The musical body: how gender and class are reproduced among young people playing classical music in England

Abstract or Description

Scholars of western classical music have predominantly studied it as a text and positioned it as a site of ‘absolute value’ through which musicians and listeners ‘transcend […] the bodily’ (Johnson 2002). This thesis uses ethnography in order to critique this approach, exploring the experience of young people who participate in classical music ensembles in the south of England. It interrogates the relationship between classical music and the middle classes, asking what classed and gendered dispositions are being (re)produced through this musical practice. The thesis argues that rehearsal processes shape the embodied dispositions of young musicians to cultivate a mode of restraint and gendered control, which is congruent with a particular classed identity. This occurs within a powerful affective group setting, which interpellates participants as subjects of value through the intimate, embodied, non-linguistic call of this music.

This argument is built through four key claims. First, the boundary-drawing which legitimises the protected status of classical music draws on the classed, gendered history of its institutions in the Victorian period. This camouflages the ways in which musical standards of ‘excellence’ are formed socially, in and between certain bodies. Second, this musical practice simultaneously disciplines but also effaces the body. A major theoretical contribution of this thesis is to argue that the dispositions this produces are audible in the aesthetic of the music. Third, an ethic of correction is central to classical music education. Those in less privileged positions capitalise on this as a route towards classed self-improvement, gaining access to a musical world where they find an expressive voice, a strong sense of identity, and a supportive and intimate social scene. Fourth, mediated through sound, the sensuous body acts back against its disciplining to share powerful affective states with others, creating a powerful allegiance to bourgeois social norms and values.

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Classical is the music of authority: of teachers, parents, cultural institutions, tradition. A small minority of American teenagers embrace classical in spite of those things, and another minority embraces it as a way of rejecting the authority of their peers. But these kids are outliers. This is the biggest difference between classical music in its intended context and its current one: the music was meant to be easily understood, and, outside of church, pleasurable. Inside church, it was still meant to be immediate and accessible. You would be surprised how many actually enjoy it. I think this is partly an assumption, as it seems common for anyone above a certain age to believe that youth dislikes anything proper, civil, beautiful, classic, talented, etc. How can music help inspire a well-rounded child? How do I reach and teach children musically? Most importantly perhaps, how can I incorporate music into a curriculum that marginalizes the arts? This book explores a holistic, artistic, and integrated approach to understanding the developmental connections between music and children. This chapter focuses on the role of music in early childhood, including the importance of musical experience in early childhood, the musical abilities and enjoyment of infants and children, and the vocal ranges of the young child. It also explores musical activities and repertoires appropriate for young children. What a child has heard in his first six years of life cannot be eradicated later. On the other, classical music was most preferred by the people who were over 45 years old and they purchased 20% music albums of this music type. However, young Britons were quite less enthusiastic about classical music with their 1-2 percent purchase of the album of this genre. Interestingly, British people from 25-34 age group preferred classical music while British citizens from 35-44 did not. [Written by – Jeff]. Rock and pop music are more popular among young British while classical among the people over 45 years. The market of rock music albums is mainly dominated by men with a purchase record of over 30% compared to 16% purchase done by women.