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Characteristics of Beethoven’s
Late Compositional Period”**

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Contents

The Historical Context and Characteristics of Beethoven's Late Compositional Period <i>Becca Hanson, Grand Valley State University</i>	4
<i>Kolombia:</i> An Exploration of the Cumbia Subculture in Monterrey <i>Jesus Gutierrez, University of California, Los Angeles</i>	14
Electric Avenue: Cultural Hybridization in Guyana and the Creation of Ringbang Music <i>Bridgette Kontner, New York University</i>	22
The Sounds of <i>Divoká Planeta</i>: A Science Fiction Film Score's Portrayal of Post-Thaw Czechoslovakia <i>Minnie Seo, University of California, Los Angeles</i>	31
Marginalized Practices: The Alexander Technique and Music Education <i>Cristian Toro, Franklin & Marshall College</i>	38
<i>Contributors</i>	49
<i>Closing Notes</i>	50

The Historical Context and Characteristics of Beethoven's Late Compositional Period

Becca Hanson

The legacy of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) began in his first, most traditionally Classical period of composition, but the works of his late period were formed by stylistic originality and ingenuity so efficacious that they altered the course of music following Beethoven's death. Beethoven's stylistic changes coincided with significant familial events and shifts in the sociopolitical landscape of Europe, and some works immediately preceding the late period directly addressed political events that interacted with Beethoven's ideologies. The most prominent characteristics of Beethoven's late style—including lyricism, expanded variation form, and extensive contrapuntal writing—came to fruition within a historical context of familial and sociopolitical events.

Historical Context Leading to Beethoven's Late Style

Beethoven's compositional style began to change significantly from 1813 to 1817. At the end of his second period and through the beginning of his late period, the political situation in Europe was rapidly changing: Napoleon and the French armies had recently been defeated, and the Great Powers were in the process of rebuilding and strengthening the European governments and systems of power in the Congress of Vienna. Physical and familial difficulties weighed down on Beethoven, impacting his mental health and stability. This period—complicated by personal issues, the Congress of Vienna, and The Great Powers' defeat of Napoleon—resulted in a political phase of Beethoven's writing that bore works such as *Wellington's Sieg* and *Fidelo*, which contain evidence of Beethoven's sociopolitical ideologies as a direct response to Europe's sociopolitical state. Such political tendencies are evident in the programmatic function of *Wellington's Sieg's* movements, each of which represents a stage of battle, and in the anti-absolutist storyline of *Fidelio*. After this phase of overt political composition passed, Beethoven's mature compositional style produced music that featured prominent lyricism, variation form with strong variations in character, strong counterpoint, and fugal writing.¹

This short four-year period from 1813 through 1817 was distinct from the immediately preceding decade of success and high creative energy, a period of high artistry which resulted in the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies.² These years were a tumultuous, uncertain time for Beethoven, as his increasing hearing loss “intensif[ie]d his isolation and harden[ed] the barriers that hindered social communication.”³ Beethoven composed a passionate letter in 1812 for his “Immortal Beloved” that expressed this despair and increasing isolation. This was not a love letter, but rather a written statement of his “acceptance of loneliness” and “withdrawal further into the self.”⁴ This statement was reflective of both Beethoven's despair and the German ideas of introspection, where the experience of internally “grappl[ing] with a crisis in human subjectivity” is accepted.⁵

Beethoven's mental distress was compounded by the pressure of the custody battle for guardianship of his nephew. Before Beethoven's brother Carl passed away from tuberculosis in November 1815, Carl granted in his will both his wife Johanna and Beethoven custody of his son Karl. Beethoven despised Johanna, who did not want

1 Lewis Lockwood, “The ‘Fallow’ Years,” in *Beethoven: The Music and Life* (New York: Norton, 2005), 333-348.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid, 333.

4 Ibid.

5 C. Stephen Jaeger, “The 19th Century German Literature,” Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/German-literature/The-19th-century>.

Beethoven to have guardianship of her son, so a custody battle ensued between Karl's two appointed guardians. The custody case failed to qualify for trial in the court of nobility despite Beethoven's efforts, so the common people's court took on the case and Johanna won full custody. His inability to take care of Karl ultimately became a contributing factor in Beethoven's growing feelings of depression and loneliness.⁶

Beethoven's concern for his family reflected the composer's persuasion that humankind's well-being should be promoted and protected; this deep social connection fueled Beethoven's political nature and interests as sociopolitical events from the larger sphere of humanity had a personal impact on him. Fenby-Hulse identifies with the popular viewpoint of Beethoven being "a man set apart from both society and culture," a misconception that confuses Beethoven's social withdrawal with an indifference to humanity.⁷ Many artists of the time, possibly including Beethoven, exhibited withdrawn mannerisms inspired by the Italian decadent movement, where individuals assimilated self-conscious and "disorderly lifestyles" as a rejection of the bourgeois.⁸ Additionally, the composer's library displayed concerns and interests in humanity. The appearance of these works shows that Beethoven found humanitarian and sociopolitical topics relevant enough to explore in literature, despite his reserved personality.⁹

Beyond his literary interests, evidence of Beethoven's political proclivity can be found in the overtly political music he composed to celebrate the defeat of Napoleon, though these compositions do not truly reveal the personal influence politics had on Beethoven. Themes of heroism were characteristic of Beethoven's second period, which faded away at the same time as "the collapse of Napoleon's dreams of empire."¹⁰ Lockwood explains that the "conquering ... works of the second period might ... have been unconsciously and symbiotically linked to the military conquests" of Napoleon, who Beethoven initially admired for his active resistance to absolutism in the French monarchy to the extent that he named his Symphony No. 3, Op. 55 after Napoleon.¹¹ However, when Napoleon crowned himself emperor in 1804, Beethoven's view of the hypocritical and tyrannical French "leader" was tarnished. In response to Napoleon's actions, Beethoven tore the title page marked "Bonaparte" from the manuscript and ripped it in two.¹² He later decided on the name *Eroica* for his third symphony.¹³

After a defeat in Russia in 1812 and that of Wellington in Vitoria, Spain in 1813, Napoleon resigned from his position of power and was exiled. Without the threat of Napoleon's military forces, the Great Powers—England, Russia, Austria, and Prussia—could both reconstruct Europe from the Napoleonic Wars and alter the system of power to protect monarchies. In order to plan this, the Great Powers held the Congress of Vienna, which lasted from September 1814 to June 1815.¹⁴ The presence of high nobility attending this conference led to extravagant events, including dazzling balls and receptions, which provided Beethoven with opportunities to perform his music. While Beethoven's performances consisted of pieces that had already been published, the composer wrote additional music for these events that fit the political narrative of the time. Beethoven, as is true of most composers preceding the Romantic Era, was unable to make a living through his musical activities alone, and required substantial financial support for basic needs and artistic endeavors from wealthy patrons, often members of nobility. As one of the most well-established composers in Vienna, Beethoven relied on his aristocratic patrons, particularly Archduke Rudolf of Austria, to fund his writing and performances of new compositions during this post-war period. One of these works was the somewhat ill-received composition *Wellington's Sieg*.¹⁵

6 Jan Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 598.

7 Kieran Fenby-Hulse, "Beethoven, Literature, and the Idea of Tragedy," *The Musical Times* 155, no. 1927 (2014): 42.

8 Matteo Sansone, "Scapigliatura," Grove Music Online, 2001, accessed April 9, 2022, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000049824>.

9 Kieran Fenby-Hulse, "Beethoven, Literature, and the Idea of Tragedy," *The Musical Times* 155, no. 1927 (2014): 42.

10 Lewis Lockwood, "The 'Fallow' Years," in *Beethoven: The Music and Life* (New York, New York: Norton, 2005), 335-336.

11 Kieran Fenby-Hulse, "Beethoven, Literature, and the Idea of Tragedy," *The Musical Times* 155, no. 1927 (2014): 18.

12 Nicholas Mathew, "History under Erasure: Wellingtons Sieg, the Congress of Vienna, and the Ruination of Beethoven's Heroic Style," *The Musical Quarterly* 89, no. 1 (2006): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/musqtl/gdk008>.

13 Kieran Fenby-Hulse, "Beethoven, Literature, and the Idea of Tragedy," *The Musical Times* 155, no. 1927 (2014): 19.

14 Jan Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 613-656.

15 Ibid.

Wellington's Sieg translates to "Wellington's Victory," which Beethoven composed to commemorate the 1813 victory of the Marquess of Wellington in the Battle of Vitoria over Napoleon Bonapart. This politically charged work is composed of three phases: a battle, followed by a charge, and, lastly, a victory symphony. Sections one and two contain the sounds of battle and war, specifically the sounds of cannons and muskets. The orchestra's part is rather violent, as it "modulates furiously" and attempts to be heard over the active weaponry.¹⁶ The ending section is boisterous and contains a fugue version of *God Save the King*. Swafford calls this political piece "gimmicky" and "opportunistic," which he says is "exactly what Beethoven intended it to be."¹⁷

Evidence of *Wellington's Sieg's* poor reception was recorded in written communications between musicians and music listeners of the time. One written example of this disfavor comes from Johann Wenzel Tomaschek, a Czech pianist. After listening to the premiere of the piece, Tomaschek said that he considered the composer he once believed to have divinely appointed musical ability "among the rudest materialists."¹⁸ Beethoven marketed *Wellington's Sieg* to publishers and patrons despite its ill reception. This piece was and is not considered a masterwork by any means, but it functions as an example of Beethoven's changing style around the time of Napoleon's defeat and the Congress of Vienna.¹⁹

One other composition with a clear tie between Beethoven's music and the state of the world is his opera *Fidelio*. A response to the political state of Beethoven's surroundings, particularly the Napoleonic Wars and absolutism, is prominent in this work as it presents a story with themes of corruption in an authoritarian government. Many believe that Beethoven meant to express the sentiment that "love, faith, and personal courage can overcome political tyranny" in composing *Fidelio*.²⁰ This opera was also interpreted and used as a vehicle to communicate political sentiments in Beethoven's time by those other than Beethoven. In 1814, librettist, playwright, and theater director Georg Friedrich Treitschke altered the ending of *Fidelio* to present a scene where ruler Don Fernando frees Florestan and all other prisoners in an act of wisdom and generosity. This scene was altered to glorify "contemporary political authority" when Europe was beginning to trend "toward the restoration of the monarchies."²¹

Analysis of the Late Period's Musical Characteristics

Diverting from its political nature, *Fidelio's* musical implications convey a compositional language that begins to sound of the late style of Beethoven. This 1814 opera is a revision of the original work composed eight years prior, resulting in a process which Beethoven deemed to have been "much more difficult than composing a new [opera]" as it combines compositional fabric from two separate and distinct periods of his writing.²² The E major overture is written in place of three C major ones, and is one of the sections most evident of Beethoven's late style; this overture is a "vigorous and strongly dramatic piece of orchestral writing," which displays not the material of the piece, but its spirit through effective instrumental writing within an operatic work.²³ Through the entire opera and especially in the overture, an emphasis on lyrical melodies "in both solo and ensemble numbers above all" provides an opportunity for Beethoven to develop and alter his instrumental style of writing.²⁴

Although his early works like his "Pathetique" Piano Sonata in C minor incorporated counterpoint from his early Vienna period of study, Beethoven's use of more contrapuntal fugue forms did not gain prominence in

16 Ibid, 615.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, 615-616.

20 Lewis Lockwood, "Beethoven's Leonore and Fidelio," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no.3 (Winter 2006): 473.

21 Ibid, 474.

22 Lewis Lockwood, "The 'Fallow' Years," in *Beethoven: The Music and Life*, (New York, New York: Norton, 2005), 342.

23 Ibid, 341.

24 Ibid.

his works until his late period. It was not just the influence of Beethoven's desire for musical innovation or his search for new musical inspiration that resulted in his more explicit fugal writing; just before his late period, the musicologists of Beethoven's time were increasingly recognizing J. S. Bach's works for their significance and legacy. It was especially esteemed musicologist Johann Nikolaus Forkel's claim about Bach from his book about the composer that led to Bach's increasing acclaim. In his written work, Forkel stated that Bach was the most exceptional composer of Western music up to that time. Forkel's bold statement altered the public's perspective that Bach's music was old-fashioned, which inspired music publishers to release numerous new editions of Bach's compositions, making the Baroque composer's works more widely available. Although Beethoven's writing did not reflect Bach's influence until later in his career, his first teacher of significance, Christian Gottlob Neefe, incorporated a considerable study of Bach's style and techniques in his teaching of Beethoven. This education gave Beethoven a comprehensive understanding of imitation and fugue. The combination of a public interest in fugues, the fact that Beethoven's contrapuntal educational roots date far back in his education to around 1780, and his experience in writing more implicit fugal sections of music—like those found in his “Pathétique” Piano Sonata—likely made Beethoven decide to write with more explicit fugal and contrapuntal intentions. Some of his late-period pieces that feature strong contrapuntal and fugal motivations include the *Diabelli Variations*, the *Missa Solemnis*, and the final five piano sonatas.²⁵

One method of fugal writing that appeared in his late music was based on motivic development. In his Op. 101 Piano Sonata in A Major, a conventionally composed fugue in the finale's development section begins after a brief introduction, which marks the first instance of a true fugue in his piano sonatas. The fugue's subject is similar to the primary theme, making it a fitting, cohesive musical idea for the sonata. It contains three sections: an exposition, a middle passage of episodes and entrances of the subject, and coda which resembles a stretto section of a fugue.²⁶ A cohesive and energetic character is conveyed in this movement through the use of an imitative fugal form. Finale movements of sonatas are traditionally lively, and the persistent subject which appears in multiple registers and characters evokes a certain excited clarity that lifts and propels the music forward and to its brilliant, bold finishing cadence.²⁷

The fugue in the exposition is introduced by a brief, fantasy-like passage marked “presto.” This introductory section is composed of trills layered above a descending line of staccato chords played by the left hand, which mark a central rhythm to the subject of the fugue. After four measures, the lively, bright trill played in the right hand is interrupted by the fugue's fully-developed subject, composed of a rhythmically interesting head, and a rising tail that leads to a half-cadence. This subject presents itself in three voices: the soprano voice in measure 33, the tenor in measure 41, and the bass in measure 57.

25 Wei-Ya Lai, “Beethoven's Late Style in His Last Five Piano Sonatas,” (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2009), 14-17.

26 In a fugue, the close succession of a subject's imitation.

27 Ibid, 18.

Figure 1

Because this work abides by formal elements of sonata form, which traditionally contains an exposition, development, and recapitulation, and, in this instance, an added coda, the development section “develops” the work by expanding the number of voices of the fugue from three to four. This four-part fugue begins in measure 124 near the key change to A minor. These voices, organized from highest to lowest, are found in measures 124, 131, 138, 146, and 155. The subject statement found in measure 155 is re-composed, containing a head that resembles the exposition but transposed. The tail undergoes recomposition, using ornamentation and a less uniform rhythm than that of the original subject.

Figure 2

A stretto section, where different voices begin the subject but are truncated and interrupted by another voice’s statement of the subject, is another typical element of fugues found in this sonata. This section is found in the coda from measures 318 to 326. The voices sing the subject’s fragments both alone and in duets.

Figure 3

Other instances of fugue-like imitation are found throughout the piece. These moments are fugal not in the sense that they present an exact repetition of a motive in different voices, but in that they call attention to the

registral layers of a fugue; one such example of this is found in measures 81 to 87. Another is found in measures 244 to 252 in the recapitulation, where a motive unlike a fugal subject first begins in the bass voice, then is joined by the tenor, and lastly by the soprano, resulting in a “choir” of the three voices.



Figure 4

Figure 5

Theme and variation was another form-related focus of Beethoven's late style, and the composer would often compose fugues within this form. Select early and middle period works contain this combination of forms, making it clear that “Beethoven's fusion of fugue and variation form is not new to his third period.”²⁸ For example, Beethoven composed a work in 1802 titled *Fifteen Variations with Fugue*, Op. 35 that ends with an *Alla Fuga* finale.²⁹ The late music of this composer, however, contains significantly more examples of this stylistic fusion. Beethoven's *Piano Sonata in E Major*, Op. 109 has a finale with an extensive fugato variation.³⁰ The fifth variation especially embodies a fugal nature, which contains a “highly imitative and stretto-like texture that relies heavily on the complete overlapping of statements.”³¹ The finale also contains examples of different voices in sequential passages that contain juxtaposed elements from the opening theme, presenting another example of fugato structure as a part of variation form. This opportunity to compare elements from the opening theme in different voices arguably makes the variations more apparently related. In variation form, it is already true that the theme comes back with each variation, but the fugue amplifies the prevalence of the recurring theme because of the use of stretto and voice passing of the subject. This makes it so the theme is not just the foundation from which the

28 Ibid, 23.

29 In the manner of a fugue.

30 Music written with the texture of a fugue.

31 Ibid, 24.

variation is built, but so that it is also expected in multiple voices or layers.³²

Less subtle fugal writing appears in Beethoven's late piano sonatas, where entire movements are marked "fugue." Two sonatas with this characteristic include the finales of his Op. 106, "Hammerklavier" and his Piano Sonata No. 31 in A-Flat major, Op. 110. "Hammerklavier" contains a marking that says *Fuga a tre voci con alcune licenze* just five measures after the beginning of the introduction, meaning "three voice fugue with some license." Similar to the fugue in the finale of the Op. 101 sonata, but much longer, the Op. 110 fugal finale contains "an exposition, middle sections that alternate with episodes, and a coda," the substance and length of which nears the independence of a piece in itself.³³

Beyond the "fusion of fugue and variation form," Beethoven's late period piano sonatas and a few other pieces feature the variation frequently found in his early and middle piano sonatas, but with "a great expansion of form" that dealt not with the number of variations but with their "size and length."³⁴ While his Op. 14, No. 2 and Op. 57 variation movements are only five minutes when performed, the finale of Op. 111 takes approximately seventeen minutes to perform. Other works present this expanded variation style, too, as seen in the variation movements of late string quartets Opp. 127 and 131 that take about fourteen minutes to be completed. A similar fourteen minute length is required to perform the third, variation movement of Beethoven's No. 9 Symphony, Op. 125.³⁵

While the "great expansion of form" lengthened variations, their themes became "more straightforward and unpretentious."³⁶ An example of this thematic simplicity is found in the finale of Op. 109, which consists of six variations and a return of the theme. This movement, marked *Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo*,³⁷ is calm in mood and harmony. The simple harmonic foundation consists mainly of "alterations between the tonic and the dominant," which enhances the expansion of variation form by simplifying the base ingredient of each ensuing variation; the more simple the harmonies that are used within a passage, the greater opportunity there is for more distinct character development of each variation through other musical means such as rhythm, articulation, and dynamic contrast.³⁸ If the harmonies were too complicated, each variation could be made to sound too busy, confusing, or overstimulating for the Classical era if other aspects of the music were altered too severely. The harmonic simplicity results in the possibility for more diverse and fresh sounding variations, the heterogeneity of which can entertain listeners for more sustained periods of time.

Notably, Beethoven was influenced by the widespread, nineteenth century transition of ornamental variation to character variation, where each variation has a more "individual and profoundly reinterpreted view of the original theme."³⁹ The Diabelli Variations, Op. 120, the late String Quartets, and the Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109's finale present this variation development where distinction between variations is found in their character, rather than in ornamentation.⁴⁰

The theme from the finale of Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109, marked *Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo*, is clear in each variation, but each one has its own, unique aura. There is much opportunity for this theme to be developed into an energetic waltz or any variation with excitable movement because it is written in 3/4 time, but this opening is another example of thematic simplicity in Beethoven's late style. The theme's serene melody is blissfully calm in its simplicity. Clear harmonies flood out from the piano, even within a single beat, just as the patient tempo progression of the music allows for. Shown in figure one, the first three measures of the theme contain an ascending motion alternating between simple harmonies from an E2 to a B3 on beat one

32 Ibid, 23.

33 Ibid, 25.

34 Ibid, 23.

35 Ibid, 23.

36 Ibid, 67.

37 Somewhat slowly, in a very singing way, and expressive

38 Ibid, 68.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

of measure four, a beat which begins an almost complete one-measure descent, to an A2 instead of an E2. This slowly ascending and quickly descending bassline motion adds to the patient, mellow character of the theme.



Figure 6

The lyrical variation in one waltz, marked *molto espressivo*, is strikingly beautiful. A typical left-hand waltz pattern is found in this section, where beat one is low in register and beats two and three are higher in pitch, reinforcing the stable or changing harmony. The right hand of this variation contains an ascending, often chromatic dotted-sixteenth note motive where the second note in each beat is higher than the first, launching one measure into the next and mixing an unsettled flavor in with the bold, lyrical nature of the variation.

An even more distinct character from the first two is found in the second variation. This dissimilarity stems largely from the most stable beat division being the sixteenth note, rather than the quarter note. The light, excited variation is marked *leggiermente*, meaning to be played lightly, and is quite contrapuntal. Its melody is created by non-consecutive notes that are divided by notes of the other hand. Never does the melodic line stay still; it ascends and descends between and within staves, usually moving in intervals outlining chords rather than in stepwise motion. The typical lyricism of Beethoven's late style is found in the B section of this variation. Here, the smallest main division of a beat moves to the eighth note instead of the sixteenth note, while consecutive notes in the right hand create a melody dependent on descending two-note slurs and ornamentation.

While Beethoven's previous periods certainly have moments of lyricism, this melodic characteristic is at the core of his late works. This role possibly comes from the melody's intuitive expressiveness, vulnerability, and humanity, which are themes of the works from this time. The difference between the late and previous compositional periods is clear when observing Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111. The second movement, marked *Arietta, Adagio molto semplice e cantabile*, is in variation form.⁴¹ "Cantabile" is in the tempo description, meaning that one must really sing through and feel harmonic direction in the theme if they wish to sustain a coherent melody at an adagio tempo. As is typical of this period, the character of each variation changes significantly for each variation. Overall, the full composition is rather contemplative and introspective. This calmer spirit contrasts "the youthful energy of Beethoven's first period piano sonatas" influenced by the lighter early Classical Era music of Mozart and Haydn.⁴²

The second movement of String Quartet No. 12 in E-flat Major, Op. 127, is marked "Adagio ma non troppo e molto cantabile."⁴³ This movement begins with the deep, lone voice of the cello. Gradually, the viola and violins join the cello, adding warmth and growing the sound. Finally, the violin climbs up to the first note in its singing melody and a brightness spills out from the registral depth of the ensemble. The lyrical intentions of "molto cantabile" are noticeable in how the piece seems to almost wait in stillness until the melody makes its entrance, and in the duets between melodic and counter-melodic lines present throughout long phrases.

41 Slowly, very simple, and in a singing way

42 Ibid, 9.

43 Slowly, but not too slowly, and in a singing way

Conclusion

The compositional style of Beethoven in his late period involves compositional decisions that distinguish it from his previous periods. The use of more fugal writing and variation form with strong affective changes in each variation is notable, and lyricism plays a fundamental role in these works. We can consider the Congress of Vienna, familial difficulties, deafness, isolation, and even the state of European politics as fuel for the shift in Beethoven's compositional style between his compositional periods, but it is impossible to say what exactly went on in Beethoven's mind that resulted in such a significant change in musical language; the specific interplay of sociopolitical events and personal insights that allowed Beethoven to overcome his period of depression and suffering enough to write music of previously unobtainable originality is unidentifiable. However, obscured or not, the connection is decidedly present and fosters the actualization of Beethoven's indelible legacy.

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Kolombia: An Exploration of the Cumbia Subculture in Monterrey

Jesus Gutierrez

People use music as a way to establish an identity that can set them free from the socio-political constrictors and day-to-day struggles that they face. People dress, talk, move, and react to music, which can be an empowering tool—constructing a sense of liberation for listeners.

In “Emotions in Music,” Robinson and Hatten discuss how music acts as a site of identification and experience for listeners, which is why they are compelled to react with what Robinson and Hatten describe as “intricate emotions”:

A complex piece of music may have a composed expressive trajectory or musical “plot,” which dramatizes a psychological journey by a persona. Moreover, listeners may be invited not only to recognize the emotions expressed in such music but also to experience these emotions themselves, either actually or in imagination¹

Robinson and Hatten explain how music is a journey for listeners where they “experience these emotions themselves,” becoming personal in building a distinctive identity. By experiencing these emotions through music, listeners participate in a personal “psychological journey” while sharing a space with others who possess similar music tastes. This “psychological journey” can also be embodied in physical terms, such as dance. In other words, music has the potential to affect as well as shape a listener’s emotions and—by extension—their identity, creating and influencing communities on a cultural, social, and political level.

The countercultural fandom of *kolombia* from Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico exemplifies music’s mesmerizing and transformative capacities. Through music, the people of *kolombia* can create an identity away from Mexican social pressures that alienate the disadvantaged youth. *Kolombia* uses music, artwork, clothing, and symbols to provide the youth with a means of self-expression built out of admiration for Colombian music and street aesthetics. While borrowing from other cultures can be considered appropriation, the lens of Harry Jenkins’s *textual poaching*—defined as a framework that analyzes how fans interact and take ownership of a text and its interpretations—illustrates how members of *kolombia* reinvent and innovate Colombian aesthetics through the creation of *cumbia rebajada*, a lowered tempo style of cumbia music.

Throughout this paper, I will explain and analyze the cumbia spirit and its history of establishing a tone of resistance within its music-listening fans. I will also describe the development of *kolombia* subculture in Monterrey and analyze the *kolombia* fandom through Henry Jenkins’s textual poaching. The latter will be achieved by using the film *Ya No Estoy Aquí* (2019) as a case study for this fandom. I propose that the *kolombia* subculture has created its own identity by poaching the Colombian street aesthetics and cumbia music. By constructing its own cultural aesthetics through mediums such as music and artwork, those involved in *kolombia* subculture have discovered a way to counter the socio-political conflicts in Mexico and create a space that gives them the ability to take ownership of their locality amidst the industrial from which *kolombia* emerges.

The Cumbia Spirit: Resistance Under a Beat

¹ Jenefer Robinson and Robert S. Hatten, “Emotions in Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2012): 71.

The cumbia spirit begins in the coastal regions of Colombia with the development of *música costeña* (coastal music). Coastal music takes African, Spanish, and Indigenous musical elements, forming a clashing tri-ethnic identity with various vocal styles, instruments, and musical forms.² Cumbia and *música costeña* has its roots in the African diaspora from West African individuals who were enslaved and brought to the coastal regions of Colombia, creating the blueprint for what would be cumbia music. More traditional cumbia music uses more indigenous instruments like the *gaita*, which is a vertical duct flute, and the *maraca*, or rattle. Cumbia musicians used many percussive instruments of African origin, such as

...the *tambor alegre* and the *llamador*, (single-headed drums of different sizes), the *tambora* (double-headed drum), the *caña de millo* (millet-cane transverse clarinet), the *marímbula* (large wooden box lamellaphone), and the *marimba de napa* (musical bow).³

Traditional cumbia music itself is in a duple meter, but can vary in being triple and quadruple depending on the specific region in Latin America. Cumbia consists of a shorter, slower tempo in comparison with salsa music which makes it easier to hear and feel the beat. One of the first documentations of cumbia music is a newspaper report from around 1879 on a performance during the festival of the Virgin of Candelaria in Colombia, which describes cumbia music as “a monotonous, but rhythmic sound.”⁴ This depiction of cumbia continues today through its heavy reliance on “monotonous” polyrhythmic patterns and its incorporation of European wind instruments, brass instruments, as well as accordions.⁵

During the 1930s, with the invention of broadcasting radio, cumbia began to be popularized nationally in Colombia and transformed into an orchestral musical style (*porro* music) that adapted “traditional rhythms and melodies to cosmopolitan dance orchestras” by the 1950s.⁶ As a result, cumbia shifted away from being *música costeña* to *música tropical*, pandering to the white Andean and mestizo middle-upper classes. During this period, cumbia adopted the big band jazz format, creating larger ensembles with more Eurocentric instruments that the upper classes appropriated.⁷ This period downplayed some of the more intricate and “monotonous” African polyrhythmic tones that constituted authentic cumbia during its inception. While cumbia’s adoption of the orchestral musical structure signified an elitist co-option of the genre for a brief time during the beginning of the 20th century, intellectuals in coastal regions of 1940s Colombia held onto the aesthetics of the African diaspora. A kind of Afro-Colombian pride emerged in literary circles as the poet Jorge Artel published *Tambores en la noche* (*Drums in the night*) in 1940, a volume of verse that portrayed Black culture in these Colombian coastal regions as being “full of sensuality, music, and rhythm as well as pain and sorrow.”⁸

Moving to the 1960s up to the 1980s, cumbia reverted back to smaller groups or bands with more emphasis on rhythm and simplicity in its instrumentation. Filtered through the same type of African diasporic consciousness from its inception, cumbia was globalized and continued to evolve with the incorporation of other musical styles, such as psychedelic rock, 1950s rock, and Colombian vallenato, a folkloric Colombian ballad that uses accordion as its main instrument. In Latin America, for instance, the rise of indigenous Andean pride in Peru spurred the region’s own interpretation of cumbia, *cumbia amazonica* or *chicha*, during the 1970s—creating a sense of transnational identity. By blending the sounds of traditional cumbia with electric guitars (effectively replacing accordions), *cumbia amazonica* mystified the genre with a psychedelic vibe and empowered oil drilling

2 Leonardo D’Amico, “Cumbia Music in Colombia: Origins, Transformations, and Evolution of a Coastal Music Genre,” in *Cumbia!: Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre*, ed. Héctor Fernández L’Hoeste and Pablo Vila (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 29.

3 Ibid, 30.

4 Ibid, 33.

5 Ibid, 35.

6 Ibid, 37.

7 Ibid.

8 Peter Wade, “African Diaspora and Colombian Popular Music in the Twentieth Century,” *Black Music Research Journal* 28, no. 2 (2008): 49.

workers.⁹ Cumbia amazonica bands would sing songs about conserving the Amazon Rainforest, such as “Poder Verde (Green Power)” by Los Mirlos, and create uplifting tunes for the petroleros (oil workers), like “La Danza de los Petroleros (The Dance of the Oil Workers)” by Los Wemblers.

This rekindling of cumbia as music of the people within disadvantaged communities throughout Latin America recontextualizes cumbia as a music of resistance against the hegemonic ruling system of Latin America. Listeners reclaimed self-ownership by congregating and developing new communities within cumbia. As noted, cumbia amazonica expressed the social realities of working class petroleros in the 1970s and became a way for Peruan immigrants to embrace their cultural indigeneity amidst extreme racism as they were sometimes called derogatory terms like *cholos*. In the poorest neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the villas miserias, shanty towns, were ravaged by the 1998-2002 economic crisis, yet the explosion of cumbia villera foregrounded the realities of disenfranchised Argentinian youth in Argentina—drugs, shoplifting for food, and prison—through socially conscious lyrics with a mixture of hip-hop and cumbia musical aesthetics.¹⁰ As a result, the cumbia spirit progressed throughout the underprivileged youth by giving them an opportunity to escape their day-to-day struggles and find community through a mutual admiration for this type of music. Through countercultural fandoms like cumbia amazonica from Peru, and *kolombia* from Monterrey, Mexico, Latin American youth embraced the old cumbia tunes that many of their parents would listen to, bringing a perceived nostalgia from their parents along with a sense of escaping from the harsh realities and living in the present without a fear of what the past or the future might bring.

Development of Kolombia

The subculture of *kolombia* is indebted, partly, to the manufacturing of cumbia records during the ‘60s and ‘70s in Texas, as well as the distribution of cumbia records from Colombia to Monterrey.¹¹ Over time, there began to be an infatuation with Colombian musical aesthetics as people in Monterrey were drawn to its use of the accordion—an important instrument in northeastern Mexican musical culture due to its use in the tradition of corridos, a Mexican storytelling music genre. The heart of *kolombia* is congregated in some of the more impoverished rural and suburban areas of Monterrey—most notably the Independencia neighborhood. Here, many rural musician migrants from other states of Mexico, such as Zacatecas and San Luis Potosi, situated themselves in Independencia and surrounding neighborhoods mingling with Colombian migrant workers as well. This blend of cumbia with vallenatos, a popular Colombian folk music, attracted the creation of small groups and bands in the 1980s, such as Super Grupo Colombia and La Tropa Colombiana.

Throughout Mexico and Latin America, the youth movement of the 1980s, reminiscent of the punk rock alternative movement that occurred in the U.S., created a countercultural ethos that would make its way into cumbia and foster a new socio-musical identity. *Los rockeros* and *los punks* in Mexico were creating a national movement that did not abide by Mexican societal standards, instead alluding to the U.S. version of this movement that existed during the Reagan administration.¹² Before the 1980s, cumbia was already commercialized and becoming a transnational musical movement. As the genre became more widespread, cumbia in Mexico became further globalized as it absorbed aesthetics of Colombian musical culture and mixed with other regional Mexican music genres, such as norteño music, creating a distinct Mexican version of cumbia.

The young and unemployed people of Monterrey from these disadvantaged neighborhoods continued the *kolombia* movement with cumbia rebajada music-making, dance, and fashion to deconstruct the values of

9 Jasmine Garsd and Felix Contreras, “Cumbia: The Musical Backbone of Latin America,” *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/16/924409951/cumbia-the-musical-backbone-of-latin-america>.

10 Louise Morris, “Cultural Resistance,” in *Voices of Latin America: Social Movements and the New Activism*, ed. Tom Gatehouse (NYU Press, 2019), 251.

11 Carlos Serrano, “Cómo Es La ‘Colombia Chiquita’ De Monterrey, La Ciudad Mexicana Donde Los ‘Kolombia’ Viven La Cumbia y El Vallenato Con Fervor,” *BBC News Mundo*, September 7, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-5841597>.

12 Darío Blanco Arboleda, *Los Colombias y La Cumbia En Monterrey: Identidad, Subalternidad y Mundos de Vida Entre Inmigrantes Urbanos Populares* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 2014), 79.

the hegemonic adult world.¹³ Cumbia rebajada, cumbia in a lower tempo, was created in Monterrey by sonidero (disc-jockey) Gabriel Dueñez by accident as his record player malfunctioned and lowered the cumbia record to a slower, more melancholy tempo. This accidental style of cumbia invoked more emotion as the lowered, slower singing was much more enticing to listeners, transforming cumbia into sort of a ballad.

Continuing in the late 1980s, the growing influence of cholo attire within Mexican-American, Chicano culture in the U.S. and the development of gangs, or *bandas*, as a response to socio-economic hardships, established a sense of inclusion that was not apparent in Mexican society for the disenfranchised participants. One of the musical pioneers of *kolombia* was Monterrey's Celso Piña, who "interpreted melodies with a sound as faithful as possible to Colombian originals in terms of instruments and vocals."¹⁴ Piña approached the *kolombia* musical aesthetic as a Colombian cumbia purist, wanting to be loyal to the music by which he was influenced. Though his intentions were to make music similar to Colombian music, Celso Piña became open to the progression and innovation that was instilled by the youth, who admired his recovery of Colombian cumbia's traditional melodic and rhythmic associations through his style of playing the accordion.

Piña's appeal as the "godfather of cumbia" in Monterrey coincided with the mass political and economic shift brought upon by NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. During the mid-1990s, NAFTA's consequential rise in consumerism and economic commercialization further marginalized youth neighborhoods in Monterrey, according to scholar Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell.¹⁵ For people living in these disadvantaged neighborhoods, Monterrey's status as a "hotbed of economic progress" worsened socio-economic disparities in the suburban and rural areas as young people bore the stigma for their blue-collar parents' lack of socio-economic advancement. This social inequality within working and middle-upper classes caused some of the youth to rob and consume drugs under the influence of consumerism, further intensifying the exclusionary divide between the oppressed youth, as well as Mexican society as a whole. Piña and cumbia music's emergence placed the youth as the image of *kolombia* to the world, revolutionizing the genre by stressing importance of the disadvantaged and rejuvenating cumbia through a blend of urban musical styles, like hip-hop.

Celso Piña and other *kolombia* musicians created emotionally-evocative and socially conscious music that *música tropical* at times lacked. Though Piña was much older than the generation of *kolombia* that wore baggy clothing, he spoke to this generation and understood the struggles of the communities in Monterrey, writing music that centered on rural realities and relatable stories of love and tragedy. In his second rise to fame during the early 2000s, Piña's *Barrio Bravo* (2002) album became an international phenomenon due to his eclectic take on traditional Colombian, compiling street and urban sounds—such as rap, hip hop, and rock—into a diverse musical collage. The youth popularized cumbia and pushed the *kolombia* fandom further into international realms as the album received two Grammy nominations. Songs like "Cumbia sobre el río" began with a dialogue in which Celso Piña utters:

Pero esta música ¿por qué no se toca en vivo?, no pues ¿quién la va tocar en vivo?,
¿Pues yo la voy a tocar compadre/desde Monterrey pura cumbia colombiana para todo
el mundo...

But why isn't this music played live? Well who will play this music live? Well I will play
it my friend/From Monterrey, pure Colombian cumbia for the whole world...¹⁶

These lyrics highlight Celso Piña's immense importance as he illuminated *kolombia* cumbia as a musical genre

13 Ibid, 101.

14 José Juan Olvera Gudiño, "Cumbia in Mexico's Northeastern Region," in *Cumbia!: Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre*, ed. Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Pablo Vila, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 87–104.

15 Jesús A Ramos-Kittrell, "Transnational Cultural Constructions: Cumbia Music and the Making of Locality in Monterrey," In *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 195-196.

16 Darío Blanco Arboleda, *Los Colombias y La Cumbia En Monterrey: Identidad, Subalternidad y Mundos de Vida Entre Inmigrantes Urbanos Populares* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 2014), 88.

that should be played and respected, accentuating the importance of youth music culture. With “Cumbia sobre el río,” Piña expands the *kolombia* movement across physical barriers by demonstrating his devotion in spreading the “cumbia colombiana” from Monterrey to the world. Thus, the history and the development of *kolombia* in Monterrey has provided a space where the youth live in the moment; cumbia music becomes celebrated away from societal divisions, under an accent of groovy rhythms that uplift the soul.

Ya No Estoy Aquí: Kolombia and Textual Poaching

The peak of the youth *kolombia* fandom was during the mid-1990s up to the early 2010s. During this period, the “colombias”—this subculture’s participants—constructed their own identity with their fascination and poaching of Colombian street aesthetics. The “colombias” would gel their hair and wear baggy clothing and converse shoes. Men, in particular, would gel their massive sideburns, which became the iconic image of a “colombia” (see figure 1). Some of the men and women would wear scapulars with their own names, the name of a significant other, or the name of their banda, which became a way to showcase their intrinsic identity to fellow “colombias.” The imagery of saints, specifically the Virgin of Guadalupe, on t-shirts or sweaters brought a spiritual component to clothing, illustrating a religious identity already ingrained in Mexican culture. These various approaches in presenting themselves through their clothing and hair became a “strategy to develop cultural capital and to create a collective identity.”¹⁷



Figure 1.

A “colombia” or “cholombia” dressed in a baggy Saint Jude Thaddeus t-shirt with long gelled sideburns. Retrieved from VICE.

Radio broadcasting—of cumbia *kolombia* or rebajadas and vallenatos, transmitted through radio station XEH-1420 twenty-four hours a day—also became a way of cultivating a collective identity. The youth would traditionally stand outside the radio station with signs of people’s names in an attempt to give shoutouts to other fellow “colombias” from their respective *bandas*.¹⁸ Artwork was another way to communicate with each other; many of the “colombias” drew in a graffiti style to poach the chicano cholo aesthetic by visualizing themes of

¹⁷ José Juan Olvera Gudiño, “Cumbia in Mexico’s Northeastern Region,” in *Cumbia!: Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre*, ed. Héctor Fernández L’Hoeste and Pablo Vila (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 95.

¹⁸ Darío Blanco Arboleda, *Los Colombias y La Cumbia En Monterrey: Identidad, Subalternidad y Mundos de Vida Entre Inmigrantes Urbanos Populares* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 2014), 92.

the *simbolo star* and *simbolo uno*, the two primary *bandas* that made up the *kolombia* subculture. Besides radio broadcasting and graffiti art, social media platforms, such as Facebook, became a forum of communication where art, music, recordings of dances, and shout-outs became more tangibly accessible, sharing the culture of the *kolombia* fandom as seen through my own investigation into the subculture's interactions with one another.

Social dances in *kolombia* created a space for the marginalized youth to embody locality and “resignify elements of Colombian expressive culture to produce *la colombia* as a phenomenological arena of cultural production and subject formation.”¹⁹ Dancing became an individual outlet where marginalized experiences and a sense of belonging were expressed by dancing in a slow, tiptoeing circular motion, flashing hand signs of *simbolo star* or *simbolo uno*. This circular dance reflects *kolombia*'s lineage with the African-indigenous form of traditional cumbia, which used a similar motion to signify a sense of community, acceptance, and collective spatial identity.

In the film *Ya No Estoy Aquí (I Am No Longer Here)* directed by Fernando Frías, the main character, Ulises, dances as he faces several challenges throughout the film. Dance is used substantially in the film in order to demonstrate the main character's sense of belonging and acceptance within the main character's self as he is forced to leave his neighborhood due to the threats from cartels. The film takes place during 2011, when an exponential rise of organized crime and drug dealing took a toll on the fandom. Police brutality and criticism from the middle class impaired the people in this fandom as many local law enforcement officials believed “*colombias*” were all part of the drug-infested gangs. In reality, most were in gangs or *bandas* out of love for the music.²⁰ The last scene of the film, when Ulises returns to his neighborhood in Monterrey with his sideburns cut and a more modest look, encapsulates the main ethos of the *kolombia* fandom: living in the moment.

The purpose of music within the subculture of *kolombia* is complex because it both draws from the past and influences the present experience of its listeners. Cumbia and other Latin American dance music genres capture how *kolombia* makes listeners aware of the realities the youth live in. At the same time, *kolombia* also decentralizes the hardships the youth face by creating a carefree atmosphere to celebrate the special moments of life that are given through dance or by actively creating the music. In other words, cumbia and the *kolombia* demonstrate that they are both driven by a socially conscious ethos, yet emphasize living in the moment with family and friends. Thus, Ulises' participation in *kolombia* creates a nostalgic environment for him before he has to flee the community that brought moments of simple, yet impactful and sentimental pleasures to his life. Returning to Monterrey after leaving restructures his perception of the city, forcing him to conform to societal standards by getting a job and facing the real, adult world. *Kolombia*, then, is its own world, where the subculture's participants do not have to adhere to the social pressures of adult life.

As Ulises stops and sees his old friend, Jeremy, he realizes that everyone has moved on from the once-thriving *kolombia* community as the realities and persecution of the outside world begin to usurp the community. He walks up the stairs of an outdoor hallway passing a group of young people carrying bats. He then sits on a hill next to a man and sees a large group of young people making their way to a busy highway to rob people inside their cars. Ulises puts on his earphones and listens to the cumbia rebajada version of “Quiero Decirte Hoy” by Octubre 82 as the chaos continues. He begins to dance slowly in a circular, overall *kolombia* style until his music player loses battery and the scene fades out with the noise of sirens.

This impactful scene uncovers society's urge to push those that are deemed as outcasts or unfit to be active participants in the societal structures that are put in place and illustrates the evident glorification of violence in Mexican society. Though *kolombia* was under constant discrimination as it culturally unraveled in the early 2010s, the love for cumbia and the Colombian musical aesthetics continues; works such as *Ya No Estoy Aquí* brought the *kolombia* subculture to light and propelled it into the mainstream once again.

19 Jesús A Ramos-Kittrell, “Transnational Cultural Constructions: *Cumbia Music and the Making of Locality in Monterrey*,” In *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. Alejandro L. Madrid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 200.

20 Darío Blanco Arboleda, *Los Colombias y La Cumbia En Monterrey: Identidad, Subalternidad y Mundos de Vida Entre Inmigrantes Urbanos Populares* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 2014), 125.

Conclusion

The *kolombia* subculture in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico endures as its musical and cultural impact has created a significant mark on the music scene in the area. By poaching Colombian street aesthetics and cumbia music, *kolombia* has created an artistic and musical identity that goes against the socio-economic hegemony in Mexican society. Though the gelled sideburns and extremely baggy clothing have since slowly diminished, cumbia music—specifically cumbia rebajada and Colombian vallenatos—is still enjoyed in the Independencia neighborhood in Monterrey. Hence, with its significance as a countercultural phenomenon that has empowered the disadvantaged youth and repurposed cumbia music, *kolombia* is a prime example of how music can be used as a reflective and evocative tool to represent one's liberation and foster one's own identity in the process.

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Electric Avenue: Cultural Hybridization in Guyana and the Creation of Ringbang Music

Bridgette Kontner

The small country of just over 740,000 people nestled between Venezuela, Brazil, Suriname, and the Caribbean Sea appears oddly out of place; Guyana is geographically located in South America, but culturally sits at the heart of the Caribbean region. It was a former British West Indian colony predicated upon the bringing of African slaves and later East Indian indentured servants, but has a name confusingly similar to a country in Africa. Now Guyana's primary language is English, but it's spoken in the typical Caribbean creole manner by people whose heritage range from indigenous Amerindian to South Asian to African to Chinese. Guyana has an identity that is—like much of the Caribbean—rooted in colonization, oppression, and ethnic diversity. But from this massive displacement of a myriad of people came what is now so characteristic of the region: reggae, calypso, soca music, and the fusion of all of these, ringbang music. Created in Guyana with the goal of uniting the various cultures and musical traditions of the region, the genre of ringbang would not have been possible without the forces of *cultural hybridization* and *glocalization*, and is an influential microcosm of how Caribbean culture and music continue to evolve.

Cultural Hybridization and Caribbean Music

Much of the Caribbean is essentially a collection of different diasporas influencing one another, or *cultural hybridization* in real time. *Cultural hybridization* is the process of multiple cultures meeting and subsequently coexisting, complementing, and influencing—rather than overtaking—one another. In other words, cultural hybridization disproves mutual exclusivity as it relates to the full and unwavering existence of multiple cultures within one person. Every person in the Caribbean, save for the indigenous people known as *Amerindians*, came from somewhere else and contributed their piece of culture into what is now overarching Caribbean culture. Evidence of this can be seen in the region's cuisine, which is crafted with the available produce in the region but incorporates the techniques and recipes of classic Indian, African, and Chinese dishes. For example, the Guyanese-Indian version of naan is called *roti*, and is thick like Indian naan but more similar in form to a tortilla. Guyana is an excellent example of cultural hybridization, as one can be both Caribbean and Indian and have those completely separate identities coexist, influencing one another through customs, food, music, and the culture that is created as a result.

Cultural hybridization has long been informing music-making in the Caribbean, even before the creation of ringbang in the 1990s. One of the earliest, and subsequently most internationally iconic, results of this hybridization in the region is reggae music, an important predecessor to ringbang. Established in the 1960s in Jamaica, reggae has come to define the country and the Caribbean region as a whole. The music was formed in conjunction with the socio-religious movement of Rastafari that had been developing decades before. The creation of the *Rastafari* ideology was a reaction to colonialism: the displaced Africans in Jamaica struggled to connect with their African identities, especially within an oppressive system that also resulted in extreme poverty for those living there. For the Rastafari foundation, reggae in its purest form was protest music. In the article “‘No Problem, Mon’: Strategies Used to Promote Reggae Music as Jamaica’s Cultural Heritage” published in the *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, Stephen A. King and P. Renee Foster discuss this connection between the Rastafari movement and the development of reggae music, writing that the movement “increasingly

gave reggae its ideological and political content, and musical direction.”¹

Bolstered by this ideology, much of reggae music included lyrics that spoke to the extreme poverty in the region and its painful history of colonialism and oppression. Examples of this can be seen in popular songs by Bob Marley & the Wailers, such as “Them Belly Full,” which was lyrically inspired by fellow Jamaican poet Louise Bennet-Coverley’s “Dutty Tough”. In it Marley sings:

Them belly full, but we hungry / A hungry mob is a angry mob / A rain a fall, but the dirt
it tough / A pot a cook but the food nah nuff²

This outlines how through history the powers that be — an establishment built by their historic colonial oppressors — have continued to thrive, while the working people of the country are starving, with dirt too tough to farm and not enough food to cook. Another example is Marley’s “Redemption Song,” where the verses and chorus read:

Old pirates, yes, they rob I / Sold I to the merchant ships / Minutes after they took I /
From the bottomless pit / But my hand was made strong / By the hand of the Almighty /
We forward in this generation / Triumphantly / Won’t you help to sing / These songs of
freedom? / ‘Cause all I ever have / Redemption songs / Redemption songs / Emancipate
yourselves from mental slavery / None but ourselves can free our minds³

These lyrics thematically reference the slave trade and how Black-Jamaicans were stolen from Africa. They syntactically employ heavy use of colloquial Rastafari jargon that disobey English grammatical rules, like the common use of “I” to refer not just to the speaker, but also the Afro-Jamaican Rastafari people as a whole. The lyrics to this song were also inspired by Jamaican Pan-Africanist activist and orator Marcus Garvey, whose work posthumously influenced the development of the Rastafari movement.

The Rastafari component also manifested itself musically as rhythm became the most essential facet of reggae. Just as Rastafari ideology encouraged Black-Jamaicans to connect with their African heritage, reggae utilized polyrhythms and complex motifs, which are characteristic of African music. A polyrhythm can be defined as the simultaneous use of two or more contrasting rhythms. Polyrhythms are found throughout much of the music that originated in Sub-Saharan Africa, and stand in stark contrast to Western European music, as the former employs syncopation and playing on off-beats or secondary beats, while the latter emphasizes primary beats. An example of a classic reggae beat can be found in another popular Bob Marley song, “No Woman, No Cry.” The following drum chart illustrates the characteristic emphasis on the secondary beats:

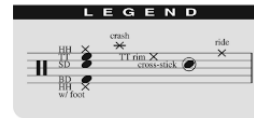
1 Stephen A. King and P. Renee Foster, “‘No Problem, Mon’: Strategies Used to Promote Reggae Music as Jamaica’s Cultural Heritage,” *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing* 8, no. 4 (2001): 3–16, https://doi.org/10.1300/J054v08n04_02.

2 Bob Marley and the Wailers, “Them Belly Full (but We Hungry),” Track #3 on *Natty Dread*, Island/Tuff Gong, 1974.

3 Bob Marley and the Wailers, “Redemption Song,” Track #10 on *Uprising*, Island/Tuff Gong, 1980.

No Woman No Cry

Words and Music by Vincent Ford



Intro
 Slowly $\text{♩} = 78$ (♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩)

The sheet music for the introduction consists of three staves. The first staff begins with a 4/4 time signature and a tempo marking of 'Slowly' with a quarter note equal to 78 beats per minute. The music is written in treble clef and features a series of chords and rhythmic patterns, with drum notation indicating the accompaniment. The second and third staves continue the musical sequence with similar chordal and rhythmic structures.

4

Rhythmic complexity is one of the biggest differentiators between the music that influenced Caribbean music (African music) and Western music. Moreover, reggae's emphasis on rhythm makes sense considering the genre's ideological foundation and the fact that its main musical influences are African music and ska, the earlier Jamaican popular music.

Reggae is now a ubiquitously popular and influential genre, with artists like Marley eclipsing the fame they had when they were alive. This was, in part, due to the fact that reggae, being formed alongside the Rastafari movement, encapsulated not just a style of music but a style of life. In the aforementioned article, King and Foster also discuss how reggae and Rastafarianism have progressed beyond their creation, becoming so symbolic of Jamaican culture that they are explicitly used in Jamaica's tourism marketing, writing:

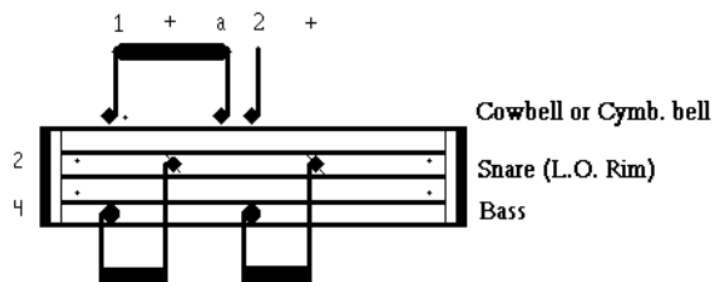
With raked sandy white beaches and brilliant, crystal blue waters, the Caribbean is a natural setting for tourists to experience 'new or different exclusive hideaways'. With the near depletion of many of the region's agricultural resources, many Caribbean countries have turned to tourism as a primary foreign-exchange earner. Beyond its breathtaking beauty, each Caribbean nation highlights distinctive 'attractions.' Grand Cayman, for example, sells off-shore discrete banking, while both St. Thomas and St. Croix promote military structures and historic public buildings. Trinidad and Tobago feature the annual two-week long Carnival festival. In contrast, Jamaica markets reggae, which in its origins was a protest music, and Rastafari, a social movement.⁵

This is significant because it calls back to the reason people create reggae music in the first place: to illustrate the post-colonial environments of broken establishments, depleted resources, and displaced peoples.

The Caribbean is also known for other genres of music like calypso, an artform that was developed in Trinidad and then spread throughout the region. Lyrically, calypso is satirical and full of storytelling, but overall it is characterized by its rhythm, the origins of which can be traced back to West Africa. Syncopation is central to calypso rhythms; the most popular calypso rhythmic pattern can be seen below:

4 "No Woman No Cry," Sheet Music Direct, accessed April 23, 2022, https://www.sheetmusicdirect.com/en-US/se/ID_No/175148/Product.aspx?.

5 Stephen A. King and P. Renee Foster "'No Problem, Mon': Strategies Used to Promote Reggae Music as Jamaica's Cultural Heritage," *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 8, no. 4 (2001): 3–16, https://doi.org/10.1300/J054v08n04_02.



6

This basic groove was also the origin of an even more specific rhythm called Dembow, also first stylized in Jamaica. This is a four-note phrase that can be seen below:



7

This highly-recognizable motif has now been adopted by countless other genres like reggaeton, electronic dance music, and American popular music. Notable calypso figures include Mighty Sparrow and Harry Belafonte, the latter of whom received much international recognition for his song “Day O!”, one of the most globally popular calypso songs to date.

The Caribbean was also the birthplace of *soca* music, another genre that can be traced back to Trinidad, specifically. Soca is a portmanteau of the terms *soul* and *calypso*, and was developed in the early 1970s by Lord Shorty as a way of uniting Trinidad’s diverse populations of African and Indian descent. Reggae and soca have been fused to form “*ragga-soca*—a rhythm that is faster than reggae but slower than up-tempo soca.”⁸ A sub-genre even exists entitled *chutney soca*, which sees the fusion of *soca* and Indian chutney music. Chutney soca has origins in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Suriname, the countries with the largest South Asian populations. The music incorporates both English and Hindustani lyrics, and both Western and Indian instruments and arrangements.

In general, these important genres have become essential to the Caribbean identity because prior to the end of colonialism, that nuanced identity did not tangibly exist. The fact that rhythm is the central pillar of all of these genres further illustrates the story of their creation, as that was the actual creation of what it meant to be Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, etc. under a system that stole them from their homelands, forced them into an English-speaking system of slavery and/or indentured servitude, and attempted to erase their culture. As such, rhythm was a piece of culture that could not be stolen, and transcended language and geographic origin. Moreover, these musical genres have had an immense global impact, evidenced by the adoption of their rhythms by genres well outside of the Caribbean and Africa. They also have almost become a sort of cultural capital that drives tourism (essential to a post-colonial economy forced to rely heavily on this income stream) and inspires greater interest into the Caribbean region in general.

Guyana and Ringbang Music

6 “Latin Rhythms Lesson 3 Calypso,” DrumDrums.com, accessed April 11, 2022, <https://drumdrums.com/free-private-online-drum-set-lessons/latin-rhythms/latin-rhythms-lesson-3-calypso/>.

7 Wayne Marshall, “From Música Negra to Reggaeton Latino: The Cultural Politics of Nation, Migration, and Commercialization,” in *Reggaeton*, eds. Raquel Z. Rivera, Wayne Marshall, and Deborah Pacini-Hernandez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 19-76, <http://wayneandwax.com/academic/marshall-musica-negra-reggaeton-latino.pdf>.

8 “Barbados Music: Calypso,” Barbados.org, accessed April 11, 2022, barbados.org/music/calypso.htm#.XBCbqPZKjR0.

Guyana happens to be one of the most diverse nations in the Caribbean. Jamaica's population is 92.1% Black, and only 6.1% mixed and 0.8% East Indian; this ratio certainly influenced the creation of reggae music with its primarily African roots. In contrast, it is estimated that about 39.8% of Guyana's population is of East Indian heritage, while 29.3% is Black, 19.9% is mixed, 10.5% is indigenous Amerindian, and the other 0.5% is Portuguese, Chinese, or white⁹, which makes it an even more ideal case study for investigating cultural hybridization. This diverse mix of people and backgrounds has had a profound effect on Guyana's identity as a country. In contrast to other nations, Guyana did not create another musical genre; rather, all other Caribbean genres fused and *glocalized* to create ringbang music.

Glocalization refers to the spreading of culture around the world, but in a way that is different from globalization. Instead of existing in a homogeneous fashion in every region, as globalization describes, those same pieces of culture interact with the respective cultures in each destination. In turn, they manifest as unique and different in every place. When applied to this case study, one can see that ringbang music is essentially the glocalization of all Caribbean music, which in and of itself is already extremely hybridized music with African, Indian, Asian, and European influences.

Guyana is not necessarily known internationally for its music in the way Jamaica is, a country that boasts huge musical figures like Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff. However, Guyana did produce one highly influential musician who pioneered the creation of ringbang music: Eddy Grant. Born and raised in Guyana, Grant moved to London as a teenager with his parents. He is best known for his smash hit "Electric Avenue" that was released in 1982 and went on to receive a Grammy nomination for Best R&B Song in 1983. The song continued to receive critical acclaim, and a ringbang remix of it was released in 2001 that reached No. 5 in the UK Singles Chart and No. 16 on the US Dance Chart. In addition to that, the remix was also featured on *Now That's What I Call Music! 49*. This song certainly put Grant on the map on an international scale, and laid the groundwork for the creation of the ringbang genre.

The ringbang genre was officially stylized in 1994 by Grant, when he introduced the genre at the Barbados Crop Over Festival. Ringbang can be described as "a fusion of all the music of the Caribbean with the focus on the rhythm rather than the melody."¹⁰ Grant himself said of the genre: "What ringbang seeks to do is envelop all the rhythms that have originated from Africa so that they become one, defying all geographical boundaries."¹¹ In addition to this being a case of hybridization, as Grant defines ringbang as an amalgamation of the culturally diverse array of rhythms in the region, it is also a prime example of glocalization. In contrast to globalization -- where this genre would not exist because either the African influences would have been completely eclipsed by Western influences in the process of colonization or they would have prevailed but unchanged by their surroundings -- glocalization in this case exists in that the incoming influences interacted together to create something new: ringbang.

As the predecessor to the actual creation of the ringbang genre, "Electric Avenue" embodies many of its characteristics. Lyrically, the song pulls directly from reggae and its origins as protest music, chronicling poor socio-economic conditions and poverty, as Grant sings:

Now in the street, there is violence / And a lots of work to be done / No place to hang out
the washin' / And I can't blame all on the sun, oh no ... Workin' so hard like a soldier
/ Can't afford a thing on TV / Deep in my heart, I abhor ya / Can't get food for the kid,
good God / We gonna rock down to Electric Avenue / And then we'll take it higher¹²

9 Central Intelligence Agency, "Guyana," *The World Factbook*, last updated March 30, 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/guyana/>.

10 "Barbados Music: Calypso," Barbados.org, accessed April 11, 2022, barbados.org/music/calypso.htm#.XBCbqPZKjR0.

11 Dave Thompson, *Reggae & Caribbean Music* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 113.

12 Eddy Grant, "Electric Avenue," *Killer on the Rampage*, 1982.

Technically, Grant was writing about the English town of Brixton, as a response to the 1981 riots against police brutality and racism; however, what he describes also parallels the conditions back in his birthplace of Guyana. In addition to pulling from the lyrical tradition of reggae, Grant incorporates lyrical elements of calypso music, a style historically full of satire, as the third verse wails:

Who is to blame in one country? / Never can get to the one / Dealin' in multiplication /
And they still can't feed everyone, oh no¹³

Grant's use of irony and satire simultaneously articulates his frustration with the song's socio-political backdrop and further exemplifies his Caribbean influences.

Guyana's history as a British colony meant that while it was part of the British Commonwealth, many Guyanese people, and similarly those from other Caribbean colonies, would emigrate to England to study or work. They were not exactly welcomed with open arms, and this subsequent racial tension directly corresponds with Grant's writing. Unfortunately, these Caribbean families would end up experiencing economies as broken as the ones from which they came, because they were completely excluded from them. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Grant explains the process of writing "Electric Avenue" and the motivation behind its message:

I'd watched the Brixton riots unfold on television. I'd seen the Notting Hill riots starting a few years previously. I wrote down: "Now in the street there is violence," and the song just flowed from there. I had been talking to politicians and people at a high level about the lack of opportunity for Black people, and I knew what was brewing... I myself might have been successful, but I could have easily been one of those guys with no hope, and I knew that when people felt they were being left behind, there was potential for violence. The song was intended as a wake-up call.¹⁴

The cautionary tale Grant describes also draws parallels to the aforementioned Bob Marley track "Them Belly Full" where Marley warns "a hungry mob is an angry mob."¹⁵ Even though almost a decade had gone by since Marley had sung those lyrics, and Grant himself had emigrated to England, that message was still true as ever, in the Caribbean or in England, in 1974 or 1982.

Sonically, "Electric Avenue"'s comparisons do not fall as perfectly inline. The song does not incorporate a signature rhythmic pattern, calypso or otherwise, and the drums fall unwaveringly on the primary downbeats, instead of the secondary off-beats which is a Caribbean norm. This is likely due to Grant's English influence and since he was gaining popularity as an artist, he likely felt more pressure to keep the drum beat palatable for a more global audience. However, the signature synth melodies -- like the four-note phrase that follows the words "Electric Avenue" in the song's chorus -- throughout the track do display a more syncopated rhythm. Moreover, Grant's ringbang remix of the track that followed in 2001 completely reinvents this straight drum beat, with a polyrhythmic soca beat as the foundation for the new version of the song.

The ringbang genre grew greatly in popularity since its creation in 1994 throughout the Caribbean nations.¹⁶ Even the same year of its advent, "calypso veteran Black Stalin became the first artist to refer to ringbang on record."¹⁷ The ringbang sound has been explored by musicians such as Calypso Rose, Superblue, Ajala, Chinese Laundry, Chris Garcia, and Marvin & Nigel Lewis. Most of these musicians are not affiliated with Grant or from

13 Ibid.

14 Dave Simpson, "How we made Eddy Grant's Electric Avenue," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/sep/03/how-we-made-eddy-grant-electric-avenue>.

15 Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Them Belly Full (but We Hungry)," Track #3 on *Natty Dread*, Island/Tuff Gong, 1974.

16 "Barbados Music: Calypso," Barbados.org, accessed April 11, 2022, barbados.org/music/calypso.htm#.XBCbqPZKjR0.

17 Dave Thompson, *Reggae & Caribbean Music* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 112.

Guyana, so this shows how the ringbang style, and most importantly the ethos of rhythmic diversity, started to permeate the larger Caribbean music scene.

However, Grant made the decision to trademark the term, and therefore the genre, so only artists under his aegis could use the word “ringbang”. As described by Dave Thompson in his book *Reggae & Caribbean Music*:

The genre itself is still very much in its formative phase; ... a consequence of Grant’s decision to trademark the term... The trademark issue has prevented [those aforementioned artists] from actually acknowledging it in song - which, in turn, holds the music itself back from finding a wider audience. (To put this in context, imagine, for example, if somebody had trademarked the word “reggae,” back in 1968).¹⁸

This is significant because it is an extremely common facet of Caribbean music to call out the genre in the lyrics, title, or name of the overall project; examples include Super Blue’s 1980 hit “Soca Baptist” and Trinidadian musician Calypso Rose’s artist moniker. However, even with the issue of copyright, ringbang made its mark on the Caribbean music industry during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Grant launched Ice Records in 1974, in partnership with Pye Records initially, and eventually Virgin Records. The label was born of Grant’s desire to lean into producing rather than performing, especially with major health problems like a heart attack and collapsed lung plaguing him in the early 1970s. It was also a way for Grant to release his own music, as well as “to record, promote and market classic calypso, soca and ringbang.”¹⁹ Ice proudly boasts ownership of the largest catalog of Caribbean music in the world and partnerships with well-known Caribbean musicians like Mighty Sparrow. To this roster of artists, which included the aforementioned Calypso Rose, Black Stalin, Superblue, and more, the later trademark of the term was not a hurdle since they were under Grant’s aegis.

The real impact of ringbang can be illustrated not only by the artists who joined Grant’s label, but by those that were inspired by the ethos of the genre. Bajan rhythm poet Adisa Andwelle (birth name Mike Richards) is one of many, including those aforementioned, that were moved by Grant’s mission.²⁰ As described by Thompson, after joining Ice Records in the mid-1990s, Andwelle “became a vociferous exponent of Grant’s ringbang style, and immediately incorporated ferocious new beats into a musical approach which has, from the onset, been built upon a relentless comprehension of the power of rhythm.”²¹ The crux of ringbang is this power of rhythm, as Grant himself has stated, and this is one common thread that can be seen throughout Caribbean music and its relationship with the region’s various cultures. Grant’s ringbang genre did not only gain popularity -- as evidenced by the commercial success of “Electric Avenue” and his record label -- but more importantly, it embodied and inspired this culture of hybridization and diversity.

Conclusion: Caribbean Music Now and Beyond

The Caribbean music industry has been rapidly expanding in recent years, especially after the success of huge musical figures like Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, Eddy Grant, and more. A report prepared for The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) entitled “The Caribbean Music Industry Database (CMID)” explored the development of the music industry at the turn of the century. The report reads: “The music industry of the Caribbean is evolving into a complex and important system of production, sale and accumulation involving many different professions and organizations.”²²

18 Dave Thompson, *Reggae & Caribbean Music* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 113.

19 Ice Records, http://www.icerecords.com/ringbang_mag.html.

20 Dave Thompson, *Reggae & Caribbean Music* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 22.

21 Ibid.

22 James Vanus, editor, “The Caribbean Music Industry Database (CMID), 2000,” October 2001, www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/about-ip/en/studies/pdf/

Like many other regional markets of the time, the majority of Caribbean artists' revenue came from live shows, which "take a wide range of forms, including tents, fetes, dances, stage show in clubs, "bashments," tours, and to lesser extent concerts in the traditional usage of that term."²³ The report was published in 2001, so does not account for streaming and other new media in the industry. Parts of the Caribbean are also known for Carnival, which is significant in the live show space of the music industry:

In Trinidad and Tobago, most of the live performances occur in the two months leading up to Carnival, although in recent years a sizable new post-carnival market for live performances has emerged.²⁴

This once again demonstrates the Caribbean's hybridized identity, as Carnival is a diverse celebration that essentially came about as a result of the collision of so many cultures, and again provides an important opportunity for local artists to perform and engage with Caribbean music.

Ringbang did make an impact in the region, though perhaps not to its full potential due to Eddy Grant's copyrighting of the word. However, what has prevailed in Guyana and throughout the Caribbean is this spirit of hybridization and fusion. Current Guyanese artists are combining genres in this same way, like Rémur fusing hip-hop and reggae, Gadinelli fusing Caribbean soca and Latin merengue, and many more.²⁵ A huge part of Guyanese culture is this type of diversity and mixture, as the people in this nation come from all over. Music is continuing to develop in the Caribbean in its naturally hybridized environment.

Ringbang is, in essence, a cultural amalgamation of what it means to be Caribbean. Its origins are in genres whose purposes were to protest or tell stories, and given the colonial backdrop upon which these genres were created, ringbang is an attempt to reclaim and create a hybridized identity, to use displacement as a gift to collaborate, to honor one's roots and simultaneously be open to diversity, to allow for opportunities for glocalization over globalization, to not only survive but thrive in a way that is artistically fulfilling and culturally significant. For, to ringbang pioneer Eddy Grant that's what this music means; he describes ringbang as:

the thing that makes the soul quiet. That in a musical concept is rhythm. A child is given ringbang when a mother rocks it in her arms. Ringbang allowed the slaves to communicate. Ringbang is a bridge that allows us to stop being insular; it is a concept predicated on our being able to communicate with one another.²⁶

Ringbang is the glocalization and fusion of the complex hybrid of music and diverse cultures in the Caribbean, and this spirit of hybridization continues to drive developments in Caribbean music today.

study_v_james.pdf.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Jesse Serwer, "Golden Children: The Next Generation of Music in Guyana," *LargeUp*, April 9, 2018, www.largeup.com/2016/07/12/golden-children-the-next-generation-of-music-in-guyana/.

26 Mark Dean, "SPILL FEATURE: EDDY GRANT'S RINGBANG TIME - A CONVERSATION WITH EDDY GRANT," *The Spill Magazine*, April 2, 2018, spillmagazine.com/spill-feature-eddy-grants-ringbang-time-a-conversation-with-eddy-grant/.

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The Sounds of *Divoká Planeta*: A Science Fiction Film Score's Portrayal of Post-Thaw Czechoslovakia

Minnie Seo

French director René Laloux collaborated with Jiří Trnka Studio in Prague to create the animated film *Divoká Planeta* (1973), resulting in a strange science-fiction film outfitted with traditional animation and a jazz-rock soundtrack. The film features a bizarre planet, where bald, blue-skinned, red-eyed giants called “Draags” rule and humans—referred to as “Ohms”—are treated like entertaining, harmless pests.¹ Humans are to draags as mice are to humans. Due to the sheer oddity of the film, *Divoká Planeta*'s meaning has been debated since its release in 1973; however, the film's possible political insurrection of the Soviet Bloc's intense censorship serves to reflect Czechoslovakia's mercurial political climate. After dictator Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, a literal period of cultural and political “Thaw” occurred: citizens of the Soviet Union enjoyed a time when censorship did not run rampant and the dissemination of information by the press was more free. Unfortunately, this would not last long for Czechoslovakia: after a period of political liberation and protests, four Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia and returned it to a Soviet-style regime.² Censorship and media scrutiny were immediately brought back subsequent to this invasion, undoubtedly impacting *Divoká Planeta*'s production and subsequent understanding. Although the events of *Divoká Planeta* occur on a fictional planet geographically disparate to Earth, the film captures the uniquely liberal and individualistic characteristics of post-Thaw Czechoslovakia through the musical score and use of diegetic sounds.

The Sociocultural Background of *Divoká Planeta*

The film's soundtrack was composed mostly by the French Jazz pianist and orchestral-arranger Alain Goraguer. Goraguer's role as a jazz musician and composing the score for *Divoká Planeta* also bears themes of resistance. The choice to have a jazz-based soundtrack exemplified the long history of political controversy this music genre has had within the Soviet Bloc. The essay “The Czarna Seria – Critical Social Documentaries in a Socialist State” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas* describes a documentary that displays dangerous youth behavior alongside jazz music, depicting “a number of long-haired misfits with fashionable hats, coats, and shoes drifting aimlessly through the streets, drinking, playing cards, dancing to decadent jazz music, and loitering in public places.”³ The wayward youths of this 1950s film throw their bodies to bourgeois Western jazz music playing in the background, which is harshly contrasted by a description of “moral” youths engaging in sports. Here, the documentary affixes an immoral connotation to jazz music.

In addition, Russian music scholar Richard Stites writes, “A great cultural pogrom, the zhdanovshchina, was launched in the years 1946-48. What Andre Zhdanov and his associates, the guardians of Soviet culture, disliked most of all was foreign inspiration which produced both frivolity (as in jazz) and ‘formalism.’” The reasoning as to why jazz music was not approved of by Soviet officials is more latently pointed out here: jazz was considered to be trivial and a product of the West, which the Soviet Union separated itself from; thus it was deemed unnecessary, unimportant, and an annoyance to Soviet officials. Andre Zhdanov, the propaganda chief

1 Derived from the French word *hommes* meaning “man.”

2 Thaw: a period from 1953 until the 1960s which was spurred by Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech—in which he denounced Stalin's cult of personality and sought to democratize the Soviet Union; Warsaw Pact: A political and military alliance between the Soviet Union and several other Eastern European countries created in response to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on May 14th, 1955. The members of this pact pledged to help each other if they ever came under attack.

3 Bjørn Sørensen, “The Czarna Seria – Critical Social Documentaries in a Socialist State,” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 183–200.

for Stalin, was considered one of the most important builders of “Soviet Patriotism”; therefore, his—and really anybody close to Stalin’s—opinion of art was to be taken seriously.⁴

Despite the period of political thawing that followed Stalin’s death, there continued to be heavy censorship of all types of art. During this Thaw period, many artists began to push creative boundaries, but De-Stalinization under Czechoslovakia’s new President Antonín Novotný was slower than that of other Eastern Bloc countries. Finally, towards the end of the 1950s, Czechoslovakian politicians came to slowly accept jazz music, eventually building up to a Golden Age of Jazz in Czechoslovakia.⁵ However, this Thaw period was further complicated by the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, which threatened to derail the project altogether.

Given that *Divoká Planeta*’s surreal and suggestive content was precisely the kind of work that paranoid apparatchiks instinctively regarded with suspicion, the production could easily have been forcibly shut down had it not been for the fact that it was bringing in hard currency from France.⁶ During the Normalization period that followed the invasion, many films were banned for alleged, but often unproven, politically allegorical content. For example, Jiří Trnka, a famous Czech animator whose studio produced *Divoká Planeta*, created *The Hand* (1965), which had very similar themes of absolute control, powerless beings, and threats to physical safety. Unlike *Divoká Planeta*, however, *The Hand* was banned after Trnka’s death in 1969 and remained so until 1989, most likely due to the Velvet Revolution and subsequent overthrow of communists in the country.⁷ Thus, the specific circumstances of *Divoká Planeta*’s production preserved it from censorship.

Rock Music’s Role in Political Protests in Czechoslovakia

Prior to this time of heightened censorship, Czechoslovakia had experienced significant cultural and political unrest, and the country’s experimental underground rock scene played a pivotal role. The presence of rock music—and its offspring, psychedelic music—was banned from the Soviet Bloc. This was most likely due to the fact that “[rock music], allegedly, promoted the destabilization of Communist ideological and aesthetic norms.”⁸ Despite rock music’s reputation as a promotion of drugs, rebellion, violence and “Western” ideals, there was still an underground rock band scene that operated in Czechoslovakia. During the Prague Spring, rock music became heavily associated with the youth subcultures of Czechoslovakia, and the government developed a more forgiving stance on rock music, allowing the genre to eventually top the charts.⁹ Martin Husák, a professor at Charles University in Prague, even writes, “In terms of music, Czechoslovak bands had made great progress, and many music journalists have viewed the Czechoslovak rock scene as the most advanced in the whole Eastern Bloc at that time.”¹⁰

One Czechoslovak group, The Plastic People of the Universe, was a critical part of the resistance and liberalization of Czechoslovakia and gained a significant following in the late 1960s through the 1970s. The band was formed soon after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and, throughout their time together, faced multiple instances of censorship. In their attempt to resist change for the policies of normalization, the group had their temporary professional license revoked, were banned from playing in Prague, and were arrested and tried for attempting to hold their own music festival. However, the band’s underground following was quite significant, and their usage of and influence from Western ideas of music—such as free jazz, Velvet Underground,

4 Kees Boterbloem, *Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 1896-1948* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 5.

5 Wolf-Georg Zaddach, “Jazz in Czechoslovakia during the 1950s and 1960s,” in *Jazz and Totalitarianism*, ed. Bruce Johnson (2016), 114-155.

6 Michael Brooke, “Fantastic Planet: Gambous Amalga,” *The Criterion Collection*, June 21, 2016, www.criterion.com/current/posts/4112-fantastic-planet-gambous-amalga.

7 A nation-wide protest in Czechoslovakia that occurred from November to December 1989, effectively ending communism rule in the country.

8 Martin Husák, “Rock music censorship in Czechoslovakia between 1969 and 1989,” *Popular Music and Society* 40, no. 3 (2017): 310-329.

9 A period of liberalization under first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Alexander Dubček. This period lasted from January 5th, 1968 to August 1968, when the Soviet invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia occurred.

10 Lindaur, Vojtěch, and Petr Konrád, *Bigbit [Big beat]* (Praha: Torst, 1999), 54, quoted in Martin Husák, “Rock music censorship in Czechoslovakia between 1969 and 1989,” *Popular Music and Society* 40, no. 3 (2017): 312.

and Frank Zappa—had already spread to the many crowds that would follow them. These Western ideas were greatly opposed by Novotny, and he increased censorship as Western Rock's popularity began to rise.¹¹

These events illustrate that the presence and use of rock music, as well as its many subcategories, carry a strong connotation of subversion against the ruling authorities of not only the general Soviet Union, but particularly within Czechoslovakia. Specifically, this period of frequent discrimination against rock music coincided with the production of *Divoká Planeta*. The rock-infused soundtrack of the score similarly reflected the political and cultural associations that are tied to this sound.

The Music of *Divoká Planeta*

Even though there were sociopolitical factors that prevented *Divoká Planeta* from being banned, the film's surreal jazz-rock score carried controversial themes in that, "During the periods of liberalization, the surreal came increasingly to be used in ways which were inherently subversive to the interests of neo-Stalinist leaders and bureaucrats."¹² The confusing nature of surrealist films had already led to multiple interpretations, which generally can be problematic for filmmakers. For example, in the case of Czech film director Věra Chytilová's surrealist-comedy film *Daisies* (1966), the film was banned for many things, but nihilism, gluttony, and a general bad portrayal of good morals were cited as the reasons for its censorship.¹³ Chytilová's usage and destruction of items such as large quantities of sausages, eggs, and apples mocked gender-roles, while the portrayal of certain actors seemed to mimic Soviet politicians. Though it could not be explicitly expressed, ideas—like those of Chytilová and Laloux—considered "subversive" to the United Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR) could be communicated through the usage of "double meaning," meaning that any type of media, in this case music, could be interpreted in a number of ways in order to avoid conflict with the government. Thus, the subversive nature of jazz music in this time period accompanies *Divoká Planeta* and its production.

It is not just the film's surrealism that carried subversive themes, but the musical motifs of the score itself that communicated the conditions under which artists had to operate. There are two distinct melodies that can be heard throughout the film: an ascending and a descending melody. The ascending melody corresponds with the power and authority of blue creatures called "Draags," and the descending represents the destruction the Draags bring to the "Ohms." Both of these melodies are altered in order to portray aspects of the Ohms' agency. Unlike most of the scales we hear in Classical Western music, the ascending melody is composed of mostly half-steps and only one whole step. The feeling this provides is very unsteady, yet becomes resolved once the melody reaches its zenith; it is both strange and beautiful. This ascending melody can be heard on the tracks "Ten et Tiwa Dorment," and "Méditation des enfants," as well as a meditation scene in which the bodies of prominent Draag authorities start to blend and almost pulsate together—relating to the disintegration of individualism within the communist Soviet Union.¹⁴ This is where the melody is produced at its most stable at a slower tempo, which embodies the unique meditation skills of the Draags.

In another scene, Terr, an Ohm and the main character of the story, is treated like a pet and goes on a walk with Tiwa, the Draag that owns him. During the walk, his body becomes trapped with rapidly growing crystals, which Tiwa breaks by whistling. After Terr is freed from crystallization, he starts to skip through the land, breaking the crystals with his voice, and whistling the tune of the Draags' meditation, altering the tempo as he pleases.¹⁵ French musicologist Florian Guilloux analyzes this scene, writing "This mise en abyme of the meditation

11 Joseph Yanosik, "Plastic People and Universe," In *Perfect Sound Forever*, March 1996.

12 Herbert J. Eagle. "Eastern European Cinema," *Eastern Europe: Politics, Culture, and Society since 1939*, ed. by Sabrina Petra Ramen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 341.

13 Thierry Méranger, "Interview with Vera Chytilová," interview by Michel Field, ina.fr, Feb. 1, 1994, video, 4:08, <https://fresques.ina.fr/europe-des-cultures-en/fiche-media/Europe00213/interview-with-vera-chytilova>.

14 *Divoká Planeta*, directed by René Laloux (Argos Films, 1973), 0:13:00 to 0:14:17, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LuNSHIPco>.

15 *Divoká Planeta*, 0:19:20-0:21:05.

theme is symbolic: by using a musical theme associated with the Draags' existence and source of strength, Terr appropriates their power."¹⁶ Whether or not the audience or even the Draags realize, Terr has just reclaimed a bit of his agency and power in a world that has viewed his race as disposable since before his birth. Terr's whole life has been controlled by Tiwa—whose love never extends past the affections a master holds towards their pet. At the start of the film, Terr is just a baby in his mother's arms, who dies shortly after being manhandled by a group of adolescent Draags. Shortly after his mother's death, Terr and his crying attracts the attention of Tiwa and her Master Dragg father, who lets Tiwa adopt Terr as her new pet. From then on, Tiwa physically manipulates Terr into doing whatever she wants; Terr's clothing changes would be at the behest of Tiwa, and if Tiwa decided that Terr was thirsty, she would pick him up and fully submerge him in water. Now, Terr's existence does not have to be contingent upon what Tiwa wants; he is gaining independence and knowledge, which can be heard through his own interpretation and use of the ascending melody.

Likewise, this melody is used at the end of the film when the Ohms witness the purpose of the Draags' sacred meditation rituals: to engage in nuptial activities with beings from other galaxies, which gives the Draags vital energy and ensures the continuation of their species. The melody has now become a faster, dissonant waltz, changing its time signature from a common-time 4/4 to 3/4. Earlier in the film, Terr was able to read the Draags' language after listening to Tiwa's lectures through a technologically programmed headband, which he ran away with and allowed the other Ohms to use, and thus be educated through. From there, the Ohms develop their own technology and create a metropolis. Now, the Draags have been effectively killed by the Ohms' advanced technology, developed from the Draags' own knowledge. The Ohms' laser destroys the meditation spheres where the consciousness of the Draags lie—blinding and leaving the whole population of Draags utterly shocked. This dissonant waltz signifies the growth and power the Ohms have accumulated, while also appropriating, manipulating, and almost making fun of the power imbalance the Draags once had over them. The traditional background of the waltz incorporated with the similarly traditional mating ritual of the Draags is interrupted, sullied, and turned into a violent scene, exemplified further by the music, which grows more and more unsteady—"Méditation Des Enfants" has finally been transformed into a cacophony and desacralized. The preservation of these traditions is important to the Draags, and something that every adolescent is expected to engage in—similar to how Soviet authorities prioritized "Soviet Patriotism" through the conservation of a society, culture, and people away from the tarnishing influences of Western capitalist culture.

The descending melodic motif also contains connections to the Ohms' resistance. The audience first listens to the descending melody, which coincides with Draags' destruction of Ohms, when Terr gets a collar put on him by Tiwa and her father. There, the piece "Le Bracelet" accompanies Tiwa's father teaching his daughter how to use a bracelet that will control Terr's collar, which Terr feebly tries to pull off. Through some kind of force, Terr is dragged around via this bracelet's connection to his collar, and his agency has thus been revoked.¹⁷ If the stability, loudness, and prevalence of this melodic line corresponds to the Draags' destruction of the Ohms, then it can be implied that instability, softness, and a weaker presence of the varied theme signals that this destruction is present but has not usurped all agency from the Ohms. When two Draags attempt to exterminate a crowd of Ohms, the Ohms fight back, eventually killing one of the Draags while the other one runs away. There, the dead bodies of many Ohms lay strewn about the bloody scene, but they fall victoriously over the slain Draag's corpse.¹⁸ Here, the theme is altered to show the Ohms' devastation, but also their advancement. Where it might have been played in the higher register of a flute or a recorder in past scenes, it is played this time on the alto saxophone, cello, and synthesizer, all heard in a lower register on the track "Mort de Draag." Whereas before the flute melody was played nervously, fleeting, and shrill in the jazzy track "Maquillage de Tiwa," the lower register of bigger instruments now symbolizes the newfound strength of the Ohms, as well as the great loss, exhaustion, and

16 Mise en abyme: French for "put into the abyss" or in film, a "film within a film"; Lorian Guilloux, "Music and Soundscapes in René Laloux's Animated Feature Films," *Lied und Populäre Kultur* 64 (2019): 197.

17 *Divoká Planeta*, 0:05:55 to 0:07:17.

18 *Divoká Planeta*, 0:52:30 to 0:53:50.

general malaise felt by the community. By the end of “Mort de Draag,” the sound has become homophonic with the alto saxophone and cello playing the melody with a more legato, smooth sound. However, these instruments almost disappear into the accompaniment, possibly representing the physical loss of Ohms within the resistance. Contrastingly, in the scene—in which “Maquillage de Tiwa” plays—Tiwa puts on makeup from ornate boxes, one of which Terr impishly switches to ruin Tiwa’s makeup vision. “Maquillage de Tiwa” features a prominent drum set, flute, xylophone, synthesizer, and electric guitar—with a wah-wah distortion pedal—part, all of which have very distinct sounds and articulations. The result is a polyphonic texture with the instruments’ parts standing out due to their different timbres, potentially aurally displaying the chaos of the scene and Terr’s mischievous, childish nature and ultimately defiant attitude towards his Draag owner. Musical themes serve as more than just an accompaniment in *Divoká Planeta*; they also convey an underlying message that supports the films’ general theme of resistance against a powerful regime.

Combining all these aspects, *Divoká Planeta* was a unique, mature, modern, and strange child born out of the collaboration between France and a politically uncertain Czechoslovakia. While strange creatures and giants may distract the audiences from Earth, *Divoká Planeta* was able to utilize the film score and its applications in the actual film to convey and portray a post-Thaw Czechoslovakia. The rebellious, adult innovation of the movie definitely garnered attention as it won the Special Prize at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival. And though the story was adapted from a French novel, in *Divoká Planeta*, the Czechoslovakian societal influences are undeniable.

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Marginalized Practices: The Alexander Technique and Music Education

Cristian Toro

“**D**are to discover” is a slogan many universities use in their efforts to encourage students to pursue research. Being “intellectually curious” seems to be a most desirable trait in all undergraduates. Discovery is indeed fascinating—waking up every morning to analyze court records, newspapers, published letters, and other documents, with the hope of finding answers to questions from the previous day. Another delightful experience is sharing one’s findings with the academic community at a research fair, enthusiastically explaining the facts and their relevance, and receiving constructive feedback from colleagues and faculty members. This may be the common experience for an undergraduate student at a prestigious American college, but not all researchers have the same luck—some are met with animosity, defamation, and derision. Such was the case of F.M. Alexander (1869-1955), an Australian actor credited with developing a postural reeducation method known as the Alexander Technique—which is widely taught in performing arts institutions around the world. In this essay, I will provide a brief history of the institutionalization of the Alexander Technique to show why music scholars should be critical of scientific discourse in their efforts to build effective advocacy models for music education. I will examine the following: the slow acceptance of the Alexander Technique in academia (particularly in performing arts institutions); the method’s psychosomatic approach to posture; the opposition Mr. Alexander faced from several medical authorities; and the use of scientific discourse to generate credibility or skepticism among scholars and the general public. Lastly, I will draw connections between these events and music education.

A Solution to Poor Posture

Depending on the source, the Alexander Technique is defined as an “educational method,” “an approach to changing habits of postural support,” or “a way to feel better.”¹ Some sources, however, do not bother finding a noun for the method and instead proceed to list what the technique teaches.² As of January 20, 2022, the website for the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (STAT) defined the Alexander Technique as a “method of re-education” and “a skill for self-development teaching you to change long-standing habits that cause unnecessary tension in everything you do.”³ Established in 1958 by a group of teachers trained by F.M. Alexander himself, STAT is the largest professional association of Alexander Technique teachers globally.⁴

Out of all the potential benefits of the method, the most important one for this analysis is that it can “relieve the pain and stress caused by postural habits, like slouching or rounded shoulders.”⁵ This claim introduces us to the concept of “good posture,” whose ambiguity was widely discussed in 1956 in volume 49 of the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, a scientific journal.⁶ This study is relevant for two reasons: it provides an overview for the evolution of the concept of “posture” during the first half of the twentieth century, and it contains

1 “What is the Alexander Technique,” AmSAT, accessed January 20, 2022, https://www.amsatonline.org/aws/AMSAT/pt/sp/what_is; “What is AT,” Alexander Technique Science, accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.alexandertechniquescience.com/general-at/what-is-alexander-technique/>; “Home,” Alexander Technique, accessed January 20, 2022, <https://alexandertechnique.com/>.

2 “Alexander Technique,” accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/alexander-technique/>.

3 “Home,” STAT, <https://alexandertechnique.co.uk/alexander-technique>.

4 “Welcome,” STAT, <https://alexandertechnique.co.uk/>.

5 Ibid.

6 Basil Kiernander and Wilfred Barlow, “Discussion on Postural Reeducation – a Critical Examination of Methods,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 49, no. 9 (March 1956): 667.

an experiment in which the Alexander Technique was tested.

In the first of two articles, Dr. Kiernander, a leading authority in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation in the U.S. and the U.K., explains that approaches to define good posture have varied enormously over time. He references several authors (dating from 1909 to 1955) to show what some descriptions of good and bad posture look like. Although he believes that it is “undesirable to attempt to achieve a single, standard, correct posture,” he also recognizes that postural errors and abnormalities are serious problems: their incidence is high, and they predispose to disability.⁷ Hence, to propose a solution, he introduces three studies—two of them on schoolchildren and one on airmen from the Royal Air Force—aimed at determining if, and to what extent, postural training and physical exercise helps to improve posture. He concluded that a successful treatment for postural defects consists of making the individual concerned aware of his errors, teaching him how to voluntarily correct them through postural training, and “stimulating him to have the right psychological outlook on life.”⁸

Dr. Kiernander’s article is also useful in describing the state of physical medicine in the U.K. and the U.S. in the mid-1950’s and previous decades. One of the three studies mentioned is from the 1932 White House Report. Both countries were trying to determine if postural training programs in schools could decrease the incidence of postural defects in students. While the remedial programs did initially improve the posture of students, another finding from the studies suggested that regression occurred after students left school. In other words, students were unable to maintain healthy postural habits outside of the school-sanctioned training programs. The main concern for the medical community, therefore, was to assess the effectiveness of the methods of postural reeducation.

The second article, written by Dr. Wilfred Barlow, explains the failures of traditional methods and presents a new alternative. Dr. Barlow describes these failures:

The cause of the problem of postural control is the subject’s postural awareness, and, at a different level, the postural model or body schema which the subject uses as a standard against which to detect his postural errors. In the past, too much reliance has been placed on verbal or pictorial instruction to re-educate the postural model, whilst the actual postural ability and its associated awareness has been tackled by exercises.⁹

Simply put, verbal instruction and the assignment of physical exercises do not provide individuals with a sensory experience that allows them to differentiate between good and bad posture. Hence, introducing a more advantageous approach, Dr. Barlow reports:

Words and ideas will only become effective when they are accompanied by demonstration of the sensory experiences to which they refer. Such experience will not be given by an ‘exercise,’ as at present understood, but will only be learned after a period of conditioning in which the new model (verbal or otherwise) is associated with the appropriate degree of muscle tension, not only at rest but in preparation for movement, during movement, and after movement.¹⁰

To support this claim that conditioning is more effective than verbal instruction, he presents a study that compares the rate of improvement in students that were subjected to two different types of postural training. The first group in the experiment consisted of students whose postural training relied on verbal instruction. The control group, on the other hand, was made up of students from the Royal College of Music (RCM)—a major international conservatory—who were trained by a conditioning procedure. Because the rate of improvement was higher for

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, 670.

9 Ibid, 672.

10 Ibid.

students in the control group, he concluded: “This experiment makes it clear that postural re-education will be ineffective unless a new ‘body schema’ is taught, by associating the postural model with an improved postural awareness.”¹¹ Thus, Dr. Barlow introduced a promising solution to the grave issue of postural deformities.

Surprisingly, the “conditioning procedure” that Dr. Barlow mentions in this article is, in fact, the Alexander Technique in disguise. Dr. Barlow and his wife Marjory were both teachers of the Alexander Technique and were invited to conduct research in the voice department at the Royal College of Music in London.¹² Their findings, presented in this article, resulted in the introduction of the technique as an extracurricular activity at the RCM, and years later, it became a mandatory introductory course for all first-year students.¹³ Notably, Alexander studies in music colleges started at the RCM, and today, about two hundred colleges and universities in nineteen countries employ STAT-affiliated teachers.¹⁴

Scientific Skepticism

F.M. Alexander’s road to credibility was paved with suspicion, contempt, and persecution. Dr. Wilfred Barlow—who claims he knew Mr. Alexander intimately for more than a decade, married into his family, and edited the *Alexander Journal* for many years—wrote that in 1943, Mr. Alexander “was becoming embittered by the refusal of the medical and educational establishment to recognize his ideas.”¹⁵ A few years later, the animosity toward him materialized in what Barlow describes as an “outrageous attack on his work in South Africa, which culminated in a libel action.”¹⁶

On March 20, 1948, the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ) published details of the libel action taken by F.M. Alexander:

In the Rand Division of the Supreme Court of the Union of South Africa, on Feb. 16, Mr. Justice Clayden began the hearing of an action for libel brought by Mr. Frederick Matthias Alexander, of London, against three medical men: Dr. Ernst Jokl, Physical Education Research Officer to the Union Education Department; Dr. E. H. Cluver, Director of the South African Institute for Medical Research at Johannesburg; and Dr. B. Maule Clark, of Houghton, Johannesburg, as editors of *Manpower*, a biannual scientific journal published in Pretoria by the Government Printer and circulating throughout the Union.¹⁷

Judging from the titles of the defendants and their involvement in editorial work for a scientific journal, it seems as if Mr. Alexander, whose background was in theater, was proceeding against the final authorities in the field of medicine. The official stature of the defendants is further evidenced in that *Manpower* was published by the Government Printer, a public entity in charge of disseminating government information to the public.¹⁸ Hence, the contents of the journal denoted official government information, which means that any false statements would mislead the public.

The following excerpt is a summary of Mr. Alexander’s allegations:

11 Ibid, 673.

12 Judith Kleinman and Peter Buckoke, *The Alexander Technique for Musicians* (London: Methuen Drama, 2013), 280, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=657843&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

13 Ibid, 281.

14 “Higher Education,” The Ready List, <https://thereadyl.com/higher-education>.

15 Wilfred Barlow, *The Alexander Technique* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 6.

16 Ibid.

17 “Libel Action by Mr. Matthias Alexander,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 4550 (March 1948): 575.

18 “Welcome to GPW,” Government Printing Works, last modified March 31, 2022, <http://www.gpwonline.co.za/GPWSplash.htm>.

The defendants published an editorial article and an introductory note, entitled ‘Facts and Phantasies,’ to a further article implying that he made false claims as to the scientific value of his technique, and that from the scientific point of view the technique was contemptible and nonsensical; that he was untruthful and dishonest, a charlatan and a quack; that he had given the public dangerous and criminally irresponsible advice; that for personal gain and to attract people he had held out false promises of the benefits to be derived from following his teachings; and that he was mentally deranged and unbalanced.¹⁹

According to these statements, the defendants appear to use “the scientific point of view” not only to nullify the claims of Mr. Alexander, but also to issue moral judgments, indictments, and medical diagnoses. The defendants, who admitted publication, imply in their statements that the authority of scientific opinion encompasses the moral, the legal, and that which has not been tested. Accusing someone of fraud and criminality, dishonesty and charlatanism—while denominating them as “mentally deranged” without providing proof—goes beyond the task of objectively determining the factual correctness or erroneousness of Mr. Alexander’s claims. Hence, the meaning of science and the scientific, along with the scope and authority of these categories, becomes unclear. Or rather, it becomes clear that scientific parameters, through language, can be expanded in order to accommodate private interests.

Adopting historian Joan Scott’s approach to the study of secularism in her book *Sex and Secularism*, I will not presume beforehand that I know what science is.²⁰ Instead, I will interrogate its meaning and treat it not as a “fixed category of analysis, but as a discursive operation of power whose generative effects need to be examined critically in their historical contexts.”²¹ I am interested in why, where, and how science is invoked and what the consequences are after its apparition. Especially because medical professionals in this case debate the meaning of science, this approach is helpful to show how “the scientific”—a category so often taken to be a synonym of absolute truth, facticity, and reality—can be stained with contradictions, ambiguities, and even outright falsehood. However, my goal is not to attempt to discredit the category of science (the field of study, its academics, the medical community, or the institutions that house them), but to explain why being critical of scientific discourse is important for scholars of music. Since the Alexander Technique is a method widely used in training musicians and its history is embedded in scientific and medical debates, it serves as a relevant case study to historically demonstrate the possible implications of scientific discourse on the study and performance of music in academic institutions.

Returning to the libel action, the attorney representing the plaintiff said: “Mr. Alexander had never pretended to be an expert physiologist, but was an educationist who had made certain observations in investigating the use and misuse of the body.”²² The defendants had accused Mr. Alexander of “dangerous quackery,” but, by clarifying that Mr. Alexander never claimed to be something he was not, the attorney could show that he was never dishonest.²³ Then, the attorney proceeded to explain one of Mr. Alexander’s main claims: that consciousness was necessary to correct postural habits.²⁴ Interestingly enough, eight years later, this idea was translated into scientific terms by Dr. Wilfred Barlow. In the aforementioned article, he stated “that posture is a psychosomatic affair, in which habit plays a part, and that ‘good posture’ does not imply some ideal standard, but rather a person’s willingness

19 Ibid.

20 Joan Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc7792k.11>.

21 Ibid.

22 “Libel Action by Mr. Matthias Alexander,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 4550 (March 1948): 575.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

and ability to maintain the best relationship possible for him.”²⁵ Moreover, instead of describing Mr. Alexander’s principles as a technique, Dr. Barlow referred to them as a “conditioning procedure” that helps individuals to overcome “psychological obstacles.”²⁶

The different reactions to the findings of Dr. Barlow and Mr. Alexander from medical and educational authorities show that language, credentials, and platform are crucial in determining the reception of research. Dr. Barlow, an Oxford-educated man, was able to publish his article in a scientific journal and facilitated the introduction of the Alexander Technique at the RCM. Yet, Mr. Alexander himself, whose educational background consisted of some acting lessons, endured scientific evaluations of his own writings that resulted in a legal battle in South Africa in 1948.²⁷ Prior to this correspondence published by the BMJ revealed that in 1932 Dr. A.P. Cawadias argued against Mr. Alexander, claiming he made no new discoveries but only described, “in popular form,” medical principles that had existed for centuries.²⁸ “He does not, however, not being a physician, realize that these principles cannot be applied except on the basis of a precise medical diagnosis,” he added.²⁹ These remarks indicate that lack of medical training and jargon disqualified Mr. Alexander from applying the principles he described, which are truthful but “medical” principles nevertheless. Hence, Dr. Cawadias’ denunciation seemed to be a matter of ownership and methodology rather than one of truthfulness. His issue, put simply, was that Mr. Alexander skipped the normative step of “precise medical diagnosis.”

Then, turning to Mr. Alexander’s concept of the “use of the self,” Dr. Cawadias commented that knowledge of the self “cannot be obtained through metaphysical considerations but through a precise scientific medical exploration.”³⁰ Even as he acknowledged that Mr. Alexander used medical principles, Dr. Cawadias insisted on differentiating Mr. Alexander’s methods from scientific medicine. The binary of “metaphysics vs. science” was his recourse. But going beyond the binary, Dr. Cawadias posited that the precision of scientific methodologies makes them the exclusive way to attain knowledge of the self. Imprecise methods like Mr. Alexander’s, therefore, were excluded from the knowledge production industry. The superiority of science over metaphysics is inherent in Cawadias’ employment of the binary. Furthermore, he added that medicine has been subjected for centuries to “violent criticism on the part of non-medical men” but has survived and developed because “it stands on the firm ground of science.”³¹ This statement reveals that Dr. Cawadias perceived Mr. Alexander’s practices as an attack on science—hence, the need to vocalize the immortal prestige of the discipline. The recurrent invocation of science’s superior credentials bear witness to the hierarchical power dynamic present in negotiations of the value of scientific and metaphysical reasoning.

Two days after this correspondence was published, W.W. Shrubshall, Doctor of Public Health, wrote a letter to the BMJ in support of his colleague.³² He praised Cawadias’s opinion, declaring that “it is time for the medical profession to take a firm attitude against all the extra-medical systems that are being proposed.”³³ These doctors asserted that there is no value in health practices outside of the standard medical system, and therefore, those practices should be opposed by medical practitioners. The question, then, is whether or not these “extra-medical” health practices, their procedures and claims, have been thoroughly researched. Otherwise, what is the basis to claim that they should be opposed or eliminated?

Furthermore, after equating Mr. Alexander’s methods to “quack medicines,” Dr. Shrubshall wrote, “it is

25 Basil Kiernander and Wilfred Barlow, “Discussion on Postural Reeducation – a Critical Examination of Methods,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 49, no. 9 (March 1956): 674.

26 Ibid.

27 “Alexander, Frederick Matthias (1869-1955),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed April 11, 2022, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/alexander-frederick-matthias-4993>.

28 A.P. Cawadias, “The Use of the Self,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 3726, (June 1932): 1056.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 W.W. Shrubshall, “The Use of the Self,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 3728, (June 1932): 1150.

33 Ibid.

not often that I have seen actual physical harm as the result of taking such ‘remedies,’ but the loss of valuable time.”³⁴ Yet, he claims it is “in the best interest of the health of the community” that medical practitioners act against these practices.³⁵ If there is virtually no harm in these practices, is it an appropriate measure to abrogate them on the basis that the time of citizens is being wasted? Should not citizens decide how they spend their time and what is valuable to them? Or should medical authorities make that decision for them by regulating the existence of all “extra-medical” practices?

This apparent preoccupation with the health of the public is likewise summoned by Dr. E.H. Cluver, one of the defendants in the 1948 libel action. Upon hearing that the introduction of the Alexander Technique into the school system of South Africa had been proposed, his reaction was to oppose the proposal as he considered it a “very serious threat to the health of school-children.”³⁶ Bearing in mind that Dr. Cluver’s credentials included a degree from Oxford and an extensive background in physiology, one would expect his judgment to be based on strong evidence, which in turn would result in great disappointment as one would come to find out that there was none. In cross-examination, Dr. Cluver revealed that he “knew of no harm caused by the technique.”³⁷ Yet, he urged Dr. Jokl (also a defendant) to expose the technique’s imaginary hazards in the journal *Manpower*. Although reluctant, Dr. Jokl gave way under pressure and wrote a defamatory article.³⁸ Evidence, it seems, played no role in the decision-making or knowledge production processes of the defendants. Rather, it was prejudice and speculation that motivated their actions—a rather paradoxical occurrence, for this time it was the self-proclaimed rationalists that seemed to be playing metaphysical games. If on the “firm ground of science” three doctors can decide to libel a man based only on “potential harm,” perhaps it is quicksand they are standing on.

The Resolution

Judging the case, Mr. Justice Clayden said: “There was no evidence to justify the allegations of dishonesty in the wider sense which were imputed by the article in *Manpower*.”³⁹ He added, “There were so many facts in the article which were not true, either in the sense that there had been a misdescription of the technique or because only part of the facts had been set out, that the foundation for the defense of fair comment had not been laid.”⁴⁰ The lack of evidence, the number of false claims, and the artful use of information out of context demonstrate that these medical men were not as committed to scientific inquiry as they were to defaming Mr. Alexander. Hence, Mr. Justice Clayden concluded that “the plaintiff was entitled to an award of damages” and the defendants “must also pay the costs of the action, including the cost of the application to take evidence on commission and the cost of that evidence.”⁴¹

However, not all doctors and scientists opposed the work of Mr. Alexander. In fact, it was thanks to many that Mr. Alexander won the court case in South Africa. Judging the appeal, the defendants entered after the resolution of the case, and the Chief Justice said that “in view of the considerable body of evidence from medical practitioners and others who deposed to benefits derived by patients from his treatment, it was not possible to find that he [Mr. Alexander] knew that his technique was worthless and that he only used it to impose upon and exploit the rich.”⁴² At least six doctors, among them Dr. Wilfred Barlow, handed in evidence or were cross-examined in support of Mr. Alexander.⁴³ These doctors, unlike those who denounced Mr. Alexander, not only read his books

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 “Libel Action by Mr. Matthias Alexander,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 4550 (March 1948): 577.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 “Libel Action by Mr. Matthias Alexander,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 4557 (May 1948): 910.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid, 1359.

43 Ibid, 575-576.

but also experienced his lessons privately.⁴⁴ Hence, even if they knew that Mr. Alexander used metaphysical descriptions and employed physiological concepts inaccurately (by medical standards), they could testify of the benefits they experienced.

Experience: An Inconvenient Phenomenon

Since experience seems to be at the center of the disconnect between opponents and proponents of the Alexander Technique, analysis of the phenomenon is necessary. In her book about individual religious experience in American spiritual cultures and practices, sociologist and ethnographer Courtney Bender writes: “While a posteriori accounts of such [religious] experiences can be subject to inquiry and evaluation, given that they are mediated by language and the need for communication, the experience ‘itself’ remains outside of this realm of investigation and thus impervious to falsification.”⁴⁵ From this perspective, the account of an experience is a mere description that attempts to illustrate the experience for the listener. But even if language enables evaluation, since it does not recreate the experience, investigation of the phenomenon remains limited. This means that if any doctor or scientist wanted to accurately test what Mr. Alexander was teaching, their only option was to receive hands-on lessons from him. However, Mr. Alexander’s opponents completely disregarded the value of experience in assessing the methods and practice of Mr. Alexander.

In addition, Bender notes that dominant social scientific understandings of practices like contemporary spirituality assume that it is an individual affair with no connection to the past—no history, no institutionalization, no credentials.⁴⁶ Correspondingly, when he juxtaposed the successful evolution of medicine over the centuries with the inevitable discontinuance of non-medical systems, Dr. Cawadias vehemently proclaimed historical institutionalization as a badge of authority and honor. To discredit extra-medical practices based on their marginal historical conditions, however, is misguided. Given that the medical establishment has actively engaged in their repression through practices such as libel, recognizing the role of the medical guild in marginalizing them—while also appropriating their discoveries—would be more ethical. To despise the peripheral status of a group one has marginalized is equivalent to despising the physical condition of a person one has maimed.

Further describing the general attitudes of researchers toward spirituality practices, Bender comments:

They [spiritual practitioners] come under scrutiny for being suspect, inauthentic, purchased, mediated through the market and other corrupted influences. Reinforced by individual-level surveys, uncritical reviews of ‘shopper’ and ‘seeker’ spirituality, and so on, it is easy to imagine that there is no culture that might catch a researcher.⁴⁷

Likewise, Alexander’s writings were described as “sales talk” and “false promises” in the South Africa legal battle. The idea that he was preying on the vulnerable for financial gain was central to the narrative of the defendants. Hence, as in Bender’s account, it is no surprise that some medical practitioners assumed that there was nothing valuable to research in his theories.

Dr. Wilfred Barlow, on the other hand, occupied a position “where commitments to scientific inquiry and to such a conception of truth point beyond what is currently known, and ‘beyond’ the tools we have to assess them.”⁴⁸ He understood the limits of physical medicine in the twentieth century, and despite being a medical practitioner, did not discard the possibility of learning something from Mr. Alexander’s practice. Remarkably, it

44 Ibid.

45 Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 8-9, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=328181&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

46 Ibid, 16.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid, 18.

was through his study of Alexander principles that he could find a better alternative to posture, as shown in the study he conducted at the RCM.

Conclusion

As the pandemic has put financial stress on colleges and universities, the value and legitimacy of music as an academic discipline have been questioned through the instrumental deposition and underfunding of music departments. Ethnomusicologist Lisa Urkevich reported that “to increase revenue, many institutions enlarged the enrollments of Fall music classes (usually taught remotely), some overextended the load of full-time faculty and did not renew adjuncts, or other institutions went so far as to diminish or completely terminate entire music units.”⁴⁹ When financial crises are cited as the reason to terminate or cut music programs, they often go uncontested. A dominant narrative is that resources are limited and administrative decisions necessary. But what if the real problem is not the availability of resources but rather the uneven distribution thereof? When higher learning institutions privilege some academic disciplines over others, it is concepts of value beyond just the state of the economy that are reflected. The hierarchization of epistemological forms results from the subjection of academic disciplines to policy makers’ standards of value. It is in this process that music does not fare well and becomes a sacrificial lamb. Hence, I believe it is imperative that robust theories about the value of music be formulated and proliferated.

As pointed out by scholar Kevin Shorner Johnson in previous attempts to defend the inclusion of music in academic curricula, scientific studies that draw connections between music education and improved cognitive abilities and academic performance have been used—and abused—as evidence.⁵⁰ This approach to advocacy is problematic, and the brief history of the Alexander Technique presented herein is useful to consider how to better support the inclusion of music in academia. As I have shown, the field of science does not have all the answers, and therefore should not have a monopoly on knowledge. If the legitimacy of music education depends on its ability—as determined by neuroscience and psychology—to enhance student performance in other academic disciplines, the study of music will be at the mercy of the latest scientific study that either supports or denies its importance. It is useful if these studies can help advocacy efforts, but they should not be central to the cause, lest we declare subservience to science, a less than ideal master.

Is not music more than a mere means to an end? Must we measure it in terms of productivity, effectiveness, and profitability? What about its aesthetic value, its historical role as a mediator of identity and politics, its ability to elicit emotion and movement in human beings, or the cultural and ritualistic nature of its practice? Perhaps these concepts do not translate well into more transactional language like “dollar amounts,” “return on investment,” and “scientific evidence,” yet they are more suitable options to build a theory of value in favor of music education.

In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, French economist and social theorist Jacques Attali argues that music is an activity that is “essential for knowledge and social relations.”⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, the historical record seems to confirm this idea. Even in the midst of tragedy, neither music-making nor music consumption disappear. In times of war, soldiers still sing together. In times of austerity and rising murder rates, disenfranchised Latin American communities do not stop dancing to popular music. Even after a genocide, the Armenian diaspora has preserved its music traditions for over a century. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception; musicians and non-musicians alike have kept music a consistent part of their lives.

But can we fully account for music’s historical presence during tragic times? Is that something neuroscience could achieve? Or would a social scientist be better equipped to engage with this question? Certainly, there are different ways of producing knowledge, but there are limits to knowledge as well. Even if through different

49 Lisa A. Urkevich, “Picking Up the Pieces after the Coronavirus Disruption and Black Lives Matter,” *College Music Symposium* 60, no. 2 (Fall, 2020): 1.

50 Kevin Shorner-Johnson, “Building Evidence for Music Education Advocacy,” *Music Educators Journal* 99, no. 4 (June, 2013): 54.

51 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 9.

methodologies and epistemologies knowledge is expanded, some things will remain beyond the scope of scholars. Those things, usually experiential matters like the performance and enjoyment of music, must nevertheless be acknowledged as realities. And even when their meaning cannot satisfy the standards of credibility of an institution, their value should be defended. If we, as music scholars, could communicate these ideas massively, perhaps we would have a better chance at reaching the right people and securing funding for music education. Perhaps then, music will transform from being an improperly socialized academic discipline to being a legitimate field of study.

Because the Alexander Technique was a marginal practice for several decades before its institutionalization, the history of its incursion into the academy is relevant for music scholars to better understand the power of scientific discourse in generating credibility or skepticism. This case study demonstrates that scientific evidence can sometimes decide whether a practice is institutionalized or marginalized, accepted or rejected, investigated or ignored. Simultaneously, it sheds light on the ambiguity of science, which is useful in challenging the commonplace preliminary assumption that all things deemed scientific are certain. Lastly, it serves as a reminder that not everything in the margins deserves to be there.

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