

T W O

The Canons in the Musicological Toolbox

Don Michael Randel

In the hefty tome titled *Inside Macintosh: Volumes I, II, and III*, copyrighted by Apple Computer, Inc., a section of the first chapter is headed "The Toolbox and Other High-Level Software," and it begins as follows:

The Macintosh User Interface Toolbox provides a simple means of constructing application programs that conform to the standard Macintosh user interface. By offering a common set of routines that every application calls to implement the user interface, the Toolbox not only ensures familiarity and consistency for the user but also helps reduce the application's code size and development time. (Apple Computer 1985, I:9)

We could perhaps transpose this to the domain of musicology as follows:

The Musicologist's Toolbox provides a means of constructing dissertations and scholarly articles that conform to the standard Musicological interface. By offering a common set of techniques that every dissertation and scholarly article employs to implement the Musicological interface, the Toolbox not only ensures familiarity and consistency for the scholar but also helps reduce the time and effort required to produce the scholarly product.

Each of us shows up for work lugging a toolbox, and the contents of this toolbox have a great deal to do with what kind of work we can do and what the work will look like when we are finished. Apple Computer, Inc., designed and made available their Toolbox precisely so as to ensure that pro-

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grams written for the Macintosh by anyone and everyone would look familiar and "friendly" to the user (with pull-down menus, icons, clicking, and all the rest). We often engage in a similar enterprise in our teaching—when we claim to provide our students with *the* "basic tools of scholarship." We tend to constrain not only how things can be studied but what can be studied at all. We sometimes give the impression that other things are not even worthy of study.

The Musicological Toolbox developed in the context of a certain canon of works. Once developed, it began to act just as surely to define and maintain that canon. By *canon* I mean primarily the canon of acceptable dissertation topics. This is not the same as *the* Canon or *the* Repertory or the Standard Repertory in general, by which we might mean the works preserved and transmitted by institutions of high culture, such as concert halls and opera houses. The musicological canon is for the most part a subset of this larger canon, though the relationship between the two has changed considerably in the last few decades and the fit between them is now much better than it was even just twenty-five or so years ago.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., writes of the relationship of Afro-American literature to the literary canon and cites Paul de Man's phrase "resistance to theory" (Gates 1986–87:345–46; de Man 1982). This phrase seems to me to resonate in our profession in ways that neither Gates nor de Man will have had in mind but that nevertheless capture much of what is at issue here. What is it about the Musicological Toolbox that has made it such a powerful force in keeping certain subjects out, including at times subjects that have the status of high art in our own culture? Or, what is it about the theoretical frame of musicology that has made so many subjects resistant to it? Here we may think both of the theory of musicology as a discipline and of music theory in the more usual sense in which we recognize it as an important tool of musicology. The resistance to theory of so much music has too often seemed like a fault of the music. Instead, we perhaps ought to think about the possible limitations in our theory, in both senses. As the Spanish proverb says, "If a book strikes one in the head and it makes a hollow sound, it is not always the fault of the book."

Of all of our tools, musical notation surely ranks first in importance, and it is central to much of our theory. Indeed, it has often been the basis for the initial sorting of all possible musics: All of music is divided into two parts—written traditions and oral traditions. The professional study of music is then similarly divided: Written music, which turns out to be principally Western

art music, is studied by musicologists. Everything else is studied by ethnomusicologists. Notation also provides the principal foundation for two of our favorite concepts: the work itself and the individual composer.

Much of the energy of musicology has gone into identifying, fixing, preserving, and studying "the work itself." And, of course, our belief in such a thing as "the work itself" is what makes possible the creation of the list of such things that make up the canon. But notation is not sufficient for a definition of "the work itself." Indeed, notation is simply not self-sufficient at all. It must always be decoded by an informed reader who brings to bear on it his or her own experience. And that experience is the product of a parallel oral tradition. This interdependence of written and oral traditions characterizes notation in the twentieth century just as surely as it characterizes non-diastematic notations of the Middle Ages. In consequence, the status of "the work itself," as something fixed in notation for all of time, is seriously undermined and with it many of our traditional disciplinary and methodological boundaries. Musicology and ethnomusicology begin to look a great deal more alike when we recognize that there is no such thing as a work without a context.

If the supposed "work itself" is a product of the act of decoding—that is, reading or listening—so is the composer as a creative force. Our image of the composer as a creator emerges only from our reading or listening to his or her works. This decoding makes our relationship to the composer rather different from the traditional one in which the composer is viewed as a Romantic genius who dispenses immutable works for all of time. And it might make us question the importance of the figure of the composer as a force in the formation of our canons. Anonymity has most often made us rather uncomfortable when it comes to musical works. Anonymous works constitute a problem and are likely to be thought not worthy of study for their own sake. Even when there is no hope of identifying a single composer, as in some medieval repertoires, for example, we seem to prefer to study music for which we can imagine more clearly the possibility of an individual creator. Thus tropes, for example, have attracted a great deal more scholarly attention than the introits to which they are attached. If we can imagine shifting some of our attention away from the figure of the composer in our traditional canons, we might be moving in the direction of expanding our canons to include music for which such a figure has never been especially important.

Our work reflects not only our reliance on—and perhaps undue belief in—Western musical notation. It reflects some of the particular features of that notation as well. Western musical notation is much better at dealing

with pitch than with any other aspect of musical sound. For all of its weakness at dealing with pitch, it is downright crude with respect to duration and worse yet with respect to timbre. Not surprisingly, our work on pitch organization overwhelms our work on rhythm, to say nothing of timbre. And not surprisingly, repertoires that place rhythmic and timbral features more obviously on an equal footing with the organization of pitch tend to be undervalued or simply excluded from our canons altogether.

What we usually refer to and teach as music theory has much more to do with pitch than with other aspects of music, and this is perhaps most true of some of the very best of our theory and analysis. Here it is quite easy to think of repertoires that could be described as "resistant to theory." Even the highest art music of France and Italy, to say nothing of England and Spain, might very well prove resistant to analytical methods developed with a view to demonstrating the tonal coherence of the masterpieces of certain German composers. This is unfortunate only if such resistance is translated into the belief that such music does not deserve the most serious attention that we can give it as scholars.

A special set of tools within our methods of theory and analysis is the set of forms and/or genres with which we approach music. These have most often been regarded as normative or as classificatory and thus have tended to exclude as much as they have included. They tend to obliterate the significant detail even of works that they appear to embrace, and they encourage us to ignore works and repertoires that they do not comprehend. The problematical in this context is at best interpreted as mixed or hybrid. A preferable approach to musical genres might resemble the approach of Hans Robert Jauss to literary genres, which favors "a processlike determination of the concept of genre" and holds that genres "cannot be deduced or defined, but only historically determined, delimited, and described" (Jauss 1982:80).

The forms and genres in terms of which we often describe music are also entangled with the forms and genres of our scholarship and with the intellectual tools that we apply to the study of history. Our views of history very often do not spring from the study of the individual works that history has left for us but instead determine which works we shall choose to study and how we shall study them. If our view of history is to avoid the radical skepticism of some reader-oriented criticism on the one hand and the falsifications of inherited historical labels on the other, we shall have to locate the experience of individual works at the center of our efforts and in relation to an appropriate historical horizon.

Another whole set of tools in our Toolbox also concerns writing, though

not necessarily just the writing of music. These are our philological tools. These are very old tools and very important tools and especially influential tools. As long as scholarship was defined largely in terms of these tools, the only legitimate subjects for study—the canon of acceptable dissertation topics—were those embodying philological problems. This restriction made common cause with a belief in the self-sufficiency and transparency of modern notation to favor the study of early music and to view music that survived in a continuous performance tradition as not altogether suitable for scholarly study.

Within the last couple of decades, there has, of course, been a great musicological leap forward. A number of scholars working on the Middle Ages and Renaissance began to concentrate more of their own efforts (and those of their students) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Works of the nineteenth century particularly, which had always been part of *the Canon* or *the Repertory*, were admitted to the canon of acceptable dissertation topics in musicology. But the tools that were applied to this newly expanded canon were largely the old ones. That is, the musicological canon expanded principally to the extent that new repertoires could be made to respond to traditional methods that privileged concepts such as “the work itself” (immutable and editable) and the composer as creative genius (whose biography and compositional process might be investigated). The canon expanded, then, not to include a greater diversity of works so much as to appropriate and dominate a greater number of works and make them behave in similar fashion. Italian operas could be treated just as if they were German symphonies or Netherlandish motets.

Of course, even on this basis, much music can be and is still kept out of the canon. Not only is it resistant to our theory, but it is recalcitrant. Jazz, however, is an interesting case, for it might be thought to be something of an exception. Jazz was perhaps the first subject outside the tradition of Western art music that began to be studied by people who did not call themselves ethnomusicologists. But this was because it suited musicologists and their methods in two important ways. Although notation was not central to what was thought to be most important about jazz, the recording industry created and preserved vast quantities of “source” material that could be described and catalogued. And jazz prized individual creative genius. Jazz scholarship, then, turned out to be like much other musicological scholarship: strong on archival and source-critical work, somewhat less strong on biography (much of it rather anecdotal), and not much in between. It could be argued that what was essential about jazz to both its practitioners and its listeners

was largely lost in the musicological shuffle and that the application of foreign tools did not in this case illuminate a subject, as scholarship claims to do, but rather falsified it.

The question is, once again, whether this constituted merely an expansion of the canon or a case of attempted appropriation and domination. The expansion of the canon is more like a struggle for empire. It is a political move as much as an aesthetic one, for it serves first of all to incorporate foreign goods into the economy of the academy.

The struggle over the canon shows itself most clearly not with respect to non-Western music (which may be thought of as attractively exotic) or jazz (which can be made to behave like Western art music), but in the domain of Western popular music—the music that by any quantitative measure overwhelms all other kinds in our society. Here the traditional Musicological Toolbox seems destined primarily to continue to keep the musical riff-raff out rather than to broaden the horizon of our investigations. The study of this kind of music will require a bigger and more varied set of tools. But some of these tools will enrich the study of our more traditional subjects, too—including some of the subjects that we have admitted to our canon under false pretenses.

Popular music forces some issues to which we have paid only lip service and some others that threaten musicology's most ingrained habits. In this domain, “the work itself” is not so easily defined and certainly not in terms of musical notation. The composer/author is not always clearly identifiable and does not leave the kind of paper trail that our tools can investigate readily. Rhythm, timbre, and performance styles, for which we have only primitive vocabularies, tend to overwhelm harmony and counterpoint as significant elements, with the result that traditional musicological discourse quickly takes on a dismissive cast with respect to popular music. Producers, engineers, and marketing people may rival our traditional subjects—composers and performers—in their contributions to the character of “the work itself,” whatever that turns out to be. Popular music aims at specific audiences, and those audiences, both as groups and as individuals, use popular music as a means of identifying and defining themselves in society (Frith 1987). In this way, popular music forces the study of social context at a level sometimes talked about—but rarely undertaken—with respect to Western art music. Finally, popular music foregrounds its own temporality. It claims importance only for the here and now, and thus is bound to threaten an academic community that represents and justifies itself as preserver and transmitter of enduring values.

We might content ourselves with the view that popular music is simply an underdeveloped specialty: in an age of specialization, it is simply not what we musicologists do, and not doing it does not constitute a fault of the profession. But popular music represents only the extreme case of something that we do a lot of the time, and in this sense it ought to be at least a lesson to us. Even in the domain of Western art music, we can think of repertoires that “don’t look like much on the page,” that rely for their effectiveness on the particular circumstances of place, audience, and performance and that have in consequence often been (to put it gently) undervalued in our profession.

We should not abandon the strengths that flow from the formalist character of some of our traditional tools. But as we increasingly recognize the contingent status of even our favorite notated masterpieces and at the same time approach repertoires in which “the work itself” and “the composer” may not be readily definable, the focus of our energies must inevitably move in the direction of the listener: away from the process of composition and toward the process of hearing; away from the presumably autonomous text and outward to the network of texts that, acting through a reader or listener, gives any one text its meaning. This shift will open the way to—indeed, will demand—kinds of musical criticism and analysis that have not yet made contributions as significant as we should expect: Marxist, psychoanalytic, and feminist, for example.

Feminist criticism has a particularly important role to play in our discipline, for it confronts directly the issues of canon formation described above and invites the collaboration of Marxist and psychoanalytic studies. That women composers are almost wholly absent from the canon of Western art music is clear enough. The reasons for this are of two general types, though the two are not easily disentangled. The first type results from women’s historical condition as an oppressed class without equal access to political or economic power in society. It lends itself to analysis in Marxist terms. The second type derives from beliefs about the nature of sexual difference and from the dominance of male-produced and male-centered constructs in Western thought. It lends itself to analysis in biological, psychoanalytic, and psychosocial terms. But what can any analysis of the reasons suggest about a proper response to the gender-related facts of the canon? This is to ask, “What should the agenda of a feminist musicology be?”—a musicology that, in at least some of its aspects, might be practiced by both men and women.

First there is, of course, the labor of discovery and exposure. The names

and hitherto-silent voices of women composers of all periods must be recovered for the benefit of teachers, students, and ordinary listeners alike. But a great deal more must be done as well. However great and important the labor of historical research and recovery, we should not be content to address only access to power and to prominence through a kind of affirmative-action program that does not take some account of gender difference and that does not question the gender-related implications of what has enshrined the canon that we propose to expand. Rather than make well-intentioned exceptions to a criterion of excellence that we claim to find embodied in the canon, we must challenge that traditional criterion. For this criterion, which is formulated only vaguely if at all, has been the ultimate weapon—not least because of its very vagueness—in the male-produced, male-dominated arsenal that has so long kept women out. Until we have asked, “Excellence according to whom?” we should remain suspicious of any canonizations that take place in its name.¹

Two issues come into play here. The first is traditional musicology’s traditional imperialism. I have claimed that musicology’s canon has been determined largely by the methods with which musicology has studied its objects. Musicology has typically added repertoires to its domain by a process of colonization that imposes traditional methods on new territories. After years of regarding Italian opera as peripheral, if not frivolous, we discovered that it too had sources and even sketches to study and edit and that it too could be investigated in terms of large-scale formal coherence. We appropriated jazz not because of what was most interesting or characteristic about it, but because it too presented us with a body of source material and variants to classify.

Music by women composers occupies, in this respect, a position precisely analogous to that of, say, most French and Spanish music of the nineteenth century. It was composed by (and perhaps for) people different from—foreign to—those who officiated at the canonizations that have dominated us. We cannot expect to understand any new repertory other than the traditional ones if we are not prepared to invent new methods appropriate for its study. The canon of Western art music as we know it was formulated by a body of specific individuals, all of whom happen to have been men. Until we interrogate that fact—and them—we cannot suppose it either an accident or a phenomenon of dispassionate nature that this canon includes only the works of men.

The second issue in play here derives from the ways in which traditional notions of canon rest on certain traditional notions of the work of art. And

this is where we must begin our agenda. Music—precisely because it is so manifestly not a single universal language—lays bare the respect in which the work of art is a function of the reader/listener. The author/composer is powerless in the absence of a reader/listener who can situate the so-called work in an appropriate matrix of the other texts/compositions on which it depends for its meaning. Once we recognize the status of the reader/listener in the production of the work of art, we necessarily confront differences among readers/listeners, of which gender is surely the most inescapable. We undermine a certain brand of pious humanism in which great works reveal great and eternal truths, and we validate the process of reading/listening as a woman alongside the reading and listening that we have been taught by men.

With respect to gender, two approaches to the canon are thus opened. First, how does a woman listen to the traditional (male-dominated) canon? And second, how might listening as a woman expand that canon, specifically to include those works that are the product of composing as a woman?² These questions raise the spectre of yet another canon that is less often mentioned but even more thoroughly male dominated. This is the canon of music theory (and, one might add, even criticism). Our present difficulty in naming canonical women composers is surely exceeded in considerable measure by our difficulty in naming women contributors to that body of theoretical writing that surrounds and thus largely defines the canon.³ This is not because the existing body of theory has exhausted what we all know to be prominent features of musical works.

Listening as a woman implies writing about music as a woman, whether the music in question is composed by a man or by a woman. Even if we decline to import in their entirety French feminist criticism's notions of *écriture féminine*,⁴ we need to recognize the possibility that gender might be expressed in ways of writing about music as well as in ways of writing music. This possibility bears on what I have called the canon of acceptable dissertation topics in musicology, which is simply our way of imposing on the young and powerless our own canonical tendencies.

If we foreground sexual difference in our approach to canon formation, we confront the need to address the nature of that difference. Feminist literary criticism has shown something of the variety of terms in which this difference might be framed and their consequences for the project of such criticism. Feminist musicology should not settle for any less variety in its theoretical orientation or in its practical projects. Above all, it should not cede to inherited male authority the theoretical frame in which its discourse is inscribed.⁵

There is one more set of tools that deserves mention here because of its widespread use in our thinking about most everything and because of the particular marks that it has left on our writing about history. This is the whole set of binary oppositions in which we frame so much of our discourse: high culture and popular culture, sacred and secular, constraint and freedom. The list is very long. Of these, constraint and freedom is surely the opposition at the heart of the master trope of music-historical writing—the trope in terms of which we have rewritten every story in history. It is the story of freedom won through throwing off the constraints (or worse) of the sacred, the courtly, of some form or genre, of convention, tonality, the barline, the work itself. And the freedom won by one generation quickly becomes the constraint against which the next generation will struggle to win its own freedom.

This opposition is just another version of the opposition between good and evil. And it is, as Fredric Jameson observes in the wake of Nietzsche, rooted in turn in the opposition between the self and the Other: "What is good is what belongs to me, what is bad is what belongs to the Other" (Jameson 1981:234). In the Western democracies since the late eighteenth century—but particularly in the United States of the twentieth century—the version that opposes freedom to constraint has risen to unequalled status. And we occupy the pole of so-called freedom. Our study of history is then a search for people like ourselves—people defined in the struggle of freedom against constraint, good against evil, the self against the Other. This is the story in terms of which we have fashioned our period labels, for "period formulations always secretly imply or project narratives or 'stories'" (ibid.:28). The Renaissance is only the most striking case of a period defined as being inhabited by people who were in certain essential ways like us. The same story can be told in one way or another for what marks the end of the Renaissance, or for the Romantic period, or at the level of generations or genres or individual composers.

How does this narrative device affect what we study or how we study it or what is admitted to our canons? It functions by identifying certain periods, composers, and works (not always the same ones, depending on the particular story being told) with constraint, evil, the Other, while identifying others with freedom, good, the (our)self. And as Derrida shows, in all such oppositions, one term is the dominant one, the other marginalized: "In a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position" (quoted in

Culler 1982:85; see also Jameson 1981:114). Our study is thus framed in terms that undermine the means by which we claim to arrive at our results: the objective, dispassionate study of "the evidence." We systematically under-value certain periods, composers, and works and privilege others because of the very nature of the conceptual and narrative tools that we apply.

It might be supposed that our formalist tools will save us. Sooner or later we must answer to the notes, and they are not so easily made to lie. But the danger in calling our formalist analyses to witness for a historical narrative is not that it may not work, but rather that such a maneuver will always work. The formalist analysis will itself always bend to the narrative strategy that motivates it. The wish to find freedom in one piece and constraint in another will always succeed unless the deck is outrageously stacked.

Our narrative tools, relying as they do on certain binary oppositions (or perhaps on only one), may be the most powerful forces at work when we as historians construct the canon. Freedom (that word again) from these forces will require the unmasking of the supporting oppositions—the reversal of their polarities, their deconstruction.

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As we use our tools, we constantly remake them. Recent years have seen the remaking of a good many scholarly tools and the forging of some new ones. Those of us who have participated in this effort ought to feel a bit uneasy. To the extent that our product succeeds in defining and describing our subjects and the methods by which our discipline has studied those subjects, it is likely to become another one of those tools that limits subjects for future study and constrains the ways in which those subjects will be studied. Either that or it will continually threaten to undo itself—to undo what we claim to know by questioning the bases on which we claim to know it. In the end we can only hope to be honest in our account of the canons of the past—and of the forces that created and maintained them—without, however, restricting their expansion in the future.

NOTES

1. With respect to literary studies, Chris Weedon puts the matter as follows: "Traditionally the social and educational function of the critic has been not merely to produce 'true' readings but to constitute and maintain certain criteria of literariness. Feminist criticism has attempted to show how these criteria have been implicitly patriarchal, marginalizing gender and rendering women passive recipients of culture rather than its producers, a role compatible with hegemonic norms of femininity outside literary discourse" (Weedon 1987:143–44).

2. Elaine Showalter writes about literary studies as follows: "Feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct varieties. The first type is concerned with *woman as reader*. . . . The second type of feminist criticism is concerned with *woman as writer*" (Showalter 1985a:128).

3. Literary theory has been much debated in feminist studies generally and much resisted in some quarters on the grounds that it is by its nature patriarchal. Rita Felski's view of the matter might prove most useful to musicology: "I suggest in contrast that it is impossible to speak of 'masculine' and 'feminine' in any meaningful sense in the formal analysis of texts; the political value of literary texts from the standpoint of feminism can be determined only by an investigation of their social functions and effects in relation to the interests of women in a particular historical context, and not by attempting to deduce an abstract literary theory of 'masculine' and 'feminine,' 'subversive' and 'reactionary' forms in isolation from the social conditions of their production and reception" (Felski:2).

4. See, for example, Jones 1985.

5. Jonathan Culler puts the matter with respect to literature in ways that might serve musicology as well: "The task of feminist criticism . . . is to investigate whether the procedures, assumptions, and goals of current criticism are in complicity with the preservation of male authority, and to explore alternatives. It is not a question of rejecting the rational in favor of the irrational, of concentrating on metonymical relations to the exclusion of the metaphorical, or on the signifier to the exclusion of the signified, but of attempting to develop critical modes in which the concepts that are products of male authority are inscribed within a larger textual system" (Culler 1982:61).

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THREE

Sophie Drinker's History

Ruth A. Solie

Knowledge has a very sly way of accumulating in odd places where it is with difficulty perceived.

Paul Henry Lang

My endeavor here is a meditation on the question of in what circumstances an alternative may arise to the historiographic paradigm current in a discipline. In particular, I want to ask what it would take—how canonic practices and values would have to be different—in order for the participation and experience of women to appear in the history of Western music. My exercise focuses on *Music and Women*, published in 1948 by Sophie H. Drinker, as an exemplar of such an alternative practice. The book provides an occasion for asking both "What is history?" and, more specifically, "What is music history?" During the period of its writing, as it happens, these were questions that much occupied practitioners of both disciplines. What sorts of questions should history ask, what are its data, how does it properly conduct its research?

The Drinker name is familiar to most musicologists from acquaintance with Sophie's husband, Henry, a lawyer and passionate amateur musician who became known for his English translations of cantata and lied texts, as

This essay is dedicated to Vernon D. Gotwals. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Henry Drinker of Northampton, Massachusetts for providing me with a copy of his grandmother's unpublished memoir; to Susan Grigg and the staff at the Sophia Smith Collection (Smith College) and to Eva Moseley of the Schlesinger Library (Radcliffe College) for their assistance in working with Sophie Drinker's papers; to audiences at Duke University, the University of Pennsylvania, Notre Dame University, and Rutgers University for their sympathetic but probing responses to an earlier version of this paper; and to Philip Bohlman, Philip Gossett, and Leo Treitler for particularly astute and detailed help.