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Introducing music research

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Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

Contents

Introduction

This free course gathers together a range of materials to enable you to explore some of the many possibilities for research music. It gives you a series of snapshots of musicology, emphasising both the breadth of musical topics that might be studied by a music researcher and the many different ways in which such study might be approached. After a brief exploration of how the term musicology might be defined, the course considers four topics:

- feminist musicology
- historically informed performance
- grime music and its reception in the UK
- soundscapes.

To begin the course, complete Activity 1.

Activity 1 Music in everyday life

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 10 minutes to complete this activity.*

Think broadly about the music you experience in everyday life and make a list of up to ten such 'musical' sounds.

> *Provide your answer...*

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course A890 *MA Music part 1*.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand something of the diversity, purposes and cultural and thematic breadth of research in music
- understand how research in music is developed and how it relates to wider cultural questions, practices and ideas.

1 What is musicology?

Put simply, musicology is the study of music and can therefore relate to anything that might be labelled as music. Music is, however, notoriously difficult to define, so it is not surprising that the study of music encompasses various approaches and perspectives. In the last one hundred years, Western musicology has moved from being dominated by a focused study of musical works and their composers to embrace a wide range of musical styles and activities, as well as adopting theoretical and methodological approaches from a broad range of disciplines. Musicology is not just focused on musical texts (i.e. notated music) but includes all the practices, ideas and cultural contexts surrounding music and its production and reception.

In this course, you will find the term 'musicology' used to refer to all aspects of music studies, studying all kinds of music. Musicology thus defined is distinct from other aspects of studying or practising music, such as performance or composition, but encompasses all types of music and musical practices from all cultures and historical periods. The course uses the term 'musical practices' because musicological study isn't restricted to studying pieces of music and their structures and meanings, but can include the ways music is discussed or written about, related elements such as the economics and production of music, and scientific approaches such as the psychology or acoustics of music and sound. Although this sounds inclusive of everything, all the authors of this course work within the context of a British university (though we come from a range of national, social and academic backgrounds). This means that the perspectives you will meet in this course are largely those of contemporary Western musicology.

It is worth noting that 'musicology' can be a contentious term, because it carries the baggage of its narrow tradition. Some scholars who work on research in music do not wish to be known as musicologists. It also has specific meanings in different cultures. In the United Kingdom, musicology is often used as an umbrella term as described above. In North American writings about music, you will often find a distinction made between historical musicology (the history of music and musical practices), music theory (the study of how music is constructed) and ethnomusicology (the study of music cultures). You may also encounter the term 'systematic musicology', frequently used in central Europe, which refers to a range of subdisciplines including music psychology, acoustics, music theory, and the philosophy of music. Complicating matters further, the word 'musicology' is often used as a shortened form of 'historical musicology'. You may find it useful, as you work through the course, to think about the differences between the approaches taken, and where your own disciplinary identity might lie.

Western music scholarship has been and remains susceptible to development, change and fashion. The concerns, methods and culture of music scholarship have undergone an important expansion and transformation since the nineteenth century, and debates have taken place about the nature, methods and scope of musicology. Some of these changes have been influenced by shifts in other areas of scholarship; from the mid-twentieth century, for example, the development of social, cultural and economic history led to the introduction of these perspectives on music history, while the incorporation of anthropological methods into the study of music helped to consolidate ethnomusicology as a distinct subdiscipline. As you will see as you work your way through this course, debates over the direction and scope of musicology continue to challenge the discipline, often in response to areas of inclusion and exclusion, and changes in priorities and perspectives.

1.1 Exploring Western musicology

In this section you are going to look at one definition of 'musicology', and how this might work in practice.

Activity 2 Asking questions about music

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 30 minutes to complete this activity.*

Part 1

Read the following definition of musicology, taken from the article on 'Musicology' in *Grove Music Online*, an important resource for music studies.

As you read, make a note of the influences from other disciplines listed in the extract.

Extract 1 Vincent Duckles and Jann Pasler, 'The nature of musicology'

The term 'musicology' has been defined in many different ways. As a method, it is a form of scholarship characterized by the procedures of research. A simple definition in these terms would be 'the scholarly study of music'. Traditionally, musicology has borrowed from 'art history for its historiographic paradigms and literary studies for its paleographic and philological principles' (Treitler, 1995). A committee of the American Musicological Society (AMS) in 1955 also defined musicology as 'a field of knowledge having as its object the investigation of the art of music as a physical, psychological, aesthetic, and cultural phenomenon' (JAMS, viii, p.153). The last of these four attributes gives the definition considerable breadth, although music, and music as an 'art', remains at the centre of the investigation.

A third view, which neither of these definitions fully implies, is based on the belief that the advanced study of music should be centred not just on music but also on musicians acting within a social and cultural environment. This shift from music as a product (which tends to imply fixity) to music as a process involving composer, performer, and consumer (i.e. listeners) has involved new methods, some of them borrowed from the social sciences, particularly anthropology, ethnology, linguistics, sociology, and more recently politics, gender studies, and cultural theory. This type of inquiry is also associated with ethnomusicology. Harrison (1963) and other ethnomusicologists have suggested that 'It is the function of all musicology to be in fact ethnomusicology; that is, to take its range of research to include material that is termed 'sociological' (see also Ethnomusicology).

(Duckles and Pasler, 2020)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

I made the following list: art history; literary studies; anthropology; ethnology (I had to look this one up); linguistics; sociology; politics; gender studies; and cultural theory.

Part 2

Return to your list of musical sounds from Activity 1. Choosing one sound, think about the ways in which you could frame scholarly research around it. Use the framework in the American Musicological Society definition in Extract 1 as a starting point to consider the following questions:

- What is the physical nature of the sound? How was it made and transmitted?
- What is the psychological impact of the sound?
- What can be said about the aesthetic nature of the sound? Can you analyse its musical content?
- What are the social and cultural contexts of the sound? Does it have a particular purpose or meaning within these contexts?

Make a note of these ideas below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Your responses will depend on the sounds you noted. I undertook some of this listening myself and became interested in the music that accompanied children's television programmes. I noticed that, at times, extracts of classical music were included, and I began to make notes about the particular ways this was used with particular effects or meanings. I was particularly interested in the way music from one context was translated into another context, which added to, and changed, its meaning and impact.

Keeping an ear out and thinking critically about the music you encounter on a day-to-day basis can lead to new areas of research and investigation. The broader framework of sounds you experience is also of interest to scholars, and forms the basis of a discipline called 'sound studies', which intersects in many ways with musicology. Sound studies, a relatively recent area of research, encompasses studies of the technologies, environments and cultural contexts of sound of all kinds, from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Other influences, many of them from specialised areas such as sociology or ethnography, have also changed the scope of music studies to go beyond music that is notated or which is performed in concert halls.

2 Women in music studies

This section of the course will introduce you to women in music studies, to feminist musicology, and to broader issues surrounding music and gender. You will explore the reasons for the exclusion of women's music from the canon of Western art music, traditional narratives of Western music history, and music education.

Figure 1 Louis Leopold Boilly, The Young Harpist, c.1804-06, oil on canvas. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. Photo: Bridgeman Images

Feminist musicology can be understood as part of a broader set of scholarly trends that arose within Western academic music studies during the 1980s, often referred to as New Musicology. Scholars began to question whether the works included within the canon of Western classical music were actually the best, and the social factors which coalesced to invest these 'canonic' works with great cultural capital, while others – including music written by women – were excluded. Cultural capital is a concept developed by the influential French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in the second half of the twentieth century (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). In their theory, cultural capital refers to the non-financial assets that people hold (such as education, skills, etiquette, knowledge/appreciation of the arts, particular manners of speaking and dressing, etc.) that tend to promote their social mobility. It can also refer to the prestige that certain works of art accumulate.

Activity 3 Naming composers and songwriters

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 5 minutes to complete this activity.*

Set a timer for two minutes. In that time, write down the names of as many women composers/songwriters as you can. Then, set the timer for another two minutes and write down the names of as many men composers/songwriters as you can. You are free to include examples from any genre or style of music.

Table 1 Female and male composers and songwriters

Women	Men
Provide your answer...	*Provide your answer...*

....

Discussion

Although the lists you compiled will be unique to you, and exactly who you included in them will very much be guided by your own personal musical tastes and knowledge, it is likely that the list of men composers/songwriters that you wrote was longer than your list of women composers/songwriters.

2.1 Women and the canon

One of the earliest pioneers within feminist musicology was the American academic Sophie Drinker (1888–1967). She wrote one of the first books dedicated to women in music, *Music and Women: The Story of Women in Their Relation to Music* (1948). Despite Drinker's ground-breaking work, the conservative and positivistic turn which musicology took after the Second World War, together with its strong focus on the white, male composers included within the Western canon, discouraged further research on women in music until the closing decades of the twentieth century.

Figure 2 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Two Young Girls at the Piano, 1892, oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA. Photo: Bridgeman Images

Among the many scholars who began towards the end of the twentieth century to research the women who had been left out of traditional narratives of Western music history was Marcia J. Citron. She developed her article 'Gender, professionalism and the musical canon' from a paper that she initially presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Baltimore in November 1988. The timing of this places it at the centre of the New Musicology trends of questioning the canon and asking different types of questions in music scholarship which were beginning to develop. The article was first published in the American music journal *The Journal of Musicology* in 1990. It has since become a foundational piece of scholarship within feminist musicology.

In the first section of the article, Citron contends that for any work to stand a chance of being included in the canon it has to be written, published, and circulated, reach public consciousness through a first performance, remain there through repeat performances, and receive a positive review early on. Before any of this can happen, anyone wishing to become a composer has to be able to receive an adequate musical education and training. She goes on to argue that the main reasons for women's exclusion from the canon include:

- systematic exclusion from access to the full range of compositional training
- lacking publication opportunities
- lacking performance opportunities
- systemic barriers which have tended to exclude them from the musical establishment
- gender-linked evaluation by critics
- not being hired as conductors
- tending to focus on smaller-scale forms, which were deemed as having less worth.

2.2 Philosophical bias

In the first section of her article 'Gender, professionalism and the musical canon', Marcia J. Citron focused on the practical 'obstacles' that women composers have faced which combined to exclude them from the canon. In the second section of the article, she moves on to consider 'philosophical bias against women as creators' (Citron, 1990, p. 110). She identifies a book by nineteenth-century American music writer George Upton, *Woman in Music* (1880) as having had a significant impact on subsequent generations of music scholars and commentators. Citron describes how Upton saw a paradox between 'woman's innate emotionalism co-existent with her inability to channel it effectively into creativity in music, that most emotional art form'. She summarises his view that a woman's true musical role was not as composer but rather as 'helpmate, or muse, to successful male composers, and also as performer' (Citron, 1990, p. 111).

Citron goes on to show how views such as those expressed by Upton, which she argues summed up widely held nineteenth-century beliefs, dominated thinking about music for many decades. Her work is not, however, solely concerned with documenting and analysing the historic practical and philosophical reasons for the exclusion of women composers from the canon. She also advocates change and offers a range of critical ideas towards achieving this.

Given the reasons for the exclusion of women's music, Citron cautions that we have to get away from the mindset that 'assumes that if a piece has not survived it is automatically unworthy of consideration for serious performance and study' (Citron, 1990, p. 112). Secondly, she asserts that in attempting to make an informed judgement on whether a particular woman's compositions should be included in the canon 'other factors must be taken into account: sociological, cultural, historical, economic, political' (Citron, 1990, p. 112). Thirdly, she highlights that when we are choosing works to include, 'we have to confront the issue of what criteria we are imposing' (Citron, 1990, p. 112).

2.3 New directions in feminist musicology

More recent feminist musicology aims at greater inclusivity, considers the intersectionality of exclusion based on gender alongside other factors of marginalisation – including race, ethnicity, sexuality, faith, class, disability and/or neurodiversity – and also seeks to get away from binary constructions of gender. Another key difference is the new willingness of

musicologists to engage with practising musicians and others involved in music education and the music industries. Many feminist musicologists today see both wider advocacy work beyond academia and actively working alongside practising musicians and other professionals within the music industries as key parts of their work and how real change can be made.

Over recent years, many organisations, groups and collectives that aim to promote women's music and to support women musicians have emerged – both in the UK and internationally. The F-List Directory of UK Female+ Musicians (founded by women-in-music activist Vick Bain in 2019), for example, has developed a large directory of female-identifying and gender-expansive musicians based in the UK (hence 'Female+'). This initiative aims to assist the individuals listed in promoting themselves and also serves as a comprehensive resource for performance hirers seeking female and gender-expansive musicians. Another notable example is the Ireland-based collective, Sounding the Feminists, which actively promotes and publicises the work of female musicians across the island of Ireland. These are just examples among many.

Activity 4 Donne Women in Music Foundation

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 30 minutes to complete this activity.*

Watch this video interview that OU Music academic Dr Laura Hamer filmed with soprano and women-in-music activist Gabriella Di Laccio, curator and founder of the Donne Women in Music Foundation in March 2023.
What motivated Gabriella to found Donne?

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 1

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Gabriella shares how she first started to become aware of music by women in 2015 when she was performing recitals of music set to poetry by Shakespeare and came across three cycles composed by the women Amy Beach, Madeleine Dring and Rebecca Clarke, which she added to her repertoire. Then in 2017 she bought a second-hand copy of Aaron I. Cohen's International *Encyclopedia of Women Composers*. This inspired her to found Donne in order to tell these women's stories widely to people outside of academia.

3 Historically informed performance

Broadly speaking, historically informed performance (HIP) aims to be faithful to what people heard when a piece was first composed and performed. Although HIP was a preoccupation of some earlier writers, the issues addressed in this branch of scholarship only became widely discussed and debated from the middle of the twentieth century. Publications such as Thurston Dart's *The Interpretation of Music* (1954) began to provide an overview of some of the HIP issues that were taken up in later, more detailed publications such as the journal *Early Music* (founded in 1973) and influential books such as Frederick Neumann's *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music* (1978). Initially, many of the questions that were asked concerned the performance of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but that period subsequently broadened to include both earlier and later music.

How possible, or even desirable, is it to recreate the types of performances experienced by previous generations, especially those from the prerecording era? This question became a subject of debate almost as soon as HIP performances began to emerge. A popular view of these sorts of performances, at least to begin with, was that they were as close as possible to the sorts of events the composers of the time would have known. But several holes quickly began to emerge in this assumption and in some instances the appropriateness of using early instruments has been called into question.

Researching HIP involves the study of a wide range of sources. As well as the instruments themselves, sources include personal texts such as correspondence, diaries and memoirs, evidence found in public documents, such as civic papers and newspapers, iconographical sources (pictures, engravings, etc.), and musical scores.

3.1 The authenticity debate

'Authentic performance' was a term popularly used at the start of the HIP movement in concert advertising, reviews, and so on to denote the use of instrumental and vocal performance styles and techniques contemporary with the composers whose music was being played. But how 'authentic' could this experience be? This was a question asked by several writers in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The term 'authentic' was questioned and subsequently largely dropped. Claims of 'authenticity' were simply too questionable. Nowadays the term 'historically informed' seems a more measured way of describing the performance of music on early instruments using techniques that have been informed by research into earlier practices.

As the authenticity debate has matured, some features of contemporary HIP begin to look rather strange and incongruous. Consider Figure 3, for example. Here you have a photograph, like many others, of a performance which uses early instruments appropriate to the 'Baroque era' which, roughly speaking, may be considered to have ended in the mid eighteenth century. Given that the performers are using early instruments you can assume that they were trying their best to play in historical styles appropriate to the music they were playing. Yet there are so many modern features in the image. The staging in a purpose-built performance space bears no resemblance to the venues in which Baroque-era performances would have taken place, while the performers are separated from the listeners, which is a modern trend. The musicians are dressed in clothes that recall the early twentieth century much more than earlier times. Then there is the conductor in front of the harpsichord: conductors of orchestras like this were not features of performances of this sort of music until the nineteenth century (Bowen, 2003). To what extent, then, can the performance represented in this image be regarded as 'authentic'?

Figure 3 The King's Consort Orchestra, conducted by Robert King, 1995. Photo: © Jim Four. All rights reserved 2023/Bridgeman Images

3.2 Investigating early instruments

Among the most important sources for a study of historically informed performance are the instruments on which music was played in earlier generations. Historical instruments have fascinated musicians for at least the last two centuries and many collections have been formed which are curated and displayed for the benefit of performers, music historians and the public.

While some curators allow the instruments in their collections to be maintained in working order and used for performances, others ensure that their instruments are kept in cabinets and left as they were found for fear that important historical evidence will be destroyed if they are restored. So, for example, if old piano hammer coverings are removed, information is lost for ever about the way in which the material was stretched over the wood beneath, even if the old hammer coverings are kept after they have been removed.

In the case of very rare instruments in particular, many think that they should remain unrestored as a resource for future generations of researchers, who may develop new questions about them which can only be answered from untouched examples.

Mozart's pedal piano

For the final years of his life, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) owned a piano which was placed above an independent pedalboard played with the feet, as on an organ. The piano survives, but the pedalboard does not. The pedalboard had its own strings, which were independent of the piano above it, and reinforced the bass of the music, making it sound rather less delicate than many imagine Mozart's music would sound like.

Activity 5 Video of Mozart's pedalboard

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 20 minutes to complete this activity.*

Watch this video, which will help you to understand the instrument and its characteristics. The instrument is a reconstruction made according to the available evidence.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 2

The evidence used to reconstruct this instrument was wide-ranging. It included:

- a concert handbill
- a letter from Mozart's father to Wolfgang's sister, Nannerl
- a few notes in one of Mozart's music manuscripts
- comments by Mozart's pupil, the English composer Thomas Attwood, in an undated letter
- comments in his memoirs by the Swedish visitor to Mozart, Joseph Frank
- the inventory of Mozart's possessions made after his death.

Details of the design of the reconstructed pedalboard are deduced from the descriptions of the instrument in documents, as well as the physical limitations of the space available beneath Mozart's piano. Other relevant instruments from the period are also taken into account, so it seems likely that the reconstructed pedalboard roughly resembles the one used by Mozart. Once the evidence has been carefully studied, not too much is left to conjecture. As for the music played on it, there is evidence that tells us something about what Mozart played on the instrument, but there is also a further layer of evidence in broadly contemporary documents that suggests other sorts of music he might have performed on it. Precisely which notes Mozart played with his feet is unknown, so this aspect of a reconstructed performance remains a matter of conjecture (Maunder and Rowland, 1995).

Returning to the problematic aspects of the term 'authenticity' outlined earlier, you will hopefully readily see how much conjecture can be associated with the 'reconstruction' of early performances. In this case, not only does the relevant instrument not survive, but neither do specific instructions about what pieces of music were played on it. HIP is indeed a problematic musical subdiscipline!

4 Grime music reception in the UK

This section looks at the sub-discipline of music reception – the way in which music is understood by groups of people at various times following its dissemination to a public. You will explore the idea of media representation using grime, a musical genre that emerged from the UK's garage music scene in London during the early 2000s, as a case study. It highlights how meaning has been ascribed to grime by various groups of people, providing an example of the kinds of cultural and behavioural associations that music can acquire.

Figure 4 Wiley with members of Roll Deep crew performing on stage. Photo: Debbie Bragg/Everynight Images/Alamy

Beginning as an underground music scene that had associations with street violence, grime achieved mainstream music success with its artists such as Lady Leshur and Dizzee Rascal even receiving a BEM and an MBE, respectively. Grime's image is complex and multifaceted. The genre initially spread through pirate radio stations and live video streaming websites such as AxeFm (McGrath et al., 2016) and has been popularised by artists such as Dizzee Rascal, Wiley and Lethal Bizzle, and later in a second wave from around 2010 onwards by Skepta, JME and Stormzy. It is often characterised by a 'do-it-yourself' approach, having taken advantage of the rapid development of audio software and social media platforms that took place in the early 2000s; it is a product of the digital era and has subverted traditional music industry methods of production and dissemination (Woods, 2020).

While the genre is male dominated, grime does have a significant number of female artists. This is something highlighted in Ellie Ramsden's project 'Too Many Man: Women Of Grime', a project consisting of 'portraits, interviews, handwritten lyrics, live music shots and urban landscapes' that attempts to bring greater visibility to the many women active in the scene (Ramsden, 2017). Ramsden self-published a crowd-funded photo-book of the project available to purchase directly through her website.

The following sections look at how grime's image and reception have been affected by its media portrayal, further demonstrating how hierarchies of power can emerge and the impact that they have culturally. Specifically, the examples focus on race and the more negative aspects of the genre, rather than gender or the awarding of MBEs. This is intentional and male grime artists take the foreground here, which in itself will have an impact on your own reception of what grime is and the culture that surrounds it. By examining lyrics, media reports, scholarly articles and interviews you will encounter viewpoints as wide ranging as the genre's image.

4.1 Wot Do U Call It?

Grime's roots lie in London's marginalised Black youth, for whom rapping and producing music in their bedrooms was a vehicle through which creativity could be explored and expressed, while reflecting on day-to-day experiences in their lyrics. Media representations of grime have associated it with anti-social behaviour and gang violence, and this is partly a result of some artists being convicted of crimes coupled with lyrics often evoking themes of violence, conflict and boisterous masculinity. It is important to remember that media representations – whether written articles or news reports – act as sources of information and require a critical eye to assess their perspective, and the following section examines this further.

While grime is by no means the only musical genre to openly discuss violence (opera and death metal are obvious examples that deal with this subject matter too), the ambiguity as to whether this is figurative or literal has caused debate amongst both its supporters and opponents. A detailed examination of the lyrical content of much grime music highlights a great deal of word play and comical, non-violent themes, further challenging the genre's violent associations. A pertinent example of this is found in Wiley's 'Wot Do U Call It?' (2004), a response to the new musical style not being garage yet still not having a name. The media, similarly, did not know what to call it, though began to describe the music as grime due to the 'hard-hitting' lyrics and 'dark beats' (Target, 2018, pp. 118–119). Activity 6 explores 'Wot Do U Call It?' as a primary source.

Activity 6 Responding to 'Wot Do U Call It?'

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 20 minutes to complete this activity.*

Find a recording of 'Wot Do U Call It?' online. Wiley is known as the Godfather of grime, and this song is considered an example of the genre. Listen to it, paying close attention to the lyrics. You will note the word 'Eski' is used. This is a shortening of the term Eskimo, an outdated and offensive term. Wiley's use of the word is not intended to be offensive, though 'Eskibeat' was the name that he initially gave to this new style of music as he thought it was 'cold' sounding. The musical style and word play that you will hear are typical of grime.

Write down your response to the music and its lyrical content. You should focus on how you might describe the sounds you can hear, what the lyrics are talking about and how they are saying it.

Provide your answer...

....

Discussion

Repetitive beats with heavy bass and synthesiser sounds act as a backdrop for lyrics delivered in a frenetic yet playful, conversational style. Lyrics are repeated in different contexts and words extended into phrases in a way that at times feels like a combination of free association and stream of consciousness. Wiley frequently uses words and phrases where the meaning is not obvious, such as 'Get sharp like a knife in the sheath, Stay sharp like a knife cutting beef, Cut the strings, there's no grief, If you don't cut the strings there's more grief'. In the context of this song, I interpreted this as the difficult situation that Wiley found himself in making his new style of music, and how that can be problematic with relation to audiences new and old. Extending this further, the lyrics appear to address the problem of finding a

> sense of place and identity for the music as a result of exploring a new style. Notably, Wiley delivers the rap in his East London accent.

'Wot Do U Call It?' is interesting in that it deals directly with the concept of reception, specifically how the new genre that Wiley was developing was received by those who encountered it. It also highlights a number of stylistic traits that permeate grime music, such as the use of language that is specific to the culture and environment of grime artists and audiences. For example, 'Roll Deep' refers to Roll Deep Crew, the grime collective founded by Wiley. As mentioned in Activity 6, the repeated use of 'Eskimo' and 'Eski' refers to 'Eskibeat', the style of music Wiley created that would later become known as grime, marking his transition away from 'garage', 'jungle' and 'drum and bass' music. As also mentioned above, the rap is delivered in an East London accent, which is a characteristic feature of grime that marks a noticeable break away from the style of delivery found in North American hip hop, though there are many examples of artists (e.g. Stormzy) from other areas of London. These traits make for a musical style that among members of its community feels very localised. However, the specific social knowledge that is drawn upon could equally alienate a listener, thus affecting the music's reception. This is something that is easily true of a lot of music, especially where lyrics are involved.

4.2 This is Grime

In Hattie Collins' and Oliver Rose's book *This Is Grime* (2016), community is a recurring theme that emerges from the many interviews conducted with grime artists. The interviews document the close ties musicians have through family and friends, but also how musicians rely on crews, self-organised events and social networking within a relatively small geographic area to create a music scene. They also reveal the social deprivation inherent in these communities at large, and consequently the day-to-day struggles interviewees face. Grime appears to have evolved out of a need to vent these frustrations, often through fast-paced shouted raps with direct reference to the urban environment.

Grime musicians generally acknowledge that the lyrics of their songs often discuss violence. Rather than encouraging violent behaviour, this is a response to their own lived experience that instead acts as a way to highlight the difficulties they may or may not have faced in day-to-day life. A superficial reading of this could suggest a fractured social group, though it's important to note that without social cooperation and a common goal of wanting to express their frustration through music, grime as a musical practice would not have become what it is today. While in no ways the only artform to reflect the environment from which it emerged, grime is an expressive medium that presents a direct, raw and unfiltered picture of where it comes from. It's revealing to hear grime MC Bruza's view on this:

> We didn't have a platform, a means, a mic to shout to the world to say what was going on in our lives. We was hearing about champagne dances, but I couldn't relate to that. That wasn't what we was going through. We was in the council estates, spitting to each other, beatboxing, spraying lyrics. But no one could hear us, 'cause we were trapped on this block, on this estate. No dad about, no guidance to show us that you could do something with your life. This was a platform for

people to hear us, what we were going through. That's how these tunes come about, so we could vent.

Collins and Rose, 2016, p. 24.

It's a bleak description, and one that doesn't reflect the playful, conversational style of 'Wot Do U Call It?'. MC Bruza does, however, emphasise the importance of community music making – that is, grime – being at the heart of dealing with the harsh reality of life, something that is often lost in the genre's portrayal.

4.3 Crazy Titch

Content warning

Please be aware, this section discusses a murder. If you are likely to find this challenging, please consider carefully how you might want to engage with this section. You can find suggestions in the 'Your emotional resilience skills: A guide for students studying emotionally challenging content' guidance. Please also be aware that this section contains strong language.

One notable event that is associated with grime is the murder of Richard Holmes by Carl Dobson. The event and its aftermath have been reported by a variety of news publications, which you will explore here.

In 2006, Carl Dobson was charged with the murder of Richard Holmes. Dobson, more commonly known as Crazy Titch, was a well-known grime MC, while Holmes was the friend of rapper Shaba Shah, performing name Shaba Shak, who had released a recording containing lyrics that were disrespectful to Dobson's half-brother. The publicity around this incident left an indelible mark on grime, suggesting that the lyrics were the cause of the murder. Activity 7 examines a number of sources that reported the event and its aftermath, each providing information on Crazy Titch and the event from their own standpoint.

Activity 7 This is Grime?

Timing: Allow around 70 minutes to complete this activity.

The following four articles discuss or reference the murder of Richard Holmes by grime rapper Crazy Titch. Read these articles and consider the way grime is represented. Do the articles give you a particular impression of the musical style? How might they affect grime's reception?

Muir, H. (2006) 'Rapper who killed producer for "disrespect" gets 30 years', *The Guardian*, 3 November.

Vice (2006) 'London – Crazy Titch'.

Parker, C. (2006)

'"You're Jailed" Apprentice star's cousin is murderer serving 30 years for shooting dead music producer', *The Sun*, 16 October.

BBC News (2006) 'Two jailed over rap lyrics murder', 2 November.

Provide your answer...

....

Discussion

The articles all provide very different points of view on the subject. There is a focus on crime and violence which detracts from what the songs of the genre actually talk about. It is not possible to describe the stylistic traits of grime or what it sounds like from these articles, but the notion of it having links to violence is one that persists.

The BBC and *Guardian* articles use 'rap' and 'rapper', respectively in their headlines, making direct reference to, and a connection between, musical style and a violent crime.

In the *Vice* article, there was an attempt to contextualise the lyrics that were supposedly the cause of the murder and how comparatively mild they were compared to other examples of grime 'beefs'. The language used in the article such as 'a bit of a temper' and 'uncalled for' doesn't really acknowledge the brutality of the murder.

The Sun article crudely uses the murder to sensationalise the background story of a contestant who appeared on the UK reality tv show *The Apprentice*.

As someone not intimately involved in grime, reading the articles above makes me question how my reception of grime has been affected by them. Having these associations already planted in my mind, my reception of grime music on a first hearing might be altered. While it shouldn't be downplayed that someone was murdered and the various participants were active in the grime scene, attempts to read the genre in response to such an event are problematic.

The articles in Activity 7 have a clear focus on violence and grime. After the headline of 'Rapper who killed producer', the *Guardian* article opens with: 'A rapper outraged because his half-brother was "disrespected" in a song lyric was jailed with a confederate for 30 years yesterday after a revenge attack ended in murder.' 'Rap', 'rapper', 'music' and 'grime' are used collectively a total of seven times. 'Murder', 'shot', 'shooting' and 'violence' collectively feature nine times in the 422-word article. The article is also tagged with the topic keyword 'Gun crime'.

The question whether grime promotes violence or whether grime is an attempt to push back against a violent environment is pertinent; in a more abstract sense, to what extent does the art form change society and to what extent does society influence art? These are questions that don't have absolute answers. The words of grime MC Wretch 32 present a distilled personal reflection on the matter: 'We're writing to escape. If you listen deep into the lyrics, there's probably a lot of cries for help in there' (Collins and Rose, 2016, p. 24). Encountering this music genre for the first time through the *Guardian* article, for example, would have an impact on your reception of the genre, influencing how you might answer the question of 'does grime promote violence?' This highlights how the sources you encounter require the careful consideration of potential issues around interpretation and bias.

4.4 Grime reception

Despite grime's poor early media reputation and negative associations with violent crime, the genre has grown because of cohesion, strong social networks, collaboration and

cooperation between its artists and audiences. Throughout this section you have discovered how reception literature and music criticism can shape an audience's perception of musical style and its status and reputation in music history. Rock and pop music has an illustrious history of artists and fans that have fallen foul of the law or caused outrage, which begs the question what is it that makes grime different? Considering its association with young Black males, examining who the reception media is aimed at and the agenda of its authors form an important part of answering this question and understanding grime music and its position within British musical life.

If this is your first exposure to grime music, it could easily skew your understanding of it, and this highlights how important it is to critically engage with sources of information. In this course, you have mainly focused on the environment that grime emerged from and a murder case. This does not make for pleasant reading, but it does raise an important question: if you were previously unfamiliar with the genre, how has this influenced the way you have received grime and how would you describe the music? Bear in mind that you have only encountered one example of grime music and a handful of sources that discuss the genre in this course.

While there are considerably more positive representations of the genre in the current media, it has taken time for this to happen. A landmark event that signified a change in the tide was grime artist Stormzy's headline performance at Glastonbury festival in 2019. The media reported positively on the performance and its socio-political significance, with the headline to the Guardian's review of the concert stating, 'All hail Stormzy for historic Glastonbury performance' (Walker, 2019). The following year female rapper Lady Leshur received a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to music and charity.

During the 2015 Brit Awards, the American hip hop rapper Kanye West (who himself has since garnered controversy through antisemitic comments) invited 40 grime artists onto the stage with him during a performance. A viewer complained about the performance commenting: 'A bunch of young men all dressed in black dancing extremely aggressively on stage. It made me feel so intimidated and it's just not what I expect to see on prime-time TV' (Virk, 2019). It's difficult to say accurately what the viewer's preconceptions were about this style of music, but it does suggest bias or racism and a lack of understanding of who these people are, where they come from, what their music is about and what they were doing on stage. Similarly, their view could have been predicated upon their reception of biased sources. What is interesting is how the quote presented above was also used in Skepta's 2015 song 'Shutdown': an example of grime artists themselves highlighting the racial bias they face.

It is important to remember how reception crafts the way we engage with all musicians. Music is heard differently by different listener groups, and the publications and critics that report on musicians uphold political positions. Whereas the reception of musicians from previous centuries have typically continued to evolve since their death, grime artists offer a more immediate example of reception developing around us. Whichever musicians' work you study, critically engaging with reception requires a greater awareness of the political landscape and positions in which the music is embedded.

5 Soundscapes

The concept of 'soundscape' has been fundamental to a number of important scholarly studies, in musicology and other disciplines, since the 1960s. The entry for 'Soundscape' in *Grove Music Online* defines this as:

> A term generally referring to the entire mosaic of sounds heard in a specific area. A soundscape comprises the wide array of noises in which we live, from sounds of nature, to the clang of church bells, the pulse of a salsa band at a local dance club, or the hum of traffic on a city street.
>
> (Hill, 2014)

Though, as the *Grove* article also states, not every scholar's approach to or definition of 'soundscape' has been exactly the same, most align with the theoretical concept outlined by the composer and writer R. Murray Schafer (1933–2021), who is generally credited as introducing the term into broad scholarly discourse. In several publications of the late 1960s and 1970s, Schafer called for the development of the discipline of 'acoustic ecology' – 'the study of sounds in relationship to life and society' – which he believed could not be achieved through objective, scientific research but only through 'considering on location the effects of the acoustic environment on the creatures living in it.' (Schafer 1977 [1994], p. 205). For Schafer, the relationship between the individual and the sounds they hear is reciprocal: while the soundscape might give its community a sense of local identity, it also encourages certain kinds of behaviour from its inhabitants, whose activities in turn shape their sonic environment (Hill, 2014).

As part of his theoretical framework for 'soundscape', Schafer developed a typology of the three main kinds of sounds that might be created and experienced within a single location. He categorised these as follows:

> **Keynote:** The constant, background sounds created by the geography and environment of a particular place (such as water, wind, birdsong, animals or even indistinct sounds of traffic or human voices). Keynote sounds are ubiquitous and do not have to be listened to consciously. The term derives from the musical concept that denotes, according to Schafer: 'the anchor or fundamental tone of a particular piece … although the material may modulate around it, often obscuring its importance, it is in reference to this point that everything else takes on its special meaning' (Schafer 1977 [1994], p. 9). While keynote sounds might not be heard consciously, as they are everywhere, they have the potential to have a deep influence on the behaviour of those within that particular soundscape and represent the character of the inhabitants.

> **Signals:** Sounds in the foreground that are listened to consciously by a community, because they act as a form of communication (such as bells, horns, sirens).

> **Soundmarks:** Deriving from the word 'landmark', this term describes sounds that are unique to a particular community and which possess qualities that are noticed by the people in that community (for example, recognisable performances by local musicians). As Schafer states, 'Once a soundmark has been identified, it deserves to be protected, for soundmarks make the acoustic life of the community unique' (Schafer, 1977 [1994], p. 10).

These three categories of sounds should be viewed on a continuum and the same kind of sound source (e.g. human, animal, instrument) might be labelled differently depending on the context in which it is heard by a particular listener or a particular community of listeners. Church bells, for example, might be regarded as a 'keynote' if they ring constantly in the background, mingling with other indistinct sounds; however, once they

serve as a means of communication by calling the community to prayer, they are regarded as 'signals'. Furthermore, some bell sounds become 'soundmarks' when they adopt a distinctive form associated with a particular location or community: think for example of the hourly chimes of the Elizabeth Tower (the clock tower of the Palace of Westminster), which end with the ringing of Big Ben. Schafer's particular categorisation above might also not identify sounds that are atypical, non-local or unfamiliar; for example, unusual birdsong, or visiting musicians. Nevertheless, there are many kinds of sounds that do fall into the typology he proposes.

Activity 8 Keynotes, signals and soundmarks

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 20 minutes to complete this activity.*

Take a moment to listen and think about your sonic environment. You can conduct this exercise either right where you are studying or nearby – for example, by stepping outdoors if you are working inside a building. You may find that closing your eyes helps you to focus on what you are hearing.

As you listen, try to identify:

- 1–3 keynotes
- a signal
- a soundmark
- a sound that you struggle to fit into the typology, or that could belong to more than one of the categories.

Make a note of these in the text box below.

Signals may not be audible at the moment you conduct this activity, so try to think about something that you might commonly hear within your sonic environment. Similarly, you may not be able to hear a soundmark from where you are conducting the activity, but try to think of something fairly close to you.

Provide your answer...

. . . .

Discussion

I started this activity with my window shut and heard two keynotes within my immediate environment: the constant hum of the extractor fan from the next room and a quieter whirr from the external hard drive connected to my computer. I then opened my window and heard several keynotes from the wider daytime environment, Wood Green in London. These included birdsong, traffic along West Green Road, and children playing in a nearby school playground.

A number of signals are common in this area, including the warning beeps of delivery vehicles reversing and the sirens of ambulances and police cars.

The soundmark closest to me is at All Hallows' Church in Tottenham, a little over a mile away. The tower has a set of eight bells that I have heard from a neighbourhood park some weekday evenings.

Some of the sounds I have listed could be understood to belong to more than one category. For example, the sound of children in the school playground is not only a keynote but a signal, since it occurs only during certain times of the day, week and year. Similarly, the bells at All Hallows' Church are both a soundmark and a signal: they are at once the sound of the neighbourhood and the signal that a service (or a

weekday bell-ringers' rehearsal) is being held. As this belonging to more than one category suggests, sounds can have different meanings for different communities of listeners.

The activity you have just completed gets you working with theory: it asks you to use an abstract or general concept to make sense of something: in this case, your immediate sound environment. You may have noticed that even as you were encouraged to work with Schafer's typology, you were also invited to consider whether it accounted for everything you heard. This is because it is important to reflect critically on the usefulness of theoretical frameworks when using them.

Researchers in music regularly draw on theoretical concepts and frameworks developed by others, but each use is an opportunity to re-evaluate that concept or framework. Is the theory relevant? Is it fully 'exportable', or does it really only work for particular epochs, places and cultures of music and sound? Does it help to explain what you are studying? If not, could it be modified or improved?

As you read further in your music studies, be sure to pay attention to how authors engage with theory. Some accept the theoretical frameworks of others, while others call them into question, and some use them as they receive them while others adapt or build on them.

5.1 Acoustic communities

Fundamental to the concepts of keynote, signal and soundmark is the recognition of hearing in the formation of 'acoustic communities', to use a phrase coined by Schafer's fellow-Canadian composer Barry Truax (b. 1947). An 'acoustic community' is defined by its members' shared understanding of the sounds of the environment in which they all live. As Truax explains, such sounds not only mark the temporal patterns of a community (within a day, a week, month or a year), but also assert the presence of dominant institutions or individuals in that community (such as bells or a muezzin calling people to prayer, gunfire asserting military power etc.). Furthermore, the soundscape defines the spatial boundaries of a community, in terms of who experiences these sounds, but is shaped itself by the local topography: features of both the natural and built environment (size, shape, structure and the material(s) of which it is formed, such as trees, plants, wood, stone or brick) all affect how sounds are experienced by the individuals living within a particular place:

> Our definition of the acoustic community means that acoustic cues and signals constantly keep the community in touch with what is going on from day to day within it. Such a system is 'information rich' in terms of sound, and therefore sound plays a significant role in defining the community (1) spatially, (2) temporally, in terms of daily and seasonal cycles, as well as (3) socially and culturally in terms of shared activities, rituals and dominant institutions. The community is linked and defined by its sounds.
>
> (Truax, 1984, pp. 59–61; see also Smith, 1999, pp. 46–7 and Fisher, 2014, pp. 7–8)

Activity 9 Acoustic communities

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 20 minutes to complete this activity.*

Try to identify some of the ways in which you are part of an acoustic community or communities. First, spend some time considering which sounds the community privileges and which ones it seeks to limit or restrict, as well as how these prescriptions are enacted.

Then, drawing on Truax's three points, find examples of how acoustic communities you belong to constitute themselves through sound.

One example should demonstrate how your community designates its spatial boundaries through sound.

Another should demonstrate how the community articulates a significant temporal cycle through sound.

A third example should demonstrate how, through sound, your community affirms shared cultural activities or rituals, or acknowledges important social institutions.

It is of course possible for a single sound to do more than one thing. Feel free to refer back to sounds you noted in Activity 8 or introduce new ones, and to discuss smaller communities (workplaces, congregations) as well as larger collectives (neighbourhoods, cities, countries).

| *Provide your answer...* |

....

Discussion

Spatial boundaries: I live in one of London's Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs). In late 2022, Haringey Council designated it as an area that would have less vehicle circulation, less pollution and less noise – a 'safer, cleaner and quieter neighbourhood' (Haringey Council, 2022). Aside from the word 'quieter', the council's website makes little explicit reference to the desired qualities of sound within LTNs. Nevertheless, its characterisation of the desired outcomes of the LTNs seems to imagine the sounds of talk and play: 'We will reclaim local streets … [as] safe, welcoming and liveable spaces where people meet, chat, [and] socialise and where children play' (Haringey Council, 2023).

Temporal cycles: Within the UK, laws prohibit loud noises at certain times during the 24-hour day. For example, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Noise Act 1996 prohibits loud noises between 11pm and 7am (United Kingdom, 1996).

The church bells at All Hallows' Church in Tottenham, mentioned in my response to the previous activity, also mark out temporal cycles: days of the week (Sundays) and days of the church year (for instance, Christmas and Easter Sunday). The bells thus articulate temporal cycles that have a religious/ritual component – which brings us to the next question.

Shared rituals and important social institutions: In centuries past, the bells in the tower at All Hallows' produced the loudest or most widely heard sounds in their area. In so doing, they enacted a sonic ascendency that was the counterpart of the church's importance as a social institution.

The same sound also had associations with other powerful institutions: namely, the nation and its military (at least for those in the know). William Robinson

(1840, 14n) reports that the main service bell at the church, installed in 1801, was seized from the French in Québec in 1759.

5.2 Soundwalks

Figure 5 Shush! Residential area road marking

As suggested by both Schafer and Truax, a good indication of the nature of a particular soundscape can be obtained through a 'soundwalk'. During such a walk, listeners make a record of the sounds they encounter and then classify the sounds according to their various individual qualities (such as whether they are human, natural, motorised, mechanical, musical etc. and whether they originate from within or outside the local area) (Truax, 1984, p. 64).

Activity 10 Initial planning for your soundwalk

Timing: Allow around 30 minutes to complete this activity.

In the next activity, you will be asked to conduct a soundwalk and make some notes on the sounds you hear. You will travel to a nearby place of your choosing and then either walk, stand or sit for four minutes while listening and recording. The place you choose may feature remarkable or unusual sounds or everyday ones: this is up to you.

To prepare for this, begin to think through some of the sounds that you would like to document in the activity. Write down a few notes on the following in the text box below:

- an idea for a place near you to document
- what you hope to document and what time of day would be best for this
- whether you will stay in one place or walk around while listening
- how you will document the place. You should bring some sort of recording device (a smartphone is fine) to record the soundwalk while you listen to the environment yourself. Afterwards, you will need to write up what you heard, and the recording will be a helpful reminder.

Try to plan your soundwalk such that it has potential to reveal something about the social life or acoustic community in the location you will be documenting. You should also keep some basic research ethics in mind. You should avoid deliberately trying to capture people's voices or words – especially such that they could be recognised by a listener. You should also be open and truthful about what you are doing and why (e.g. when asked by a passer-by). You might want to focus on sounds that invite questions such as the following.

- What do the keynotes, signals or soundmarks you hear tell you about the sonic and human environment?
- Do the sounds you hear acknowledge or perhaps mark out social and spatial boundaries?
- Do the sounds you hear announce or acknowledge a particular time of the day, week, month or year?
- Do the sounds convey anything socially or culturally distinctive about the community you are in, or allow insights into particular institutions?

Provide your answer...

. . . .

Discussion

You may wonder why you have been asked to do some preparatory work and the actual soundwalk as separate activities. This is in part because research activity benefits from planning and re-planning, just as writing benefits from drafting and re-drafting. Taking some time away from planning a project allows you to revisit it later with a critical eye. (For this reason, it would be best to undertake your actual soundwalk on a day other than the one on which you begin this planning activity.)

Activity 11 Initial planning for your soundwalk

🕐 *Timing: Allow around 60 minutes to complete this activity.*

Review the plans you made in Activity 10, thinking particularly about the logistics and practicalities involved. Travel to a nearby public space of your choosing and then either walk, stand or sit for four minutes while listening and recording. The place you choose may feature remarkable or unusual sounds or everyday ones: this is up to you. Any kind of recording device will do for this activity, including a smartphone: the key things is to make a record of what you hear.

After you have gone on the soundwalk, return to your place of study and make notes of what you heard, drawing on your recording as a reminder. Identify keynotes, signals and soundmarks (as acknowledged earlier, categories that have some degree of overlap) and make notes about any other kinds of interesting sounds. You may wish to identify how the sounds were created (human, natural, mechanical etc.) and whether you consider them representative or not of the local area.

Write a summary of around 200 words in the text box below. The post should include:

- where and when (i.e. which day of the week, which time of the year) your soundwalk took place

- discussion of one or two significant elements of the soundscape you noted
- an attempt to interpret at least one of these elements, using concepts introduced in this section. For example, drawing on Truax, you might consider how a sound helps to delimit an acoustic community spatially, how it articulates certain points within temporal cycles, or how it affirms aspects of a culture or particular social institutions.

Keep in mind that in the course of this activity you will produce far more information than you can put into a summary of 200 words. This is true of almost any such work. One of the goals of the activity is thus to identify one or two significant points of discussion within a much larger body of data.

Provide your answer...

Conclusion

This free course has introduced you to four different approaches to and topics within musicology. Through these, it has raised some interesting questions about what it means to study music. By highlighting the ways in which music intersects with matters such as gender, race and politics, it demonstrates the breadth of questions that musicology can address, the multiplicity of ways in which musical topics can be investigated, and the broader range of ideas and theories that the study of music both draws on and contributes towards. The different examples also draw attention to the wide range of sources that musicologists draw on in their work and the range of musical contexts that can present opportunities for musicological enquiry, from composers and songwriters whose music is performed on the stages of concerts halls, clubs and at festivals to the everyday sounds encountered in your own locality.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course A890 *MA Music part 1*.

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