

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

PETER J. MARTIN, *Music and the Sociological Gaze: Art Worlds and Cultural Production*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, vii + 246 p., index.

Despite distinguished early dabblers like Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Alfred Schütz, music has not figured very prominently on the sociological agenda. As a result, the sociology of music has been a scattered and conceptually fragmented field of study. There are, however, signs of change.

In *Music and the Sociological Gaze*, University of Manchester sociologist Peter Martin's starting point is that "since the mid-1990s the distinctiveness of a sociological approach to music has become increasingly apparent" (1). Building on his first book on music, *Sounds and Society* (1995), Martin's main goal in *Music and the Sociological Gaze* is to further crystallize the sociology of music, a task that he seeks to accomplish by defining sociology largely in terms of what it is not – namely musicology. Indeed, he stresses that sociology and musicology "are to be considered as emerging from, and grounded in, distinctly different academic discourses" (31). The book is divided into four sections, each of which develops this theme around a different set of issues. Parts two, three and four focus on substantial topics ranging from class and concert-going in nineteenth-century Manchester, to jazz improvisation and the role of music in everyday life. While each of these sections points to a forking of sociological and musicological investigation, the differences are articulated most systematically and polemically in part one.

Martin begins by sketching what he calls the "turn to the social" in musicology, a disciplinary shift that has its roots in the 1970s. It was around this time that musicologists, who had for a long time considered Western art music as the asocial fruit of absolute genius, gradually began accepting the point that people were socially produced social producers, and that music was thus socially constituted. In light of this realization, a lot of so-called "new" musicological work has busied itself with developing a "social analysis" of music (to use Martin's term), a way of linking musical forms with social structures and mores. While this "analytical reorientation leads musicologists to engage with issues that are also of fundamental concern to sociologists," Martin's concern is that it "has not led to a sustained engagement with the themes and traditions represented within the established discourse of sociology" (14).

To take one of the many examples presented by Martin, musicologist Susan McClary notices striking parallels between the onset of modernity in Western society and the rise of tonality in Western music, and uses the tools of musicological analysis to tease out "musical analogs to such emergent ideals as rationality, individualism, progress and centred subjectivity" (McClary in Martin,

48). The basic sociological problem with such “social analyses” is that they decode meanings that are supposed to inhere in musical works through a process of textual analysis, without providing a satisfactory explanation of how the social was imputed to the musical in the first place. Hence Martin’s jab: “If musicologists . . . are serious about producing a social analysis of music, they had better start reading some sociology” (55). The sociological alternative proposed by Martin prefers to understand the processes through which musical meaning is encoded by observing the uses of music in particular instances of social interaction; it moves “away from both the idea of inherent meanings and a preoccupation with individual subjectivities, and towards the social processes which sustain the intersubjective world of everyday appearances” (5).

In subsequent chapters, Martin pushes the discord of sociology and musicology beyond the realm of abstract arguments and provides concrete examples of ways in which a sociological approach can problematize the social analysis of music. A particularly interesting case study is presented in part two. Here, Martin complicates the idea of a Bourdieuan correlation between social class and musical taste, and extends this to challenge the notion “that there is a correspondence between the formal qualities of ‘serious music’ and the culture of dominant social classes” (78), a conviction which lies at the heart of social analyses like those of McClary. Martin tests this thesis by studying two nineteenth-century Manchester-based musical institutions, the Gentleman’s Concert series and conductor Charles Hallé’s symphonic concert hall performances. If the thesis about class/music correlations were correct, we would expect to find the city’s elite attending “serious” symphonic performances (the music of which supposedly embodies their Enlightenment values), and a wider range of people attending performances of the “light” music featured at the Gentleman’s Concerts. However, looking carefully at concert attendance and repertoire performed, Martin concludes otherwise: “indeed, it could be argued that the situation in Manchester was its very opposite, since Hallé played ‘high-class orchestral music’ to a socially inclusive audience, while the exclusive Gentlemen’s Concerts offered mainly light and heterogeneous programmes to the city’s elite” (118). While Martin admits that this historical image is simplified, the point is that it “is not consistent with the notion of a close correspondence between social and musical hierarchies” (ibid.), and therefore concretely problematizes a textual-analytic musicology that presumes bourgeois music represents bourgeois values.

Two possible points of criticism warrant mention here. First, there are times when Martin paints both sociology and musicology with rather broad strokes, and he occasionally borders on portraying caricatured versions of the disciplines. Take for instance Martin’s challenge to Bourdieu, mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Sociologists might dispute Martin’s reading as one that doesn’t do justice to the complexity of Bourdieu’s theories or his oeuvre. And music scholars might question the exclusion of recent musicological work that recognizes and attempts to amend the sort of sociological shortcomings identified by Martin. As an example, John Shepherd and Peter Wicke’s 1997 book, *Music and Cultural Theory*, is one of the most ambitious theoretical treatments in this area (to say nothing of its successes or failures), yet it is never mentioned. From both sociological and musicological points of view, then, there is room to challenge and refine Martin’s insights.

Second, readers familiar with Martin's earlier work will notice that his theoretical position remains unchanged (though elaborated and rearticulated), and will perhaps be disappointed by the fact that his empirical examples are based on syntheses of existing work, rather than fresh studies of his own. The potential criticism here, then, is that the book does not offer anything essentially new. Martin acknowledges this on page one, and argues that the book's value lies elsewhere, in its harmonization of a variety of sociological contributions to the study of culture. Indeed, from general ideas like Howard Becker's art world and Richard Peterson's production of culture perspective, to specifically musical contributions such as Tia DeNora's focus on musical "affordance," Simon Frith's Bourdieu-meets-Becker conception of genre-based identity, Antoine Hennion's pragmatic and quasi-ethnomethodological emphasis on musical taste, Schütz's mutual tuning-in relationship – the broadly interactionist "sociological gaze" that Martin seeks to establish is an amalgamation of all of these ideas and many more. There are, of course, points of divergence among these various approaches. But Martin is admirably able to present what they share as sociological perspectives, without sacrificing either the clarity of his writing or the coherence of his argument. As such, the book contains a breadth and density of reference, as well as a degree of conceptual richness, that will stimulate seasoned scholars, while at the same time there is a level of accessibility that makes it an excellent introduction to the sociology of music and, therefore, to issues in the sociology of culture more generally.

Another great advantage of this book is its consideration of a variety of Western music – from Harrison Birtwistle's avant-garde compositions to karaoke, from bebop to "The Teddy Bears' Picnic." This is a strategic move on Martin's part, an effort to demonstrate not only that sociology has something distinctive to say about "musicological music," but also that sociology is interested in seemingly banal, everyday music – music that is unlikely to rouse much musicological curiosity, but which is nevertheless sociologically significant because of the clues it offers about musically negotiated senses of self and community. Although this issue is explored most fully in the book's final chapter on Everyday Music, Martin makes his strongest case for the sociology of music – all music – in an earlier chapter: "what is empirically undeniable is the persistence and the strength of the attachment which people in modern industrial societies have to music . . . For the sociologist this phenomenon has a particular fascination. Why should music matter so much in contemporary culture?" (64-65).

His answer is that music has "an ability to give people a sense of secure identity – whatever they wish that to be – and a sense of belonging at a time when the accelerating pace of economic and technological change is making it increasingly difficult to achieve continuity and stability in social life" (65). Incidentally, the terrains that currently raise some of the most challenging questions about the place of music in social life – namely web-based, digitized, and globalized musical practices – are topics on which Martin is unfortunately silent. However, the theories and methods that he builds here certainly constitute useful places to begin considering such issues.

As a final note, I want to return to the idea that sociology and musicology "are to be considered as emerging from, and grounded in, distinctly different academic

discourses” (31). The dominant sentiment in studies of music in society is that sociological and musicological perspectives can be – should be – bridged. Contrary to this notion, Martin’s book is not an exercise in bridge building. But neither is it an effort in putting up walls. It is, rather, an attempt to systematically articulate the differences between sociological and musicological perspectives, in the hopes that “With a recognition of these differences . . . may come an awareness of, and a mutual respect for the complementary strengths of the different disciplinary perspectives” (31). And while Martin ultimately does see the promise of an interdisciplinary project that would draw on both perspectives (222), his point is that sociology and musicology must be soundly established as separate entities before any fruitful combination can be achieved.

To sum up, Peter Martin’s *Music and the Sociological Gaze* is a welcome addition to the relatively minor field of the sociology of music, a commendable distillation of a variety of sociological work, and an encouraging sign that a distinctive sociological approach to music is indeed beginning to coagulate. Any student or researcher asking questions about music and society should read this book, and it will doubtless be of interest to those working in the sociology of art and culture more broadly.

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