

1. *Why this book?*

The idea behind this book started to take shape in the mid 1980s when pop video, cable TV and academics specialising in popular music were novelties. That odd conjuncture was, I suppose, one reason for being asked on several occasions to talk about music videos, a topic on which I have never been an expert. The invitations came mainly from people in media studies, linguistics, political science and the like, rarely from fellow music educators and researchers. Those colleagues from other disciplines seemed to find pop videos problematic because, if I understood them right, standard narrative analysis was unable to make much sense of visual sequences that clearly spoke volumes to their MTV-viewing students. Some of those teachers deduced – and I agree with them – that much pop video narrative makes a *different type of sense* partly because it functions as *visualised music* rather than as visual narrative with musical accompaniment. Consequently, those colleagues, all qualified to talk about socio-economic aspects of music and about Hollywood film narrative, seemed to reason that their epistemological problems with pop videos stemmed from a lack of musicological expertise.

Painfully aware of musicology's overwhelming disinterest or incompetence at that time in helping fellow educators outside our discipline solve an important problem, I have to admit that, faced with the task of semiotically deconstructing musical narrative for media teachers and their students in the 1980s, I felt at the best of times like the one-eyed man (and a very mediocre eye at that) in the land of the blind. Since then I have, thanks to a variety of factors, managed to acquire impaired vision in the other eye, too. This slight improvement means I can now see enough, however blurred, to write this book.

This book is intended for people like the teachers just mentioned. It is for people without formal qualifications in music or musicology who want to know how *the sounds* of music work on a daily basis in the contemporary urban West. It is for those who want to understand: (1) how music's sounds can carry which types of meaning, if any; (2) how someone with no formal music(ologic)al training can talk or write intelli-

gently about those sounds and their meanings. To cover that vast territory in a short book, simplifications and generalisations will be unavoidable. At the same time, in order to make sense of that territory, it will be necessary, in the first part of this book, to summarise basic tenets of music's specificity as a sign system and to defuse such epistemic bombs as ABSOLUTE MUSIC and MUSIC IS A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE.

This book will *not* tell you how to make music, nor will it explain musical production terms like modulation depth or diminished sevenths; nor does it provide potted accounts of composers, artists, genres or of the music industry, nor will it be of any use to students cramming for any kind of music history exam. It certainly won't help those who need to bluff their way through conversations about jazz, folk, rap, rock, film music, classical music or 'world' music. Moreover, it will definitely not claim, implicitly or explicitly, the superiority of one type of musical behaviour over another: there is plenty of literature of all the types just mentioned. *This* book's job is to explain, without using musical notation and in terms accessible to the average university student outside music(ology) departments, the phenomenon of music as a meaningful system of sonic representation.

The appearance of this book is further motivated by factors linked to the emergence, since the early 1980s, of popular music studies as a serious field of inquiry in higher education.¹ The majority of scholars in this field have tended to come from the social sciences (communication studies, cultural studies, sociology, etc.) rather from departments of music or musicology. Like the teachers epistemologically flummoxed by pop videos in the 1980s, these colleagues have understandably tended to steer clear of the *music* in *popular music*, leaving a methodological gap which musicologists have only recently started trying to fill. Since the mid eighties, when I conducted reception tests on title tune connotations and, more notably, since the early 1990s, when I started teaching popular music analysis to students with no formal musical training, I have seen repeated proof of great musical competence

1. Both IASPM (International Association for the Study of Popular Music) and the Cambridge University Press journal *Popular Music* were founded in 1981.

among those who never set foot inside musical academe. It is a largely uncodified vernacular competence that has with few exceptions been at best underestimated, more often trivialised or ignored, by conventional musicology. This competence is explained in Chapter 3 and used as one starting point for the analysis section.

The reasons, just mentioned, for writing this book assume of course that music is important. Now, judging from music's relatively humble status in the pecking order of competences housed in most institutions of education and research, you would be excused for concluding that maths, natural sciences and language must all be much more important than music whose conceptualisation as either art or entertainment implies that it is little more than icing on the cake of 'real knowledge'. Everyday extramural reality, however, tells quite a different story. Here we'll deal with music's relative importance in solely quantifiable terms. Its qualitative aspects are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

Music: how much?

Time budget

A simple way of illustrating one aspect of music's extramural importance is to estimate the amount of time the average citizen of industrialised nations is exposed to music on a daily basis.²

[1] If the TV monitor in the average household is switched on for two hours a day, about seventy minutes of music will pass through its speakers into its viewers' ears and brains in the form of jingles, logos, advertising music, theme tunes and underscore, occasionally also as performances and music videos.³

[2] Music heard in shops, boutiques, shopping malls, supermarkets, hotels, bars and lifts (elevators), or at religious and sporting events, or at the dentist's, or in public spaces like airports and railway stations, or at the cinema or in the theatre accompanies probably at least thirty min-

2. The figures cited for points 1 and 6 are based on information from a wide variety of sources (e.g. Ala *et al.* 1984/1985), including notes taken from seminar or conference presentations (see notes 3 and 4). Approximations given in the other five points are based on reasoned extrapolation or on 'intelligent guesswork'.

utes a day in the life of the average citizen of industrialised nations.

[3] Some people wake up to a clock radio, some listen to weather and traffic reports and some just keep a the radio on in the background for large parts of the day. Another thirty minutes per day seems a reasonable estimate here, given that most radio time consists of music between bouts of news and weather.⁴

[4] Some people are exposed to music all day in their place of work, others aren't. Another average of thirty minutes per day would hardly be an excessive estimate for this source of music.

[5] Most people listen to some music of their own choice at home, in the car or on a personal stereo system. We may also hear music performed at festivals, on the street, in clubs, bars, concert halls, opera houses and so on. Many of us sing, whistle or hum in the shower or in the kitchen and parents still sing lullabies and nursery rhymes to their young children. Some of us go to karaoke bars and most of us join in *Happy Birthday* and other festive songs. Some of us even play an instrument or sing in a choir: if so, we have to practise. These mainly voluntary acts of music will likely account for another average of thirty minutes per person per day.

[6] If young people in the USA spend an average of fifty minutes every day playing computer games (they *do!*), they will also hear the best part of fifty minutes of music during that time. If young people constitute one fifth of the population, the average citizen will hear another ten minutes of music per day while gaming.

3. Lennart Weibull, in a paper on cable television, delivered at a 1989 Göteborg University seminar on 'Music and the Media', calculated music to be present during 70% of TV broadcast time. This figure included MTV and other cable channels as well as Sweden's (then) three terrestrial channels. Gemma Maull's third-year undergraduate dissertation (1999) at the Institute of Popular Music (University of Liverpool) included an extensive inventory of music's presence on the UK's all four terrestrial channels one spring evening in 1999. She calculated music to be audible 35% of the time. However, since Maull's calculations included two complete football (soccer) matches, the compromise approximation of 58% (70 of 120 minutes in front of the TV) may be quite reasonable.
4. According to Weibull (see note 3), music accounted for 90% of radio programming in Sweden in the late 1980s. As early as 1935, 70% of even BBC radio programming consisted of music.

[7] If you have to phone a major corporation or public institution, you will, after 'your call is important to us', often be subjected to hold music before you are finally connected to a human being. On an average day you will also hear a fair number of mobile phone ring tones, as well as several musical attention-grabbers over P.A. systems in airports or train stations. You may even be within earshot of a belfry or carillon. It is not be unreasonable to estimate an average of another five minutes per day for hold music, ring tones and tonal signals, bell chimes, etc.

Table 1: Average daily dose of music

<i>Source of music</i>	<i>Estimated minutes/day</i>
TV, DVD, video, etc.	70
Shops, bars, airports, etc.	35
Radio	30
Place of work	30
Personal choice	30
Gaming, phones, signals, etc.	15 (10+5)
Total	210 mins. = 3½ hrs.

If these estimated durations have any validity, average citizens of the industrialised world (including babies, pensioners and the deaf as well as pop fans and music students) hear music for almost one quarter of their waking life. Even if you think these figures are exaggerated, it is unlikely that any other sign system – the spoken or written word, pictures, dancing, etc. – can on its own rival music's share of our average daily dose of symbolic perception.

Money budget

Music's share of our time budget is echoed by its economic importance. Although phonogram sales have been falling in recent years, sales of satellite/cable TV services and of computer games, both featuring more than their fair share of music, have proliferated. The turnover of music publishing rights has also increased with, for example, mobile phone ring tone download rights alone topping \$1 billion (US) in 2002.⁵ It is also worth noting that music is an important source of revenue for the national economy of countries like the UK, the USA and Sweden.

It is also quite instructive to try and calculate how much money the average citizen of the industrialised West spends on music.⁶

Let's say you buy a new sound system for your home every ten years and let's assume that the music you hear via the TV and DVD player you buy every ten years is worth one quarter of the purchase price value. Perhaps you have an MP3- or MiniDisc player, maybe an in-car stereo, probably also a sound card and audio software for your computer. You may also be among the one in twenty who buys musical instruments, sheet music, etc. and you might be paying for private lessons. You'll almost certainly have to buy cables, plugs and batteries for various items of your music equipment and you'll definitely be paying for the electricity you use to run it. Estimating all these costs at \$3,600 over ten years implies an expenditure of one dollar a day.⁷

If you buy ten recorded CDs each year or if you pay regularly to download music files, or if you buy stacks of blank CDs and DVDs,⁸ you'll probably be spending about \$150 annually (\$0.40/day). In addition to that, the share of the money that goes to cover music production and copyright costs when you buy or rent a DVD or videocassette, plus whatever music budget your public authorities may finance via taxation and levies,⁸ may well account for another \$150 annually. All in all that makes another \$300 per average year or \$0.80 on a daily basis.

5. The music industry's turn-of-millennium crisis seems to be largely its own fault. Stuck in the rut of counting its profits on the basis of phonogram sales and air time rights, the established music business prefers to accuse internet file sharers of piracy and to criminalise those potential customers. The music industry has been in general very slow to find constructive ways of mediating music over the internet. It is also disturbing to note that around 2000: [1] CD sales did not start declining until *after* the Napster share site had been shut; [2] the industry had recently cut inventory and artist investment by 25%, resulting in fewer releases for buyers to choose from; [3] CD prices increased while average disposable income for all but the top 5% decreased markedly in Europe and North America.
6. The estimates given in the next few paragraphs are no more than 'intelligent guesswork'. Their inclusion is mainly intended to encourage readers to realistically calculate what they spend on music themselves.
7. All prices are approximate and in Canadian dollars, including taxes, as of December, 2006. A low-price flat-screen 27" TV monitor alone costs \$1,000, an average computer setup about the same. A standard iPod with accessories, including docking station, amp and average speakers will set you back another grand.

Much of our musical expenditure is indirect. The radio and TV license fees paid in some nations have to cover the costs of broadcasting copyrighted music as a public service. Commercial broadcasters must also pay for the same rights but receive money first from the pedlars of consumerist propaganda who in their turn pass down their advertising costs to those of us who buy the goods or services in question. Market-eers use money they get from us to pay radio and TV stations to broadcast music that will make us want stay tuned to whatever channel diffuses their propaganda. This means that whenever we buy something advertised on broadcast media we aren't just paying for propaganda production: we're also paying for the very thing that exposes us to their propaganda, i.e. music on our favourite format radio station. It is very difficult to quantify, on average, what proportion of a commodity's retail price is devoted to its advertisement, let alone determine what part of the advertising budget generally goes to its musical production but there is little doubt that the amounts of money passing hands here are substantial.⁹

Every time we visit a café, restaurant, shopping mall, hospital, railway station, etc. where piped music is publicly diffused, the costs of licensing that music are once again passed down to the customer or user. Every time we visit a bar or club featuring live music or a karaoke machine we will either have to pay an entrance fee or much more than standard retail price for drinks.¹⁰ Even mobile phone ring tone rights and telephone hold music costs are ultimately paid for by us, the cus-

8. A blank media levy exists in several countries. One of its purposes is to offset the loss of music rights revenue attributed to private copying. A small but significant part of revenue from the direct and indirect taxes we pay to government is used to finance non-profit-making ventures like symphony orchestras, ballet companies, jazz festivals, not to mention music education and research (including my salary!).
9. Advertising budgets constituting 15-20% of production costs do not seem uncommon, judging from a quick glance through fifty-odd web pages in December 2006. Typical prime-time TV advertising costs in the USA are calculated at \$40,000 for 30 seconds or 10-15 cents per viewer but can skyrocket to \$2.4 million (| ocw.mit.edu/NR/rdonlyres/Sloan-School-of-Management/15-810Spring-2005/455AE876-A2FB-42C0-A6B7-92CC1CA48591/0/discussion_qus.pdf | and | www.apache.co.za/i/news/axcess/part1/nfl-super-bowl-ads-attract-big-audience.asp?article-tricks=6272 |, both 2006-12-28). For advertising music production costs, see Fellows (1998).

tomers. Perhaps you are a member of the Céline Dion or Karlheinz Stockhausen fan club, in which case you might buy a T-shirt or other merchandising memorabilia.¹¹ Add to these indirect payments for music the possibility of two visits each year to musical performances in a concert hall, theatre, opera house, entertainment complex or sports arena, plus your travel expenses for getting to and from the venue, and we are looking at another estimated \$250 each year or \$0.70 a day.

In short, we probably spend on average the best part of \$900 each year on music, the equivalent of about \$2.50 each day. In December 2006, \$2.50 is roughly what you would pay in Montréal for a standard loaf of bread or for a litre of milk.

Conclusion

If music is as important as the descriptions just presented suggest, why does it so often seem to end up near the bottom of the academic heap? The short answer is that education and research (including this book) are largely language-based while music is a *non-verbal* system of representation. We may like to talk enthusiastically about our musical experiences and tastes but we are often at a loss when it comes to explaining why and how which sounds have what effect.

'Why and how does who communicate what to whom and with what effect' is of course the million-dollar question of semiotics and part two of this book will suggest ways of tackling that question in relation to music. Still, before launching into the treacherous waters of music semiotics it is essential to establish a workable definition of the word *music* according to its use in contemporary Western culture: we need at least to know what sort of boat we're in before navigating those troubled seas, because some of our difficulties about explaining music come from culturally specific assumptions about its very nature.

10. If you visit a bar featuring live music or karaoke three times a year, if you drink three beers at \$7 on each occasion, if the usual price for one beer is \$1, and if the music share of the mark-up is \$4, that expense alone will count for \$36 a year (1¢/day).
11. Though Stockhausen may have no official fan club, there are hundreds of web pages (often 'myspace' sites) where he is mentioned with fan-like reverence. There are many Céline fan sites, including the official |celinedion.com|.