

Contemporary Music and its Audiences

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



D. Biron

To my parents Pam and Angelo,

*and in memory of
Jennine Anne Savage
1966-2001 ...*

“We’ll know where when we get there”

(Sonic Youth: “Hoarfrost”)

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Abstract

This dissertation enquires into the discourses surrounding contemporary music and contemporary music audiences. It is concerned with the language used to describe, and inscribe value upon, music, and with the categories and genres used to organise its texts and audiences. It is concerned with the “between-spaces” of music and culture, and how certain interpretive positions tend to fall into the cracks between the ascendant dialogues and canonical monuments.

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of various strains of recent music research, with a particular focus upon popular musicology and popular music studies. Subsequently, the dissertation moves on to explore a number of areas of contestation, including the persistence of the opposition between high and popular culture, postmodernism and music, canon formation and critical praxis, and interpretive practices and studies of music audiences. The discussion is underwritten by the themes of isolation (suggested in the kind of nomadic and multifaceted critical position endorsed by Edward Said) and doubt (suggested in the concept of the ironist as developed by Richard Rorty).

The overriding goal of the dissertation is one of addressing the relative lack of attention given to individual audience members and to both the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of their everyday engagements with music. The discussion concludes – via a critique of the dialectic between Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin – by proposing an alternative way of thinking about music audiences in the 21st century.

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