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Talkin' Musical Identities Blues

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Talkin' Musical Identities Blues

(*About This Text*)

So, Wayne, you said, "Have fun with it." (ACT Reviews Guideline #8). What a challenge! I have to admit when I think of having fun, the first thing that pops into my mind is not reading an edited collection on psychology(ies) of music. I'm not sure it would make my Top Forty fun list.

It is an interesting book. Certainly, it is one that is worth reading and discussing. As I read it, I often found myself saying things like, "Now that's fascinating" and "Geez, I'm intimidated by these psych folks. I know very little psych lit. What can I say?" But just as often, I found myself saying "OK, but what about ____ ?!" or "This is soooo narrow! What about the music!!"

I do enjoy a good conversation. That makes my Top Forty. A good conversation might even make my Top Ten. So, Wayne, how about a little chat?

My side of the conversation won't be too analytical or critical, certainly not in the way that exudes academic one-up-MaNship or AuthoRity. A little Lite on the subject can't hurt, eh? I'll amble through music, through identity(ies), past learning and teaching (though don't expect me to speculate on "implications for music education"). I'll ask in passing what the book seems to mean in my life and what it might mean in Mayday Group's life (lives). I'll try to give some thought to how having read *Musical Identities* might possibly influence my research, my teaching, my being a musician. And I'll ask what the authors/editors might do differently in their research and their approaches to their subject – if we were to have a meaningful conversation leading to mutual understanding (Is there understanding that is not mutual? Must be one of those oxymorons.)

So why “Talkin' Music Identities Blues”? I certainly don't have rhythm. If you wanna get to heaven, let me tell ya what ta do. I don't sound like Woody Guthrie or Robert Johnson, or Gladys Bentley or Alberta Hunter, but I have been listening to their recorded voices and I am listening to Rory Block sing the blues, her blues. I've got a 'harp. You know what I like about the blues? The blues sing conversation, commenting on life situations of all kinds, inviting participation. Where did we white folks get the idea that the blues are sad and serious? Some of the best blues poke and tease, political commentary and sexual innuendo. Just like life, the blues show it's easier to get through the day when you don't take yourself too seriously, no matter how serious the issues you face. A little smile. Blues follow an apparently simple form and structure but the nuances surprise just when you were sure you had the pattern. And blues testify. Blues signify. My conversational essay comments on the life situations of *Musical Identities*, hopefully leaving room for improvisation and related ideas in call and response, in the spaces between the beats and choruses.

Talkin' Musical Identity Blues

Sing those blues in the morning . . . Sing these blues all through the day.

I sing those blues in the morning . . . Sing these blues all through the day.

Ain't nothing too big (or small) that the blues can't wash away.

[About Verse 1: [Values](#)]

I'm sitting here thinkin' . . . The year's two thousand and three.

Yes, I'm sitting here thinkin' . . . The year's two thousand and three.

O lord, I been wonderin', if they be leavin' out you and me?

[About Verse 2: [Left Out](#)]

You're sittin' there singin' inside that tiny, tiny room.

Now, you're sittin' there singin' inside that tiny, tiny room.

And we're outside a-hollerin' this sweet 'n salty tune.

[About Verse 3: *Insiders & Outsiders*]

The young ones sit in school . . . most of the live-long day
Don'tcha know, the young ones sit in school . . . most of the live-long day
Sometimes they be singin' just to pass the time away.

[About Verse 4: *Youth & Schools*]

Gran'ma's been singin' and a-tellin' us those family tales.
Oh, my Gran'ma's been singin' and a-tellin' us those family tales.
So tell me, sister, why your story sounds so pale?

[About Verse 5: *Gender Issue*]

If a sister don't talk . . . same way as you do.
If a brother can't walk . . . same way as you do.
Do they go out singin' . . . Talkin' Identities Blues?

[About Verse 6: *Others*]

I been walkin' by the river, my feet all caked with mud.
Now, I been walkin' by the river, my feet all caked with mud.
And I wonder, oh, I wonder, when the river be clear of this flood?

[About Verse 7: *National Identity*]

Brother's countin' and sortin' . . . Sister's sortin', too.
I say, Brother's countin' and sortin' . . . Sister's sortin', too.
At the end of the day, oh yes, we takin' somethin' from you.

[About Verse 8: *Learning*]

It's blues in the morning . . . Blues night, noon and day.
Lord, it's blues in the morning . . . Blues night, noon and day.
When you got those Talkin' Musical Identity Blues, there ain't no other way.

[About Verse 9: *Conclusion*]

Values

What does my identity have to do with hearing or singing or creating music?
What does identity have to do with music for me? From what moral position do I write here, and how does that frame what I have to say?

My moral position is about the choices I make: what I teach, what I learn, what I write. For me, choices like these are influenced extensively by feminist philosophies and political necessities. The links between who I am, what I do, and why I do it are profound. For instance, teaching for me is not simply something I do: like Audre Lorde (1984), teaching is about survival (p.88); and artistic work is not a luxury but a necessity (p.36). Like bell hooks (1994), I find that passion has a lot to do with it:

That's probably what feminism was initially about: How do we make room for self-determining passionate women who will be able to just be? I am passionate about everything in my life--first and foremost, passionate about ideas. And that's a dangerous person to be in this society, not just because I'm a woman, but because it is such a fundamentally anti-intellectual, anti-critical thinking society. I don't think we can act like it's so great for men to be critical thinkers either. This society doesn't want anybody to be a critical thinker. What we as women need to ask ourselves is: "In what context within patriarchy do women create space where we can protect our genius?" It's a very, very difficult question. (p.39)

(To read my comments on feminist influences in music education [click here](#))

These are questions I ask when I write about music and identity. They have become such an indispensable part of the fabric of my thought and action that I am often scarcely aware of them – just as music educators find it difficult to explain to others why music is important, why identities are important, and why things like these are worth thinking about as musicians and educators.

How does music relate to identity? Is music expressive? Powerful? Visceral? Spiritual? It is all these, of course, but none of them simply, neatly, or tidily. Music is an ineffable reality. Talk like this, however, too often slips into claims like "music heals," "music is love," or "music is a universal language" – claims that nauseate my intellect. Too self-absorbed. Too ignorant. Still, there is in music and musical identity something

that operates at a deep, inarticulate level: murky and muddy. Ah, the tension! (Here I am, a mud wrestler!)

So, these music and identity issues have to do with identifying the Cartesian duality, but then putting the mind-body-spirit back together again. Humpty Dumpty! Alice falling down the rabbit hole. A fall from grace. A free fall. Curious. And curiouiser. Pema Chödrön (2001) writes:

I remember very clearly, at a time of enormous stress in my life, reading *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice became a heroine for me because she fell into this hole and she just free-fell. . . . I used to aspire to be like that because I saw myself getting near the hole and just screaming, holding back, not wanting to go anywhere where there was no hand to hold. (p.66)

I borrow Chödrön's words to describe some of my experience with the muddy tensions of music(s) and identity(ies). Considered separately, music and identity are enormously complicated. Together, they are even more so. Like the author/editors of *Queering the Pitch* (Brett, Wood, & Thomas 1994) I am concerned "with representations, performances and roles." My interest lies in

throwing into question old labels and their meanings so as to reassociate music with lived experience and the broader patterns of discourse and culture that music both mirrors and actively produces. . . .The risk, the threat that "queering" represents, may be to uncover for music lovers what it is we generally repress in thinking about our experience of music: our emotional attachments to music, our needs met by music, our accommodations to society through music, our voices, our bodies.

(pp. *viii-ix*)

One further value that frames the position or perspective from which I write is this definition of feminist scholarship in music:

[F]eminism in music scholarship is a critical theory of music and of music history that engages broad questions of social context, representation, and meaning. . . . feminist scholars share the postmodern conviction that all knowledge is situated and that 'objectivity' is a phantom; they conceive both personal and scholarly life in terms of responsibility and (often) activism; and they find, experientially, that political and scholarly commitments have inevitably been commingled even--perhaps especially-

-among those who disclaim or repudiate any such entanglement. (Solie 1997, p.7)

This constellation of values leads me to a fundamental conviction (or dilemma) that forms the backdrop for my reading of *Musical Identities*: I cannot easily separate "identities in music" from "music in identities." In fact, I cannot conceive of music apart from identity. Life, music, identities, and the relationships among them are much more complicated than that. I look for ways of thinking and talking about music and identity that don't attempt to do away with the murkiness and fluidity and tension that are such central features.

(See also *Learning*)

Left Out

This book takes a very narrow approach to its topic, it seems to me. Where is feminism? Power? Queer theory? Anti-racism? *Where is the music?* I wonder if the authors would say anything differently were we to engage in a dialog about these missing areas? How would this conversation sound?

It would only be logical to have included references to queer studies (e.g., Ablove, Barale, & Halperin, 1993; Walcott, 1998) ; to critical (feminist, queer) musicologies (e.g., Brett & Wood, 200; Brett, Wood, & Thomas, 1994; Fuller & Whitesell, 2002; Moisala, & Diamond, 2000; Solie, 1993); to cultural studies (e.g., Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992); and to popular music studies (e.g., Swiss, Sloop, & Herman, 1998; Whiteley, 1997)-- even if these are not the book's primary focus, or lie outside the domain of psychology. And why the focus on British authors to near-exclusion of others?

Donna J. Haraway urges us to contextualize feminisms, so that markers of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, and gender are not separated from each other. Surely we could do the same kind of contextualizing with psychologies, musics, and identities. Haraway (1991) says:

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. (p.195)

If this were taken to heart by psychologists, educators, musicians, and learners perhaps we might begin to get over the need for single and absolute truths: to encourage communities of psychologists, educators, musicians, and learners who accommodate critique, questioning, dissent, and disagreement (Crow & Gotell, 2000). Such communities would include all kinds of people and demand constant challenge of the status quo.

If there is a rationale for excluding the related areas I have mentioned here, it should be made explicit, so that context is acknowledged and may become part of the discussion.

(See also *Values, Insiders & Outsiders, The Gender Issue*)

Insiders & Outsiders

An even greater problem occurs when these psychological categories (see *Left Out*) are misconstrued as mutually exclusive. I wonder, is this the way psychology is? Is it the nature of psychology to deal with these small units, with categorical and mutually exclusive distinctions only? If educators are concerned with equity and with all students reaching their full potential in music, how does music psychology help us in these endeavors? Is it possible for psychology to take a both/and position rather than the either/or -- the cut and dried dichotomy? Where is the fuzziness? The mud and muck of mud pies?

Simultaneously there is something in the seeming precision, neatness, and boundedness of these studies that leads me to deeper exploration of the fuzziness that interests and concerns me. What are the fibers of fuzziness? Can any of water's clarity

be found amidst the muck and the mud? There is something here for me to consider and learn from, even though the rigid and arbitrary categories cause me great concern.

Perhaps we can and should find ways to make sense of the mess (See also *Values*). Only, we get into trouble when we try to make the categories too boxy, precise, and controlled. Life is more complicated than that. Categories and labels and concepts and words have the potential to help us make meaning out of life's immensity and minuteness, but these tools ("objets d'art") are not life's meaning or life itself. They are not real. Music is real, the ineffable reality.

Why should we read psychology when it is so narrow? (See also *Learning*) Perhaps *because of* the narrowness of its conceptions, the boxy-ness of its categories. We need to be reminded of such things regularly. But these characteristics originated for and continue to serve the purposes of dividing people: into self and other, into in-group and the out-group, into dumb and smart, into talented and clumsy, and so on. (My thanks to Karen Frederickson for bringing this point to my attention). Drawing lines around groups may help us better understand a category, but it also helps create the category, and in so doing determines who is included and who is excluded. (See *Left Out*)

Consider '70s disco and its images. This was gay black men's music. Definitely an out-group, outsider identity. Then in the commodification of disco that outsider identity merged into that of the in-group, if ever so briefly, and its root identity disappeared. Outside in. Outsider invisible. Fast forward to the early '90s and QueerCore.[www.people.iup.edu/bmwg/gbjones.htm; www.pansydivision.com, www.tribe8.com; www.mrlady.com; www.punkrockacademy.com/stm/int/fifth.html] We're here; we're queer; and we're definitely out!

Hmmm . . . It seems possible, therefore, that reading psychology from a positive viewpoint may provide us with some intense facets of a tiny particle; however, we do not want to substitute the part for the whole, making music psychology a synecdoche for musical knowledge and experience, such that a person who does not play an instrument becomes a non-musician.

Youth and Schools

For me, the most fascinating aspects of the four chapters addressing some aspect of schooling and youth are the discussions of the flexibility and fluidity of identity-- undercut by rather dichotomous, narrow, and rigid definitions of what constitutes musicality, musicianship and music.

How is it that a child who does not take lessons on a musical instrument is a non-musician? Contemporary music education curricula emphasize all kinds of participation in music-- listening, singing, composition, improvisation, analysis, criticism, movement and dancing. While these aspects of music are tangential to the definitions of musician and musical identity employed in these chapters, they may well be the most important to specific individuals-- and to their musical identities.

In reflecting on the kinds of music with which young people so often identify, I looked through the index. The entries "youth" or "youth music" do not appear there. Neither does "rock," although "pop music" appears twice. "Heavy metal" receives one reference (to Walser's work) in the gender chapter. Annie Lennox is referenced in the chapter on solo performers, and "global youth music" is referenced under "national identity." There are no references to hip hop, R & B, ska, reggae, dance music, jazz, or other genres. Since some of these genres are mentioned briefly in certain chapters, part of what I'm pointing out can be attributed to the simple fact the index that doesn't always reflect content very specifically. However, there is no in-depth discussion of the music as mediator of identity(ies) or identity as mediator of music(s) (See also *Learning*). What would that discussion look or sound like?

O'Neill provides an interesting and useful study of young musicians. When reading it carefully I find many points that could imply a project more activist than is apparent at first reading. She acknowledges that embodiment, materiality, and power as identity issues have not received the attention they deserve. This seems to me to be a proposal to examine gender, sexual, race and ethnic identities (within class and political status) as factors in the musical identities of youth. O'Neill does say that "we need to

challenge these assumptions" (p.93). And she concludes that, "Only by raising our awareness of the possibilities and constraints afforded by particular ideologies can we hope to transcend the boundaries of what it means to be a musician" (p. 94). If I could have my wish, it would be to hear more about how social psychology as a discipline might raise awareness of ideology as it functions among musicians and in musical social locations.

The Gender Issue

Dibben provides a logical (if brief) overview of gender identity and music with no mention of feminism, although there is a passing reference to feminist theory. She sketches a psychology basis for gender studies, primarily from the viewpoint of educational psychology. She offers an overview of some 20-30 years of feminist and gender research but does not acknowledge or explore the difference between the two. The overview is helpful, then, but remains too broad, especially in view of its stated purpose to discuss "gendering of music as an activity, the gendering of musical practices and tastes, and the way in which musical texts may position the (gendered) subject" (p.117). Each of these could be the topic for a chapter of its own. Many chapters and articles have been written on these concerns. This chapter's breadth comes at the expense of depth and complexity. Further, the semblance of breadth may imply to an unsophisticated reader that this trade-off is acceptable, when it is actually an inaccurate portrayal of the fields of gender and feminist studies.

The New Groves includes a three-page definition of gender that emphasizes the relational and semiotic nuances of gender as applied in music:

The cultural, social and/or historical interpretation of the biological and physiological category of sex. Nearly every experience of music, including its creation, performance and perception, may incorporate assumptions about gender; and music itself can produce ideologies of gender, uncovering the workings of gender in even the most 'absolute' musical contexts has thus emerged as a basic task of the critical exploration of music. . . . [C]oncepts of gender alter over time and take on

different shapes in diverse cultural contexts. . . Gender is a relational phenomenon Exploring concerns related to gender permits fresh critical perspectives on music, ones that complement traditional formal, source-critical, historical and biographical approaches, even as they may partake of and even reinforce these traditional modes of enquiry. . . . In effect such investigations return to a basic set of concerns: how music and discourse on music signify gender, even when the ostensible subject may cloak its relationship to the topic.

(Kahlberg 2001, pp.645-47)

I offer several definitions of feminism elsewhere in this essay/conversation (See *Values* and *Left Out*). Using Solie's definition of feminism and Kahlberg's definition of gender would give us with a much richer image of gender identity(ies) in music, as well as gender identity(ies) and music.

Critical and feminist musicologists in 2003 have moved a long way from McClary's 1991 (and earlier) beginnings. We respect her work even though we may not agree with those initial forays. It is disappointing, then, to read yet another McClary bashing (129-130). It is not good scholarship to present such an argument in 2003. Why are there no references to recent historical musicology and ethnomusicology studies?

On the same page, historical musicology's disciplinary emphasis on the 'work' is criticized and contrasted with sociological accounts of music in daily life and of music and identity in media education: accounts in which the 'work' is deemed irrelevant. This seems to me like blaming an apple for not being an orange or a tangerine. While philosophers have criticized the hegemony of the work-concept (Goehr 1992 being the best-known), the work is important in the Western art music tradition. Clearly the situation is different in oral/aural musics, traditional or folk musics, and popular musics where the performance, the participation, or the social practice is important and a 'work' proper may not exist. This is not to say that performance, participation and social practice are not significant in Western art music, where such aspects are increasingly under study.

Although Judith Butler's ideas of performativity as “gender trouble” are discussed in this book, after the brief and fairly accurate definition the unfortunate assumption

appears to be made that gender maps simply and directly (without trouble!) onto the male/female dichotomy. This is the very "gender trouble" Butler warns us against! The performativity of gender demonstrates its fluidity and permeable boundaries. And gender is much more easily changed than biological sex (For examples in music, see Lamb 1997a & b; Brett, Wood, & Thomas 1994; Blackmer & Smith 1995), to say nothing of the various ways it is enacted, embodied, transformed, twisted and enjoyed within a multitude of heterosexualities, bisexualities homosexualities and transsexualities. Moreover, queer theory has been, and continues to be, fundamental to explorations of gendered identities in music, especially the "way in which musical texts may position the (gendered) subject." The sources are so numerous. Why is this chapter so straight? (See also *Left Out* and *Insiders & Outsiders*)

While psychoanalysis and psychology are different disciplines, many general readers will associate the two, and understandably. For this reason it would be useful to acknowledge the role played by psychoanalytic studies of gender identity in music, particularly by those who engage in poststructuralist critiques. While Judith Butler presents some of the most dense interpretations and extrapolations of poststructuralist psychoanalytic theory, others have synthesized it in a format helpful for music scholars. One most useful essay for those beginning this kind of work in music is Ruth Solie's "On Difference" (1997).

Finally, Ellen Koskoff has identified two fundamental questions pursuant to music shaping gender and to gender shaping music: "First, to what degree does a society's gender ideology and resulting gender-related behaviors affect its musical thought and practice? And second, how does music function in society to reflect or affect inter-gender relations?" (Koskoff 1987, 1). These questions remain as cogent for gender studies in 2003 as they were sixteen years ago, and are worthy of discussion in a gender identity and music chapter. Examining a society's gender ideology(ies) and the functions of music in that society help us to consider the effects of power and institutions. Koskoff elaborates on her two basic questions in "Gender, Power, and Music" (1991) and presents

a concrete example in her "Foreward" (2000). These theoretical tools provided by Koskoff are tools we should be using.

Others

The last two chapters move towards consideration of musical identity among people often classified as "other"-- those with special needs and disability caused by severe chronic illness.

Complexity is acknowledged, as are changing personal identities, where "music can be thought of as not only facilitating specific changes in musical and psychological factors, but also contributing to the identity projects in which the individuals are engaged" (p.176). Composition and improvisation are recognized as a valuable musical activity, but the chapter's primary emphasis still appears to be on performing music in some way, with listening and listener-identities relegated to the realm of (apparently unimportant) recreation.

As I read these chapters, I thought repeatedly about all the other 'others' who are absent from this book. What might we learn from a direct discussion of class privilege and musical identity? Race? Ethnicity? Religion? Nationality and/or geographic location? Sexuality? (See also *Insiders & Outsiders*)

National identity

When I read the "National Music and Identity" chapter I don't find the same kind of rigidity as in the others. Folkestad exposes some of the messiness that fascinates me: "What does the fact that one can hear a didgeridoo at a Swedish wedding in a Middle Age stone church tell us about today's and tomorrow's society?" (p.161) Folkestad also acknowledges that some nationalist curriculum and writings by Kodaly could be interpreted as racist (p.157). He includes information about Norway and Sweden that is not easily available to North Americans. I don't feel as much strain of "yes, but..." when I read this chapter.

Still, I pause. I wonder. Images from film and radio come to my mind that seem to connect musical and national identity. . . . Adrien Brody as W. Szpilman silently practicing (or is he playing?) the piano as he hid in Warsaw from the Nazis, as depicted in Roman Polanski's film, *The Pianist* (2002). . . . Geoffrey Rush in *Shine* (1996) and Susannah Fowle in *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977) come to mind from Australia. . . . From the United States there is Meryl Streep as Roberta Guaspari in *Music of the Heart* (1999) and Richard Dreyfuss in *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995). . . . Canada with Glenn Gould's contrapuntal radio in "The Idea of North." . . . *The 32 Short Films about Glenn Gould* that followed some ten years or so after his death (1993). . . . Douglas Coupland says, "*Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, strangely, does capture the feeling of being Canadian." Is this national identity?

I wonder about ethnomusicology. According to Schneider, "Wellek states that the foundations of a scientific psychology of music are owed to comparative musicology" (note 2, p. 309). Identity has long been a concern in this field. While Charles Seeger did not use the word identity, he worked with these ideas (e.g., nationality, inter-American musics, cultural values, ethnic values, musical values, folk and non-folk, and so forth) and is cited frequently in current ethnomusicological scholarship. Recently Steven Feld (2002) describes the place of musical identities in ethnomusicology:

Ethnomusicology today also studies the production and circulation of musical identities in such a world, equally attending to history and geography, culture and power, and analyzing the musical expression of social categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality. In this way ethnomusicology connects considerably with the field of cultural studies and especially popular music studies. This way ethnomusicology is now very much about contemporary musical identity formation, in light of media industrialization and world politics.

Folkestad describes the CDIME (p. 159) and brings some of these ethnomusicological precepts into the discussion. Through CDIME I am drawn back to the Gender Issue, performativity and transitional, permeable identities, but within national or cultural identities. As Campbell & Peterson (2001) put it "The musical expressions [children]

learn and create are the result of the fused and fluid nature of the cultures that surround them. Teachers do well to recognize the cultural permeabilities of communities."

What do ethnomusicology, music psychology, and music education say to, about, and with national identity, cultural identity and multiculturalism?

Learning

What do I learn from reading this book? (See also *Insiders & Outsiders*) What is its value? (See also *Values*) I have a sense that my first answer is not much, although I don't really feel as negatively about it as that may sound. There must be something interesting I've found. Sometimes I'm not sure. It is pretty dry reading. Or maybe it is more accurate to say it is naive, when so much social material is ignored. Life is more complicated than that. What do these psych folks have to say to me and my work? How will reading them have an impact on what I do? What I get from *Musical Identities* are small particularities that are worthwhile for me to consider, to compare to what I see in classrooms and what I understand about psychology. This is where the conversation begins for me. *Musical Identities* gives me bits of information I did not have beforehand. I wouldn't go so far as to say what the authors found in their studies becomes truth I should adopt, although I read it with attention focused. I thought about their assertions, their conclusions, their results; I compared them to those of other studies, to experiences I have had, and to experiences I observe. That is useful.

I am reminded of issues I raised on the GRIME email list (to which colleagues contributed their ideas) and at the May Day Group Institute for Music Teacher Educators, Amherst 2002 (Lamb, 2002b) – identity issues in need of further research:

- Construction of gender expectations within music and music education professions
- What it means to be female in a discipline that greatly favors males
- What it means to be male in a discipline that greatly privileges males
- What it means to be male in a feminine discipline

- What it means to be queer in music, both as teachers & students
- How race, ethnicity, sexuality, sexual orientation, age, social class, culture inflect gender in music
- How music inflects race, ethnicity, sexuality, sexual orientation, age, social class, culture and gender in music
- Psychology of different music media and technologies in music education

I want to learn about these identity issues. How would the *Musical Identities* authors frame or go about such inquiry?

Conclusion

To summarize, my main concern with *Musical Identities* is that its narrow focus may reinforce the kind of categorical or dichotomous thinking that excludes the many people whose modes of musical identity(ies) are neglected by the book.

It also troubles me that the book appears to exist in a vacuum without reference to current musicology, ethnomusicology or education scholarship— much of which would contextualize, problematize, and interrogate the subjects and issues of *Musical Identities*.

Yet, *Musical Identities* was worthwhile for me to read because its psychological particulars offer me things to think about as I go through my daily work of teaching and research.

Musical Identities provokes me to think again about all the messy stuff found in music and education through a history of sexism, homophobia, racism, class privilege and the important activist and reactionary movements responding to that messiness.

And that, as poor Martha (Stewart) would say, is a “good thing”!

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Feminist Influences in Music Education

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People often ask me what the role of feminist thinking and feminist action should be in music education. This is not easy to answer, and yet it is an worthwhile question to ask. Pondering possible answers and experimenting with their practical implications are even more important. Such pondering and experimentation take time and effort, and failures are an inevitable part of the quest for eventual solutions.

Teachers want the best for and from their students. Musicians want the heights of creative expression to flow through in performance or composition. What a teacher or a student or a musician "is" changes depending on the cultural and social contexts. Each category of teacher, student, and musician is influenced by (and/or a product or part of) the society in which she/he lives: a society where certain categories of people have more opportunities than others, and where certain ways of thinking and doing are more valued than others. When values and goals differ from the dominant position, struggles to express or accomplish them ensue whether in social or artistic venues.

Therefore, the influences of feminism(s) in music education will differ substantially depending on the kinds of musical participation involved in a particular setting. As teachers/learners, we need multiple strategies and multiple answers to go with multiple questions: the pedagogical problems we face manifest themselves in ways that are multiple, divergent, and subtle.

The philosophies and politics of feminism(s) make a great difference in the way I "do" music education. Like Audre Lorde I find teaching to be about survival (Lorde

1984, p.88) and artistic work to be a necessity not a luxury (Lorde 1984, p.36). Like bell hooks (1994), I believe passion has a lot to do with it. In fact, as hooks says, that's "probably what feminism was initially about: How do we make room for self-determining passionate women who will be able to just be? . . . What we as women need to ask ourselves is: In what context within patriarchy do women create space where we can protect our genius? That's a very, very difficult question" (hooks 1994, p.39).

"I am passionate about everything in my life," hooks continues, "first and foremost, passionate about ideas. And that's a dangerous person to be in this society, not just because I'm a woman, but because ours is such a fundamentally anti-intellectual, anti-critical-thinking society." hooks goes on to say that she doesn't think it's much different for men (that it's fine for them to be passionately critical thinkers) because, she asserts boldly, society doesn't really want anybody to be passionately or critically thoughtful. The fact that being critically passionate is potentially dangerous for men as well as women shows that all people may participate in and benefit from feminist thinking and action. This is crucial to feminism in education: feminist thinking provides a means for developing creative and critical spaces for all students and teachers.

From an examination of the interaction of local context, valuing the arts, and a passion for life, I find three broad spheres of feminist influence on/in music education: (1) music history; (2) music is not an absolute; and (3) music as a product of identity (or identity as a product of music, which is a very closely related thing). In my everyday teaching/learning life I encounter and reflect upon many questions within these three fields. An important part of my practice involves working through provisional answers. Such reflection is particularly important, since current school reforms touting "excellence" as the antidote to diverse student needs (with no mention or consideration of equity) seriously constrain potential courses of action. My teaching practice is guided by my provisional answers to critical questions these three areas.

Music history, the first feminist influence

I now recognize that women have a history in music and that it is a complicated one to uncover. Women have been (and are) composers, performers, conductors, teachers, patrons. Women have participated in all manner of musical roles and assumed all manner of musical identities throughout recorded history. It was an astonishing thing for me to discover as a young musician who had just completed an undergraduate music degree that the Chaminade "Concertino" I had performed was by a woman. By habit I had turned the name Cecile into Cecil it could be no other way! In the ensuing twenty-five years I have become aware of many complications to women's history in music. Family, class, ethnicity/"race", religion, education, location, and musical genre: these are among the many factors, subtle and obvious, that complicate knowing women's historical identities in music. Doing feminist history in music is therefore one way of engaging in critical thinking and questioning the status quo.

Music is not an absolute, the second feminist influence

Insights like these can be profoundly unsettling because they challenge commonly held beliefs about the purity of music as an abstract art and a product of talent, showing that they are culturally determined. This de-centering of the absolute qualities of music means that what counts as music is not so obvious, that theoretical principles about the aesthetics and structure of music must be identified as context-specific and context-relative rather than transcendent. It makes the construction of curriculum more complicated because it is no longer easy to say what music (or what in music) is most worthy of study what counts as music (and as educationally-relevant) and what does not. It means changing expectations about how music is to be taught and what happens in a rehearsal or a performance. It means re-examining the silent precept of musical performance as untheorized practice, the thing musicians do just because they do it.

In the face of this shifting terrain some prefer to hold tighter to older traditions (such as great masterworks, *tahs* and *tih*s, singing in head tone, the absolute authority of the music director), as does Ontario's provincially mandated music curriculum. I would rather practice more inclusive, creative thinking and, like Audre Lorde, flourish within the "intimacy of scrutiny" (Lorde 1984, p.36) of my beloved music in order to find a greater passion and power for living through new knowledge and expectations. It is in this space of shifting positionality and shifting truths where I look for practical, teachable moments. As a feminist teacher I point out the contradictions within the curriculum, and the power structure that requires it to be taught. I subvert the curriculum by teaching a critique of its content and process, even as I meet the letter of the officially sanctioned rubric.

Music as a product of identity, the third feminist influence

Naming the specifics of my self-identification with and in music as a female, as a lesbian, as a white, middle-class person in North America, has meant acknowledging the woman-centered aspects that are crucial to me. And this has meant, in turn, that I've had to acknowledge that all aspects outside my experience could be central to someone else. This requires, for example, that I examine the place of "race," class and ability in music in addition to gender. At a very basic level awareness of different identity factors implicates an equal-opportunities approach, but one that addresses explicitly political issues and power imbalances. It isn't simply a matter of treating everyone fairly or the same. It does require constant examination of cultural values. It does mean recognizing and appreciating differences, seeing the value in treating people differently but fairly, and going further than noting the difficulties when deep-seated and/or unexamined prejudices and beliefs interfere with that fairness (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia). Since interfering beliefs most often relate to factors outside ones personal experience, such identity-driven issues cannot be addressed once and forgotten: instead they must become part of an ongoing process of scrutiny and learning.

For me, this means that I ground theory in my experience but do not limit theory by my experience. That is, my experience is valid not eccentric, not atypical, not undeserving of consideration and so are the experiences of others. I start my music teaching and learning from where I am but do not limit concepts or practices to that frame. This leads to an expanded concept of praxis, one that extends well beyond knowing what I do and doing what I know.

These three feminist influences in music education draw from my experience and my identities as a musician, teacher, and feminist, as well as my knowledge of theory and practice in each of these areas. Each music educator must seek his/her own strategies for challenging the status quo in creative and critical spaces for all students.

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Gender Research in Music Education <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/~grime/>

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Return to [Values](#)

THE PERFORMER PERFORMED



IDENTIFICATION

The identity represented in this "Talkin' blues" should not be confused with Roberta Lamb, Associate Professor, School of Music Queen's University. Rather, the "Talkin' blues" identity is an imagined composite adopted to illustrate a point.

ABOUT THIS TEXT

This text is not linear.

Neither is a book, although it may appear to be so. No one forces a reader to begin at the beginning and read to the end. It is possible to skip paragraphs, even chapters, to start in the middle or at the end. The reader makes meaning out of a text, even a seemingly linear book or chapter.

This text emphasizes the reader's role in the process because the reader must leap through hyperlinks in order to find all the text (For more of R. Lamb's examples of performative presentations, see Lamb, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1999,

2002a). It is possible to read this text without clicking on a single link, but then what would one miss?

According to reader response theory the reader brings much to a text. The author is not the only author. There is an interaction or series of interactions between the reader and the text. This is not dissimilar to the relationship or interaction between the audience and the performer, or the performer and the performed (the work).

Enjoy!

(back to [Talkin'](#))

Biographical Information

Roberta Lamb (Ed. D., Music and Music Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1987; M. Mus. Ed., University of Portland, 1979; B. Mus. Ed., University of Portland, 1974) was one of the first to research women in music for school curricula with her dissertation, "Including women composers in music curricula: Development of creative strategies for the general music classes, gr. 5-8." Her current research brings together education, ethnomusicology, and feminist theories in a study of Ruth Crawford Seeger. Her chapter, with Lori-Anne Dolloff & Sondra Wieland Howe, "Feminism, Feminist Research and Gender Research In Music Education: A selective review," in *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*, Richard Colwell & Carol Richardson, Editors. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002 (pp.648-674) is the first such review in music education. She is listed in *Women and Music in America Since 1900: An Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, Kristine H. Burns, Editor. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002 (pp.363-364). She is a founding member of GRIME (Gender Research in Music Education, <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/~grime/>). Roberta Lamb is an associate professor, School of Music (with cross-appointments to Women's Studies department and Faculty of Education) Queen's University, Canada.

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