“High Brow, Low Brow, Knot Now, Know How”: Music Curricula In A Flat World

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The Death Of Classical Music?

Writing more than ten years ago, music historian Joseph Horowitz summarized the state of classical music in America as he saw it:

Taken as a whole, American classical music describes a simple trajectory, rising to a height at the close of the nineteenth century and receding after World War I. In the decades of ascendancy, the quest for an American canon was its defining virtue, whether or not the reigning German model proffered true hope for an indigenous American style. The decades of decline were at first highly interesting: a new culture of performance was crowned by amazing feats of virtuosity and probity, and textured, as well, by an exciting if subsidiary pursuit of the American symphony. After 1950, the absence of a native canon was a defect no longer disguised or minimized by
spectacular borrowed goods. By century’s end, intellectuals had deserted classical music: compared to theatre, cinema, or dance, it was the performing art most divorced from contemporary creativity, most susceptible to midcult decadence. [1]

For Horowitz, American classical music culture in the twentieth century would have done better to focus on American composers rather than on performers—orchestras and ensembles who mostly played the music of European composers. The spectacular rise of celebrity conductors like Arturo Toscanini in the first half of the twentieth century brought with it a kind of neglect of American composers that ultimately led, in Horowitz’s view, to classical music’s lack of relevance to contemporary intellectual life in the United States. Summoning the name of perhaps the last great celebrity advocate for classical music in American culture, Horowitz writes, “Americans of the 1930s, 60 percent of whom said they liked to listen to classical music, knew who Toscanini was; for most people today, Leonard Bernstein is not even a memory.” [3]

It is worth noting that laments over the “death of classical music” have continued to sound in recent years. Gigi Douban (2015), for instance, refers us to sales figures: “Classical music sales have been struggling for years now. They make up just 1.4 percent of music consumption, compared to 29 percent for rock, according to a Nielsen survey last year. Symphonies from Nashville to Canada’s Prince Edward Island are dealing with mountains of debt. And audiences of classical music haven’t changed much, which makes it tough for artists who aren’t Andrea Bocelli to make it in the industry.” [3]

Such figures will not surprise many who have been engaged in the creation, performance, promotion, or teaching of classical music over the last twenty-five years. In fact, a Nielsen report (2017) for the year 2016 places classical
music at 1 percent of total music sales in the United States. [4]

Classical music today is simply not as popular among the general music-consuming public as other styles are. And taking into account Horowitz’s observations about classical music’s status in the intellectual community, it is also not considered the only type of music worthy of sophisticated listening and discussion. As musicologist Robert Fink writes: “It is no longer even news, as it seemed to be in the mid-1990s, that ‘popular’ styles like indie rock and hip-hop have more artistic credibility for the average reader of, say The New Yorker, than the sound of the downtown avant-garde. Vernacular music is, by now, so interwoven with remnants of the Western canons of art music and jazz that today’s hard-working and adaptable composers don’t even expect special credit for knowing and loving it all.” [5]

This chapter will focus especially on how this change in the cultural standing of classical music might impact the ways we teach music at universities, which traditionally have been primarily focused on classical music. But before engaging in that discussion, it will be useful to explore some of the factors that have played a role in this music-cultural transformation. If classical music is no longer regarded as the only music worthy of serious consideration among listeners, performers, critics, and scholars, how did this shift in cultural standing happen?

**Highbrow/Lowbrow And Music In A Flat World**

The terms “highbrow” and “lowbrow” were used in academic discussions of culture for many years before Lawrence Levine’s 1988 book *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* prompted a fresh discussion of the topic within academia. [6] Levine chronicles how a sense of sophistication came to be associated with various aspects of American culture. He devotes
his most sustained attention to the plays of Shakespeare, positing that in the
nineteenth century, these plays were enjoyed by both simple and
sophisticated audiences. By the end of the nineteenth century, however,
Shakespeare’s plays became strong and distinct markers of highbrow
culture, and Levine examines how this transformation took place. Levine
also explores other areas of culture, including fiction, park design, museum
curation, and—central to the concerns of this chapter—the rise of classical
music. One of his fundamental claims is that the highbrow/lowlbrow
distinction in cultural status is constructed within society, and as such, it is
subject to change over time. He writes, “One of the central arguments of this
book is that because the primary categories of culture have been the
products of ideologies which were always subject to modifications and
transformations, the perimeters of our cultural divisions have been
permeable and shifting rather than fixed and immutable. To accept this
thesis is to accept a picture of the American cultural past and present that
departs considerably from the images most of us have learned to accept,
which is never an easy thing to do.” [7]

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu makes a stronger claim for such cultural
stratification, arguing that distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow
provide a mechanism for the upper classes to retain a hold on political
power. He employs the term “cultural capital” to explore how some aspects
of culture can benefit one element of society over another. For Bourdieu,
these distinctions can allow individuals to maintain status within society, to
ascend within that society, and to even prevent (or strongly impede) ascent
in social, political, and economic standing.[8]

It is important to note that Bourdieu’s work—and
particularly the data on which he bases his analysis—focuses on French
culture in the 1960s. As a consequence, it might not be directly applicable or
strongly analogous to American culture in the twenty-first century. [9]

The possibility that highbrow/lowlbrow
distinctions might reinforce social inequities in today’s American musical
culture, however, is worth bearing in mind, especially as we consider how such distinctions might affect the ways we design our music curricula.

Horowitz (1987, 2005) provides an in-depth chronicle of the origins of the highbrow/lowbrow distinction in American culture and the rise of classical music as a marker of highbrow status. Beginning with the origins of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera in the late nineteenth century, Horowitz follows the growth of classical music in America into the age of radio and those halcyon days in which, as noted previously, classical music enjoyed a certain popularity among the general listening public. The rise of great conductors like Toscanini and Leopold Stokowski, and the celebrity that went with it, was made possible by many of the same entertainment-business vehicles (radio and movies) that also made stars of Fred Astaire, Judy Garland, and Bing Crosby. The difference was that classical music—although it was thoroughly commercial—projected an image of art for art’s sake: to many, it was music that rose above the everyday concerns of commerce, elevating the soul and ennobling the spirit. It is this sense of artistic authenticity that was (and remains) crucial to classical music’s appeal.

The idea that classical music is culturally superior to other styles, according to Horowitz, goes back to John Sullivan Dwight, a nineteenth-century Boston writer who played a key role in establishing this distinction. Horowitz reports that Dwight “particularly esteemed Beethoven’s symphonies as the embodiment of ethical striving, and considered music as entertainment invalid and corrupt. He inveighed against whatever seemed frivolous, bacchanalian, or exhibitionist. He espoused ‘classical music.’”

For most of the twentieth century, classical music’s highbrow status was widely recognized and relatively unchallenged. Other styles might be thought of as approaching highbrow status—third-stream jazz and some forms of ambitious pop and rock, for instance—but classical music’s
highbrow standing has never been significantly diminished. [12]

Classical might have become less popular in recent decades, but it has retained its clear association with high art and culture. While Fink argues that intellectuals and artists might also regard other musical styles as interesting and worthy of critical appreciation and study—perhaps even preferring these other styles to classical—this does not mean that classical music is no longer considered sophisticated. Classical music has not lost prestige as much as it is now forced to share it. This new sharing of cultural status is an indicator of a levelling of the historical distinction between highbrow and lowbrow in American musical culture.

In his 2005 international bestseller *The World Is Flat*, Thomas L. Friedman coins the term “flat world” to describe an increasingly global economic and technological environment that he believes is fueling a crucial transformation in civilization. The idea at the center of the book is that the rise of digital technology has made the world a smaller place and provided dramatically increased access to resources to a greater number of people worldwide. The world is flat, at least in part, because the hierarchical structures that had previously restricted access to resources have been bypassed. [13] And as the popularity of classical music has declined in recent decades, the distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow have become less pronounced: in many ways, we are living in a flat world of musical styles—a world in which almost any style can be given serious intellectual consideration. As more styles of music have access to the elevated cultural standing once held only by classical music, the highbrow/lowbrow distinction collapses—or is at least dramatically reconfigured. In the flat world of music, highbrow and lowbrow seem increasingly useful only as historical terms—as categories that help us understand how people made such distinctions in the past.

The technological changes that are such a crucial part of Friedman’s argument have also had a significant impact on the world of music. The rise of the Internet has made more music available to more people than at any
other time in history. The often controversial practice of file sharing has both created a serious threat to record labels (since many listeners want to download music for free) and made a vast range of music readily and easily available to any listener with a playback device and an Internet connection.

The rise of digital technology has made it possible to inexpensively record music, while specialized websites have provided ways for musicians to get their music to fans worldwide. If a flat world means that more people have access to markets, ways of creating a product, and abilities to promote it, then music has certainly become a much flatter world than it has ever been.

And in this new flat world of music, more classical music is available to more people free of charge than ever before. The fact that the music is plentiful and easily accessed, however, has not done much to reverse classical’s reduced popularity among listeners.

We are living in a flat musical world in which classical music is no longer seen as the only music worthy of being considered art. As we turn our attention back to music school curricula, it is important to note that many of our students have backgrounds outside of classical music—and sometimes very rich backgrounds. Given the present status of classical music in our culture, should we insist that the musical education of these students be dominated by classical music?

**Music Curricula in a Flat World**

In his recent memoir reflecting on a life spent as an administrator in the performing arts—including a lengthy term as director of the Eastman School of Music—Robert Freeman acknowledges the changes that music schools need to grapple with:
It is a central part of the message of this book that in a world of very rapid change, music teaching, still the predominant way musicians make a living, has been very slow to change, as have the curricula of our major music schools and the pedagogical goals towards which those curricula have been directed. The assumptions that basic study in fundamental musicianship may be put off till college, that the symphony orchestra should remain the backbone of a music school’s enrollment plans, that instrumental and vocal students learn optimally from weekly lessons from well-known specialists, and that the road to musical heaven lies straight through the practice room remain unexplored axioms inherited from the nineteenth century. [16]

Freeman clearly suggests here that the old ways might no longer be the best ways when it comes to music school curricula. Elsewhere, he suggests that today’s students need greater educational exposure to popular music. [17]

Considering the status of classical music in a flat world and its limited appeal within the culture at large, an outsider observing current university-level music training and education might wonder why classical music is still so central to the curriculum. She might also wonder what the situation has been in music schools historically that would make it necessary to even have to propose including study of other music to the curriculum—the music that most people outside the music school actually listen to far more often.

In a 1995 book entitled Heartland Excursions, ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl provides a fair-minded examination of what we might call “school-of-music culture” (he calls it the “Music Building”). [18] Nettl observes that most programs focus on what he calls a “central repertory,” which is roughly analogous to what we have been calling “classical music” here. Nettl writes, “The center is classical
Western music (almost exclusively European music) composed roughly between 1720 and 1930. There is no single accepted term that represents this sector of art music, but the music community often uses common-practice music or standard music. I would suggest the term central repertory. It is what the music school considers music par excellence.”

Nettl claims that pop music—he mostly means rock and country music—is actively suppressed in the Music Building, writing that “rock and country music groups appear ‘once in a blue moon’” and that “music school teachers prefer that their students avoid contact with these musics lest they become irrevocably polluted.” Such musical styles are not banned completely, however: “Musics outside the central repertory may enter the hallowed space by way of a servants’ entrance: classes in musicology. They may be accepted (performed) so long as they behave like the central repertory (performed in concerts with traditional structure) but remain separate.”

Following the highbrow/lowbrow distinction discussed by Levine and Horowitz, the word music in “Music Building” is mostly synonymous with “classical music,” and the principal focus on classical is an unmistakable consequence of the highbrow status of this style in the culture during the mid-twentieth century, when music curricula began to standardize.

To be fair, many schools have offered significant jazz programs for decades, and a far smaller number now offer programs in pop music (or commercial music). But at the core of many music schools’ curriculum is still—more than twenty years after Nettl wrote about it and now well into the twenty-first century—the central repertory.
The centrality of the central repertory should probably cause us to pause for at least a moment; it is as if the Music School existed in a time warp, cut off from the world around it but nonetheless producing students who will necessarily enter it after their training is complete. Even the most generous figures in music sales would only award 5 percent of the market to classical and jazz combined. [23] [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/maize/mpub9470277/1:19/--coming-of-age-teaching-and-learning-popular-music?id=N11_23;note=ptr;rgn=div1;view=trgt] This would seem to indicate that—in most but not all cases—music schools ignore or place a markedly secondary emphasis on 95 percent of the music the rest of the world seems to want to hear. [24] [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/maize/mpub9470277/--coming-of-age-teaching-and-learning-popular-music?id=N11_24;note=ptr;rgn=div1;view=trgt] Such a narrow focus cannot possibly serve most music students well. For those who will play in professional orchestras, or even those who will teach in music schools and conservatories, such a limited specialization might not prove problematic. But often enough, the most narrowly focused classical musician will emerge from music school into a world that will require that graduate to build a career, often freelancing and teaching without the security of a full-time position in classical music. In such an environment, a broader range of musical skills and experience are a significant asset.

It is thus clear how the focus on classical music in college and university music curricula arose—it paralleled the rise of classical music in America during the twentieth century. The highbrow status of classical music made it a good fit for college and universities, placing music comfortably beside literature, philosophy, and other disciplines in the arts and humanities. But in a flat world, one in which the highbrow/lowbrow distinction has been strongly attenuated and in which classical can no longer claim an exclusive place as the sole musical style in the pantheon of serious art forms, how must music curricula change to reflect the new musical environment?

The Integrated Curriculum

Consider the following hypothetical case: A flagship state university offers a top-ranked music program. Somewhere in that same state, there is an enormously talented and dedicated guitarist who is eager to study music. This student is very accomplished at playing rock music but has not yet been
challenged to broaden her skills. She auditions for a program in guitar performance but has not mastered either jazz or classical—the only two choices available at this school. Members of the music school faculty and admissions staff recognize the talent in this student but do not have a program of study that does not force this student to either abandon her focus on performance (perhaps focusing on music business or technology) or change styles to one of the available options. The school remains dedicated primarily to the central repertory, largely owing to the influence of the faculty, who hold that no style of music other than classical or jazz is worthy of study at their school. In a state in which this student’s parents pay taxes, and at a school that is a direct beneficiary of state support, this student is forced to study somewhere else—or worse, not at all. This student cannot attend the best school in the state because she plays the wrong kind of music—she does not play the 5 percent of music this school cares about.

I have argued elsewhere for what I call the “integrated curriculum.”

At the center of this proposal to reorganize our music programs is the idea that musicians of all types should study together in an environment that challenges all but privileges none. It is not beneficial to create a separate education for pop musicians, as a handful of schools have done; students who specialize in a wide range of musical styles should study together in an environment that privileges no repertory over any other, at least early in the curriculum.

All students benefit from being pushed beyond their musical comfort zones into an experience of music and musical practices they might not otherwise have sought out. The integrated curriculum is an approach that interprets the meaning of music to be broader and more inclusive than that of the Music School. This breadth does not mean that students cannot specialize and develop an extremely high degree of mastery, even in
traditional classical performance; rather, it means that music schools would open their programs to a broader range of young musicians than they typically do now—a wide variety of students focusing on a wide variety of styles.[29] Figure 1 provides a summary of the integrated curriculum. It is intended to serve as an outline for bachelor of arts in music (BA) and bachelor of music (BMus) degrees that more effectively blend training in a broad range of musical styles. Each school, department, or program could customize this outline to serve its own particular profile and needs and emphasize its own strengths and distinctive character. The crucial elements of this curriculum are (1) stylistic diversity (providing meaningful training for a wide range of musicians) and (2) integration of students of differing specialization (encouraging versatility) as opposed to segregation of students by specialization. Let us examine each component of this curriculum in more detail.

**THEORY (4 SEMESTERS)**

- semesters 1 and 2 integrated, includes harmony, melody, some voice-leading, rhythm and meter, and form (could be done in a large-class format)

- semesters 3 and 4 specialize (smaller classes), including options in advanced harmony/voice-leading/counterpoint, form and analysis, pop and jazz harmony and practice, post-tonal analysis, songwriting and arranging, analysis of world music

**AURAL SKILLS (3 SEMESTERS BA; 4 SEMESTERS BMUS)**

- traditional emphasis on sight-singing, melodic and harmonic dictation

- additional emphasis on form, timbre, and production

- blends wide range of styles

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HISTORY/LITERATURE (4 SEMESTERS)

- semesters 1 and 2 integrated, featuring short units on a contrasting variety of styles, blending classical, with pop, jazz, and world music
- semesters 3 and 4 specialize (smaller classes) with more detailed studies of individual styles and eras (such as classical, baroque, jazz, rock, world music)

ENSEMBLE (4 SEMESTERS BA, 8 SEMESTERS BMUS), AS SPECIFIED BY EMPHASIS

- traditional band, orchestra, and choir
- jazz band and rock combo
- world music ensemble

LESSONS (4 SEMESTERS BA, 8 SEMESTERS BMUS)

- students study principal instrument in style of emphasis

MUSIC ELECTIVES, REQUIREMENTS SPECIFIED BY SPECIALTY DISCOURAGED

- traditional electives in theory and history/literature, with the additional of upper-level electives in jazz, pop, and world music
- music business, technology, and entrepreneurship
- all students encouraged to take at least one semester of ensemble outside of their specialty

**Figure 1.** Integrated curriculum for the BMus and BA in music.
MUSIC THEORY. As it is currently taught, music theory gives strong priority to common-practice harmony and voice-leading. These courses should be recalibrated to create greater parity among repertories and reserve the most detailed study of voice-leading for second-year courses and electives. To a certain extent, many instructors are already incorporating popular music and jazz into their first-year courses. If the first-year sequence becomes more diverse, it creates an instructional environment in which students focusing on different styles come together with no style considered more fundamental than any other. From a technical point of view, emphasis is put on the features of musical understanding that cross stylistic boundaries such as form, rhythm and meter, texture, and to some extent, harmony and melody. Students should emerge from the first-year sequence able to identify and follow the form in a variety of pieces, focusing primarily on cadence points. They should be able to recognize and notate rhythms in a variety of styles as well as understand the fundamental elements of tonal harmony, including chromaticism and modulation—in many cases without extensive part-writing experience. There would be no emphasis on chorale-style writing.

Second-year course offerings would build on the first year, revisiting materials with an eye toward greater detail. Emphasis on part-writing, counterpoint, the finer points of rhythm and meter, and more complicated examples of form are appropriate here. These courses would be style specific, so a course emphasizing classical music need not consider other styles. Likewise, courses in pop, jazz, or world music need not base any element of the instruction on models established to study classical music (though they may well choose to do so). While all students would study together in the first year, in the second year, students would specialize according to emphasis. These second-year courses could also serve as electives for students outside of the emphasis, and such diversity should be encouraged. Courses such as the ones suggested in the outline currently exist in many programs but often only as electives.

AURAL SKILLS. Like theory, aural skills would privilege no particular repertoire, and in many cases, this is already the norm. In the early
semesters, detailed work on sight singing would be partly replaced by emphasis on longer-range hearing: identifying the location of phrase beginnings and endings, as well as the cadences and harmonic/melodic/contrapuntal schemes that accompany them (sonata form, fugue, twelve-bar blues, AABA form, etc.); texture (number of parts present, roles of the instruments in an ensemble, stereo placement, effects, etc.); improvisation; and instrumentation. Harmonic dictation (not involving SATB transcription) would be placed early in the sequence, and detailed sight singing would appear later in the sequence. The organization of theory and aural skills proposed here advocates a progression from general to specific as the sequence unfolds, allowing students to perceive and conceptualize more of the big picture earlier and refine the details of that picture later. [31]

MUSIC HISTORY/LITERATURE. The first-year sequence abandons the chronological survey of Western classical music. The first two semesters instead blend together a variety of units presenting often dissimilar styles with an emphasis on variety and no claim to comprehensiveness. A three-week unit on early polyphony, say, could be followed by successive units on the Beatles and the ’60s, the symphonies of Mozart and Haydn, and finally the music of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. None of these units would have any less depth than they would have in a chronological sequence; they would simply occur in isolation and juxtaposition. The emphasis would be on how we study and understand the music, not on making sure we cover everything. [32] While some might claim that abandoning chronology in itself creates a lack of depth, the current manner of progressing through music history from plainchant to the new complexity is far too specialized for most degree emphases and—by virtue of its exclusion of other styles—has an inherent lack of depth with regard to other important styles. Many programs have already developed a more general approach to music history in the first semester of the first year, and one can imagine other ways of achieving a meaningful organization of first-year materials in keeping with the principles advocated in the outline. The key to the approach proposed here is that all students are together in the first year.
In the second year, students might separate out according to emphasis (as with theory), with courses outside the emphasis acting as electives. Courses devoted to surveys of specific eras in Western music history could be offered in the second year, though students would not need to cover the entire chronology with such courses. In addition, courses in jazz and pop history could be offered in the second year, as well as courses focusing on world music.

ENSEMBLE. Traditional ensemble experiences in band, orchestra, choir, and jazz band would remain, though now augmented by ensembles in popular and world music. Lab bands in songwriting and arranging, as well as in music production, could also be developed to meet the degree requirement within certain emphases. Some programs have already developed excellent models for these pop ensembles.

LESsons. Students would receive private instruction in their principal instrument, though the types of lessons would now be extended to accommodate students with emphases in pop and world music.

MUSIC ELECTIVES. Many current BM degree programs allow very little room for students to take elective courses (the situation with the BA is often much more flexible). This proposal encourages programs to require students to take at least two electives outside of their emphasis.

Some traditional schools might choose to continue in the current mode of very high specialization, continuing to embrace the central repertory and rejecting the integrated curriculum—or any significant curricular change—completely. Others might adopt only some of ideas presented here, while some might develop the fullest curricular integration. Such a result would ultimately provide students with a rich variety of educational options between programs at various schools. Of course, programs providing professional accreditation, such as music education, must continue to follow state guidelines in their curricular design.
This chapter has argued that most music curricula must change. Viewing the twentieth century from a historical perspective allows us to understand how music schools came to focus on the central repertory. But the decline of interest in classical music in American culture, combined with a flattening of the highbrow/lowbrow distinction, is forcing music school faculty to reconsider how to best educate, train, and prepare their students for a rich, rewarding, and successful life in music. We must protect the great tradition of classical music, to be sure, and work to maintain the high standards we have established over the years. Music sales cannot dictate music curricula. But we also cannot bury our heads in the sand when it comes to music in the flat world. This seems obvious to almost everybody but us; within the music school community, we are just now—and especially in the last few years—having debates and discussions that might result in significant changes. The flat world of music brings with it many opportunities and possibilities. We need to embrace these changes and use them to our advantage. Critics might claim that this broader approach to musical education at the college level will ruin the great tradition—that classical music will suffer. But indeed, classical music is already suffering mightily. The only chance of saving it within our programs is to place it within a broader context that is in keeping with the real world of music outside of music school.

Notes

1. Horowitz (2005), 516. Horowitz’s use of the term “midcult” here is influenced by McDonald (1960).  

2. Horowitz (2005), 508. See also Horowitz (1987). Bernstein, of course, advocated not solely for classical music but also for musical theater and pop.  

3. Douban (2015). Mark Vanhoenacker (2014) addresses the issue more boldly and succinctly: “When it comes to classical music and American culture, the fat lady hasn’t just sung. Brünnhilde has packed her bags and
moved to Boca Raton.” Farber (2014) is more optimistic. For more on the kinds of issues facing symphony orchestras, see Flanagan (2012). 

4. A chart on p. 10 of Nielsen (2017) also reports that jazz represents just 1 percent of overall music sales in the United States. At the top of this list is rock at 29 percent, followed by R&B/hip-hop at 22 percent, pop at 13 percent, and country at 10 percent. 

5. Fink (2014). In an essay first published in 2007, Richard Taruskin (2009) wrote: “Since the ‘British invasion,’ nearly half a century ago, it has been socially acceptable, even fashionable, for intellectuals to pay attention primarily to commercial music, and they often seem oblivious to the existence of other genres. Of no other art medium is this true. Intellectuals in America distinguish between commercial and ‘literary’ fiction, between commercial and ‘fine’ art, between mass-market and ‘art’ cinema. But distinction in music is no longer drawn, except by professionals. Nowadays most educated persons maintain a lifelong fealty to the popular music groups they embraced as adolescents, and generation gaps between parents and children manifest themselves musically in contests between rock styles” (335). 

6. Important and vigorous discussions of the highbrow/lowlbrow divide occurred, for instance, in the mid-twentieth century with regard to the rise of middlebrow culture, as well as in discussions of mass culture. See Rubin (1992), McDonald (1960), and Rosenberg and White (1957). For the origin of the terms “highbrow” and “lowlbrow” in the late nineteenth century and their derivation from phrenology, see Levine (1988), 221–22. 


9. Jenkins (1992) writes, “I am less convinced than Bourdieu . . . that the use of French data does not undermine the general relevance of the argument. It may be that there is, for example, something highly specific about the relationship of the French metropolitan elite to Culture. America or Britain may be very different” (148).

10. See Covach (2016) for a more detailed discussion of the common features regarding marketing in classical and pop music in the twentieth century.

11. Horowitz (2005), 27. Levine (1988) refers to this elevation of classical music as “sacralization,” writing that “the urge to deprecate popular musical genres was an important element in the process of sacralization . . . If symphonic music was . . . divine, then it followed that the other genres must occupy a lesser region . . .” (136). With regard to Beethoven, it is perhaps worth noting that there is only one composer’s name above the stage of Boston’s Symphony Hall.

12. For a discussion of classical music and third-stream jazz, see Joyner (2000); for an examination of rock music and its relationship to classical-music ideals and values, see Covach (2007). The special issue of *Contemporary Music Review* in which the Joyner article appears contains several other contributions that explore the relationships of popular music to classical music in the twentieth century. See especially Caswell and Smith (2000).
13. Friedman (2007) writes, “Whenever civilization has gone through a major technological revolution, the world has changed in profound and unsettling ways. But there is something about the flattening of the world that is going to be qualitatively different from the great changes of previous eras: the speed and breadth with which it is taking hold” (49).\[N11_13-ptr1\]

14. On the problems facing the music industry, see Knopper (2009). On the impact of Napster on the practice of file sharing, see Menn (2003). For a historical account of the rise of the Internet, see Isaacson (2014) and Ryan (2010). Sterne (2012) provides a detailed account of the rise of the mp3 audio format.\[N11_14-ptr1\]

15. Digital technology has brought with it certain problems as well. For instance, having the ability to make recordings easily and inexpensively does not necessarily correlate with making good recordings. And being able to make one’s music readily available on the Internet does not solve the problem of how listeners will find the music there. Technology may have flattened the music world, but it has also made it seem much more crowded.\[N11_15-ptr1\]

16. This chapter argues that a decline in classical music’s popularity has occurred, but it does not directly engage why this happened. The reasons for the waning interest in classical music over the past few decades would make an interesting study, and at least one of these reasons would likely include the loss of classical music’s exclusive highbrow standing. As Rubin (1992) and Horowitz (1987, 2005) have pointed out, a significant part of classical music’s appeal during the height of its popularity had to do with the listeners’ view that understanding this music offered a path to cultural self-improvement. As it stopped being viewed as the only path, it also became far less traveled.\[N11_16-ptr1\], \[N11_16-ptr2\]

17. Freeman (2014a), 10. Freeman was director at Eastman for twenty-four years, from 1972 to 1996.\[N11_17-ptr1\]
18. Freeman (2014a) discusses European and American repertories, roughly equating them to classical music and pop. He writes, “While 638 NASM schools focus on the first of the two repertories, only Boston’s Berklee School of Music concentrates on the second. It is a principal thesis of this book that musicianship of the twenty-first century will necessarily include both bodies of music, now assimilating, in addition, new influences from Asia, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa” (66–67). There are other schools besides Berklee that focus on pop, but Freeman’s point here is clear. See Covach (2015a), Randles (2016), and Freeman (2014b).\[N11_18-ptr1

19. For another insider’s view of music study, see Kingsbury (1988). Nettl writes about a Midwestern music school, while Kingsbury recounts life at a northeastern conservatory. While there may be differences between the two, the focus on classical music is not one of them.\[N11_19-ptr1

20. Nettl (1995), 84.\[N11_20-ptr1

21. Ibid., 96. Similarly to Bourdieu, Nettl also picks up on the political angle: “It is difficult to avoid the comparison with the colonialist who expects the colonized native to behave like himself (adopt Christianity and give up having two wives) but at the same time to keep his distance (avoid intermarrying with the colonialist population).”\[N11_21-ptr1

22. The wind band tradition also plays an important role in many schools, especially those with large athletic departments that support the marching band. But even though the roots of the wind bands are different from those of classical music in the United States, wind ensembles in the Music School mostly aspire to the status of the symphony orchestra, performing often aesthetically demanding concert-hall works, frequently by contemporary composers. See Battisti (2002) for a comprehensive history of the wind band and wind ensemble in American music. For a more general view that takes the broad history of American music into account, see Crawford (2001). For an interesting account of Frederick Fennel and the founding of the pivotal Eastman Wind Ensemble in 1952, see Lenti (2009), 96–99.\[N11_22-ptr1
23. In the remarks quoted above, Nettl mentions classes in musicology. In contrast to the adherence to the central repertory in performance programs in the Music School, graduate programs in music theory and musicology have mostly embraced the study of popular music. Twenty years ago, a student took a significant professional risk by writing a dissertation on a popular music topic, both in terms of landing her first job and later in terms of earning tenure. Today, a specialty in popular music is often considered an advantage, both on the job market and in terms of publication opportunities. This makes the contrast with the traditional performance programs all the more pronounced. See Covach (2015b).\footnote{\#N11_23-ptr1}

24. As mentioned above, Nielsen (2017) reports classical music sales at 1 percent of the total market; with jazz also at 1 percent, this makes for a total of 2 percent combined. Expecting that some readers may find this figure inaccurate or variable from year to year, I use 5 percent for the purposes of this argument.\footnote{\#N11_24-ptr1}

25. Certainly music sales are not the only way to gauge popularity. Advocates of classical music might argue that such figures do not capture the attendance at community orchestra and school concerts or even classical music as it is performed in church services. But it is also true, viewed from the popular music side, that these figures do not capture the many bands and artists performing nightly in bars, clubs, and concert halls across the country nor the enormous amount of free pop music produced by independent artists that floods the Internet.\footnote{\#N11_25-ptr1}

26. I posit this here as a hypothetical case, but I have personally seen this scenario unfold many times during the past four decades.\footnote{\#N11_26-ptr1}

27. See Covach (2015b).\footnote{\#N11_27-ptr1}

28. Providing instruction devoted exclusively to pop can result in a kind of pedagogical pandering by which students are assured they will study only the music they already like without having to confront or engage other styles and practices. It is worth noting, however, that there is certainly tuition rev-
enue to be generated by offering such programs. Pop programs began to appear in the 1970s, with Berklee and the Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT, now the Musicians Institute) being the best-known schools for providing instruction centering on jazz and rock. Initially these programs were dismissed by many in the Music School as “trade schools.” Over the years, Berklee has become one of the most recognized music schools in the United States and recently merged with the Boston Conservatory. The trade school criticism was misguided, however, since in many ways the traditional conservatory degree is not much different from what Berklee and GIT offered. The problem with the programs developed by Berklee and GIT decades ago, as well as with some of the programs developed in the first jazz departments, is that they suffered from the same stylistic narrowness that afflicts the Music School programs. [#N11_28-ptr1]

29. “Students studying rock, for instance, need significant exposure to classical music and musicians. Classical musicians need to know about jazz and recording technology. Jazz musicians need to know more about musical theater and world music. All students need to understand the business of music and to develop entrepreneurial skills. Keeping those aspects of music-making and creative activity in separate boxes and segregating students by program hurts them both artistically and practically” (Covach 2015b). [#N11_29-ptr1]

30. For other solutions and discussions of music curriculum revision, see the “CMS Manifesto” (Sheehan Campbell 2014), which has sparked lively debate, as well as Weston (2017) and Baumer (2015), which explore new approaches to teaching music history. [#N11_30-ptr1]

31. While there has been a greater integration of popular music into theory textbooks over the past few years, the tendency has been to add pop to a framework that remains driven almost exclusively by the concerns of common-practice music. Snodgrass (2015) is probably the most centered on pop, followed closely by Holm-Hudson (2017), though the latter remains strongly committed to the values of classical music (i.e., partwriting, figured bass, and counterpoint). An integrated theory text would place elements of theory that a variety of styles commonly share at the center of the frame-
work, at least in the first year, in order that no repertory is considered even tacitly superior to any other.\footnote{#N11_31-ptr1}

32. Integrating pop music into aural skills training can occur quite organically. Dictation and sight singing of pop melodies can be done easily from sheet music, and collections of pop songs are plentiful, readily available, and inexpensive. Assignments that require students to transcribe from recordings or simply figure out the chords can be integrated into other more traditional kinds of assignments.\footnote{#N11_32-ptr1}

33. Effective implementation of this approach would depend heavily on the areas of expertise among the faculty and might require team teaching or shared teaching. But since no attempt is made to cover all styles, this approach also allows great flexibility in course planning. See Baumer (2015) and Lowe (2015).\footnote{#N11_33-ptr1}

34. Most pop and rock ensembles play almost entirely by ear, and thus in most cases there is no score for the director to work from in rehearsal. This practice can strongly reinforce aural skills training for students, as well as offer practical applications for theory concepts, as students work out their own parts and organize the form of the song at hand according to models learned in class.\footnote{#N11_34-ptr1}

35. This chapter addresses only curricular reform in college and university music teaching. There has been a burgeoning literature developing on the integration of nonclassical musics into K–12 teaching in the last few years, as indicated by the recent launch of the *Journal of Popular Music Education*.

**References**


music-sales-enter-survival-mode


