

SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION: THE FIELDS OF ACADEMIC MUSIC
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by

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Music in the Academy

The academic field of music comprises many distinct disciplines, with equally distinct creative products. At its most broad description, music consists of performance-centered or applied work on the one hand, and academic study on the other. The communication and evaluation of applied musical output encompasses a diverse set of options, ranging from concerts and lectures, to recordings, published scores, and a host of other outlets. The communication and evaluation of academic musical output remains relatively grounded in the domain of scholarly articles and books.

Music-Specific Elements

Although a description of applied musical output would engage with many critical issues of scholarly communication and evaluation of scholarly work, the remainder of this discussion will address academic musical output, and the current state of scholarly communication within that discipline as it more generally related to other humanities disciplines. The various fields of academic music, including music theory, musicology, and ethnomusicology, share several common concerns regarding certain aspects of publishing about musical topics. First among those is that presentation of research often includes sound recordings. In academic conference presentations, it is common for speakers to integrate edited sound recordings into a formal talk, and in classroom teaching, the same is done. Obviously, conventional publication formats do not allow that option, whereas digital multimedia formats would allow it.

A second shared concern is the notation and language through which musicians communicate. Musical notation, whether it be contemporary western notation system or ethnomusicological notation systems, is often essential to an author's work, but it requires special consideration for printing/publishing. Flagship journals within the discipline have even designed their physical shape to accommodate musical notation in their examples more readily.

Audience

The subject matter of music is of appeal to the general public, to an interdisciplinary scholarly community, and to specialists. Publication in music likewise spans a continuum from popular press outlets to trade publications and academic journals. However, the size of the discipline's professional population is quite modest. For instance, the field of music theory is represented by the Society for Music Theory, which hosts a single annual

conference. Approximately 100 presenters appear on the program, while several hundred attend. Membership in the Society is approximately 1,000. Although music theory is a smaller field than either musicology or ethnomusicology, even those larger societies host annual conferences of only approximately 1,000 attendees.

Journal Publishing

Each field of academic music considers only two or three journals to be the most prestigious outlets for academic work. For instance, in music theory, those journals are *Music Theory Spectrum* (published by University of California Press on behalf of the Society of Music Theory), and *Journal of Music Theory* (published by Yale University Department of Music). Similarly, in musicology, *Journal of the American Musicology Society* (published by University of California Press on behalf of the American Musicological Society) *Journal of Musicology* (published by University of California Press) are joined by a few others in the top ranks. A short list of journals span the different fields of music scholarship (*Musical Quarterly*, for instance), and most sub-fields feature one or two primary journals (*Nineteenth-century Music*, *Popular Music*, or *Perspectives of New Music*, for instance).

Paper journals have remained the primary format for academic publication. However, readership of these journals is slowly switching to digital access, made available by services such as that offered by JSTOR (a not-for-profit organization that makes digital images of many scholarly journals available on-line through participating libraries). Ironically, these paper journals do not offer the multimedia advantages that a fully digital medium could, so even though audiences are often reading the journal articles through websites, the articles remain static text without sound or video, and with the same limitations on musical notation that existed in the paper copies.

On-line journals exist in academic music, but only in a few instances. Music theorists set up an on-line journal in 1993 (one of the first of such efforts). *Music Theory Online* specifically advertises itself as a medium where authors can combine sound recordings, video, musical notation, and text. This peer-reviewed journal is regarded with the same respect afforded the other major journals in music theory, but it remains a single example. Within the field of musicology, sub-fields such as scholars of Seventeenth-Century music have produced on-line journals (*Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music*, launched in 1995), but again, such examples are few in number.

Journal publication involves a lag time of anywhere from six months to two years in the various fields of music scholarship. The peer-review process, still regarded as the most important evaluation procedure for new research, is slow, although certain flagship journals and a few of the on-line journals advertise to scholars their faster turn-around times in an effort to recruit the best submissions.

Costs associated with journal publication are linked to the unique aspects of music publishing. Although a few publishers will take care of setting musical notation for the authors, many require “camera-ready copy” of graphics that include musical notation.

Thus, many authors hire this work out. Subscription rates, however, remain quite modest. The on-line scholarly music journals that are most respected typically offer entirely free access to the public.

Although journal publication remains quite traditional for the fields of academic music, production continues to rely on the patterns of peer-review, volunteer editing and, in some cases, technical production, and modest subscription rates. Peer-reviewed on-line journals are welcomed, but have not substantially affected the established paper versions.

Monographs

“The Book” remains the central focus of many fields of academic music, at least in regard to tenure at research institutions. Monographs from university presses are expected, and both the research structure and the publishing structure in the discipline support that tradition. The audience for these publications remains a relatively small and specialized group, although in the past few years, publishers have been increasingly interested in academic books with a broader appeal, either toward interdisciplinary readership or to a lay readership. Books on music for the general public abound, and particularly in fields such as popular music studies, the distinction between scholarly and trade publications is becoming increasingly complicated. As those lines are blurred, partially for marketing reasons and sales numbers, the way that those publications are evaluated for tenure and promotion is called into question.

As with journal articles, publication costs for academic music books are often passed to the author. Fees for permission to reproduce musical excerpts, photographs, and other materials, plus fees for setting musical notation, often total several thousand dollars. Publication subvention grants are awarded by universities and by professional societies quite frequently, but in the absence of a grant, those up-front costs of anywhere from a few to several thousand dollars would be paid by the author.

Although recent years have seen many attempts to bundle CDs or website passwords with books, that trend has taken root primarily in textbook publishing. Thus, the monographs that are the focus of music scholars remain static text in paper form, in spite of the fact that the subject matter of those texts is closely dependent on sound.

Summation

In general, academic music comprises a discipline of modest size, whose constituent fields carry on traditional modes of publishing. A few on-line journals have successfully established themselves among the most respected ranks, and those peer-reviewed journals have typically been made available free to the public. Most publications still appear in paper format, which cannot accommodate sound recordings, and even today, publishing musical notation in journal articles is either very time-consuming or expensive for the author. However, the indicators at national conferences, in conversations with senior faculty, and in communication with editors, are that publishing in academic music is relatively stable.

Broader concerns that are common to the humanities certainly apply: lag time between submission and publication for articles and books, costs to the author for publication, the evaluation of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary work in tenure and promotion, and access to journals and books with sometimes limited circulation.

In one final comment, I find it ironic that graduate students and faculty alike search on-line bibliographies and databases, then access digitized versions of publications, and read them via computers. In the commercial world, those computers handle sophisticated combinations graphics, sound, video, text, and non-linear conceptual presentations. Yet our primary publishing outlets remain paper-based, and it is these paper publications that we read on our computer screens.