

INTRODUCTION

Queer Musicking

CRAIG JENNEX with CHARITY MARSH

We write this introduction in the disorienting reality of the global Covid-19 pandemic that has upended lives and resulted in extraordinary levels of illness, fear, and death. Vulnerable communities have been hit particularly hard, not only because of the virus, but also because of unequal access to financial resources, private property, food, insurance, job security, family support, and medical care. Simultaneously, we are also witnessing a renewed and extraordinary response to systemic oppression and ongoing police brutality through the Black Lives Matter movement, and a further call for justice as ongoing violence against trans people, particularly trans women of colour, continues. While so much remains unknown in this moment, the virus, the cries for change, and our collective response have laid bare the profound inequalities and disturbing problems that persist in life under late capitalism.

There is something particularly cruel about the reality in which we currently live. The very moment we need to feel connected to others and a sense of communal agency and care, we are forced to keep our distance — to stay away from each other. The nature of the coronavirus requires us to be physically apart from one another as we navigate the dangers it brings. The pandemic has decimated the live music industry and impacted our abilities to collectively engage with music as we have so often done in the face of turmoil and crisis. And yet, to fight against emotional and social isolation as we practice physical distancing, we have taken up practices and actions that allow us to feel a sense of connection: video calling loved ones, eating dinner together through our screens, dropping off baked goods on neighbours' steps, plastering messages of hope in windows facing the street, honking as we pass the homes of people celebrating birthdays or other milestones. And we have

turned to music in a myriad of forms: performers offering live concerts on Facebook and Instagram, choirs and orchestras compiling and sharing videos of collective music-making, friends sharing lists of formative records and links to meaningful songs, returning to the music of our teenage years to glean a sense of comfort and stability. As pandemic times have progressed, musicians are engaging in virtual technological platforms in new ways or in physically distanced formations to rehearse and perform together. Musicians have taken to podcasts as a way to stay connected, to talk about their Covid-19 music experience to fans, or to collaborate with other artists who have also been disconnected from their audiences.¹ Community radio stations are demonstrating creativity and leadership by developing kids' programming that supports both caregivers and children, as well as works to exist within the economic downturn.² We have turned to music in an effort to find a sense of joy, peace, comfort, and community. Our listening experiences in this moment remind us that music has the capacity to connect us with others in intimate and meaningful ways — even when we are physically apart.

In his 1998 book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Christopher Small argues that music “is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do” (2). By articulating music as a verb, Small calls our attention to the social process of music participation and the role that countless individuals play therein. Depending on the genre and the style of performance in question, there are various people playing various roles; in live performances, some of these are obvious — composers, performers, listeners, producers, engineers, among others — but some are less overt (9): the architects and construction workers who built the concert hall, the cleaners who prepare the space, the fellow patrons who shuffle into the venue and take their seats, the bartender who serves you drinks between sets, even the transit employees or taxi drivers who get you home after the show. To participate in music is to become part of a broader collective endeavour of people whose participation makes the musical experience possible. For Small, musicking is fundamentally about relationships:

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships

between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world. These are important matters, perhaps the most important in human life. (13)

Musicking is, primarily, a way of enacting idealized, embodied, and affective relations with others. Such a claim, once transformative for analyses of participation in music, seems relatively ordinary from a contemporary perspective. Indeed, Small's radical interventions might strike some readers as axiomatic in our current moment. The way that each of the articles in this special issue join Small's work in resisting (or, in some cases, flat out rejecting) assumptions that have long pervaded histories of music studies shows the way Small's thinking has become custom in queer music studies — a field indebted to Small's work even when the connection is not explicit. To put this another way: the kinds of ideas that Small articulates are now at the heart of queer music scholarship and queer musicking.

Musicking, Small's work makes clear, is a political process. It has the capacity to bind us with others, to validate our desires and beliefs, and to make us feel, if only for a moment, that we belong. To music is to explore and articulate our identity and our desires for the world. In his article "Exploring, Affirming, Celebrating — and Teaching," Small argues that "musicking has long functioned as a means of self-definition, who we are or think we are socially" (2016: 193). Thus, it makes sense for us to think about the potentially significant relationships between musicking and queer-ness, queer-ing, and queer identities. And while, as Small notes, we must not be too categorical about this, "if each performance articulates the values of the members of a social group, then every musical performance is inescapably to some extent a political act" (Small 2016: 194). And during this prolonged sense of despair undergirding our present in the pandemic, as musicians and performers attempt new ways to connect with their audiences, the possibilities of music being thought of and articulated as a political act are ever more present.

Small's thinking has always seemed prophetic to us; his experience and accomplishments across disciplines, genres, and methods enabled him to reassess and rearticulate some of the basic assumptions about music performance and participation. He showed us how to listen, to perform, and to interpret with slightly different emphasis and to experience music anew. He reminded us, time and time again, that what is important — what matters — when we music is that we become part of a collective comprised of countless others who made the experience possible. Ten years after his death — as we navigate a momentary reality of isolation, of being alone, of being without — we return to Small's

work to be revived by his thinking about musicking as a collectivizing force, a way of gleaning a sense of belonging and agency, and a way of imagining and working toward a more beautiful future. In these jarring moments of solitude and isolation, Small's work reminds us of the ways we are necessarily bound with others through the various acts of musicking. To listen, to perform, to participate in the music-making process in any way, is to be part of a collective — to be together with others in embodied, affective, and meaningful ways. The spectacular disruption brought on by Covid-19 has encouraged us to step back and reassess our priorities and desires. Music and musicking has been central to this process.

This special issue participates in a broader reassessment of Small's concept of musicking as a generative way for thinking about collectivity and social movements. In this special issue, we are focused on *queer* musicking. By bringing these concepts together, we hope to show the ways that Small's work remains important for thinking about marginalized communities' participation in music and the way that queerness has the capacity to enliven our thinking about performance and participation in music. In this issue, we use the term *queer* to indicate a longing for relations with others that challenge normative modes of relationality — especially around conventional ideals of gender and sexuality. As we discuss later in this introduction, authors understand and articulate queerness in ways that are specific to the cultural and historical moments they analyze, but each instance is in dialogue with the others through musicking individuals' desire for alternatives to heteronormative notions of ostensibly proper gender and sexual behaviours. Musicking can serve as a powerful form of resistance to counter dominant hegemonic logic and can elicit alternative ways of being in the world.

In a 2018 article entitled "Musicking in the Borders: Toward Decolonizing Methodologies," Burke Stanton reads Small's *Musicking* in conversation with Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* and argues for a collective musicking project that emphasizes decolonization and a "radical upheaval regarding epistemic and material power from within the academy and from without" (6). There is radical potential in what Small conceptualizes as "musicking," Stanton argues, and music scholars would do well to interrogate ways we are complicit in hegemonic discourses of music that reify normative power relations. Stanton presents Small's theory of musicking as having potentially decolonial ramifications, arguing that Small's foundational claim — that we should approach music not as a thing but as an activity that people do — "remains a radical and powerful entry into new ways of relating through our musicking" that emphasizes the "complex web of ongoing social relations constituted in an actual performance of musical material" (10). As Stanton

makes clear: Small identifies and critiques a limiting and normative mode of meaning-making and valuation that is mutually constituted with other systems of power. The theory of musicking reconstitutes our attention to a diverse variety of acts that serve as sites of struggle and negotiation over meaning and value. Musicking thus offers the potential to resist stultifying, normative, majoritarian logics, but requires “sustained, collective, and embodied action,” according to Stanton (11). We have started to see this kind of work being positioned as more urgent in certain disciplines and geographical locations where there is a collective and public call for accountability and change. Queer liberation, like decolonization, is a collective project — indeed, the two should be understood as intimately linked.

The contributors to this special issue elucidate the political nature of queer musicking in a normative world, articulating the generative potential that manifests when queerness and musicking collide. In “Considering (Queer) Musicking Through Autoethnography,” Mathew Klotz draws our attention to the ways that musical encounters with others shape queer bodies. They deftly show that queerness and musicking are both relational experiences of disruption, contestation, and becoming. For Klotz, queer musicking has the capacity to reformulate individuals, spaces, and musical histories, to simultaneously resist normative behaviours, and to create possibilities — and potentialities — for queerer futures. Klotz’s autoethnographic approach in this article recalls Small’s own writing style — simultaneously confessional and analytical — while recasting some of Small’s foundational claims about musicking: that many of us feel a strong urge to musick and often feel our best — our most alive — when we do this well alongside and among others.

In her article “Why ‘Political’? Blackness and Queer Urban Geographies in Toronto and San Diego,” Sadie Hochman-Ruiz analyzes disparate spaces of LGBT and queer political formation (including Toronto’s punk-influenced queercore movement in the late 20th century and contemporary San Diego drag scenes) and pays particular attention to the ways race, class, consumption, and belonging inform the sonic politics of the musicking communities to which she feels a meaningful sense of kinship. Reading and rearticulating genealogies of queer musicking across location and time, Hochman-Ruiz puts into conversation historical collectives of queercore in conversation and in contemporary drag politics to tease out the complicated ways that whiteness, normativity, and divisions of identity manifest in queer spaces. Building on Small’s work, Hochman-Ruiz shows the way that capacious perspectives on musicking can connect listeners and performers to others in unconventional ways. In “Why ‘Political’?” queer figures like Bruce LaBruce and GB Jones become part of the queercore musicking process and its meaning.

Kevin Schattenkirk's "Telling LGBTQ+ Stories through Choral Music: A Case Study of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus" shows how musicking can enable a collective response to histories of violence and oppression while simultaneously archiving and enlivening such histories. Drawing on interviews he conducted with current and former members and directors of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, Schattenkirk identifies a form of queer musicking in which vulnerability, intimacy, and shared precarity can bind individuals to others in the musicking experience as well as with countless others whose lives have been impacted — or worse: ended — by homophobic violence. Paying particular attention to a SFGMC performance in Laramie, Wyoming — the site of Matthew Shepherd's violent torture and murder — Schattenkirk explores how the literal space of anti-gay violence, and the broader narratives that frame and shape histories of oppression, affect the musicking processes of chorus members. Schattenkirk's focus on homophobic violence and musicking recalls an important aspect of Small's theorizing that is often missing from contemporary readings: that musicking is not necessarily a beautiful or hopeful thing. While Schattenkirk's contribution to this collection articulates the way musicking can amass, can make space, and can heal, it also calls our attention to the way musicking experiences can inform and elicit negative and sometimes violent effects. Musicking can certainly respond to violence and oppression — but so too can it spur violence in the first place.

In "Musiquer en ligne? Une analyse de la formation de communautés queer et féministes autour des musiques metal," Louise Barrière identifies and analyzes political and musical values around which queer and feminist metal listeners form virtual collectives. In the wake of the #MeToo movement (and the way it was subsequently taken up in metal communities through the evocation of #MetalToo and #KillTheKing), Barrière asks: How do notions of authenticity, elitism, and belonging function in musical spaces where non-normative experiences and desires of gender and sex collide with metal fandom and musicking? Barrière's work puts into practice one of Small's primary claims: that music is not a one-way system of communication from performer to listener but is, instead, a complex site of negotiation over meaning that involves a variety of actors with disparate political ideas and ideals. As Barrière makes clear: the way we conceptualize and categorize musical sounds, genres, and politics is always in-process.

Readers will notice the disparate ways contributors conceptualize the queer collectives of which they write. This extends to the way these collectives are interpolated through language: while we use "LGBTQ2+" as an attempted catch-all moniker in this introduction, Hochman uses both queer and "LGBT" in her article as she draws out how queer has been, at times, framed as bearing

a kind of politics and activism that differs from LGBT; Barrière uses “LGBT” and “queer”; Klotz uses “LGBTI,” drawing attention to the way intersex individuals are vital to their conceptualizing of non-normative gender and sexual communities and politics; and Schattenkirk uses “LGBTQ+” in his article on the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus. While these authors also use “queer,” the collectives they hail with each use is neither static nor exhaustively framed through their invocation. In fact, in a number of articles, the authors problematize and analyze the way disparate terms — “queer” and “LGBT” — are imagined and wielded in the specific musicking cultures they analyze.

Rather than forcing consistency of terminology throughout this special issue, we’ve encouraged authors to unpack their thinking around collectivity, terms, and concepts, and not assume the collectives hailed by these terms will be the same for all readers. We think the plurality of monikers for the musicking collectives discussed in this special issue serves as a useful reminder that the way individuals think about gender and sex are culturally and historically specific, and that language can never adequately encompass the difference that is fundamental to queer political movements. In her 1993 article “Critically Queer,” Judith Butler argues that the term “queer” must “remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes” (19). Contributors to this volume come from varied cultural locations where, as their articles show, the pressing political purposes are specific to the musicking communities whose experiences inform their thinking.

The articles that comprise this special issue are bound together by the idea that queer musicking has long functioned and continues to function as a form of activism in the face of heteronormative, homophobic, and transphobic oppression. As we grapple with the current conditions of the pandemic, the rising up of the BLM and #MeToo movements, the recognition of the increasing numbers of trans women of colour being murdered, and the persistent challenge to decolonize music disciplines, we are reminded that musicking connects us with others. When we speak and write about music, we are speaking and writing about people. In a world that increasingly privileges individualism and competition over collectivity and forms of communal care, the collectivizing function of queer musicking is necessary and potentially transformative for those involved. And finally, musicking can be vital to queer collectives’ identity, formation, and sense of agency.

Building on the broader theme of the issue, all of these contributors develop Small’s notion of musicking for pressing contemporary queer issues, showing how Small’s capacious theory remains productive in our contemporary moment for an array of political endeavours that may not have been immediately

apparent when Small's work was originally published. To be sure, each article in this special issue identifies one avenue for research on queer musicking and, in the process, points to countless more, reminding us of the open and fluid nature of both "queer" and "musicking" as theoretical concepts and, more importantly, generative and collectivizing markers of experience, collectivity, and desire. 🍀

Notes

1. See, for example, *The Hip Hop Learners Podcast*, *Pep 'n Ched with Megan Nash*, and NPR's *Pause/Play*, among others.

2. See www.cjtr.ca for an example of 91.3 FM CJTR Regina's Community Radio Station executive director Amber Goodwyn's creative development of Imagine This! and Imagine This Music!, a kids' program that ran 9am-12pm Monday through Friday from the end of March until September 2020.

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