music fuses the machine (synthesizer) to the human (voice). It is the disillusionment between the two; the stark contrast of living a “normal” life and transcending into another world in the discotheque, and it is the pleasure derived from both the confusion and the juxtaposition of the two realities that provide liberatory potential. To her listeners, Donna Summer is not only the essential face of sex and disco but a cyborg, and through this, she allows dancers to transcend reality.

## Conclusion

The evolution of disco music as an institution of normalized gay sexual liberation is owed to a number of

1 Ibid, 15.

2 Shapiro, *The Secret History of Disco*, 101.

3 Ibid.

4 Vince Aletti, *The Disco Files: 1973-1978, New York’s Underground Week by Week*, (New York: D.A.P., 2018), 258.

5 Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” *Socialist Review*, no. 80 (1985), 66.

6 Kheshti, *Switched-On Bach*, 18.

7 Ibid, 20.

cultural and musical elements. Discotheques, in the height of their significance, operated as a revolutionary space. This is owed to a number of cultural and historical factors. The sociopolitical environment of the 1970s demonstrates gay liberation efforts, such as the formation of the Gay Activist Alliance which emphasized "outness" as a tool for liberation. Most popular discotheques were in cities where there were large concentrations of Black and gay men, brought together by similar interests, "pleasure principles" and The Great Migration. Richard Dyer poses disco music as not solely a musical genre, but as a "sensibility" achieved through a culture of behavioral codes, style, dance moves, values, and aesthetic achievements. This music, coupled with the economic climate and freedom from heteronormative familial structures, allowed for the introduction of a gay identity. While disco's musical movement into the mechanical and synthetic aided in shaping the definitions of authenticity, it also validated these newfound identities.

The institution of discotheques accompanied by disco's anti-teleological erotic structure made a space for unprecedented queer exploration and gay sexual liberation. Disco as a digitally recorded form of music that is "spun" rather than performed emphasizes the importance of the listener's experience and the whole-body eroticism exclusive to listening to disco music. Disco's anti-teleological open-endedness furthers discussions of female pleasure by steering away from the predictable, "satisfying" and often straight male-centered sexual politics of music, freeing room for discussions surrounding pleasure and sexuality. Electronic components of disco music, with their foundations largely due to female musicians and technicians, help establish the synthetic nature of disco which allows for a blend of fiction and reality, and the freedom to establish an alternative identity within a part-imagined reality. Donna Summer, with her cyborgian character that embodies the voice of the sexual revolution, propels alternative sexualities and synthetic elements of music into validity. The popularization and electronization of disco music capitalized on the various sociopolitical ecosystems that existed during the 1970s, creating the conditions for cultural and bodily transformation and aiding in an evolution that redefined societal value of "realness."

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# Gender Nonconformity in Punk: A Close Analysis of YUNGBLUD's Album *weird!*

Vaniel Simmons

Punk as a genre started to develop in the 1960s, coming to the height of its fame in the late 1970s, after which some music critics claim the beloved genre died. But can a musical subgenre ever die? Punk ideology has fostered a subculture around the genre that goes far beyond the music: punk subculture can be thought of, or defined as, an anti-mainstream belief system that encourages individuals to think for themselves and craft their own ideas. In the past, members of the subculture expressed their individuality by dressing in stereotypical punk attire that is now characteristic to the genre: ripped clothes, fishnets, dyed hair, tattoos, and piercings were all very common in the punk scene but considered abrasive by outsiders. Today, this aesthetic is much more mainstream and less of a visual shock to the general public. Punk has survived the test of time by evolving according to changing notions of what it means to be anti-mainstream and what it means to “look” punk. As modern artists have taken punk into their own hands, the punk revival of the late 1990s and the current rebuilding of the genre look vastly different from past punk culture.

YUNGBLUD is a modern punk artist who reimagines what punk looks like for himself and his fans. Rather than expressing himself through tattoos and piercings, he leans into gender nonconformity. In his personal life, public activism, and produced music, YUNGBLUD encapsulates a gender-diverse and fluid concept of gender, dressing as various gendered stereotypes and also including transgender and gender nonconforming individuals in his music and at live venues. In doing so, YUNGBLUD crafts his own image of punk artistry rooted in gender nonconformity, emphasizing the entangled relationship between punk music and queerness.

## The History of Punk Culture

Punk has a rich and controversial history, both in its initial development and in its continued evolution. Reading scholarship about the subgenre of rock-n-roll reveals many contradicting opinions about what is and what is not “punk.” Overarchingly, scholars use the term to refer to the style of rock beginning in the 1970s and the subculture that formed around it.<sup>8</sup> This subculture is particularly interesting and unique to punk music, as the musical genre began to take on specific characteristics of clothing styles and political mindsets, allowing punk to evolve beyond the music’s compositional differences to a full subculture.

At the time of its origin, punk music used little embellishment, sticking to traditional sounds from a select few instruments and plain vocal expressions. Many punk artists made the distinct decision to forgo the up-and-coming electronic instruments that were increasingly popular in mainstream music—a choice that was seen as a commitment to individuality and a tool to focus on the lyrics and message of the music over the song’s musical composition.<sup>9</sup> This lack of “advanced” instruments and vocal effects was seen by critics as the artists lacking musical skill, but it alternatively provided space for energy: the music’s ability to make a person feel invigorated.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, punk music’s simplicity when it came to musical composition furthered the genre’s “Do-It-

8 Tricia Henry Young, *Break All Rules!: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1989), 7.

9 Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (Binghamton: PM Press, 2015), 77.

10 Eugene Montage, “Skill, Music, and Energy in Punk Performance” (paper presented at 12th Biennial IASPM-International Conference, Montreal, 2003), 647, [tinyurl.com/ndz9f7ee](http://tinyurl.com/ndz9f7ee).

Yourself” attitude, making the creation of punk music accessible to those who did not have the means to purchase electric instruments.

Vocally, few distinct characteristics set punk music apart from other genres, like rock, another popular genre of the time. The first is punk’s emphasis on live recordings and lack of editing during studio production. At the time, live performances were seen as inferior to the studio production for mainstream artists, as artists exercised more control in the private studio and made more money selling records than concert tickets. Punk artists upended this model by rising in popularity and establishing their reputation through live performances.<sup>11</sup> Further, when punk musicians recorded albums, it was common for them to make non-traditional choices for their songs, such as including background noises (i.e., the band members’ conversations with one another, the singer counting off the song, etc.).<sup>12</sup> Similar to punk artists’ choice not to use electronic instruments, the production style of punk albums was not traditional at the time. In contrast with other music being produced, punk records created a more intimate, raw space between the listener and the artist that emphasized meaning over musical polish. This choice to lean into the music’s message rather than its sonic qualities is a distinctly punk attribute.

Punk as a mindset is subversive and anti-expectation, going against the societal values at the time the music is produced; punk enthusiasts largely share a common goal of disrupting these norms.<sup>13</sup> This is seen in punk’s “shock” value, where members dress in a fashion that is tailored to surprise and perhaps disturb viewers; this may be done through various aesthetic choices such as colored or extreme hairstyles, black clothes, studded or spiked accessories, and body modifications, most commonly tattoos and piercings, but sometimes more extreme choices such as horns or split tongues.<sup>14</sup> This particular aesthetic is meant to be symbolic of punk’s “against-the-grain” mindset: the more out-of-the-ordinary, the better. These specific examples are representative of a larger punk belief system, which is often more valued than the specific costume choices. When self-identified members of the punk community were asked what it meant to be punk, a major theme in responses was the genuine, authentic representation of oneself.<sup>15</sup> While what is defined as authenticity was highly debated amongst respondents, the consensus was that there is no specific “correct” way to dress; as long as the person put thought and effort into their outfit and deemed their attire to be a self-reflection of their personality, it was authentic and, consequently, punk.<sup>16</sup> The expression of authenticity falls into extreme and shocking representations because of an underlying belief that mainstream culture has foregone individuality and replaced it with cookie-cutter aesthetics.<sup>17</sup> This is seen in the music industry, politics, and fashion, to which punk developed a counterculture in response. Stepping outside of the box and thinking for yourself is the ultimate goal of punk culture.

Punk continues to be relevant, extending beyond trends in music or fashion. As the subculture developed, more emphasis was put on political beliefs and action-driven movements. Punk aimed to draw attention to the misfortunes of the working class and younger generations, bringing to light injustices that many were hesitant to talk about in the conservative 1970s.<sup>18</sup> Punk individuals may convey this message lyrically in songs, visually in worn patches or logos, or represented, through acts of resistance. The defiant actions punk individuals take can range from small acts of vandalism or theft or could be much larger socio-political movements.

*Burning Down the Haus* is a creative nonfiction work that follows multiple real-life individuals who were inspired by punk music and culture and took action during the fall of the Berlin wall; it is through this book that punk’s role in political activism can be most intimately understood.<sup>19</sup> In the book, Tim Mohr retells the story of punk teens who found the core of their identity within punk’s culture. Importantly, this took place during a politically tense time: in the months leading up to the infamous fall of the Berlin Wall. Mohr describes Major, a punk

11 Laing, *One Chord Wonders*, 69.

12 Ibid, 70.

13 Jesse Prinz, “The Aesthetics of Punk Rock,” *Philosophy Compass* 9, no.9 (2014): 586.

14 Lauren Langman, “Punk, Porn and Resistance: Carnivalization and the Body in Popular Culture,” *Current Sociology* 56, no. 4 (2008): 664.

15 Phillip Lewis and J. Williams, “The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture” in *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, ed. by Patrick Vannini and J. Patrick Williams (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 70.

16 For further discussion on the limitations of this paper and its use of the word “authentic,” see page 20.

17 Langman, “Punk, Porn and Resistance,” 664.

18 Young, *Break All Rules!*, 115.

19 Tim Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus: Punk Rock, Revolution and the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (London: Dialogue Books, 2019).



teen turned political activist, and the empowerment she found in punk:

Punk sounded and looked and felt like liberation. Major had never doubted she lived in an illegitimate system, but she hadn't wanted to throw rocks or build bombs or murder anyone. She just wanted to be herself, and doing, saying, reading, and writing the things that would have made her feel like herself were all verboten. Becoming a punk imbued Major with a sense of power on two levels. First, the music seemed to give voice to the rage she felt inside and gave her the strength to survive in a system she hated. Second, the look provided an explicit way for her to show her opposition every time she stepped out in public.<sup>20</sup>

One overarching experience Major and the other punk-turned-activists share was their discovery of punk lyrics' ability to state their thoughts and concerns. Within a political climate that heavily censored individuals' acts of speech, the teenagers of Berlin sought a way to express their frustration. Throughout the story, the teens found they had nothing else to lose but their own freedom, so in the face of violence, they decided to take a stand and refuse to conform. In many cases, police arrested the punk activists, with and without charges, simply to question their style, attitude, and beliefs. When faced with prosecution from school administrators and government officials, and social isolation from family and friends, these teens channeled their fear and anger into determination and stood against the grain. This is seen more intimately in the story of Lade and Kaiser, a relaying of two individuals' efforts to access writing on punk ideology when the books were considered illicit materials.<sup>21</sup> For these two, punk culture was entwined with anarchy ideals; their perspective draws an explicit link between punk thought and political movement. Beyond explicit political action, much can be said for the impact of their protest via indulgence in the culture. Ideals of punk culture were heavily considered taboo to the point of government scrutiny, so simply refusing to conform and change their appearance was an act of protest. Punk patches, a jarring visual staple and walking advert of the culture, further called attention to relevant political topics such as anti-capitalism and anti-police slogans, prompting conversation on these topics with varying levels of success. Overall, the teens in *Burning Down the Haus* show the political impact of punk culture—not just in theory, but also in practice—and demonstrate how punk goes beyond music and becomes a mindset and lifestyle.

## The Artist YUNGBLUD

English singer and songwriter Dominic Harrison, better known by either Dom or his stage name, YUNGBLUD, launched his music career in 2018 and released his sophomore studio album, *weird!*, in 2020. Both as an artist and as an individual, YUNGBLUD fully embraces punk ideology, especially in terms of authenticity. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, he talks about his experience growing up, when he felt his identity was stifled, and then describes his turn to creating his own image: he proclaims that he is “never going to conform again to be something that someone else wants [him] to be.”<sup>22</sup> In a short film he later produced, YUNGBLUD described music as “freedom”: the moment he began to produce music was “the first time in [his] life [he] finally, genuinely, undeniably felt free.”<sup>23</sup> Both examples show his commitment to punk ideology: YUNGBLUD does not care to fit in with any specific style or representation but instead seeks to express himself in a fashion that feels authentic to him, regardless of what others think. This authenticity of having one's outer self be a representation of one's inner soul is vital to his self-identification within the punk community.

For YUNGBLUD, his outer self represents his inner soul most completely when he expresses himself

20 Ibid, 23.

21 Ibid, 45.

22 Brittany Spanos, “Yungblud: Pop-Punk Rebel on a Mission,” *Rolling Stone*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/yungblud-interview-artist-you-need-to-know-904078/>.

23 YUNGBLUD, “YUNGBLUD - lonely together (a short film about belonging) | Vevo LIFT,” Youtube, December 13, 2019, 0:06:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn93OxWHy1w>.

outside of the gender binary; his clothing and makeup choices in his everyday life, music videos, and lyrics reflect this total expression. In one interview, YUNGBLUD explained his expression of gender as ‘coming into’ himself: “I can be who I want to be, where I can f\*\*\*\*\*g speak however I want to speak, identify how I want to identify, love whoever the f\*\*k I want to love.”<sup>24</sup> In the same interview, he states that he enjoys dresses and makeup as forms of expression that allow him to feel sexy.<sup>25</sup> When he puts on clothes and makeup that others see as outrageous, he feels comfortable with himself—the height of authenticity in punk culture.

People have been steadily becoming more aware of the gender spectrum, especially identities that range outside of what an individual was assigned at birth. Nonbinary identities have become more prevalent and accepted in society as individuals realize they view themselves outside of the strict labels of “man” or “woman.” While different rationales have been theorized to account for this shift, YUNGBLUD believes more individuals are realizing their freedom to express their gender and that these tasks seem less daunting today due to changing progressive politics:

Interviewer: One of the ways in which younger people seem to be expressing themselves these days, certainly with greater volume than before, is through gender identity. What is happening there?

YUNGBLUD: Because I just think we feel like we can. The world is becoming so much more liberal and it’s so funny man, it’s like when you have an argument with your parents, where in their generation, it’s like well, it’s not normal, I’m like, sorry, what you mean? It’s not normal? Normal is changing; normal will always grow and develop if we are allowed to express ourselves and people feel like they don’t have to suppress the feeling.<sup>26</sup>

While YUNGBLUD has not publicly stated he identifies as nonbinary, he has recently shown his support for nonbinary and transgender fans by requesting that all venues he plays at have gender-neutral bathroom options. When one venue in Newcastle would not comply with providing a gender-neutral bathroom, YUNGBLUD went to Twitter and posted two videos clipped together: in the first, he speaks on how important it is to him and his audience that gender-neutral bathrooms are included at venues, and, in the second, he states he is excited to play at Newcastle, with a sign taped above a bathroom that states “gender-neutral toilets.”<sup>27</sup> YUNGBLUD concludes the video by shushing the camera implying that he put the sign above the restroom himself without the venue’s permission. Actions such as these show that the artist is not afraid of taking a stand for what he believes in, regardless of ramifications, one of the chief principles of punk culture. YUNGBLUD is firm in his beliefs of equality and love, and, in true punk fashion, does not back down from demonstrating these beliefs.

24 Uppy Chatterjee, “INTERVIEW:: Yungblud On Why ‘Gender Is Becoming As Irrelevant As Genres’,” *Cool Accidents Music Blog* (blog), December 24, 2019, <https://www.coolaccidents.com/news/yungblud-interview>.

25 Chatterjee, “INTERVIEW: Yungblud.”

26 “Yungblud on why ‘old people have robbed our generation’,” Sky News, YouTube, January 24, 2019, 0:10:42, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7YxquNoHb8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7YxquNoHb8).

27 YUNGBLUD (@yungblud), “I WILL TRY MY BEST THAT EVERY YB SHOW TILL THE END OF TIME HAS GENDER NEUTRAL FACILITIES ! ily ☐☐☐”, Twitter, October 12, 2021, 10:33 a.m., <https://twitter.com/yungblud/status/1447978629149995017>.

## *weird!* Album Analysis



Figure 1: *weird!* Album Cover

In his sophomore album, *weird!*, YUNGBLUD expresses both his punk and queer identities, from the cover of the album to the songs' lyrics and music videos. YUNGBLUD describes *weird!* as "an album that would ultimately completely tell the truth about sexuality, identity, gender, [and] love..."<sup>28</sup> YUNGBLUD's adherence to his truth is foundational to his expression as a punk artist: as he states himself, it is explicitly within gender queerness and subversive gender performances that YUNGBLUD feels comfortable and confident sharing himself with his audience. As later lyrical analysis will show, his music contains many intimate references and stories; these acts of vulnerability are completely framed around his queerness. It is through the lens of gender diversity that YUNGBLUD tells personal life stories, allowing individuals to relate to any or many of these aspects of himself.

While this is first established in how YUNGBLUD unveils the album, as above, it is also important to analyze how he teased at his work prior to release. Before releasing the album, YUNGBLUD established that *Weird!* would be an exploration of himself, hinting at what it means to him and inviting fans to begin thinking of what the album would mean to them. On his Instagram, he released the cover of the album and stated in the caption:

i cannot wait for you to fall into this world with me. together let's re define what it means to be 'different'. embrace the strange. never settle for being anything less than 100% who you are, even if that's 15 different people all at the same time. i love each and every one of you for exactly who you are. you saved my f\*\*\*\*\*g life! what does it mean to be weird? let's find out.<sup>29</sup>

This caption reflects YUNGBLUD's overarching intention of the album to be a representation of himself that highlights the fluidity that is possible in personality and gender. The album cover itself is quite demonstrative of his personality, as it features seven different versions of himself in various attire and poses standing against a blue wall with the album title written on the wall in graffiti (Figure 1). YUNGBLUD views himself as a multi-layered individual capable of different expressions, so he embraces all versions of himself in perhaps an act of authenticity by highlighting the different personas on the cover. YUNGBLUD's goal is for his music to extend beyond himself, so he represents as many individuals as he can, welcoming others to join his diverse exploration of gender. He also encourages his audience to think of their own multifaceted identities and how they can bring alive different representations of themselves.

Diving into the imagery of the cover art itself, each YUNGBLUD figure stands out from the next. The

28 "Yungblud On The Story Behind His Song 'Mars' + More!", iHeartRadio, YouTube, December 26, 2020, 00:26, <https://youtu.be/rIU2WC17OQw>.

29 YUNGBLUD (@yungblud), "WEIRD! the album will be released on 4th of December.", Instagram photo September 17, 2020, [https://www.instagram.com/p/CFPMrKaJCYz/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&ig\\_id=58796733-f7f2-42f6-ac88-37e3743f848b](https://www.instagram.com/p/CFPMrKaJCYz/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_id=58796733-f7f2-42f6-ac88-37e3743f848b).

first depiction of himself, moving from the left to the right, is of him shirtless in red plaid pants, black suspenders, and a dog collar, with his hair in spikes. This outfit is similar to the outfit he wears in his music video for the song “Strawberry Lipstick” from the album. The next version of YUNGBLUD wears a long brown wig with a floppy bow, dress, and pink stockings over her knees. Pointing to his desire to embody other gendered identities, YUNGBLUD describes this character as the feeling he gets in the mornings when he sometimes wakes up and thinks “Oh my god, I should’ve been a girl.”<sup>30</sup> Further embracing his fluidity, YUNGBLUD acknowledges this is not always how he feels; he allows himself to traverse across multiple gender identities and expressions. Other individuals on the cover include a nerd stereotype with a book and glasses, a rocker stereotype with a leather jacket and black pants, and two versions of himself kissing in what appears to be a mock heterosexual relationship. While each of these representations of himself follows traditional stereotypes that are reminiscent of high school, there is power to be found in one person enacting them all—it may be rare that a person wholly fits one stereotype, but people can instead be understood as compilations of various stereotypes. Instead of choosing to form his entire identity around a singular focal point, YUNGBLUD is recognizing the accumulation of the different aspects and influences that combine uniquely into who he is.

The last version of himself on the cover is of a fully genderqueer-presenting individual who is wearing a black feathered boa and two different fishnets under their heels. YUNGBLUD remarked that the last figure in comparison to the stereotypically feminine figure earlier on: “The girl is the girl, but this is the femininity on top of the masculinity, and blurring that line completely.”<sup>31</sup> YUNGBLUD thus destabilizes the idea of a fixed gender binary by offering various self-depictions that cannot be easily taxonomized as masculine or feminine.

Turning to the musical content of *Weird!*, several songs on the album notably showcases the artist’s beliefs and values as a queer punk artist, such as his use of gender and sexual fluidity. One song that highlights both of these topics well is the song “cotton candy,” which was released as a single prior to the album. In anticipation of the song’s release, YUNGBLUD posted a photo of him to his Twitter page, with the caption: “sex ain’t a sin. cotton candy out friday. u ready?”<sup>32</sup> Accompanied is a photo of himself, sitting with his knees pulled to his chest, in what appears to be the full nude, with barbed wire wrapped around his body, and most notably a crown of barbed wire placed around his head. With the Christian religious imagery as well as his discussion of sin in the caption, YUNGBLUD sets the song up to be a sex-driven and religion-opposing song. While individuals can most definitely be both religious and sexual, YUNGBLUD is alluding to the long history of purity culture that is encouraged by many various religious organizations, as well as the classification of a variety of sexual acts as sinful or impure.

“cotton candy” begins with the lyrics, “Tallulah knows that she’s not the only one I’m holding close / On the low, I get vertigo from body overdose,” introducing the idea of sexual fluidity in the form of ethical non-monogamy.<sup>33</sup> As the music video continues, it displays YUNGBLUD lying in bed with multiple individuals, as well as many people around him who are dancing, singing, and making out with one another. Multiple gender-nonconforming individuals are represented in the video, as well as polyamorous couples and other sexualities. As the video progresses, YUNGBLUD changes from a full red jumpsuit to a white crop top and skirt with angel wings.<sup>34</sup> The imagery combined with the lyrics above explicitly stating he is involved with multiple people alludes to the possibility that everyone in the room is a current or potential partner, loosening the traditionally rigid idea of sexuality and socially acceptable sexual practices. Further, YUNGBLUD himself does not adhere to one strict gender representation, changing from masculine bedclothes to an angelic uniform with wings, continuing the allusion to religion. In an interview with *Kerrang!* around the release of “cotton candy” as a single, YUNGBLUD stated that, for him, the song revolves around themes of sex, the idea of freedom, and “the idea that you can lose yourself

30 YUNGBLUD, “Yungblud - Weird! (behind the scenes of the album cover),” Youtube, December 6, 2020, 0:01:28, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=leUgY-08IOrc&t=34s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leUgY-08IOrc&t=34s).

31 Ibid, 00:02:17.

32 YUNGBLUD (@yungblud), “sex ain’t a sin. cotton candy out friday. u ready? □□□□”, Twitter, October 6, 2020, 9:58 a.m., <https://twitter.com/yungblud/status/1313523946155843587>.

33 YUNGBLUD, “cotton candy (Official Video),” YouTube, October 15, 2020, 00:08, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDeIAIIUAWc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDeIAIIUAWc).

34 Ibid, 00:55.



in other people of all genders, of all shapes and sizes..."<sup>35</sup> In this manner, YUNGBLUD not only promotes sex positivity but also represents a small portion of the incredibly vast world of sexuality and gender, both with his own actions and attire in the song, and with the others in the room with him. He enforces an overarching message of inclusivity and community, allowing the people to simply exist without being scrutinized. This actualization of inclusion is another example of YUNGBLUD taking action toward diversity and the development of anti-mainstream ideas, emphasizing his punk identity.

The song "mars" is also particularly important because of its explicit representation of transgender individuals, as seen in both its lyrical content and accompanying music video. The song is based on a transgender woman who spoke with him at a show, telling YUNGBLUD that his music helped her with her own insecurities as a transgender woman and difficulties that she had with her family.<sup>36</sup> In the lyrics of "mars," YUNGBLUD tries to capture the story of her strength and struggles:

Every morning she would wake up with another plan  
Yeah, her Mum and Dad, they couldn't understand  
Why she couldn't turn it off, become a better man  
All this therapy  
Eats away gently at the side of her mind...<sup>37</sup>

Up until this point in the song, the accompanying music video depicts individuals of various gender identities and expressions singing along to the lyrics and painting their faces, including YUNGBLUD himself. However, as they sing the lyrics, the individuals' hands come in from off-screen and begin to brutalize them. Starting with YUNGBLUD himself being spit on, he and the other individuals begin to physically fight and resist the anonymous hands that are hitting them and pulling their hair. The attackers pull the group's hair, tear their clothing, and shove their faces back and forth. Eventually, the assaulters bloody the individuals' faces, but, throughout the ordeal, each person remains sitting strong and upright. As the song continues to its closure, the individuals become more desperate and bruised, one individual even sporting an eye swollen shut.<sup>38</sup> What started as a group of calm and strong individuals who seemed cheerful to sing the lyrics turns into beaten and wounded people who appear to scream the lyrics as if their lives depend on it.

"mars" does not shy away from covering the brutality that many individuals in the LGBTQ+ community face and does not sugarcoat it. The lyrics talk explicitly about Gender Identity Change Efforts (GICE, previously known as conversion therapy), in which a provider of some kind, often in the mental health field, attempts to change or alter an individual's gender identity into that of a cisgender identity. The video also covers the physical violence experienced by queer individuals, which could come from a multitude of sources, such as home life, strangers, or society as a whole. Social justice and civil rights in the face of brutality and violence is a common theme throughout the punk subculture.

Juxtaposed against "cotton candy," "mars" is a stark contrast, exemplifying the artist's goals of depicting a wide variety of experiences in the album. While "cotton candy" focuses on a sex-driven, sex-positive view of queer individuals, it is an idealization and quite fantastical in its video depiction. "mars," on the other hand, shows a sad, but common, reality that LGBTQ+ individuals face as they are growing into their sense of self and beginning to come out to others with their true identity. Both songs are relatable, often even to the same audience, but show the range of experiences that individuals who identify with the queer community may face in their lifetimes. The array of topics addressed in *weird!* allows individuals to find at least one aspect of YUNGBLUD's experience with gender diversity and nonconformity with which they resonate.

<sup>35</sup> Emily Carter, "Yungblud Embraces 'Sexual Liberation' on New Single Cotton Candy," *Kerrang!*, October 9, 2020, <https://www.kerrang.com/yungblud-unveils-new-single-cotton-candy-about-sexual-liberation>.

<sup>36</sup> "YUNGBLUD wrote a track about a fan for next album | Paaspop | 3FM Gemist," YouTube, April 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKhepsHx-L6o>.

<sup>37</sup> YUNGBLUD, "mars (Official Video)," YouTube, November 27, 2020, 00:48, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMA171qWYZk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMA171qWYZk).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 02:40.



Both songs are clearly able to articulate experiences of genderqueerness and the spectrum of sexuality, but their claim to punk culture status further hinges on their political importance. Similar to the punk teens in *Burning Down the Haus*, by simply portraying queer realities, one of love and lust and one of a violent narrative, YUNGBLUD begins to generate conversations around what queer realities currently are and what they could be. The song “mars” showcases the dangers of being gender-diverse, highlighting the hate that transgender people face as they navigate their lives. While this song was initially released in 2020, its message remains undoubtedly just as salient today, if not more, with states across the US passing anti-trans legislation and promoting discrimination and hate along the way. Still to this day, the act of existence is resistance, politically speaking, a theme highlighted in both videos: in “cotton candy” through the radical acceptance of all things sexual, and in “mars,” as the people remain upright and focused throughout the violence they endure. First-time listeners of YUNGBLUD are explicitly introduced to radical ideology and forced to reconsider their morals and opinions about genderqueerness and identity.

## Future Research and Limitations

The values and aesthetics of punk culture have changed throughout the years, but the overall message remains the same: being authentic, especially if it means going against the grain. This message of unapologetic authenticity is one that YUNGBLUD embodies and further perpetuates. Historically, punk individuals were identified by their bright hair and extreme tattoos and piercings, which have now faded into the mainstream and are no longer a jarring form of rebellion when seen on the streets. This has led modern punk artists to develop their own anti-mainstream ideals, which YUNGBLUD does by moving gender nonconformity into the spotlight, highlighting fluidity when it comes to gender identity and expression.

This paper’s scope is significantly limited, as there are many other moments that could be analyzed and angles from which *weird!* could be examined. Material that could have been covered in more depth include the songs “strawberry lipstick” and “the freak show,” both of which discuss YUNGBLUD’s overall relationship with his queer identity. “love song” is another song that speaks to YUNGBLUD’s identity; it is his attempt to analyze himself through the view of one of his past relationships, positioning himself as his ex-girlfriend. This song gives space for theoretical work exploring Yungblud’s embodiment of a woman, but is less explicit about Yungblud’s personal identity or genderqueerness and was not able to be explored within this essay. Furthermore, YUNGBLUD released a short film in 2022 named after the song “mars,” which gives greater insight into the artist’s goals and desires for the song. The short film was released during a time in which society was seeing increased hostility towards transgender individuals, pointing to YUNGBLUD’s commitment to standing for his values rather than conforming to beliefs that would make him more palatable to wider audiences.

Additionally, the paper is theoretically limited in its understanding and use of the term “authenticity,” which has been debated in different punk spaces and interpreted in different ways. Specifically within various subcultures of the alternative community, many groups believe that other groups are more or less authentic, based on a variety of factors. In a psychology study examining the conceptualization of belonging, alternative-identifying individuals were interviewed and asked what alternative subcultures were and weren’t authentic; respondents of the groups turned on one another and put down other groups for not investing enough time into the culture or having a tendency to shift out of the culture.<sup>39</sup> This paper makes the broad assumption that authenticity is a self-determined judgment, based on one’s perception of how true they feel they are to themselves. This paper sought to deeply analyze YUNGBLUD’s perception of himself in relation to his music and how he controls and shifts others’ perceptions of him while taking for granted that his actions are authentic because he claims them as his truth.

Beyond the singular album covered in this essay, there are many more artists, albums, and songs that highlight punk values and have helped transform the punk scene. It is also important to acknowledge that YUNG-

39 Sue Widdicombe & Rob Wooffitt, “‘Being’ Versus ‘Doing’ Punk: On Achieving Authenticity as a Member,” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 9 no. 4 (1990): 263.

BLUD is not the first artist, by far, to have leaned into gender nonconformity, either on stage or in everyday life. Glam rock, for example, is a style of alternative music which is known for its over-the-top rockstars such as David Bowie and Queen, both of whom thrived years before YUNGBLUD. An important distinction between other rock stars and Yungblud is Yungblud's courage to speak clearly and explicitly on the topics to which previous artists may only subtly refer. YUNGBLUD has the privilege of coming after other nonconformist artists that radically shaped their time period with their forward-thinking behaviors, a tradition that YUNGBLUD is continuing to push forward with a modern lens.

After analyzing the history and various evolutions of punk culture, one can speculate how the future of punk will come to be. The historical anti-mainstream punk symbols have become commonplace, allowing for new methods to be embraced as anti-mainstream, but it is just as likely that this shift could occur again, and the portrayals of sexual and gender fluidity that YUNGBLUD explores in his music could eventually become a societal norm. In the next few centuries, the style and aesthetics that turn heads and are considered radical today may become conventional and eventually expected from people, giving future contributors to punk culture the opportunity to redefine what punk is and discover what it means to be unique in their own way.

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# Twin Suns and Spiral Galaxies: The Role of Extended Technique and Augenmusik in the Music of George Crumb

Sven Joseph

In the Romantic era of the nineteenth century, the gradual dissolution of aristocratic patronage in the arts and the rise of industry throughout the 1700s pushed Western composers to reconsider how their music reflected the contemporary human experience. As they became drawn to the individual passions of the artist and music's ability to convey an emotionally evocative story, composers departed from the restrained rationalism of the eighteenth century in favor of a more passionate musical aesthetic centered around human emotion and the natural world.<sup>1</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, artists felt inspired by their Romantic predecessors' shift toward individual expression, and many composers sought to create completely new kinds of music that could accurately represent the human experience during the 1900s. Composer George Crumb (1929–2022) was particularly successful in this objective through his employment of extended instrumental techniques, or atypical methods of playing an instrument that produce unique sounds, and Augenmusik, a unique form of visual notation. Unlike many composers of his era, though, Crumb held on to the Romantic tradition of dramatically emotive musical storytelling while framing his innovations within the contemporary context of his mysterious, supernatural aesthetic inspired by the modern era. By asking performers to approach their instruments in new ways, Crumb achieves a distinct timbral diversity in his music through extended technique. In his *Augenmusik*,<sup>2</sup> Crumb manipulates the score to create a visual representation of the work's subject matter, providing the performer with additional information to properly execute his artistic intentions. In tandem, these compositional techniques allow Crumb to create the haunting soundscapes that characterize his musical impression of the post-industrial world.

## Industrialization and the Age of Experimentation

Toward the turn of the twentieth century, Romantic authors were hopeful that industrialization would eventually foster an “active and informed” society engaged with arts and culture. While increased production did affect positive change in people's daily lives, it would also bring the steady development of weaponry and warfare.<sup>3</sup> The repeated crises of the 1900s, culminating in the two World Wars and the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, applied a widespread sense of existential impermanence to social order (and humanity, for that matter),<sup>4</sup> leading fear and uncertainty to ultimately become the groundwork that many twentieth-century musical aesthetics were built upon. University of Virginia Professor Michael Levenson describes these “inescapable forces” as more than just the auxiliary context of the Modernist movement;<sup>5</sup> rather, these forces “penetrated the interi-

1 David Knight, “Romanticism and the sciences,” in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, ed. Andrew Cunningham and N. Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 22.

2 *Augenmusik* is a German term that translates to “eye music,” in reference to the role that the visual construction of the score plays in its expression.

3 John Hall, Mary Jo Neitz, and Marshall Battani, *Sociology on Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 119.

4 Marina MacKay, *Modernism, War, and Violence* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 135.

5 c. 1900–1950.



or of artistic invention” throughout the century.<sup>6</sup> Gerald Graff, a professor of English at the University of Illinois, Chicago, echoes Levenson’s claim by centering the products of Modernism on the “chaos and fragmentation of industrial society” and the artist’s attempt to impose order upon it, thereby exercising some form of control over their fate.<sup>7</sup>

Composers of this era sought to understand the simultaneous prosperity and disparity of the machine-centric world they lived in and how their music represented this dichotomy. They began to question the applicability of Western musical traditions to their new culture of unpredictability and developed compositional techniques that properly reflected their experience within it. The drive to reinvent societal conceptions of sound in music is represented in Luigi Russolo’s (1885–1947) manifesto *The Art of Noises*, which argues that the “advent of machinery” recontextualized the sonic themes of everyday life. In order to avoid a weak regurgitation of past styles and reconnect music with the values of the new world, Russolo calls for a swift transition from restrictive music of “pure sounds” to the limitless possibilities of “noise-sounds.”<sup>8</sup> Twentieth-century composers took it upon themselves to combat the stagnation of musical tradition by challenging, expanding, or outright rejecting previously held aesthetic values of tonality, timbre, form, or noise.<sup>9</sup> Acceptance of this mantle launched the school of avant-garde experimentalism that legislated innovation as the express goal of music composition, achieved by purposefully defying long-established conventions.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, composers of the late twentieth century’s Postmodern movement,<sup>11</sup> such as George Crumb (1929–2022), saw no purpose in renouncing musical traditions of the past. Graff argues that this period was the “logical culmination of the premises of [Romanticism and Modernism],” unifying 19th-century aesthetic values with the inventive sounds of the modern world.<sup>12</sup> Crumb’s postmodern affiliations brought him into close contact with Romantic notions of musical storytelling and emotional expression, filtered through his personal avant-garde style. Crumb does indeed have an affinity to the “background hum” of post-industrial life as he calls it, but he finds that all music—old, new, foreign, and domestic—intersects in its relatability. He believes that the cyclic nature of time grants contemporary relevance to the music of any period if the composer’s inspirations call for it.<sup>13</sup> Crumb’s inclination toward recontextualization, combined with his upbringing in experimentalism, is what drives the primary appeal behind his music: his ability to tell a modern Romantic story with the sounds of his era.

Crumb grew up at the height of Russolo’s projected golden age of noise, and was therefore keen to the possibilities of sound in music. In Crumb’s obituary, the *New York Times* notes his rejection of arid 12-tone techniques in favor of “his own musical language” capable of expressing a wide array of moods “from peaceful to nightmarish,” derived from both his Appalachian roots and various Eastern traditions.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the mechanical noises from works like Edgar Varèse’s (1883–1965) *Ionization*, which features anvils and sirens, or George Antheil’s (1900–1959) *Ballet Mecanique*, which features motorized propellers and sirens, avant-garde composers experimented with extended instrumental techniques to produce new timbres with traditional instruments. George Crumb, with his fascination for recontextualization, was particularly drawn to these techniques, as they allowed him to draw directly on the familiar sounds of the past to tell entirely new stories.

Composers of this era also explored the relationship between the expressive nature of their music and the visual structure of their scores by modifying standard notation or developing entirely new systems of notation. Iannis Xenakis (1922–2001), an architect, created scores that eschewed standard notation in favor of a visual aesthetic

6 Michael Levenson, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

7 Gerald Graff, “The Myth of the Postmodern Breakthrough,” in *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, ed. Brian Nicol (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 208.

8 Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, trans. Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 24.

9 George Rochberg, *The Aesthetics of Survival: A Composer’s View of Twentieth-Century Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 226.

10 Susan McClary’s “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition” *Cultural Critique* 12, Spring (1989) details how this task was self-imposed through arrogance, a detail that I find rather interesting when considering why certain “high-art” movements were responsible for progressing musical thought over, say, jazz or rock.

11 c. 1950–2000.

12 Graff, “The Myth of the Postmodern Breakthrough,” 207.

13 “A conversation with George Crumb,” YouTube video, 9:38, interview, posted by “West Virginia Public Broadcasting,” Dec 21, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xo8SHjTxc>.

14 Vivien Schweitzer, “George Crumb, Eclectic Composer Who Searched for Sounds, Dies at 92,” *New York Times*, Feb 6, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/06/obituaries/george-crumb-dead.html>.

modeled after the mathematical nature of his career. The symbolism found in Crumb's *Augenmusik*, a particular form of visual notation, also makes a significant contribution to the mythological, extratemporal atmospheres of his works.<sup>15</sup> Crumb had a particular mission to "find an evocative notation that would convey something to the performers" and make his music "want to become sound."<sup>16</sup> He found that notation could be used to support the meaning behind a composition; the visual construction of a score, in Crumb's mind, is directly "tied in with [the] actual sound."<sup>17</sup>

While his soundworld is exceptionally inventive, Crumb's ultimate goal is not to arbitrarily progress music composition or distinguish himself as an artist; instead, he simply seeks to create accurate and authentic sonic representations of his narratives. Crumb, unlike many of his contemporaries, manages to apply experimental ideas surrounding sound and notation in a way that is conducive to realizing a specific programmatic message. A longer form of this paper would see a complete analysis of the numerous performative and compositional techniques that Crumb employed to achieve his goals, such as choreographed theatrics or quotation. For the purposes of this paper, however, I find that Crumb's visual scores and distinctive use of extended technique sufficiently exemplify the idiosyncrasies in his mysterious and haunting musical aesthetic. By analyzing particular movements and passages in Crumb's *Black Angels*, *Vox Balaenae*, and *Makrokosmos*, and juxtaposing them with the work of other twentieth-century composers, I aim to illustrate how Crumb's use of extended technique and *Augenmusik* is beyond simple experimentalism or proof-of-concept. I argue that they are, instead, crucial components to the mystical meta-narrative structures in his work that cannot be supplanted without severely compromising the integrity of his compositions.

## Extended Technique

The difficulty in researching the history of extended techniques stems from the fact that new strategies to produce novel timbres are often eventually absorbed into common instrumental practice. The most direct examples of this phenomenon are the technical innovations developed by composers of the late eighteenth-century German court of Mannheim, referred to collectively as the "Mannheim School." The "special effects" that came from the composers of Mannheim are exceedingly simple in the context of music today, though their contemporary inventiveness brought them widespread fame:

Among the effective special effects that brought acclaim to the orchestra were (a) extended crescendos and diminuendos, ranging from softest pianissimo to loudest fortissimo, (b) unexpected general pauses that created great windows of silence, (c) measured tremolo, (d) the "roll," scale passages in measured tremolo, coupled with crescendo, and (e) the so-called Mannheim rocket (*Raketen*), the rapid upward arpeggiation of a chord over a wide range.<sup>18</sup>

Much like the twentieth century, musical discourse during this time was informed by an upheaval of societal values in German territories in the century following the Thirty Years War, which saw the perishing of nearly twenty percent of the German populace. The erosion of the decorum and formality that subordinated musical expression in the past paved the way for Mannheim composers to create music that focused on "self-expression and subjective passions."<sup>19</sup>

Composers of the twentieth century experienced a near-parallel set of circumstances, though their cultural practices were far more homogenized and developed more rapidly as a result of technological advancements in

15 Victoria Amadenko, "George Crumb's Channels of Mythification," *American Music* 23, no. 3 (2005): 331.

16 George Crumb, "George Crumb: Jumping Off The Page to Become Sound," by Frank J. Oteri, *New Music USA*, July 12, 2002, <https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/george-crumb-jumping-off-the-page-to-become-sound/>.

17 Crumb, "Jumping Off The Page."

18 K. Marie Stolba, *The Development of Western Music: A History*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1997), 450.

19 William Trotter, "Mannheim School," *American Record Guide* 69, no. 1 (2006): 231.

international communication. Whereas the Mannheim School refers strictly to the innovations of the composers and orchestra in Mannheim, experimentation in instrumental technique during the 1900s proliferated globally. Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki's (1933–2020) *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* contains instructions for orchestra members to knock on the soundboards of their instruments, bow behind the bridge or between the bridge and the tailpiece, or employ *col legno* (playing with the wooden side of the bow) techniques to create the haunting atmosphere that characterizes the work. Penderecki's extended techniques are certainly capable of appealing directly to the imagination to elicit some kind of story—his intentions, however, do not align with this capability. It is well-known that Penderecki's *Threnody* was not composed with the bombings of Hiroshima in mind; instead, he was “seeking recreation in pure sound, without narrative or historical references,” only ideating the famed title once he had heard the work.<sup>20</sup>

As mentioned prior, what sets Crumb apart from his contemporaries is his ability to walk the line between Romantic expressionism and the twentieth-century avant-garde. *New York Times* critic John Rockwell describes Crumb as a “fascinating, idiosyncratic American artist,” capable of utilizing new idioms while still engaging conservative audiences with his music.<sup>21</sup> Crumb's signature dark, spiritual moods stem from what he calls his “inherited acoustic”:<sup>22</sup> an ominous, looming buzz inspired by the sounds of the echoing West Virginia mountains and the flowing rivers between them. As described by another *New York Times* critic, Donal Henahan, Crumb builds upon this foundation even further by employing his own novel instrumental techniques, effectively “invent[ing] his own orchestra” with “highly imaginative sonorities and timbres.”<sup>23</sup> In pieces like *Black Angels* (1971) and *Vox Balaenae* (1972), Crumb's world of sound, constituted by these extended techniques, paints entire narratives through a unique and inventive timbral language.

*Black Angels* (1971), subtitled “Thirteen Images from the Dark Land” and composed for electric string quartet, uses extended techniques to describe the horrors of war in the post-industrial era and Crumb's spiritual quandaries. Crumb dates the work “*in tempore belli* [in time of war] 1970” and describes it as a “kind of parable on our troubled contemporary world,”<sup>24</sup> clearly referencing the horrific events of the Vietnam War. *Black Angels* follows the voyage of a fallen soul (i.e., a black angel) in three parts: “Departure (fall from grace),” “Absence (spiritual annihilation),” and “Return (redemption).” The title and structure of the work are a signal to Crumb's spiritual influences, which serve as the thematic foundation for *Black Angels*. Building upon this, Crumb uses extended techniques to represent the fundamental struggles between good and evil, life and death, or God and the Devil. His use of electronic amplification for each instrument throughout the piece is the most prevalent, and perhaps most simple, extended technique that brings the audience into direct contact with the subtle nuances of Crumb's musical aesthetic. In addition to amplification, Crumb's use of various extended bowing techniques create an “unearthly sound palette” that drives *Black Angels* from a collection of novel sounds into fragments of its mysterious soundworld.<sup>25</sup>

20 Manuel Sánchez, “Guerra y memoria: Nono, Penderecki, Britten,” *Revista de Filología Románica* 33, Special Issue (2016): 223; *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* was originally titled *8'37"*, reflecting Penderecki's desire to eliminate narrative or historical influence in the compositional process.

21 John Rockwell, “Music: George Crumb,” *New York Times*, Jun 30, 1983, 15.

22 “A conversation with George Crumb.”

23 Donal Henahan, “‘Voices of Children,’ Crumb's Full-Blown Masterpiece,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1970, 68.

24 George Crumb, *Black Angels*, (New York: Edition Peters, 1971).

25 Elizabeth McLain, “In Tempore Belli: Crumb's *Black Angels* and the Vietnam War,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 38, no. 1 (2019): 45.



**Fig. 1.** The opening bars of “Sounds of Bones and Flutes” from Crumb’s *Black Angels* showing the various *col legno* techniques and percussive effects employed. Image sourced from the *Black Angels* score.

In the second movement, “Sounds of Bones and Flutes,” Crumb uses *col legno* (with the wood of the bow) techniques to create the despondent atmosphere that follows the soul’s initial fall from grace in the preceding “Departure” section of *Black Angels*. Crumb applies the mood indicator of “delicate and somewhat mechanical” to elicit imagery of brittle bones repeatedly clicking and knocking against each other in disjunct rhythm. This is achieved by the *col legno* bowings, as well as percussive staccato whispers, tongue clicks, and the tapping of Tibetan prayer stones (see Figure 1). Similar to Penderecki’s *Threnody*, Crumb primarily utilizes *col legno* techniques for the string instruments that allow him to access empty, wispy melodies and dry percussive effects that emphasize the movement’s arid atmosphere. He uses *col legno battuto* (striking the strings with the wood of the bow) techniques to animate the clicking bones further by applying limited tonality to them.<sup>26</sup> Crumb also instructs the players to “throw the bow” throughout the *battuto* lines to create indeterminately pitched glissandos that further disorient the listener. Whenever the melody appears, Crumb instructs the players to play *col legno*



**Fig. 2.** The opening bars of “Sarabanda de la Muerte Oscura” from Crumb’s *Black Angels* showing Crumb’s instruction to bow behind the left hand and hold instruments like viols. Image sourced from the *Black Angels* score.

*tratto* (bowing with the wood of the bow) to produce the titular hollow, flute-like tone of a waning quality. The thin and raspy melody serves to represent the desperation in the early stages of the soul’s voyage, hopelessly avoiding its reduction to the quiet tapping of bones.

In “Sarabanda de la Muerte Oscura,” the eighth movement of *Black Angels*, Crumb instructs players to

<sup>26</sup> According to “Col legno,” in the *Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham, Saint-Saëns used the same technique to specifically suggest the rattling of bones in *Danse macabre* (1874).



hold their instruments like a cello, bowing on the opposite side of the left hand to create a quiet, soul-stirring moment of anxious solace between the first violin, viola, and cello (see Figure 2). At this point in the work, listeners are immersed in the soul's descent to rock bottom—the spiritual annihilation phase of the “Absence” section. By asking players to gravely and solemnly play “like a consort of viols,” the Renaissance predecessor of contemporary string instruments, Crumb evokes a transitional space “between the living and the dead” that stands outside of time.<sup>27</sup> Crumb asks the first violinist and violist to hold their instruments like the cellist, mimicking the traditional manner of a viol ensemble. All three are told to bow above the left hand pressing the fingerboard to diminish their resonance and weaken the overall sound to mimic the sound of viols in a small stone chamber. This approach changes the sound of the instruments to match the grave and solemn mood indicators Crumb provides; their tone is quieter, less resonant, and slightly detuned, recalling the sounds of a sixteenth-century ensemble playing a dance for the dead, as the title suggests. The reference to viols exemplifies Crumb's affinity to the cyclic nature of time and his ability to recontextualize the past in the context of the Vietnam War. Crumb's decision to reach outside of time and allude to music of the Renaissance through extended technique further emphasizes the feeling that, in this space, “death [is] less obscure, less infinite.”<sup>28</sup>

While *Black Angels* was concerned with spiritual mortality in a conflicted world, Crumb's *Vox Balaenae* or “Voice of the Whale” (1972) uses extended techniques to examine the entangled relationship between the natural environment and humans throughout time. After a marine biologist showed Crumb a tape of whale sounds in the late-1960s, he was inspired to create an image of the developing Earth over millions of years. In particular, he wanted this work to underscore Earth's independence from human influence for most of its history, represented by the whale. Scored for electric flute, electric cello, and electric piano, Crumb instructs performers to wear black masks to “[efface] a sense of human projection” and emphasize the “powerful impersonal forces of nature.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, he asks that performers have a blue light to shine upon them throughout the performance, if possible, to add a theatrical element to the work's expression. In a callback to traditional forms, *Vox Balaenae* is structured as a theme and variations; following an introduction, the “Sea Theme” serves as the primordial sounds of an early Earth while each variation that follows is named after the major geological eras. The concluding movement, “Sea-



**Fig. 3.** The opening bars of “Vocalise (..for the beginning of time)” from Crumb's *Vox Balaenae* showing Crumb's “sing-flute” instruction. Image sourced from the *Vox Balaenae* score.

Nocturne (for the end of time),” represents a chronological purgatory as the Earth continues into an unknown and uncertain future. In order to tell this large-scale story, each movement features different sets of extended techniques that evoke an atmosphere Crumb associates with the era in question, “filtered through a haunting, medita-

27 Marcel Cobussen, “Music and Spirituality: 13 Meditations around George Crumb's *Black Angels*,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 1 (2007): 197.

28 Ibid.

29 George Crumb, *Vox Balaenae*, (New York: Edition Peters, 1971).



tive, [and] decidedly aquatic sensibility.”<sup>30</sup>

The opening of the piece, “Vocalise (..for the beginning of time),” for example, features extended flute techniques to directly connect the audience with Crumb’s inspirations in whalesong (see Figure 3). He instructs the flutist to use a “sing-flute” technique, whereby the player, accompanied by the piano’s sympathetic resonance, simultaneously plays and sings into the flute to imitate the “plaintive song of the humpback whale.”<sup>31</sup> Occasionally, the flutist ceases their playing to only sing into the flute to mimic the sounds of a whale more directly; in these sections, the flutist is told to tap the flute’s keys to add a shimmering, subaquatic effect to the sound. Later in the movement, the pianist enters with loud, dense chords played with a dramatic and fateful energy, followed by a low

The image shows a musical score for the opening of the "Archeozoic" variation from George Crumb's *Vox Balaenae*. The score is for E. Vc. and E. Pno. The E. Vc. part features a "seagull effect" marked with "\*\*\*" and "poco accel. rit.". The E. Pno. part features a "chisel-piano" technique marked with "\*\*\*" and "chisel on string (AH) (sempre gliss.)". The tempo is marked "mp" and "pizz. (f.t.)". The score is titled "ARCHEOZOIC [VAR. I] Timeless, inchoate".

**Fig. 4.** The opening bars of the “Archeozoic” variation from Crumb’s *Vox Balaenae* featuring the cello’s “seagull effect” and the piano’s “chisel-piano” technique. Image sourced from the *Vox Balaenae* score.

step-like thumping achieved by playing the keyboard while muting the strings. This brilliant event and its thumping reverberations signal the sudden presence of “a world coming into being” by suddenly adding a new character—the Earth, perhaps—to the emptiness of a young universe.<sup>32</sup>

In the first variation, “Archeozoic,” Crumb takes advantage of extended cello and piano techniques to create an empty, lonely atmosphere evocative of the Archean geological period. He employs what he calls the “seagull effect” by instructing the cellist to slide down the fingerboard while playing an artificial harmonic (see Figure 4). By pressing on the fingerboard and touching the string a perfect fourth above the depressed point, string players can play in the upper harmonic register anywhere on the string; sliding down the string will then generate a repeating descending figure that sounds like the shrieks of a seagull. The pianist responds to the seagull sounds by applying a chisel to the piano’s strings to create a similar pitch-bending figure accompanied by its violent sympathetic rattling. Crumb’s “seagull effect” communicates a certain emptiness: in the silence of a concert hall, the squawks feel lonely, the only sound filling an otherwise empty space. The piano’s otherworldly pitch bending expands upon this atmosphere, echoing the opening’s whalesong and adding to the empty and mysterious landscape. The violent buzzing from the vibration of strings against the chisel evokes the image of an aggressive and unforgiving ocean filled with rapidly erupting undersea volcanoes, further transporting listeners to the lifeless Archean age when rocks and oceans first formed and the most advanced life was single-celled.

## Augenmusik

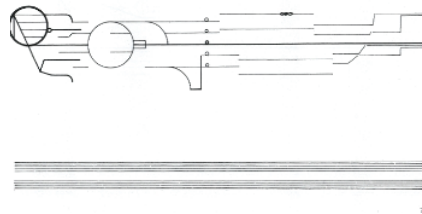
So far, this paper has focused largely on how composers of the twentieth century challenged longstanding notions of musical sounds to instigate a new era of musical expression; the sound of music, however, was not

30 Joe Banno, “At Kennedy Center: A Whale of a Recital,” *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2005, C.02.

31 Mark Swed, “Music Review: The beguiling world of George Crumb,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2005, E.2.

32 Mark Swed, “Music Review: Eerie Voice From the ‘60s Still Speaks to the Present,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 2000, F.1.

their only means to achieving this. Many composers during this time also toyed with the visual structures of music to investigate alternative methods of communicating musical instructions to the performer. American composer Morton Feldman (1926–1987), for example, found that different notational systems consistently produced their own unique, individual styles. He describes notation as “an aspect of style” that can be used in “determin[ing] the style of [a] piece,” similar to how an artist might switch between painting and sculpting when developing new ideas.<sup>33</sup> Considering the relationship between notation and style, it is natural that notation would develop when the expectations of musical sounds changed. Traditional Western notation was, after all, designed around the aesthetics of European music over the last millennium and specific to its style, so many composers felt inspired to develop notational systems that were capable of expressing the aesthetics of their own experimental era.



**Fig. 5.** Page 75 from Cornelius Cardew’s score for *Treatise*. Image sourced from the University of Greenwich Galleries.

Exploration in notation during the twentieth century fell mostly into two camps that I will distinguish as “graphic notation” and “Augenmusik.” Graphic notation refers to scores that use an entirely new set of notational symbols as a departure from Western tradition in an attempt to create a new, functional musical notation in the context of the twentieth-century Avant-garde movement. Similar to other experimental composers of the time, those who created graphic scores also assumed the aforementioned mantle of musical progress, and therefore made innovation the primary objective of their work. British composer Cornelius Cardew’s (1936–1981) *Treatise*, for example, is a 193-page graphic score written between 1963 and 1967 made up of various geometric shapes, lines, and symbols that have no defined musical instruction (see Figure 5). The purpose of *Treatise*, rather, is to provide the framework for a consistent notational system that “could be used in a meaningful, linguistic way” in the vein of conventional Western notation.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the symbols in Cardew’s previous graphic scores were systematically defined to inform how it was to be performed, in *Treatise*, Cardew instead explores the limits of musical notation by creating an arbitrary, undefined system of graphic notation consistent enough to maintain a “perceived coherence” similar to traditional notation.<sup>35</sup> Cardew purposefully left no instructions to the performer as to the “sounds, noises, and musical relationships” of the piece—the symbols were, by design, “purely graphic” and devoid of inherent musical meaning.<sup>36</sup> *Treatise* is unrivaled in its inventiveness and certainly impressive, but ultimately, it has no programmatic message or experience that Cardew intended to communicate through the work.

While graphic notation saw a surge of use in the twentieth century as composers tried to conceive entirely new scoring methods, Augenmusik is an older practice whereby a composer alters traditional notation to form a pictorial representation of the subject or mood of a piece. The key difference between the Augenmusik and graphic notation is reflected in their purpose: graphic notation is an exploration of systematic notation, and Augenmusik is an exploration of expression through notation. Graphic notation is mostly a product of the twentieth century, but Augenmusik has a rather old history in the late-medieval *ars subtilior* style. Defined by its “unprecedented notational, rhythmic, and harmonic complexity,” the *ars subtilior* style, most prevalent between 1380 and 1410,

33 Morton Feldman, in discussion with Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, Buffalo, NY, August 17, 1980. <https://www.cnvill.net/mfgagne.htm>.

34 Virginia Anderson, “‘Well, It’s a Vertebrate...’: Performer Choice in Cardew’s *Treatise*,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 25, 3–4 (2006): 291–292.

35 Ibid.

36 Cornelius Cardew, *Treatise Handbook*, (New York: Edition Peters, 1971), xii.

expressed the aspirations of composers near Avignon, France who aimed to develop a “subtler manner of composing” with extreme stylistic detail.<sup>37</sup> Baude Cordier, whose birth and death dates are not exactly known, composed the most well-known pieces of Augenmusik during this time: *Belle, Bonne, Sage*, a love song scored in the shape of a heart, and *Tout par compas suy composés* (“I was composed with a compass”) which is set in circles.<sup>38</sup> Although Augenmusik never quite took root as a standard notational medium, Crumb took advantage of the practice nearly 700 years later to reinforce the narrative themes in his music.

Crumb’s visual scores fall cleanly into the definition of Augenmusik; he had no interest in departing from conventional Western notation, but he wanted to experiment with its arrangement on the page to add an “emblematic dimension” to his scores.<sup>39</sup> Crumb sought visual and musical clarity through simplicity—he wanted to take the musical beauty that he found in the works of Beethoven or Mozart, and the visual beauty he found in their published scores, and push their boundaries further to make his music sound the way it looks on the page in a direct manner. By observing his hand-hewn scores, one can see the ancient history of Augenmusik guiding Crumb’s hand, further enforcing Crumb’s desire to combine his appreciation for tradition with the experimental framework of his time. In some cases, he only displaces standard, horizontal staves to highlight a cyclic element in the music. In others, he meticulously manipulates the staves to form a pictorial device that directly emphasizes the subject matter of a given piece. The most famous examples come from Crumb’s *Makrokosmos*; a set of 33 pieces for piano divided into four volumes, though the latter two break away from the shared structures and symbolisms of the former. Many people point to *Makrokosmos* as representative of Crumb’s unique sound: music historian Christopher Wilkinson describes *Makrokosmos* as the culmination of “inventiveness in rhythm, texture, and melodic structure” and a “virtual synopsis of the composer’s very original style.”<sup>40</sup>

The first two volumes of *Makrokosmos* are composed of 24 pieces for solo piano that explore Crumb’s interest in mystical, spiritual, and celestial themes. Both volumes are separated into three parts, further divided into groups of four movements. The last movement of each part is a work of Augenmusik, to which Crumb adds the tag “[SYMBOL]” to add further clarification. The *Makrokosmos* title, directly inspired by Béla Bartók’s volumes of keyboard exercises titled *Mikrokosmos*, is a clear indicator of Crumb’s inspiration in the “largest possible cosmic context.”<sup>41</sup> Each volume is given the subtitle “Twelve Fantasy-Pieces After the Zodiac,” further delineating the astrological contexts of the set. While the continuity of symbolism between each movement is inapparent at times, there is an overarching progression that describes a spiritual pilgrimage “from temptation and threats of damnation to ultimate salvation and transcendence” similar to that of *Black Angels*. Crumb describes this journey in the titles of the movements; the first movement of Volume I, for example, is titled “Primeval Sounds (Genesis I),” while the final movement of Volume II—one of many examples of Augenmusik in the set—is titled “Agnus Dei” (“Lamb of God”) and arranged in the shape of a prayer wheel.<sup>42</sup>

The most famous example of Augenmusik in *Makrokosmos*, and all of Crumb’s repertory for that matter, is the final movement of Volume I, “Spiral Galaxy” (see Figure 6). The score for this movement further evokes Crumb’s inspiration in the vastness of space in all its dimensions, paying special focus to the macro-operations of the universe. In this movement, Crumb uses the score to communicate the mounting energy of the piece as it progresses using the initial, singular bass note as the subject of the story. As the music becomes increasingly active, it begins to feel uncontrollable; the listener is clued into the fact that the subject is becoming enveloped in the slow-yet-powerful gravitational forces pulling it into the center of the spiral galaxy. Visually, it is apparent where we start to get pulled in; at the start, there is space between the notes, and it is fairly easy to make out musical gestures on the page. As the score twists and crowds, the music becomes softer and denser, and phrases are

37 Reihard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music, 1380–1500* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1993), 36–37.

38 John Milsom, “Baude Cordier,” in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://www.oxfordreference-com.proxy.lib.csus.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-1621#>.

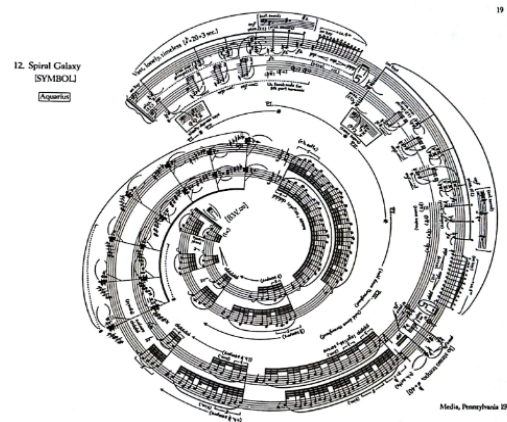
39 Carlton Wilkinson, “Opus Focus,” *Brunswick Review* 10, Spring (2016): 81.

40 Christopher Wilkinson, “Makrokosmos I and II: A Case Study of George Crumb’s Compositional Process,” in *George Crumb: Profile of a Composer*, ed. Don Gillespie (New York: C.F. Peters, 1986), 55.

41 Suzanne Mac Lean, “George Crumb, American Composer and Visionary,” in *George Crumb: Profile of a Composer*, ed. Don Gillespie (New York: C.F. Peters, 1986), 24.

42 Ibid.

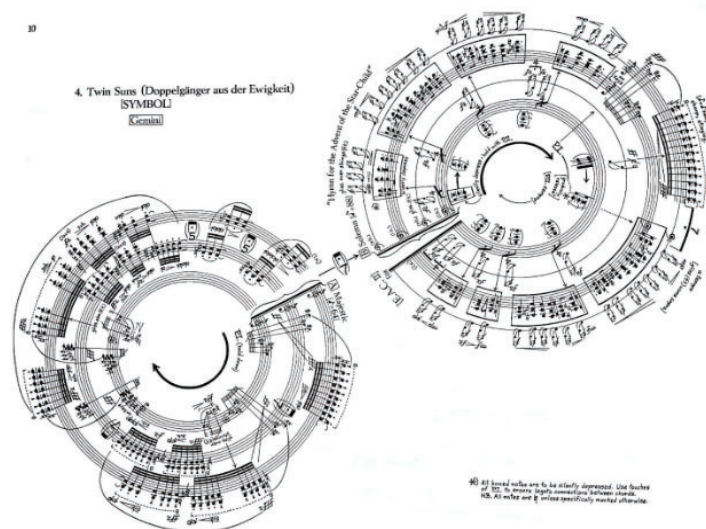
fragmented and ripped apart by the forces of an implied supermassive black hole at the center of the spiral galaxy. As the subject is separated from the listener, they do not perceive a satisfying conclusion, but rather the subject's



**Fig. 6.** “Spiral Galaxy” from Crumb’s *Makrokosmos, Vol. I*. Image sourced from the *Makrokosmos, Vol. I* score.

overwhelming loneliness caused by insurmountable forces. The inclusion of a deliberate pause at the end of the movement communicates that the sound is not necessarily gone—it is still in motion, but gravity has pulled the music into the vastness of space.

The fourth movement of the second volume, “Twin Suns (Doppelgänger aus der Ewigkeit)” (see Figure 7) immediately connects those observing the score to Crumb’s celestial inspirations. In conjunction with a unique visual arrangement, Crumb uses traditional Western musical notation to enable the performer to digest the music in a familiar way while observing his more avant-garde intentions. This movement presents two musically and visually separate-but-related phrases, set in two circles rotating clockwise joined in the center by a single arrow and aligned from start to finish. The title of this movement relates our two suns, evoking imagery of two massive bodies interlocked in an eternal dance more clearly indicated by the German title, translated roughly as “doubles



**Fig. 7.** “Twin Suns (Doppelgänger aus der Ewigkeit)” from Crumb’s *Makrokosmos, Vol. II*. Image sourced from the *Makrokosmos, Vol. II* score.



for eternity.” The revitalization of the “A” section’s energetic material toward the end of the slow, humming “B” section further emphasizes the idea that the listener is only temporarily witnessing the eternal and perpetual cycle of these two sympathetic characters. Understanding the character relationship of the two suns is imperative to a convincing and impactful performance. Through their arrangement, the twin suns each take on their own vitality—a reorganization of the staves into horizontal lines would destroy their relationship, reducing the dialogue to a simple call-and-response with little narrative meaning.

## Conclusion

Crumb’s music is defined by the sophisticated depth it achieves through its frequent and selective implementation of extended technique and scrupulous use of *Augenmusik*. These compositional devices enable Crumb to create works with the emotional and narrative exuberance of the Romantic era while still working within the experimental framework of the twentieth century. By pushing the sonic capabilities of the instruments he writes for, Crumb creates a certain extratemporal sound that serves as the unsettling foundation of his mystical narratives. The extended techniques that he uses are a crucial part of his identifiable soundworld; *Vox Balaenae* would not have the same impact had the flutist played their melodies normally, or if the pianist imitated pitch-bending through chromaticism. The dry and lonely atmosphere in “Sounds of Bones and Flutes” in *Black Angels* would not have been so clear without the frictive *col legno* techniques or amplification of the instruments. Crumb’s technique of playing the instruments in reverse in “*Sarabanda de la Muerte Oscura*” enabled the string trio to create a dreary atmosphere evocative of early-Renaissance viols playing a dance for the dead.

Additionally, Crumb’s *Augenmusik* serves as an extra-musical representation of an element of the music and what it is meant to communicate. His extension and manipulation of traditional notation transforms its purely instructive nature into an expressive one—an equal player to the pitches, rhythms, dynamics, and phrase markings by communicating a specific artistic idea that is sonically realized in performance. The visual components of these scores add a meaningful interpretive layer that describes the character of a piece, its subject matter, and how it develops. In “*Spiral Galaxy*,” the tightening of the music on the page coordinates with the movement’s phrasal development and its eventual disappearance within itself; the score makes the performer aware of the lone subject being progressively overwhelmed by an impossibly large black hole. The score of “*Twin Suns*” constitutes its subject characters entirely: two large cosmic forces perpetually transferring energy between themselves, each bearing a different temperament realized in Crumb’s partwriting.

These two “tricks,” *Augenmusik* and extended techniques, are essential to Crumb’s sonic and compositional signature. Not just because they make him unique—though they do—but also because they allow him to create a perfect map of what he heard in his head. His neo-Romantic style allows him to draw on the sounds of his era while portraying the hopes, horrors, and questions of his contemporary world riddled with war and existentialism in a dramatic light. Many composers of his time sought to push the boundaries of sound and notation for the intellectual advancement of music to distinguish themselves as elite, “serious” composers without “[caring] what the music is trying to say.” Crumb, however, dedicated his idiosyncratic artistry to “fulfilling what he feels is the primary purpose of music... the communication of a transcendental message about life.” phrasal development and its eventual disappearance within itself; the score makes the performer aware of the lone subject being progressively overwhelmed by an impossibly large black hole. The score of “*Twin Suns*” constitutes its subject characters entirely: two large cosmic forces perpetually transferring energy between themselves, each bearing a different temperament realized in Crumb’s partwriting.

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the intellectual advancement of music to distinguish themselves as elite, “serious” composers without “[caring] what the music is trying to say.”<sup>43</sup> Crumb, however, dedicated his idiosyncratic artistry to “fulfilling what he feels is the primary purpose of music... the communication of a transcendental message about life.”<sup>44</sup>

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43 Mac Lean, “George Crumb, American Composer and Visionary,” 20.

44 Ibid.

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## Closing Notes

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