

# Musicology, Performance, Slavery: Intellectual Despotism and the Politics of Musical Understanding

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## Résumé de l'article

Cet article se penche sur la relation difficile entre le savoir et la pratique musicale. L'auteur avance que cette relation est basée sur une hiérarchie encore très présente, qui attribue aux disciplines du savoir le pouvoir de réguler et même de limiter ce que les musiciens savent et comprennent eux-mêmes de la musique à travers leur pratique. Les conséquences en sont importantes puisque cette relation imprègne les définitions épistémologiques de la nature de la musique et de l'interprétation, et qu'elle détermine les connaissances fondamentales portant sur cet art. En effet, dans l'université de recherche d'aujourd'hui, cette relation fait qu'est attribuée la légitimité épistémologique à toutes les instances institutionnelles s'occupant de musique exceptée celle des musiciens eux-mêmes. Lorsque les musiciens et leur activité sont considérés, ils le sont toujours dans une position subordonnée, en tant qu'objet d'étude, pouvant être questionné, sondé, mesuré, ou en tant que lieu d'application d'une grille d'analyse relevant d'une discipline et/ou d'une démarche de recherche particulière. Ce type de situation implique une dynamique de pouvoir ressemblant de façon troublante aux dynamiques politiques de pouvoir basées sur la classe, l'inégalité sociale, et l'esclavage. Cette dynamique peut être retracée jusqu'à la *Politique* d'Aristote, ouvrage dans lequel sa défense de l'esclavage repose sur la séparation du travail de l'esprit du travail manuel afin de protéger la pureté de la pensée. L'expression de cette séparation est évidente dans la théorie boécienne de la musique, qui considère ceux qui pensent la musique comme l'unique autorité, et ceux qui « font la musique » (compositeurs et musiciens) comme des ignorants qui ne savent ce qu'ils font. Plusieurs passages d'ouvrages musicologiques récents et moins récents continuent à présenter cette position, que l'on pourrait nommer « despotisme intellectuel », et à déterminer le discours institutionnel sur la musique au moins de quatre façons : (1) en déformant la musique d'une pratique en un objet d'observation, (2) en privilégiant la position de l'auditeur et son expérience de la musique, (3) en donnant la primauté et l'autorité épistémologique à ceux qui traitent de musique à partir d'autres disciplines, et, enfin, (4) en considérant les musiciens comme des ignorants ayant besoin d'être « éduqués », « informés », et « civilisés » par l'étude. Cet article conclut en proposant un programme pour déconstruire cette politique, et qui place les musiciens et leurs savoirs enracinés dans la pratique, aux fondements de la compréhension de la musique.

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# MUSICOLOGY, PERFORMANCE, SLAVERY: INTELLECTUAL DESPOTISM AND THE POLITICS OF MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING

*Dillon Parmer*

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But in this world if you do not say a thing in an irritating way,  
you may just as well not say it at all, since nobody will trouble  
themselves about anything that does not trouble them.

—Bernard Shaw

Enough has been said about the cultural work that music supposedly enacts, about the ways it constructs identities, about how it inscribes hierarchies that marginalize and oppress. What needs to be talked about more is the cultural work that music scholarship itself enacts, about how it constructs identities, and about how it inscribes hierarchies that marginalize and oppress. Discussions of the discipline along these lines might seem to have already run their course in the literature (see, for instance, Kimmey 1988; Bohlman 1993; Cusick 1999; Locke 1999; Nettl 1999; Korsyn 2003 and Moore 2010). But when you are running, you always miss something, and, in the case of music studies, that something is something students, especially of music in the Western classical tradition, need to be made aware of as they strive to understand the art, for when their desire to understand it takes them to the modern research university or to the liberal arts college, they come face-to-face with the socio-cultural work of music scholarship and with what that work does to musicians under the guise of “higher learning.”

The present article—an intensely polemical think piece—aims to lay out what that work might be, where it might come from, and how it might be manifested in formal programs of music study. I have chosen to frame the argument as a polemic despite Michel Foucault’s warning—pointed out to me by one of the peer reviewers—that polemics are parasitic “on discussion and [are] an obstacle to the search for the truth” (Foucault 1997, 112). I have done so because, for reasons that will become clear by the end of this article, a discussion that actually searches for truthful answers to the uncomfortable questions I pose here has yet to take place in an open forum such as this journal is supposed to provide. Rather than look such questions in the face and try to formulate even provisional answers, it is much easier (and cowardly) to characterize the exercise as “polemical,” make the routine appeal to authority (in this case, Foucault), and consequently ignore the exercise altogether (by giving it a negative recommendation in the peer-review process). Surprisingly, the closed-mindedness that Foucault ascribes to the polemicist is actually exemplified both in his

own refusal to follow her to a conclusion and in his eagerness to dismiss her outright from the start. Like the reader who judges a book by its cover, Foucault fails to see that what a polemicist might be up to is not precisely what he convicts her of, for the polemicist focuses the issue at hand by asking the hard questions in ways that disturb and by providing pointedly provocative (but admittedly provisional) answers, not to foreclose discussion but to get it going so that the truth might be found. In the domain of music—and let us not forget that Foucault himself admitted his incompetence when it came to musical matters (130)—a discussion of the issues I raise here has never taken place, even though the issues that define it are, in my view, part of the day-to-day goings-on in all academic institutions where music is studied. It is precisely when intellectual apathy and fear of change forestall discussion that polemics can be most helpful, for it can incite a readership to engage a matter that it might find easier to neglect when framed in softer, less unsettling ways. And so instead of doing the fashionable thing and follow Foucault, I invoke the deeper wisdom of George Bernard Shaw, not because he embodies a counter-authority but because he understood something about human nature very well, that when you frame a matter in a way that irritates, you trouble people to stop and think about it, and (this is my add-on), perhaps, even do something.

And there is much to be done, as I hope the following will make clear. The article itself divides into four main sections. The first gives a brief illustration of how academic discourse carries out an agenda that aggrandizes the scholar on the one hand by demeaning musicians on the other. The second frames that agenda in terms of a dialectic between two forms of knowledge, knowledge and skill, and then situates that dialectic in social structures founded on slavery and class division. The third takes specific examples from scholarly literature old and new to show how the values implicit in those social structures are manifested in how knowledge, musical and otherwise, is valued and organized in the university. The fourth and final section suggests possible paths of resolution. The point of the critique is not just to point out the contradiction between scholars who like talking and writing about socio-cultural matters as a theme in their research profile but who are blind to the socio-cultural work that their own research itself carries out. The point is also to raise the awareness of musicians, especially students but also professionals, so that they can speak up and out against what I see are long-standing institutional inequities. To that end, the article concludes by outlining a program for setting in motion a radical reconceptualization of what musicology is and does.

### THE CLEARER PERSPECTIVE

Students of music are exposed to the cultural work of music scholarship right from the start, when they walk into their very first classes of music history and music theory. (Of course, pre-college students with conservatory training, or high-school students in programs with music courses, will encounter this cultural work well before they enter university programs.) To illustrate what precisely it is they confront, I shall take a short excerpt from *Musicology: The*

*Key Concepts*, one of those handbooks designed to help students—and professors as well—grasp the central ideas of the discipline. Of course, first-year undergraduate music students will not be required to read such a book, but they nevertheless will be affected by the implications underlying how its authors, David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, define music scholarship in relation to music culture at large. In the preface, the authors confess that musicology is a relatively young discipline, but then they make the radical suggestion that the thinking specific to the discipline (let us call it musicological thought) may have existed all along, within a broader scope of thinking (let us call it musical thought) embodied in the creative acts of composing and performing. They write, “Music has a long history, while musicology has, by comparison, enjoyed a relatively short lifespan. Yet musicology, which can broadly be defined as the thinking about and study of music, could be argued to have been present within the acts of composing and performing music. Music is an art form and context that has always invited theoretical speculation and critical reflection, and we can presume that composers [and performers] have always thought about their own creative processes and that these processes are somehow informed by the study and experience of other, already existing, music” (Beard and Gloag 2005, x). By this reckoning, composers and performers have always already been musicologists because they think about the art, not just within their own creative practices, but also in relation to other music.

When the authors proceed to distinguish musicological thought proper from the thinking that goes on in acts of composing or music-making, however, they abandon this inclusive definition to adopt another one in which the two modes of thinking become mutually exclusive and epistemologically unequal. They write, “However, such reflection and interaction [i.e., musical thinking] may be seen to stop short of a properly conceived musicology that could be understood to stand outside the creative process in order to provide a clearer perspective upon that process, its end product in the form a musical work and, just as significant, the social and cultural contexts within which the process and product could be situated and interpreted” (Beard and Gloag 2005, x)

What should be troubling to musicians and students of music alike is not just the distinction the authors want to make, between musicological and musical thought. What should be troubling is also how they elevate the understanding embodied in the former over and above the understanding embodied in the latter, for doing so entails not only demoting to a lower order of thinker someone who composes or—more to the point of this article—performs. It also demotes to a lower form of understanding all that goes on in the thinking specific to these acts. I might be reading too much into that last quotation, especially since the authors have strategically placed less committal subjunctives to soften their casual and largely uncritical assumptions. But what else could they mean when they conceive of musicology as providing the clearer perspective, other than that the perspective from which musicians themselves understand music, from reflecting on what they do as musicians in actual artistic situations, is itself less than clear? This is the principal belief that student musicians encounter throughout their university education, that whatever it is they

might know of music from whatever experiences as practising musicians they might have already had (or will have) lacks a clarity of perspective that they will find only in the study of music history or theory, or some other institutionally legitimated discipline. Indeed, that was the prejudice underlying my own “schooling,” from my first weeks of a BMus at the University of Western Ontario (London, Ontario), through my MA at the same institution, right down through to the end of my PhD at the Eastman School of Music (Rochester, NY). From the start, I was aware of it as a form of prejudice. But even if I was eager to point it out and question it, I lacked the conceptual tools to do so, and, since the ideology underlying most academic training is mostly about learning how to comply, I bought into the belief myself. And that belief entails more than just seeing the musician’s perspective as less than clear, for even though Beard and Gloag do not explicitly draw it out into the open, the prejudice underlying how they construct the musicological identity inevitably commits them to this position, that it is the scholar who understands music in ways that are clearer than what even the best composers, conductors, instrumentalists, and singers understand of the art.

Ironically, it was my academic training—coupled with reflecting from a few decades of performing experience—that has given me the tools to formulate the present argument, to point out the prejudice, and perhaps to account for its origins. But before moving on to all of that, it might be helpful to reflect a little more on how Beard and Gloag construct the musicological identity, for underlying their process is a curious logical fallacy. If, as they suggest, clarity of perspective depends not on engaging in an actual practice (musical or otherwise) but on standing outside of it so that one can observe it as an object from afar (what might be called “requisite critical distance”), then how is it that they can have the clarity of perspective from which to understand the discipline they themselves practise, the discourse they themselves produce? Think about it. If they were to follow their first principle, they ought to say that only those who stand outside the discourse of musicology have the clarity of perspective to understand the discipline. But in writing their book, they effectively embody the very perspective they demote, that someone who practises musicology is properly positioned to understand and write about it. This kind of contradiction, between what they assert on the one hand and what they do on the other, might resemble those archetypal self-refuting statements, as when I say, “I never tell the truth” or “I always tell lies.” But whereas the truth of those statements is refuted by the act of making them—if it were true that I never tell the truth or that I always tell lies, then neither statement can be true—contradictions such as those embodied in Beard and Gloag’s project do not necessarily refute the claim being made. They merely contradict it. Thus, Gloag and Beard’s basic claim—that the externalist objectivist scholar (who studies things from afar) has the clearer perspective—is contradicted, but not necessarily refuted, by the fact that, in writing the book they wrote, they enact the converse perspective—that of the internalist practitioner whose understanding derives from engaging in a practice and is embodied in what Donald Schon terms “reflective practice” (Schon 1983). Later in this article, I will take up the

question of which of the two perspectives might actually yield more clarity. What is more important at this point is to be aware of the contradiction itself, and what it might mean that the authors unwittingly make it, for the contradiction—that they are comfortable denying the musician who speaks to music from reflecting on what she does as a musician the same clarity of perspective they accord themselves when they speak to musicology from reflecting on what they do as musicologists—may suggest that the presence of faulty reasoning at the very basis of how they define the discourse of musicology is a symptom that something else might be going on. And what that something else is, as my title suggests, is what I will call the politics of musical understanding. It is a politics that extends far past any one book clarifying the key concepts of a discipline to encompass the very way scholarship conceives of music, and what it means to understand it. And, as I shall suggest in what follows, it is a politics that is far from salubrious for musicians.

### THE RULE OF THOUGHT

Understanding what generates the performative contradiction at the heart of how Beard and Gloag construct the musicological identity involves reflecting briefly on how musical understanding is itself constructed. According to Erkki Huovinen, the history of such understanding in Western culture tends to value “abstract theoretical knowledge concerning music” over and above “practical competence” (Huovinen 2011, 125). This unequal valuing opposes two contrasting forms of knowledge: knowing facts about something, what might be called “epistemic understanding,” against knowing how to carry out some action, what might be called “procedural understanding.” When it comes to music, the latter generally encompasses all that goes into knowing how to configure your body into a musical instrument, or knowing how to play one. When such understanding is deemed neither sufficient nor necessary for the acquisition of epistemic understanding of music, what generally happens is that musical understanding itself comes to be equated exclusively with the former type, with only what one can say about music, about its history, its form, its style, its meaning. In other words, epistemic understanding comes to be associated with knowledge (the purview of the musicologist), whereas procedural understanding comes to be associated with skill (the purview of musicians).

At first blush, this difference seems to resemble the distinction Ludwig Wittgenstein poses between “saying” and “showing” (McGinn 2001). “Saying” involves knowledge that is mediated through language and that is often verbalized as logical propositions. “Showing,” by contrast, involves everything that cannot be “said.” But whereas all epistemic understanding is constituted by what can be stated as a logical proposition, by what can be said, not all procedural knowledge is restricted to only what can be shown. In the case of knowing how to sing, it is entirely possible to say what precisely is involved, either in a description of the physio-acoustic procedure that one would normally show, or in a set of instructions for doing something. For example, singing involves managing four variable components: (1) the maintenance of a continuous stream



of air that, though continuous, still varies in pressure, (2) a point of resistance found in the vibrating vocal folds, which change in thickness and length to produce different pitches when they are met by that stream of air, (3) the amplification of those pitches in the cavities of the pharynx, mouth, and sinuses, the first two of which can vary significantly in shape and size, depending on vowel, volume, and frequency, and (4) knowing how to maintain that variable configuration within the shifting musical and expressive demands constitutive of musical works as well as the contexts in which their performance is embedded. Additionally, it is important to recognize that the distinction, between saying and showing, as well as that between epistemic and procedural understanding, fails to take into account a third form of knowledge: knowledge by acquaintance. This kind of knowledge derives from actual experience, as when I say that I know a particular place or locality, like the Upper West Side of Manhattan, not because I have read Fodor's travel guide or watched *Person of Interest*, but because I have spent a lot of time there walking its neighbourhoods, checking out its shops, eating at its restaurants, taking in shows, and talking with its denizens. In a forthcoming essay, I develop the thesis that all three forms of knowledge are mutually interdependent, that each depends on the other two, that understanding itself derives from their reciprocal interaction, and that the correlation of understanding with only one of the three forms is, consequently, logically untenable.

All of this theorizing about knowledge really leads us away from the matter at hand, for the issue is not so much the distinction that Huovinen (or Wittgenstein) wants to make, but rather that the analysis itself always fails to account for why, at least in the history of musical understanding, one form of knowledge, epistemic understanding, is valued over the other two. Were those whose job it is to give such accounts to look more carefully, they would find that the unequal relationship seems to replicate a specific social practice that goes back to what one of my colleagues calls "the beginning." In the beginning, the privileging of knowing that something is the case over and above knowing how to do some activity—I will leave the third form of knowledge out of the discussion until later in the article—is embedded in political structures that accept class division and social inequity as natural and necessary conditions for effective governance. Now, it might not be necessary to go back to the beginning to show how that is the case, except that way back there, the ways in which epistemology is enmeshed in theories of governance is discussed way out in the open. Aristotle (384–32 BCE), for instance, formulates the matter succinctly in what he calls the ruler–ruled relationship: "For if something is capable of rational foresight, it is a natural ruler and master, whereas whatever can use its body to labor is ruled and is a natural slave" (Aristotle 1998, 1.2). The reasons why he believes this to be the case are worthwhile quoting at length:

For ruling and being ruled are not only necessary, they are also beneficial, and some things are distinguished right from birth, some suited to rule and others to being ruled.... For whenever a number of constituents, whether continuous with one another or discontinuous, are combined into one common thing, a ruling element and a subject element appear.

These are present in living things, because this is how nature as a whole works....

Soul and body are the basic constituents of an animal: the soul is the natural ruler; the body the natural subject....

At any rate, it is, as I say, in an animal that we can first observe both rule of a master and rule of a statesman. For the soul rules the body with the rule of a master, whereas understanding rules desire with the rule of a statesman or with the rule of a king. In these cases it is evident that it is natural and beneficial for the body to be ruled by the soul, and for the affective part to be ruled by understanding (the part that has reason), and that it would be harmful to everything if the reverse held, or if these elements were equal. The same applies in the case of human beings with respect to the other animals. For domestic animals are by nature better than wild ones, and it is better for all of them to be ruled by human beings, since this will secure their safety. Moreover, the relation of male to female is that of natural superior to natural inferior, and that of ruler to ruled. But, in fact, the same holds true of all human beings.

Therefore those people who are different from others as body is from soul or beast from human, and people whose task, that is to say, the best thing to come from them, is to use their bodies are in this condition—those people are natural slaves. And it is better for them to be subject to this rule, since it is also better for the other things we mentioned. For he who can belong to someone else (and that is why he actually does belong to someone else), and he who shares in reason to the extent of understanding it, but does not have it himself (for the other animals obey not reason but feelings) is a natural slave. (Aristotle 1998, 1.5)

As with Beard and Gloag's reasoning, Aristotle's justification for the ruler-ruled relationship trips up on points of logic of which the most problematic is a faulty argument from analogy, for even though it might seem natural that the soul rule over the body, reason over emotions, intelligence over passion, and even though it might seem better for the wild animal that men domesticate it, it does not at all follow that men should, therefore, rule over women, or that men should rule over other men, on the basis of a difference in the ability to use reason or to do manual work.

But it is not the cogency of Aristotle's logic, nor the truth-value of the claims he makes, that should worry. What should worry is how breezily the philosopher associates matters of the intellect with the ruler, the master, even the despot on the one hand, and matters of the body with the ruled, the servile, indeed the slave on the other. Of course, we cringe at such associations today, but it is easy to see why Aristotle did not. In cultures based on class division, those in power generally assign a higher value to the things that differentiate them from the underclass. And, in the case of slave-based culture, that entails maintenance of clear-cut distinctions between mind and body, thought and action, knowing and doing, understanding and execution, cognition and physicality, concept and implementation. Thus, when Aristotle advises that "one should



not exert the mind and the body at the same time,” he does so not so much because “these kinds of exertion naturally produce opposite effects: exerting the body impedes the mind and exerting the mind impedes the body” (Aristotle 1998, 8.4). He does so because work of the body is what slaves and servants do and, for that reason, is inherently menial and degrading. If the work of the intellect is to remain elevated and pure, it must be extricated from the body, because “the crafts that put the body into a worse condition and work done for wages are called vulgar ... [because] they debase the mind and deprive it of leisure” (Aristotle 1998, 8.2). It is hard to say if it is an *a priori* hierarchy between mind and body, thought and action that Aristotle uses to justify a social structure founded on class division, or if it is a pre-existent social structure that causes him to see the work of thought as having a value higher than physical labour. But the answer really does not matter when it comes to music, for in Aristotle’s theoretical framework, musicians get the short end of the stick, regardless. Whether they sing or play, musicians necessarily belong to the class of people who use their bodies. By contrast, those who stand back from the act of music-making and just think about and “study” the art, they belong to the class of those who use their minds, and only their minds.

Readers who know their Aristotle will be quick to point out that I am oversimplifying the matter. His philosophy of education actually allows for the study of musical performance as a component in the formation of a well-educated “citizen” (read “free” as opposed to “enslaved” person). He writes, “It is not difficult to see, of course, that if someone takes part in performance himself, it makes a great difference in the development of certain qualities, since it is difficult if not impossible for people to become excellent judges of performance if they do not take part in it” (Aristotle 1998, 8.6). I have, in other words, taken things out of context. But I will be just as quick to answer that Aristotle allows for such participation only to a degree, and only “if the students do not exert themselves to learn either what is needed for professional competition or the astonishing or out-of-the-ordinary works which have now made their way into competitions and from there into education, but rather learn the ones not of this sort and only up to the point at which they are able to enjoy noble melodies and rhythms, instead of just the common sort of music, which appeals even to some of the other animals, and to the majority of slaves and children as well” (8:6).

Put another way, Aristotle rejects

professional education in instruments ... (and by professional education [he means] the kind that aims at competition). For the performer does not take part in this kind of education for the sake of his own virtue but to give his audience pleasure, and a boorish pleasure at that. That is precisely why [he judges] this sort of activity to be more appropriate for hired laborers than for free men. For performers do indeed become vulgar, since the end they aim at is a base one. The listener, because he is boorish himself, typically has an influence on the music, in that he imparts certain qualities to the professionals who perform for him, and to their bodies as well, because of the movements he requires them to make. (Aristotle 1998, 8.6).

When we clarify where exactly Aristotle draws the line, therefore, we see how musical understanding intersects with a politics of class division. Making music is allowed only for the edification of oneself, or for that of others, but only to a certain point. When the activity is undertaken as a professional service or for the sake of competition, music-making becomes a form of menial labour and as such is to be avoided. He writes, “For what one does for one’s own sake, for the sake of friends, or on account of virtue is not unfree, but someone who does the same thing for others would often be held to be acting like a hired laborer or a slave” (Aristotle 1998, 8.2). This distinction it would seem is the crux where socio-intellectual value goes one way or the other, higher when the musical experience is directed towards personal edification (what might be called appreciative understanding), lower when the musical experience is directed towards those levels of vocal or instrumental mastery that allow musicians to earn their living from practising their craft, or from teaching it.

That the distinction between appreciative understanding and professional aptitude carries political consequences in the musical domain is more clearly borne out in the work of that medieval theorist responsible for funnelling Aristotelian thought into the way we now talk about music: Boethius. Students of music generally encounter him in the first weeks of their university training, when they read about the categories of music (*humana, mundana, instrumentalis, divina*) that he differentiates in *The Fundamentals of Music*. But what does not get pointed out enough, at least in the usual textbooks, is how Boethius sets up his theoretical framework for understanding the art in terms strikingly reminiscent of the ruler–ruled relationship. He does not refer to Aristotle explicitly, but his conception of the “true” musician—as one who understands (rather than as one who merely makes) music—arguably puts the politics embedded in the philosopher’s ruler–ruled relationship to musical work, for when Boethius divides musical culture into three classes—instrumentalists, singer-composers, and listeners—he does so in a way that elevates the third class into sole epistemological authority, because it is only this class that properly understands the art. He excludes the other two from such understanding because

they act as slaves. None of them make use of reason; rather, they are totally lacking in thought.... The third class [listeners] is that which acquires an ability for judging, so that it can carefully weigh rhythms and melodies and the composition as whole. This class, since it is totally grounded on reason and thought, will rightly be esteemed as musical. That person is a musician who exhibits the faculty of forming judgments according to speculation or reason relative and appropriate to music concerning modes and rhythms, the genera of songs, consonances, and all the things which are to be explained subsequently, as well as concerning the songs of the poets. (Boethius 1989, 1.34)

It is not so much that Boethius denies the other classes—to whom I shall now refer collectively as performers—the capacity for critical judgment, as it is how he locates understanding only in what is experienced by those who just listen, for when you bracket off acts of music-making, listening is all that remains

in the musical equation. His explanation for why this reduction must be so is surprisingly reminiscent of Aristotle's politics. The work of thought, Boethius writes, is

inherently more honorable than a skill which is practiced by the hand and the labor of an artisan. For it is much better and nobler to know about what someone else fashions than to execute that about which someone else knows; in fact, physical skill serves as a slave, while reason rules like a mistress. Unless the hand acts according to the will or reason, it acts in vain. How much nobler, then, is the study of music as a rational discipline than as composition and performance! It is as much nobler as the mind is superior to the body; for devoid of reason, one remains in servitude. Reason exercises authority and leads to what is right; for unless the authority is obeyed, an act, lacking a rational basis, will falter. (Boethius 1989, 1.34)

In other words, Boethius denies performers the capacity for understanding the art they practise, not just because they themselves are without such capacity, but also (and just as important) because the actions in which they are engaged themselves do not entail thinking. Indeed, the very act of making music taints and corrupts thought itself. Whether this value system comes from Aristotle or not is beside the point, for it has distressing implications for performers, regardless. Not only does it deny an order of understanding intrinsic to the act of performing. It also implies that that act acquires value only when informed by a type of understanding located in those minds whose experience of music is confined to just listening, because it is only the members of this class who have "gained knowledge of making music by weighing with the reason, not through the servitude of work, but through the sovereignty of speculation" (Boethius 1989, 1.34). In other words, speculative thought—thought that is pure and untainted by the labour of the body—rules over action.

## HIGHER LEARNING

Boethius is long dead. He was executed—not by performers but by the Ostrogothic king, Theoderic, for suspicion of conspiracy. And the culture of Aristotle's Greece has been dead even longer, even though its remains are repeatedly harvested to inspire intellectual and artistic developments throughout Western European history, musical and otherwise. But that does not mean that the frameworks that Boethius and Aristotle devised for understanding, and the political work those frameworks might do, are not still alive and well millennia later, deeply embedded in how we think and talk and write about music today. (Just take the extent to which both ancient Greek and Latin underpin so many modern languages.) Indeed, the persistence of these frameworks may be the very reason why there has been important scholarly work undertaken in the past few decades that strives to put the body back into the musical equation. I am thinking specifically of the feminist critique of the mind/body split, as well as the embodied-mind thesis stemming from cognitive science (see, amongst others, Lidov 1987; Cusick 1994; Mead 1999; Lochhead and Fisher 2002; and Zbikowski 2002). But if the way in which Beard and Gloag allocate

to the musicological perspective a clarity not to be found in reflecting on what you do as a performing musician is any indication, then there is still a great deal more work to be done, for that allocation is strongly reminiscent of what Boethius does when he elevates “the study of music as a rational discipline” over and above the study of music “as composition and performance.” Arguing that the embodied experience of making music might be at the root of how we conceptualize and understand and talk and write about music may seem to undermine mind/body dualism, but it does very little to alter the kind of thinking that still grants higher educational value to liberal over vocational studies, to *ars liberalis* over *ars mechanica*, or (to put it in Aristotelian terms) to the kinds of subjects a free man would study over the kinds of things slaves and servants would occupy themselves with. It does very little to undermine the difference between the higher critical learning of the university and the lower technical learning of the college or trade school, a difference that, as has been recently pointed out, turns on setting understanding based on theoretical, speculative, or other purely intellectual work over the kinds of understanding that are applied in or arise from concrete and local situations of actual human activity (Hussey and Smith 2010). And it does very little to alter the unequal status accorded the musical degrees conferred in the modern university, the BA, MA, and PhD to which we assign more, and the BMus, MMus, and DMA, to which we assign less. All of these institutional inequalities are themselves embodied in an unequal music curriculum, one that requires those engaged in applied musical study to demonstrate from year one to the end of doctoral work an ongoing competency in such academic subjects as music history and theory and the like, but exempts those engaged in academic study from demonstrating by the third year of their undergrad (if at all) their ongoing competence as a musician.

Now, it is beyond the scope of this article to fill in the gaps between Aristotle and Boethius, and between them and the present. That is probably best left to a real archeologist of knowledge (which I am not). Jean Moreno, for instance, shows how the history of thinking about music, at least in the domain of music theory, “can think its objects, represent them, and designate a cognitive figure as the arbiter for the value and usefulness of those represented objects” (Moreno 2004, 2). This all-important cognitive figure who arbitrates not just the value and usefulness of its objects, but also what constitutes valuable and useful knowledge about it, is not the practising musician. It is rather the listener, “a cognitive configuration whose focus of knowledge is hearing, listening, perceiving, and understanding” (7). The similarity, between a line of thinking that constructs musical understanding on the foundation of the listening experience and a legacy of Aristotelian rules and Boethian fundamentals that associates that construction with forms of governance that rely on slavery, is more than suggestive, even if the gap from classical antiquity to the present can probably never be fully filled in. Bringing that similarity to the foreground might seem to entail my making the claim that present-day music scholarship enslaves performers and performance, that scholars are masters, musicians their slaves. Those would be absurd inferences, and I am in no way drawing

them out. What I am suggesting is that if the ancient framework is replicated and reproduced in the modern university and its programs of study, then there is no reason why the institutional framework would not also continue to do forms of cultural work similar to what the ancient frameworks were intended to do. Indeed, the ways in which the university itself values, organizes, and manages its knowledge product is a case in point. According to Fritz Machlup, that product consists of a “body of coherent, systematic knowledge of any subject, formal or empirical, natural or cultural, arrived at by any means whatever,” provided that such knowledge is (1) “based on hard, honest and serious study and research and reaches insights not available to laymen or superficial observers and (2) is designed for either intellectual or general-pragmatic purposes, but not for immediate practical application in a concrete case or situation” (Machlup 1980, 69). This formulation might be an apt generalization of what precisely constitutes “higher learning,” but it illustrates where precisely the kind of understanding intrinsic to music-making actually belongs, for even though musicians might have a coherent grasp of their art, even though they might conduct their practice with “hard, honest, and serious study,” they are by this definition concerned with knowledge only in its immediate application and, for that reason, can never accord their understanding the status of higher learning, at least under Machlup’s definition. Indeed, he himself makes precisely this distinction when he differentiates higher learning from “the applied knowledge of the practitioner” (69).

Machlup’s configuration—which elevates abstract, universal, general knowledge over concrete, local, particular knowledge—effectively creates a situation in which those engaged in the production of the former (let us call it “theory”) are given highest epistemological status and are consequently allowed to rule over those engaged in the production of the latter (let us call it “practice”). It is this hierarchical distinction that, as I see it, allows Aristotelian politics and Boethian fundamentals to continue to do their cultural work. And in keeping with what I see are its origins in classical antiquity, I shall call it “intellectual despotism,” and I shall apply that term to any epistemological configuration that privileges generalized, theoretical knowledge abstracted from practical application over and above the more concrete and specific knowledge that circulates in local arenas of that application. This configuration constitutes the monolithic ideology upon which the modern research university is built, and I see it working in the scholarly study of music in at least four interrelated ways: (1) in how it distorts music from an activity that we do into an “object” to be studied; (2) in how it privileges listener-spectatorship and the experience of music had therein over those modes of experience that take place in performance; (3) in how it promotes to sole epistemological authority those who speak to music through the discourses of anterior disciplinary voices; and (4) in how it constructs musicians as benighted subjects who need to be “educated,” “informed,” or “civilized” by scholars. I will take each in turn.

The first project, *objectification*, is essentially what Beard and Gloag are up to when they separate themselves from the creative processes that produce music—composition and performance—in order to obtain the supposedly clearer

perspective on the product that results from those processes, the musical work. Indeed, whether you are looking at a score and imagining that work in the abstract, whether you are attending to some live or recorded performance, whether you are situating music in some broader contextual web, reducing music into an object effectively requires that any authoritative or rigorous or serious talk about the art be detached from actually having to go through the motions of making it. Some readers will say that objectification is necessary not only for understanding, but also for the very act of reflection itself, as Giles Hooper suggests when he writes that “thinking is always thinking some-thing—some object, however conceived. One simply cannot think ... music without representing it to oneself (or others) as an object of some sort” (Hooper 2006, 93–94). This may be so, but objectification should still give cause for pause. One particular case will illustrate why. When, in an essay addressing the nature of the musical object, Patricia Carpenter advocates for a type of intellectual engagement with musical works as abstract mental entities detached from the experience of performing them, she does so in a way that aggrandizes such engagement as grown-up, civilized, and evolved while characterizing the performed experience of music as infantile, barbaric, and primitive (Carpenter 1985). Although she makes no mention of ancient Greek or medieval philosophy, the way she constructs music as a “thing” available for detached intellectual contemplation is strongly reminiscent of Aristotelian rules and Boethian fundamentals. Of course, just because Carpenter, or anyone else, thinks this way does not mean that what she thinks is true. But this way of thinking, of according higher cognitive status to the objective understanding of music, is what rules in the academy, and that rule is embodied in the next three projects.

The second project is a big one and tends to follow as a consequence of the first. Turning music into an object necessarily privileges the one subjectivity that actually experiences music as an object, that of the *listener-spectator*. Carpenter again makes that consequence clear, and without any consideration for whom it excludes, when she defines the musical object as “a heard thing, a thing ultimately made to be perceived for its own sake, something sheerly to be listened to” (Carpenter 1985, 80). This kind of thinking is not to be taken lightly, because it embodies several questionable premises, that listening is the primary medium through which music is experienced, and that listeners are the principal subjectivity to whom music is addressed, for whom it properly exists, and by whom it is properly understood. Listening, in other words, is the quintessential musical experience. Bennett Reimer puts it this way: “The foundational interaction with music is listening. The composer listens while composing, the performer while performing, and both produce sounds to which others will listen. The improvement of the ability to listen with perceptual discernment and affective sensibility is fundamental in any notion of improving the quality of musical experience being undergone” (Reimer and Wright 1992, 231).

Demonstrating the metastasis of this reduction across academic discourse is easy enough. It is marked everywhere, in how scholars talk, in what and how they write, in how they teach. It governs the textbooks servicing the music appreciation racket to the most opaque of musical analyses. It underlies historical



reconstructions serving as backdrops for understanding to the constructive descriptions supposedly opening the various meanings housed in even the most absolute of musical works. It is impossible to take any of this discourse in without feeling it pressure you into the subject-position of the listener-spectator. Here are just a few examples:

[It is the] fundamental assumption of the aesthetics of music ... that the significance of music lies in what we perceive as we listen to it ... [for music is] a kind of commodity whose value is realized in the gratification of the listener.... [Many] works of the classical tradition seem to have been written for an idealized listener—a listener who is able to keep track of the formal and tonal unfolding of the music. (Cook 1990, 5, 7–8, and 145)

The all-important question upon which musical aesthetics must ultimately depend [is] the question of the listener, his capacities, experiences, values, relations—in short, his culture. (Scruton 1994, 351)

In the end it is always the listener's response and imagination that give meaning to musical symbols. (Lang 1997, 239)

The phenomenology of musical experience [involves] ... the intra-action of music and listener, or stimulus and subject, and the embodied cognition ... motivated by such experience.... [M]usical concepts ... [depend] on the listener's experience of music ... and the listener's metaphoric conceptualizations of this experience. (Cox 1999, 13 and 17)

Musical meaning ... is a construct that arises out of the act of listening and is thus shaped as much by the listener as by the musical work being heard. (Bonds 2006, xviii)

The perception of musical meaning is therefore the awareness of meaning in music while listening to it. (Clarke 2005, 4–5)

All of them illustrate just how little the notion of what constitutes a musical experience has actually developed since Boethius. And the too few exceptions (Monson 1996; Small 1998; and Le Guin 2006) are the few that prove the rule, the rule of the listener as sole epistemological authority.

This is not the place to give a historical account of the ascendancy of the listener when others have already done so (see, for example, Bonds 2006). What is important to point out is how that ascendancy affects musicians, for the experience of music had in listening has become so privileged that we all too easily equate musical understanding with how we “hear a piece.” Ronald Gerhardstein formalizes that equation under the neologism of audiation, the “ability to internalize music, to think and to process [it] within the mind” (Gerhardstein 2002, 106). By this definition audiation does not arise from acts of playing or singing. It arises only when the auditor grasps the structural, syntactical, formal, and stylistic aspects of music, as well as its expressive or hermeneutic content. In other words, it arises only when you perceive, and have an appreciation of, what the notes themselves are doing. As long as those who sing and play do not perceive and appreciate that, their experience of music remains

precognitive, without understanding. And conversely, anyone who can appreciate what the notes are doing possesses understanding, even if they cannot sing or play to save their lives.

Now, by problematizing such structural or perceptual understanding, I am not denying that listening is an important part of engaging with music. I am simply taking issue with the facile assumption that the experience of music within the domain of performance is just a species of listening, as when Lawrence Kramer defines performing as “a practice of listening” (Kramer 2007, 11–12). In such reductions, performers become listeners who just happen to be making the music they are listening to. But surely this is not what the experience of music entails in the act of music-making, for even though various forms of listening figure into it—performers listen to make adjustments in balance, ensemble, dynamics, articulation, sonority, and tone colour, to name a few, either in acts of self-expression or in response to what other musicians might be doing—in no way reduces the performed experience of music down to a type of appreciative listening, and performers into appreciative listeners. As David Lewin puts it, performing is a broader category of musical experience that includes not just such listening but other sense experiences as well, like sight, touch, kinesthesia, and interoception. He writes, “Since ‘music’ is something you *do*, and not just something you *perceive* (or understand), a theory of music can not be developed fully from a theory of musical perception.... But so far as I can imagine [a theory of music] that includes a theory of musical perception, I imagine it including the broader study of what we call people’s ‘musical behavior,’ a category that includes competent listening to be sure, but also competent production and performance” (Lewin 1986, 377; emphasis in original).

Having spent a great deal of time in the field as a musician (Lewin’s “competent production and performance”), I would argue that in this broader domain of musical experience, appreciative listening is largely peripheral. And yet, in academic discourse, it is this type of listening that dominates to the point that if musicians do not appreciate music according to its dictates, they are chastised for not understanding the music they are making. I call this the tyranny of listening, and its pervasiveness is indexed by how it excludes performing from what it means to understand the art. That exclusion is enacted whenever the musical experience is reduced to a transaction between a composer and listener, as in Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s appropriation of Jean Molino’s semiological tripartition (Nattiez 1975), or Richard Taruskin’s “literate” approach to telling his story of music history (Taruskin 2005), to name just two big ones.

The third project involves how scholars whose experience of music is limited to the pastime of listener-spectatorship give what they have to say about the art the air of authority. This process has, in my view, less to do with what Kevin Korsyn calls “narratives of legitimation” (Korsyn 2003, 61–90) and much more to do with a specific mechanism that seems endemic to the scholarly study of music. Elsewhere, I have called this mechanism *derivative disciplinarity* (Parmer 2007), and it seems to work by tricking us into displacing, in some cases even abandoning, our musical identities and forcing us to speak to music

through the mouthpieces of other disciplinary voices. It is the verbal manifestation of the institutional power relations I have been postulating thus far, and it is marked in how music students, and musicians in general, are expected to think and talk and write about music, not as musicians and not from within the domain of their performing experience, but in terms generally dictated by how scholars in non-musical fields discuss their subject matter. (Even though ethnomusicology emphasizes the importance of experiencing music as a performed art, as something you do, it too capitulates to anterior disciplinarity, that of ethnography and related fields.) Discussing music in the same way other scholars think and talk and write about what they study may have been necessary in the nineteenth century in order to bring music into an institutional domain hostile towards or suspicious of its inclusion. But now that music is here to stay, the means by which talk about music acquired legitimacy back then seems to have become the principal way, perhaps the only way, music scholars want to (or can) talk about the art. Go to any scholarly conference, read any scholarly article, and you will hear people speaking like historians, structural linguists, ethnographers, semiologists, scientists, critics, indeed, every disciplinary identity you can name. Not that there is anything wrong with that. Really. It may be that—as one former student (and now colleague) of mine defended—borrowing methodologies from other disciplines helps us in music talk about the art in new ways. But I find it so very strange that we do not hear scholars talking about music *as musicians*, even when they are musicians of accomplishment. Rather than encourage the musician to add her voice to the discussion, musicology seems more content to keep it out, preferring instead to listen to speakers dabble in the bits and pieces of anterior discourses they only half understand and, when in a foreign language, can't even pronounce correctly. In its most degenerate form, this kind of pseudo-disciplinarity works to confer on dabblers the semblance of rigour simply by virtue of the names they drop, the buzzwords they deploy, the jargon they use, the books they cite. This is amusing when the dabblers are graduate and doctoral students trying to establish a distinctive professional profile in a climate that is more and more competitive. It is disturbing when the dabblers are eminent scholars who, when asked to define the buzzwords they are using in a conference lecture, cannot. (In the case of my negative reviewer, the dabbling is manifested in how a willingness to quote Foucault's warning against polemics on the one hand, blinded his or her recognition that what my article resembles is a Foucaudian archeology of an episteme on the other—in this case, the episteme grounding musical thought from classical times to the present.)

There is, however, an irony in all of this anterior disciplinary borrowing, one that touches upon the central theme of this article. Whenever music scholars aspire to mimic other discourses to construct their epistemic authority in the broader intellectual community and in musical culture at large, they not only fail to do their job, which is to assess the relevance and rightness of all claims being put forward. They also become slaves to disciplinarity itself. This enslavement is borne out in how reviewers assess musicological work, not by cogency of argumentation but by the extent to which the work carries out as

yet to be explored anterior disciplinary precedents. In the case of the present article, a recurring motif in informal feedback I receive from colleagues has been that showing how institutions enact forms of discipline and punishment has “already been done,” as if music scholarship is only supposed to be about implementing into musical discourse as yet to be implemented anterior disciplinary precedents. (The article rarely receives critical feedback that exposes weaknesses in argumentation.) Finally, by forcing music scholars to play the lapdog to anterior disciplines, derivative disciplinarity has precluded the formation of a distinctly musical discipline in its own right, with the autonomy to formulate its own discourse in its own terms. It is the principal reason why musicology as a discipline is always so belated: how can any discipline be cutting-edge when its disciples are always waiting for what scholars in other fields of study have to say?

The fourth and last project completes this picture of how intellectual despotism works in the institution. It involves the systematic construction of the *musician as benighted subject* in need of enlightenment. I find this project the most disturbing of the four because the negative attitudes towards musicians it harbours are difficult to document, even though those attitudes are what students of music must confront day in and day out in any university program. The problem has been discussed with different emphases outside of music, as when Jeffrey Masten notes that “the idealist tradition has constantly attempted to separate language from its machines ... from the adulterations of materiality, and consequently from writing itself, which, as the work of the hand, is seen as a debased activity” (Masten, Stallybrass, and Vickers 1997, 2). We can catch a glimpses of similar exclusions in the darker corners of the musicological literature. When, for instance, Leonard B. Meyer says that “performing doesn’t necessarily entail understanding” (Meyer 1994, 291); or when Manfred Bukofzer writes that even expert musicians “do not know what they are doing” (Bukofzer 1957, 24); or when Joseph Kerman characterizes the communication musicians share in performance as “an arcane sign-gesture-and-grunt system” (Kerman 1985, 196), these scholars might not be making explicit reference to Aristotle’s ruler-ruled relationship or to Boethian fundamentals. But they are nevertheless toying with ideas similar to what Aristotle and Boethius entertain, that performing is insufficient for understanding, that performers belong to a lower socio-epistemic order, and that performers consequently need to be educated, informed, or civilized by the voice of reason—in these cases, the voice of the theorist, the historian, and the critic respectively. And when performers take the time to heed what those voices have to say, the promised benefit is improved music-making. Here is what Theodor Adorno says will happen when performers both follow the advice of the music analyst and actually undertake one themselves: “Any [performer] who has initially made music only from what, pre-critically, is called ‘musicality,’ and who has then subsequently performed from an all-encompassing analytical consciousness, will, I think, have no difficulty in acknowledging here what an enrichment is to be discovered in the realization of hidden relationships which, so long as the work is not analyzed, cannot come to the fore” (Adorno 2002, 168).

And just so that readers do not dismiss these as the muddled ideas of generations past, here are a few from more recent times:

A detour through music history will make students better musicians because they'll know what they're playing. (Korsyn 2003, 65)

The best musicians filter what they know through their own modern sensibilities to achieve compelling performances. Those who insist on increasing their knowledge do so out of a profound conviction that the effort to understand ... music in its historical setting is a crucial part of this process. (Gossett 2006, 171)

A performer who can speak intelligently of the historical background and style of a piece of music is a more competent musician than a performer who can play the notes but cannot say anything about the music. (Wingell 2009, 2)

These are all variations on the same old theme, one that scholarship pitches at the music student to justify why she must read all those books, analyze all those pieces, write all those essays. (Of course, the real reason has to do with ensuring enrolment in the courses such scholars teach, lest they, the courses, and the programs offering them be cancelled.) Even though music students never know how exactly doing all those things will make them better musicians, they nevertheless comply. And it is not just students who must dance to this tune. Gossett's *Divas and Scholars* brings professional musicians into its scope and in no subtle way. The title itself is offensive, suggestive of exactly the kind of socio-cultural work the fourth project carries out, for singers never use the word *diva* with affection when talking about each other. It is always an insult: to be called one is to be criticized for being unduly vain and overly pre-occupied with oneself. His affection for opera singers notwithstanding, Gossett spends a great deal of time chastising almost every performer he mentions for violating some "truth" his (or somebody else's) scholarship has unearthed through painstaking research. And with that "truth" revealed to them, performers are somehow redeemed from their sins, and their performances are somehow made better. As such, his book is just another iteration in the telling of not just operatic history, but of music history in general, that the art of music needs to be rescued from the vanity and ignorance of its practitioners.

All of this poses two very irritating questions: if disciplinary understanding is supposed to make the musician better at what she does, how is it that the scholars who believe this to be true know it to be true if they have not gone out into the field as musicians and checked for themselves by putting their scholarly understanding into actual musical practice? And even more irritating, if the acquisition of such understanding is supposed to make for better musicians, why is the musicianship of those who produce disciplinary understanding all too often no better than the musicianship of the students they seek to discipline? When I ask these questions in casual discussion, they are almost always evaded, not just because the empirical evidence suggests otherwise (if it were true that the acquisition of disciplinary understanding makes for better

musicians, then scholars would be better musicians than many of them actually are); but also because the answers fly in the face of the epistemological ideology underlying the institution at large, for when music scholars explicitly promote the importance of their discipline on the basis of demoting performance, they implicitly configure the flow of knowledge in one direction only, from higher knowledge (read disciplinary or research-based understanding) to its implementation in actual practice. Indeed, in a posthumously published collection of essays by Paul Henry Lang, the editor (Alfred Mann) justifies the ordering of its contents precisely in terms of this configuration, as moving from the “broader concepts of the musicologist’s calling to their detailed application in informed performance” (Lang 1997, xi). Almost a decade beforehand, Jürgen Habermas called this way of configuring knowledge “technological rationality” (Habermas 1989), and more than a decade after he gave it that name, John Rink called for its rejection in the musical sphere: “For too long there has been an implicit assumption within musicology that scholars have the upper hand in matters of knowledge and judgement, and that performers who do not seek out and eagerly assimilate the findings of scholarship in their interpretations run the risk of shallow, meaningless music-making which serves them as individuals rather than some higher ideal. Such a view is untenable and should be laid to rest once and for all” (Rink 2003, 307).

But it is a view that continues to stick, at least in the study of music. It sticks because it provides scholars who lack musical expertise a loophole that allows them to become experts on the art of music, complete with the institutional power to decide what music is, what it means to understand it, and how it should be thought and talked and written about it. It allows them to become a Master of the Art without ever having to master the art.

Technological rationality just may be the funnel through which both Aristotle’s ruler-ruled relationship and Boethian fundamentals continue to do their cultural work centuries after the fact, for when such scholars subject the musician (and themselves) to the rule of disciplinary understanding, when they say that music-making is improved only when the musician is informed by history or theory or analysis or critical theory or semiology or whatever, they do exactly the same thing Boethius does when he claims that bodily work becomes ennobled only when it is subservient to the rule of reason, they do exactly the same thing that Aristotle does when he advises that the actions of the slave are legitimated by the authoritative understanding of the master. As I have come to see it, you do not even have to espouse Boethian fundamentals or Aristotelian rules to be party to their politics. When you reduce music to a thing addressed only to the mind, when you define understanding exclusively in terms of what you hear, when you displace the performed experience of music as a foundation for knowledge, when you look for authority by appealing only to what the ruling disciplines of the university have to say, you have created a system that aggrandizes purely intellectual work on the one hand, while making other forms of work, musical or otherwise, subject to the rule of the intellectual on the other. All of us, whether we are aware of it or not, are complicit in this system, scholars for perpetuating it in their research programs



and teaching curricula, musicians for remaining tacit when they come face to face with it in and out of the classroom.

## **WAYS OUT**

I expect that this article will be summarily dismissed by many readers for its polemical formulation. Such a response hardly constitutes genuine critical engagement, of either the substantive or logical kind, with the arguments I have set forth. Readers who really engage with those arguments might charge that the article errs because it sets up music scholarship as a straw man on the one hand, and because it is resolutely one-sided on the other. I'll take each point in turn.

There are, to be sure, many music scholars sympathetic to performers, indeed who are performers themselves, and there are many scholars who have worked, or are working, to bring performing into the equations of understanding. But just because a set of individuals might be sympathetic to some underdog does not mean that the structures that put the dog in its place are non-existent. If that were the case, if the sympathies of individuals were sufficient to diffuse oppressive socio-cultural frameworks like patriarchy or racial apartheid, then the critique of misogyny or racism would be moot. But we all know that that is not the case. So why should it be true for the present matter? I do not mean to imply that the subjugation of musicians by institutional disciplinarity compares to that of female and non-white minorities by patriarchy and systems of racial apartheid, but just because there are scholars sympathetic to performance does not mean that intellectual despotism is not doing its work through the institutional structures in which the study of music, academic or applied, is embedded. As for the one-sidedness of this article, yes, I am the first to admit that it is. By focusing exclusively on how scholars and scholarship create and transmit prejudices in places of learning and understanding, I have failed to give an account of how musicians themselves do the same. Too many musicians, both in and outside of the institution, adopt a holier-than-thou attitude, a kind of "artistic snobbery" that constructs student musicians, amateur musicians, students in non-performance, and music scholars as lower on the status pole of musical prestige, as somehow being failed musicians. Such cultural work flows from the confluence of at least four distinctive practices—the guild tradition, the music school culture, the competition, and the cult of stardom (see variously Kingsbury 1988; Nettl 1995; Godlovitch 1998; Small 1998). Intellectual despotism may be an ancient socio-epistemic practice, but it may actually be artistic snobbery that sets it in motion. Indeed, the four projects constituting it may arise as a kind of reaction formation against the feelings of inadequacy and rejection which high-level musicians instil in those who are not. But artistic snobbery has quite different origins and is, therefore, a subject best left for another article. If my analysis for the subject in the present article is on the mark, that the ways we study and talk and write about music in the institution derive from or appropriate political structures rooted in slavery, despotism, and class division, and that these values play out both in the

production of scholarly discourse and in how actual musical practitioners are compelled to relate to it, then what are we to do in an institutional climate that, at least according to James Currie, purports to promote democratic principles that leave nobody out (Currie 2009)? Well, we could do what much intellectual work ends up doing even within the confines of its readership: nothing.

Or, we could do something. We could, for instance, enforce a rigorous separation between academic and applied study, scholarship and performance, university education and conservatory training. Indeed, that is exactly what P. Murray Dineen advises in this very journal, that the aims and goals of academic and applied study be kept separate and distinct, because the applied study of music is, supposedly, irrelevant to and impedes objective understanding of the art (Dineen 2008).

Such a proposal is hardly new. More than half a century earlier, Bukofzer makes precisely this recommendation in his manifesto for musicology. There, he distinguishes between the music school and the music department. The purpose of the first, he writes, is “the production of competent [musical] professionals,” performers in other words. By contrast, the goal of the second is to produce “the future audience of our concert halls and opera houses ... the future supporters of our musical life, on which in turn professional musicians depend” (Bukofzer 1957, 14 and 15–16). Even though both school and department often coexist in the same building, perhaps even mingling their contingent of students in the same classrooms, even though they are mutually dependent one upon the another, they are fundamentally divergent, and, for this reason, Bukofzer avers (in something mindful of Aristotle’s philosophy of music education) that “a careful distinction of aims must be made; the student may perform ... music in order to achieve technical proficiency or as a means of gaining an understanding of its structure and its cultural values” (14). Thus, the aim of the school—the mastery of performance skill—is fundamentally distinct from, and potentially at odds with, the aim of the department—to foster a “more intense aesthetic experience with wider and richer associations, greater sensual pleasure, and deepened spiritual satisfaction” (26). What Bukofzer calls the fallacy of the false compromise arises when the two programs of study are combined into one, when the purposes of the school and the department get mixed up.

But, as we saw in Beard and Gloag’s theoretical framework for constructing the musicological identity, Bukofzer commits the logical fallacy of inconsistency in the implementation of his program. Instead of maintaining that rigorous distinction between school and department, he effectively makes the understanding embodied in the latter an essential component in the educational formation of the students enrolled in the former. He does this in order to overcome what he sees as the principal danger of the school, to “turn out superbly trained technicians without intellectual grasp of the music they perform.” This hazard is avoided “only by a sound general education in music” (Bukofzer 1957, 15). And that sound education (I do not know if the pun is intended) entails exactly what Gerhardstein means by audiation. Since understanding grounded in audiation does not fall within the more technical

orientation of the school, the student who wishes to be more than mere technician must comprehend music in precisely the same way that scholars experience it—as a heard object. Bukofzer explains why:

It should be remembered that “knowing music” is not the same as memorizing music. There are many virtuosos who have committed every note of a complex work to memory and can start playing it at any given point, yet have no idea of its formal and harmonic structure. In the deeper sense of the words they do not know what they are doing, even though they may give “unconsciously” a creditable performance. The correct order of the notes is meaningless if one does not understand the relationships between them that turn a series of pitches into the potential source of an aesthetic experience. The study and explanation of such relationships are within the province of musicology. (Bukofzer 1957, 24)

Without a sound general education, one that teaches musicians how to appreciate music as an aesthetic experience, the professional musician is nothing more than an automaton whose performances, however praiseworthy, are creditable only by fluke. Even when separated, therefore, the politics embodied in Aristotle’s ruler–ruled relationship and Boethian fundamentals are still doing their dirty work.

Perhaps I am reading too much into it. But I cannot help but wonder why someone committed to maintaining a clear institutional separation between school and department, on the one hand, can still claim, on the other, that real knowledge, real understanding, of and about music falls exclusively within the domain inhabited by the denizens of the department. Does not Bukofzer’s claim, that the expert musician does not know what he is doing, deny that the activities of the musician—the ability to memorize music, to play with technical mastery, to give creditable performances—embody forms of knowledge of and about music that are specific to performing? And, more to my point, does not Bukofzer’s fear, about the music school turning out superbly trained technicians who do not know what they are doing, ignore the converse danger, that the music department might be turning out superbly trained historians, theorists, analysts, critics, all of whom can talk (and talk) about music but, because they have minimal experience in the field as performing musicians, might not actually know what they are talking about?

As the problems underlying Bukofzer’s fallacy of the false compromise show, keeping a rigorous separation of the music school from the music department does not just reinforce the class system that this article has tried to expose. It may actually impede understanding in either domain. Rather than reinforce that system, the task before us should be something a little more radical: we should run it right out of business. How? Not by applying the critical tools the new musicology has copied from other disciplines, not by embracing an empirically based performances studies paradigm that just reduces the performer, performance, and performing into the new object to be prodded, probed, and measured (Cook 2012). We run the system out of business by reversing the flow of knowledge between research and practice. Instead of

reducing music-making to a venue for the application of higher knowledge (“informed performance” as Mann calls it), instead of turning musicians and the fruits of their labour into laboratory specimens to be measured and prodded (“performance studies”), we should take (and here is where the third form of knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance, comes back) the understanding embodied in real-world performance practice—what is recently being identified as experiential-based understanding—and make its acquisition part of the foundation upon which we not only create new knowledge, but also assess the rightness and relevance of the claims that a scholarship disconnected from actual musical practice makes. In other words, we should turn performance and performing into a component of research, as a testing ground, as a basis upon which to assess claims to truth, perhaps even as a source for critique. I say this neither to accord musicians supreme epistemological status, to make them as it were the new masters of the house. Nor do I say it to demonize the discourse of music scholarship for systematically putting musicians down. I say it because more than two decades of experience as a professional musician has shown me at least two things: (1) that the clearer perspective Beard and Gloag purport musicology to have on the art clearly does not explain or account for or correspond to how music actually works in concrete situations of real-world music-making; and (2) that the practice of music-making is hardly the superfluous activity a decade of musicological disciplining—my academic deformation, if you will—tried so hard to program me into believing, an activity that becomes epistemologically authoritative only when informed by the supposedly clearer perspectives of music history, theory, analysis, criticism, or some other brand of derivative music scholarship. On the contrary, performing is the very basis for making sense of music at all. It is, as others have argued under the auspices of praxis and embodied cognition, a primary source for understanding the art (Elliott 1995; Small 1998; Mead 1999; and Le Guin 2006). And with this claim we come full circle, to how Beard and Gloag construct the musicological perspective—by extricating and distancing it from actual musical practice so that it can achieve a clarity not to be found when you reflect from that practice. But what if the clarity that seems to arise from this manoeuvre is just an illusion created precisely by removing oneself from practice? What if things should have always been the other way around, as Beard and Gloag initially suggest, that musicological thought is really a subset of a broader base of thinking generated in and by the actual practice of music? And what if musicological thought as a subset of that broader base finds its clarity only when informed by that broader base of which it is a subset? And, finally, what if without being so informed, musicological thought is at best incomplete and hypothetical, at worst impoverished and off the mark?

These are big questions that cannot be answered here. And it is probably not going to fall within the purview of a derivatively conceived music scholarship to answer them. It is going to have to fall to musicians, or at least to a brand of scholarship that is open to what musicians have to say, and that means that a new discourse must be allowed to come into being. That means that we are going to have to defer, if not entirely reject, the authority of other disciplines only

so that this new discourse can establish its own voice independent of other disciplinary identities. That means that musicians are going to have to move their knowledge and understanding beyond the confines of teaching studios, master classes, practice rooms, rehearsal halls, and concert stages into the domain of the discussion forum. And that means that musicians are going to have to speak at conferences and colloquiums, and that they are going to have to (here it comes) publish. Something of what I am proposing here has already taken place in the form of an international symposium (*The Performer's Voice*, Singapore 2009). There, performers got together to give voice to what I have called musical understanding, to the knowledge embodied in the performing experience. But a dedicated symposium on the other side of the planet, like Bukofzer's and Dineen's program for separation, just keeps that understanding at arms length from the discourse of conventional scholarship on this side. And that separation would be unproblematic if it were not for the hierarchical relationship between them that technological rationality, driven by intellectual despotism, enforces. One way of circumnavigating that relationship is to bring musical understanding into direct contact with musicological thought by making room in the classroom and in forums of scholarly discussion for musicians, both student and professional, to speak from the vantage of their own field experience as performers. Whenever possible, I try to foster this rapprochement in the academic courses I teach—which include undergraduate surveys and seminars as well as graduate research seminars. At my institution, most of these courses are populated by performance majors, or by students with at least some performing experience. Once they are sensitized to how intellectual despotism works in their curriculum, students are fired up and compelled to define for themselves what it means to know and understand music from the perspective of their own performance practice, whether that be as soloist or ensemble musician, instrumentalist or singer. I cultivate their awareness of the thinking that is specific to their instrument and the contexts in which they play or sing, and I encourage them to use that thinking as a basis from which to engage, perhaps even assess, scholarship in some fashion. Two brief examples, one a lecture module, the other a term-paper project, will illustrate.

When I teach a music-history module on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, for instance, I try to do more than just the usual score and libretto analysis, or the quest for music-text relationships, or the exploration of the Don Juan literature, or the reconstruction of historical-cultural context (all of which can be found in Brown-Montesano 2007). I also have students act out the scenes under consideration. By acting it out, they become aware of how constructing an operatic character for performance requires them to bring to the process elements from outside the score, elements that are not incidental or supplemental but definitive for what the work is and means. In the case of the infamous first scene (which is the excerpt provided for in at least one standard North American textbook), what students find is that no amount of score analysis or historical reconstruction can give a definitive answer to the question driving the interaction between Donna Anna and Don Giovanni: what exactly happened? Was she raped, was she seduced, or was something else going on? And yet it is

a question that must be answered by the singers performing the parts for their singing and action to have motivational purpose in the moment of performance. Sometimes, I augment the performing exercise by watching contrasting performances of the scene. What the students come to learn from performing it, and to a lesser extent from watching performances, is not how to imagine some idealized abstraction, the work, in the context of its compositional conception or some other cultural backdrop. What they come to learn is how the process of performing itself determines what the work is, how the work works, and what that work means in the context of that working.

In the case of a term-paper project at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the rapprochement gets more interesting. Instead of assigning students the usual topics, like distinguishing a Beethoven from a Clementi sonata, or tracing text-music relationships in some song, or stringing together in a coherent narrative the development of the string quartet, I have them perform the music they write about (or write about the music they are currently performing) so that they can bring to the table what they have learned from engaging in such an experience and relate what they have learned to some aspect of the scholarly literature. That engagement ideally does not consist in talking about their performing experience in terms dictated by how scholars, musical or otherwise, are talking, although many students like to fall back on to doing just that. (As I have already said, education is mostly about learning how to comply.) Nor does it consist in blind acceptance of what has been put into print as authoritative. Rather it consists in students assessing what they read from the perspective of having performed the music they are writing about. It may be that what they read in the literature is correct, even if what they read is written by those who have not themselves gone out into contexts of artistic practice and performed the music they claim to understand. But more often than not, the students confront a disparity between what scholars have to say about music in general and the particulars of what happens in actual artistic situations, that inveterate gap between research and practice (Rink 2011). One example will illustrate.

During the course of one year, virtually the entire class in my undergraduate survey of nineteenth-century music was occupied in the final concert of the year, a performance of Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*. The students wrote about the work from diverse perspectives, as orchestral players, as members of the chorus, as listeners. The essay required them to articulate as much of the whole process as they could or were involved in, from the first rehearsal to the final performance, and to engage Rossini scholarship from the basis of what they learned from undertaking that process. I will be the first to admit that students found the project difficult, and the results were mixed. Many students fell back on the usual, making the music into an object available for historical or theoretical elucidation. But some students actually fulfilled the expectations in unexpected ways. Some articulated what might be called "adaptive contextualism," which is how the conditions of a specific performing context require musicians to adapt both themselves and the music to it. In the case of our production of the Rossini *Mass*, these adaptations amounted



to altering the score—tempi, articulation, expressive markings, sometimes even the notes themselves—in order to accommodate the large and overly reverberant hall, a sixty-piece orchestra, a 200-voice choir, and the fact that the soprano soloist was ill. But some students took the exercise further, by demonstrating how musical meaning arises, not from tonal configurations found in the score or from making sense of the work against some historical background, but from the social interactions arising in both rehearsal and performance. (They were perhaps egged on in this direction by my own insights into the issue, which came from my participation as one of the four soloists. In the fugal trio for alto, tenor, and bass soli, which on the page looks like a compositional exercise in counterpoint, became in performance an opportunity for one-upmanship, each statement of the subject functioning as an opportunity for a soloist to outdo the other two. This interaction is, of course, not written into the score. It arose during rehearsal in an ad hoc fashion and out of a social process: we (the soloists) were all friends who loved to tease one another and we continued to tease each other in the act of music-making.) Some students were even able to rise to the critical imperative. One took a noted scholar to task for dismissing the artistic merit of the orchestral version of the *Messe*—the opus was originally conceived for twelve singers, two pianos, and harmonium. Another explained her experience in terms of the social structures implicit in the very enterprise of performing music, the arrays of hierarchies between soloists and conductors, orchestra and chorus, within the orchestra, within the chorus, between music majors and non-music majors, all of which were symbolized in the pain she experienced from having to stand for two and half hours. (She was a chorister, a member of the only group that had to stand throughout the entire show when everyone else, except for the conductor, could sit.) Even though these essays came from second-year undergraduate students, they contained insights into the varied ways music works in the context of performing from a perspective that is not only absent in classical music scholarship, but is also supposed to be (if we are to take Beard and Gloag on their word) less than clear.

It is for the inclusion of the less than clear insights embodied in this perspective, and for the potentially beneficial effects its inclusion can have, that spaces really need to open up within conventional scholarly conferences and journals so that musicological and musical thought can intermix. Conventional music scholars who have displaced—dare I say given up—their identities as musicians, and learned to speak in the voices of other disciplinary identities, might be too put off by this mingling. Perhaps it is to avoid the unpleasant feelings associated with that displacement that musicology has historically defined itself—from Guido Adler's map for *Musikwissenschaft* right down to Hooper's tripartite taxonomy for musical understanding (Hooper 2006, 73–98)—by the absence or exclusion of the performer's voice, and by hermetically sealing itself off from the culture of music-making. But whether it entails focusing exclusively on musical structure, whether it entails preventing musicians from having a voice in scholarly discourse, whether it entails retreating into the confines of some other academic unit (like a history department or a faculty of social

science or a school of cultural studies), such hermeticism means missing out not only on renewing the musician within. It also means missing out on encountering, and entering into actual dialogue with, the real Other of music scholarship, the musician. And it also means missing out on forming partnerships with that Other to do the unprecedented, to articulate, codify, preserve, and disseminate ways of thinking about music that seem to have been historically devalued.

Such a call for collaboration between conventional scholars and practising musicians, between the humanities and performance, has already been made (Winn 1998). But that was well over a decade ago, and so little has changed at least in the domain of music. If we were to go with Beard and Gloag's initial definition of musicology, we can see why, for that definition not only entails that all musicians *are* musicologists, it also means that not all musicologists are musicians. The a-musia of the latter group is no reason to deny them the right to speak, but it is this a-musical group that controls who gets to speak and what gets spoken in "the discussion." Under their control, the voice of the musician is silenced, in journals, at conferences, not because she has nothing to say but because there is no chair for her at the table. And that is why polemics, *pace* Foucault (and my negative reviewer), is so important, even necessary, for with disciplinary structures so entrenched and music scholars so indifferent to real difference, with the rule of detached intellectuality so pervasive and the tyranny of listening so widespread, with music scholars so committed to speaking in the language of other disciplines, so preoccupied with self-perpetuation and career advancement rather than with assessing and critiquing their most basic beliefs, what is needed is only what polemics can provide, an exhortation for a radical departure from the norm, a resolute defiance of convention, a veritable wiping of the slate, a starting over. This departure would place the performer and the performed experience of music at the centre of discourse, not just to give the performer's voice its due, but also to allow the musician herself to challenge conventional music scholars to think outside the box of institutional discourse.

And so I will conclude with a vision of what a musicology conceived on this epistemic foundation might look like. Imagine programs of study in which performance is not a peripheral but an integral and necessary component for all coursework, from the freshman year to doctoral study. Imagine a curriculum in which we think and talk and write about music, not on the fantasy island of abstraction, but in the here and now of what actually happens in real-world performance. Imagine theories of music in which we conceptualize the art, not in terms of reified structural relationships, but in relation to the structure of singing and playing. Imagine surveys of music in which we replace the historical narrative with a paradigm in which we reflect on how the contexts in which our own music-making is embedded determine real musical outcomes. Imagine a discipline in which we ground what we say not by appealing to critical authorities A through Z (Adorno through Žižek) but by verbalizing the understanding embodied in what we do in the moment of performing. Imagine a style of peer review in which it is this kind of understanding that works

to confirm or contest research, pure and applied. Of course, imagining all that, or anything else, is pretty easy. The challenge is to do it. Because if we actually do it, we will have come more than just a long way from Aristotelian politics and Boethian fundamentals and all that they entail. We will have brought into existence a new institutional discourse about music, one created by musicians from out of our experience of being musicians. Such a discourse would not only constitute a new musicology. It would also be a discourse in which music and musicians rule.

#### NOTE

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## ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the uneasy relationship between scholarship and performance. I argue that this uneasiness stems from a still pervasive hierarchy, one that gives scholarship the power to regulate, even repress, what musicians themselves know and understand of music through the act of performing. This relation has far-reaching consequences that not only underscore basic epistemological formulations concerning the nature of both music and performance, but also govern what constitutes authoritative knowledge about the art. Indeed, in the modern research university, this relationship effectively accords epistemological legitimacy to every institutional identity that has something to say about music except that of the musician herself. If the musician and her activity figure in, they do so in subordinate positions, as objects to be studied, interviewed, prodded, or measured, or as vehicles for the application of disciplinary or research-based understanding. Such a situation enacts a power dynamic disturbingly similar to those operative in political structures founded on class difference, social inequality, and slavery. Indeed, I trace this dynamic back to Aristotle's *Politics*, where his defence of slavery effectively separates the work of thought from that of the body so as to keep thought elevated and pure. The relevance of this separation to musical matters becomes explicit in Boethian music theory, where those who merely think about music become musical authorities, while those who make music (whether as composers or performers) remain largely ignorant of what they are doing. Excerpts from musicological literature past and present show that this division, what might be called "intellectual despotism," continues to underwrite institutional music discourse in at least four salient ways: (1) by distorting music from a practice into an object to be observed; (2) by privileging listener-spectatorship and the experience of music had therein; (3) by promoting to sole epistemological authority those who speak to music through the mouthpieces of other disciplinary voices; and finally (4) by constructing musicians as benighted subjects who need to be "educated," "informed," or "civilized" by scholarship. The article concludes by outlining a program for undermining this politics, one that places musicians, as well as the knowledge embodied in music-making, at the foundation of musical understanding.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article se penche sur la relation difficile entre le savoir et la pratique musicale. L'auteur avance que cette relation est basée sur une hiérarchie encore très présente, qui attribue aux disciplines du savoir le pouvoir de réguler et même de limiter ce que



les musiciens savent et comprennent eux-mêmes de la musique à travers leur pratique. Les conséquences en sont importantes puisque cette relation imprègne les définitions épistémologiques de la nature de la musique et de l'interprétation, et qu'elle détermine les connaissances fondamentales portant sur cet art. En effet, dans l'université de recherche d'aujourd'hui, cette relation fait qu'est attribuée la légitimité épistémologique à toutes les instances institutionnelles s'occupant de musique exceptée celle des musiciens eux-mêmes. Lorsque les musiciens et leur activité sont considérés, ils le sont toujours dans une position subordonnée, en tant qu'objet d'étude, pouvant être questionné, sondé, mesuré, ou en tant que lieu d'application d'une grille d'analyse relevant d'une discipline et/ou d'une démarche de recherche particulière. Ce type de situation implique une dynamique de pouvoir ressemblant de façon troublante aux dynamiques politiques de pouvoir basées sur la classe, l'inégalité sociale, et l'esclavage. Cette dynamique peut être retracée jusqu'à la *Politique* d'Aristote, ouvrage dans lequel sa défense de l'esclavage repose sur la séparation du travail de l'esprit du travail manuel afin de protéger la pureté de la pensée. L'expression de cette séparation est évidente dans la théorie boécienne de la musique, qui considère ceux qui pensent la musique comme l'unique autorité, et ceux qui « font la musique » (compositeurs et musiciens) comme des ignorants qui ne savent ce qu'ils font. Plusieurs passages d'ouvrages musicologiques récents et moins récents continuent à présenter cette position, que l'on pourrait nommer « despotisme intellectuel », et à déterminer le discours institutionnel sur la musique au moins de quatre façons : (1) en déformant la musique d'une pratique en un objet d'observation, (2) en privilégiant la position de l'auditeur et son expérience de la musique, (3) en donnant la primauté et l'autorité épistémologique à ceux qui traitent de musique à partir d'autres disciplines, et, enfin, (4) en considérant les musiciens comme des ignorants ayant besoin d'être « éduqués », « informés », et « civilisés » par l'étude. Cet article conclut en proposant un programme pour déconstruire cette politique, et qui place les musiciens et leurs savoirs enracinés dans la pratique, aux fondements de la compréhension de la musique.