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### Music Trouble: Desire, Discourse, Education

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#### Article abstract

"Music Trouble" is an experimental paper, a linear re-presentation of the multi-media performance (which included costume, poetry, photographs, and musical scores, in addition to the paper) designed for the Ottawa Border Crossings Conference. "Music Trouble" explores identity construction through music and music education, specifically in relation to issues of sexuality. Judith Butler's idea of "gender is drag" and Sue-Ellen Case's "butch-femme aesthetic" are employed in conjunction with feminist auto/biography to critique current theories and practices supporting music education.

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# MUSIC TROUBLE: DESIRE, DISCOURSE, EDUCATION

Roberta Lamb

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## Introduction

Some years ago I noticed certain musical characteristics in my writing — attention to the sound of the words and great concern with the movement of the form through time. I associate this convergence of how-the-words-sound-through-time with the content in my writing to a particularly difficult life--period when my body made it obvious to me that I would not survive the separation of mind and body I adroitly practiced as musician, teacher, and academic. Negotiating the inside/outside “epistemology of the closet”<sup>1</sup> further accentuated that mind/body split. As I listened intently, integrating the mind/body duality to a coherent self, recognizing she knew more than I could tell,<sup>2</sup> I realized a single narrative strand would not satisfy the complexities and multiplicities of voice, such that since 1990 I’ve admitted a predilection for polyphonic writing.<sup>3</sup> “Why can’t you just say it?” a leather-dyke sociologist once demanded. “Because it wouldn’t be music if I did, and the music is reason for writing. I am looking for ways of bringing musical meaning and experience into the verbal metaphors.” This is very much what Sam Abel describes as his purpose in writing about opera:

I write in the first person not because I think I am a typical opera audience member or because I think there is something unique about my reactions, but because my feelings are what I know. And I write about my own

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<sup>1</sup> This insider/outsider division serves an important function in camp sensibility, where self-reflexive commentary on physicality, embodiment, and parody are part of the critical discussion. See Sam Abel, *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet,” in *The Lesbian And Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halpern (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45–61; and Blackmer, Corinne and Patricia Juliana Smith, eds., *En travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966). Polanyi’s concept of ‘tacit knowing’ has been adapted for use by many music educators; see for example, Keith Swanwick, *Music, Mind, And Education* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> For earlier examples of writing polyphonic theoretical text, see Roberta Lamb, “Medusa’s Aria: Feminist Theories and Music Education — A Curriculum Theory Paper Designed as Readers’ Theatre,” in *Women and Education*, 2nd ed., ed. Jane Gaskell and Arlene McLaren (Calgary: Detselig, 1991), 299–320; “Aria senza accompagnamento: A Woman behind the Theory,” *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 4, no. 4/5, no. 1 (Winter 1993/Spring 1994): 5–20; and “Tone Deaf/Symphonies Singing,” in *Gender In/Forms Curriculum*; ed. Jane Gaskell and John Willinsky (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995), 109–35.

experience in the hope that my feelings will resonate with those whose experience of opera is like mine — and perhaps with those who respond to opera in fundamentally different ways or with those who do not respond to it at all.<sup>4</sup>

I must confess, also, to being aware of Elizabeth Wood's early work on

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... to explore that gap between male dominant culture and an emerging culture in-the-feminine ... This was not theory about fiction, but rather ... a reflexive doubling-back over the texture of the text. Where nothing, not even the "theory" escapes the poetry, the eternal rhythm (as opposed to the internal logic) of the writing. The better to break continuity (the continuity of patriarchal mythologies) into fragments in order to question syntax/context. This habit of stopping to reflect on the process within the text itself looks forward to a meaning in-the-feminine. Mutable meaning, open-ended ...

Gail Scott<sup>5</sup>

Dame Ethel Smyth. Although it was purely subconscious and not intentional, I believe I have borrowed from her analysis of Smyth's struggle with the fugue as compositional form. Wood argues that Smyth composes the fugue as a musical representation of pursuit and flight, of Smyth's pursuit of a woman lover and subsequent flight. Thus, the canonical voices of the fugue musically reveal, while the overlapping texture conceals, the

life in art and the art in life.<sup>6</sup>

My most passionate concept for this particular piece was that it be a counterpoint in three voices: visual cues signifying crucial moments in the construction of specific musical identities represented through poetry, photographs, and musical scores; sound images, that is, music; and, the paper you read. As a polyphonic piece these three voices would simultaneously interweave; however, the limitations of the printed narrative prohibit. For the Border Crossings Conference, where these ideas were presented initially, I settled on a two-part counterpoint: reading an academic paper to the conference participants from behind the skirted table on the stage while showing a set of multiple images projected on the screen above. These images included photos of myself, my friends, and my family engaged in music-making; initial pages from scores of favorite pieces of music important to my performing self; and bits of poetry, prose, and theory. As well, I wore the appropriately feminine performance costume of a rather formal long dress, high heels, and make-up, in order to act the part of a female musician performing western European

<sup>4</sup> Abel, *Opera in the Flesh*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Gail Scott, *Spaces like Stairs* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1989), 47.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Wood, "Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 164–83; and "Sapphonics," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 27–66. My thanks to Wood for allowing me to read these papers when still unpublished.

classical art music. This one-dimensional journal article re/presentation of that performance can only approximate the conference session by presenting the academic paper and the poetry, prose and theory selections, although the latter are restrained as blocked images.

At first reading, these images may not appear to be relevant to the text proper at the moment of their insertion, yet there has been an attempt to locate the

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... The lucidity of the theoretical process—in itself an intertextual process involving reading, talking, in which the words of other women play a key role—constantly prepares the way for the new risks she herself moves towards in her own fiction.

Gail Scott<sup>7</sup>

images on paper at a point similar to the time where they occurred in the conference presentation. At some point in the text these images cycle back to connect directly, because each image has been an influence, expression, experience, desire that permeates my thinking

about music as I work out the issues of desire and the discourse of music education and their relations to pedagogy and what any of it has to do with music (proper). The images could be read as a more intimate, subjective, or subconscious playing with music; while the paper is the public, conscious, but not necessarily objective representation. And yet, because most of the images are published they are more crafted, more mediated, more public, more object/ive in status than my subject/ive ramblings in this paper.<sup>8</sup> In any case, I invite your participation in meaning-making through your readings and interpretations of these multiple voices in counterpoint.

## The Story of Music in Drag

The story of music in drag begins a story of trouble ... in which we uncover some trouble music education is in, theoretically.

“Music Trouble” also reconstructs or re/presents some of the trouble I/we may be getting into as musicians in music and music education. Fact and fiction intertwine in “Music

To make trouble was the reigning discourse of my childhood, something one should never do precisely because that would get one *in* trouble. ... Trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it.

Judith Butler<sup>9</sup>

Trouble,” as do auto/biography and analysis. In other words, the trouble is that music is a drag, the drag that is performance, a real slow drag.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Space like Stairs*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Although with its publication in this journal, this essay joins the highly mediated category of published work.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), ix.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## 1. Slow drag the first ...

We were sitting in a trendy cafe on Queen Street, discussing music (the sounds of the other conversations, the muzak Brandenburg concerto, moving in and out and around from music to noise and back again). She was tall enough that her body seemed out of proportion to the bentwood chair and the too small table. In positioning herself on this crowded stage she rehearsed the tale only she could tell. Her angular features — some would call the face androgynous, the body ambiguous — her angular features accentuated the earnest tone of her voice.

She was telling me about a lost dream, how much she had wanted to teach music and why she had switched her undergraduate degree concentration from music education. She was compelled to perform and she liked children — teaching kids to play music in a band seemed the perfect vocation. But by the end of the first year of university classes, she knew it would be impossible. She had been interested in any kind of music teaching, elementary or high school, but the elementary music education classes were even more full of traditional gendered and cultural stereotypes than the secondary, and the music was of such poor quality — she didn't see how she could justify being a part of it. She had dreams of making music teaching better, but she knew she couldn't survive the teacher education project. One time a music education professor suggested she should at least wear make-up, if not a skirt, when she went to the schools — and that was not the worst of it — whatever she said or did was wrong, or at least so totally awkward and uncomfortable that the action became a scene, even if the music was right. She was out of place. The school culture couldn't acknowledge her and wouldn't recognize who she was. She considered going directly into university-level music education, but saw that location to be only slightly less restrictive than the schools, and realized, too, that first she still would be required to survive the music education degree program and school teaching. She switched to a performance major in music, hoping to find it less repressive, because, as she said, "I was the right biological sex — I mean I am female — but I was the wrong gender. There was no place for a stone butch in any aspect of the music education profession."

Her stories remained with me for some time while I wondered about what does go on in the name of music education and questioned my participation in its plot of false glamour and rectitude. As I remembered my experience of music teacher education (almost two decades prior to hers), thinking about the necessary skirts and make-up that I comfortably wore, I wondered ... so what truth could be salvaged? So,

who's in drag and who's in trouble? Troubling music education can mean

feverish seaside coffee  
scenario of what causes suffering  
in the voices  
how to describe this opera of the interior  
passion like an overture  
on the sea, a reflection  
of the voice to arouse interest  
illusion \_\_\_\_\_ lyre

Nicole Brossard<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Nicole Brossard, *Lovhers*, trans. Barbara Godard (Montréal: Guernica Editions, 1986), 38, originally published as *Amantes* (Montréal: Éditions Quinze, 1980).

questioning, can mean resistance, can mean some motion towards de-centering, de-stabilizing, a manner of shifting the ground and interrogating the Cartesian foundation underlying music pedagogy. Or it can mean banging your head against the proverbial brick wall. Troubling music education can be a waste of time. Liz Stanley suggests that in a feminist interrogation of this frame,

we stand and look from outside of this particular thought-system, neither the woman who is a sexual political object nor the man who is a sexual political subject, but ourselves, on the one hand a *refusing female* subject and on the other an *analytically inquiring feminist* subject.<sup>12</sup>

To my mind that younger butch musician certainly embodied a *refusing female* subject and in her trouble she moved into the *analytically inquiring feminist* subject, yet, inevitably, the result of her decision to leave music education hadn't troubled music education nearly as much as it troubled her. So, who's doing the real slow drag? And is there any musical truth to salvage?

## 2. Slow drag the second...

I trace my formal music education to a desiring moment, memory, image, one that became primary in my musical life. I wanted to play the flute because Mary Jo played the flute. Mary Jo lived across the street from my family when I was in elementary school. Her hair was not quite blonde; she was not tall, but being a few years older than me, she was taller. The only song I remember hearing her play on her flute was "Clair de lune." I would later know that she hadn't even played it well: the tone was all air; the phrases choppy; the articulation heavy and inaccurate. Now, as a musician, I wouldn't call it musical; it might not even qualify for any of those carefully structured and learned classifications that constrain "classical" music. But that didn't matter back then. Mary Jo organized shows in her backyard under a big shade tree. Most often we followed her lead to create a fantastic circus, but once we imagined a ballet and another time an opera. On two 45-rpm records, I had a child's version of Tchaikovsky's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that provided the accompaniment to our dancing and singing through that magical forest. A few years later my family had moved thousands of miles away and my father had taken me to the high school gym for band instrument try-outs. I knew I would play the flute, so there was no point in trying anything else. The band director attempted to get me to try the tuba — I almost died! What an embarrassing insult! How stupid! It was the wrong instrument. Mary Jo played the flute. I would play the flute. And I did.

## 3. Slow drag the third...

I had a best friend in high school who played the flute, also. We studied with the same teacher who came in once a week from a larger city. Lou played First Chair First Desk, while I played First Chair Piccolo. We played duets for hours. Our friendship was primarily musical, so it was through the music that we made

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<sup>12</sup>Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester University Press, 1992), 34. Italics in original.

connections to other areas of our lives and made sense out of the 1960s world. Lou and I argued about everything — books, politics, religion, civil rights — except music.

Recently, thinking about a contemporary violent incident that occurred near our high school in the same neighborhood where we had often walked and talked about music as adolescents, I remembered the one time we got in trouble together. We snuck off to MacDonald's during lunch hour, hurrying past some unkempt apartments and through the smokers' tunnel under the railroad tracks. We got in trouble with the Dean of Women, first for leaving school, then for being tardy, and finally for walking through a poor neighborhood. But mostly we did not make trouble, mostly our friendship centered in those flowing connections made through perfect musical moments.

On September 26 [1992] a twenty-nine-year-old black lesbian named Hattie Mae Cohens and a forty-five-year-old white gay man named Brian Mock were at home in the apartment they shared in Salem, Oregon when a group of skinheads threw a molotov cocktail into their basement and these two members of our community were burned to death.

Sarah Shulman<sup>13</sup>

By this time, I also knew I would become a music teacher. That teacher image — both my mother and her mother had been elementary school teachers — was so strongly imprinted that years later I would devote considerable energy and angst to questioning the direction of my life (the inevitable trouble): Where was the integration of the *refusing female* subject with the *analytically inquiring feminist* subject? Was I merely fulfilling yet another patriarchal myth? Was there any truth to salvage from participating in these myths as an elementary music teacher? What kind of drag is this?

It would seem, by all accounts, that I was both the right sex and the right gender for music education. There had always been a definitively stereotyped place for me, first as a white, female flutist, then as an elementary music teacher and now as a professor teaching elementary music education — all properly feminized aspects of music's discipline. Female, femme — that initial desire remained hidden — but I, too, knew being not right, awkward, out of place. So, who is the right sex and who is the right gender to correctly and comfortably take up the position of music teacher?

### Dragging in the Theory<sup>14</sup>

It has long troubled me that from the outside, to the uninitiated, music appears female-dominated, but from the inside, to the resisting novice or renegade

<sup>13</sup>Sarah Shulman, "Why I Am Not a Revolutionary," in *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life during the Reagan/Bush Years* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 259–60.

<sup>14</sup>While it may appear that the counterpoint of images has disappeared, during the Border Crossings Conference presentation, this was the point where photographs of musical experiences were projected as a contrast, or balance, to the increasingly theoretical content of the paper. I was not able to include the photographs for publication.

professional, music is male-dominated. Feminist musicologists work with this problem within specific contexts of particular composers, musics, histories, and so forth, but have not taken the argument far enough into the cultural process of music education. In the terms of a sociology of music, John Shepherd names this inside/outside musical paradox as one in which music reproduces industrial capitalism, while that function is denied through cultural and educational practice:

In this sense music occupies contradictory positions in the social structures of industrial capitalism that are parallel to those of women: music reaffirms the flux and concreteness of the social world at the same time that, through its categorization and packaging, it denies them.<sup>15</sup>

Now it seems music educators, those who are most concerned with the transmission process in music, are undertaking a thorough analysis of the is-it-feminine?/is-it-masculine? music puzzle. In ways similar to Shepherd, historian Vicki Eaklor places the music gender paradox in the development of the American middle-class, such that music becomes “problematic for either sex: neither masculine enough for males ... nor feminine enough for females.”<sup>16</sup> The result of this problematic, first hinted in the music education literature by Charlene Morton and Julia Eklund Koza,<sup>17</sup> and simultaneously stated blatantly by musicologists, Philip Brett and Suzanne Cusick,<sup>18</sup> is that music is a bit queer.

Further, Lucy Green, Elizabeth Gould, and Morton identify the marginalized position of music in education as a function of western duality, perpetuating a subject/object, masculine/feminine model that crudely oversimplifies diverse musical realities while masking the gendering effects. Morton suggests the precarious position of music in the schools is directly contingent with its feminized standing in western cultures.<sup>19</sup> Gould makes a particular point of the varied, contradictory, and shifting subject positions music teachers and music

<sup>15</sup>John Shepherd, “Difference and Power in Music,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 59.

<sup>16</sup>Vicki Eaklor, “The Gendered Origins of the American Musician,” *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 4, no. 4/5, no. 1 (Winter 1993/Spring 1994): 45.

<sup>17</sup>See Charlene Morton, “Feminist Theory and the Displaced Music Curriculum: Beyond the ‘Add and Stir’ Projects,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 106–21; and Julia Eklund Koza, “Big Boys Don’t Cry (or Sing): Gender, Misogyny, and Homophobia in College Choral Methods Textbooks,” *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 4, no. 4/5, no. 1 (Winter 1993/Spring 1994). Morton discusses these issues in terms of the “discreetly gay” and Koza does so in terms of homophobia in choral education textbooks.

<sup>18</sup>See Philip Brett, “Musicality, Essentialism and the Closet,” 9–26; and Suzanne Cusick, “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*. Brett’s and Cusick’s essays are probably the most widely known, but all the essays in *Queering the Pitch* are relevant to this concept. In the years since the Border Crossings Conference, the sub-field of gay and lesbian musicology has grown. Two among several newer publications considering queerness in music are Sam Abel, *Opera in the Flesh*, and Kevin Kopelson, *Beethoven’s Kiss: Pianism, Perversion, and the Mastery of Desire* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup>Morton, “Feminist Theory and the Displaced Music Curriculum,” 118. She expands her ideas in her dissertation, “The ‘Status Problem’: The Feminized Location of School Music and the Burden of Justification” (Ed. D. diss., Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 1996).



students occupy throughout music education.<sup>20</sup> According to Green, who examines inherent and delineated masculine/feminine genderings,

we learn our gendered relationships with music, not only from wider historical, political and educational contexts, but also through musical experience itself. The operation of musical meaning as a gendered discourse occurs poignantly in the school classroom as a microcosm of the wider society.<sup>21</sup>

Using these latter ideas to critique hegemonic educational theory and elaborating on Koza's suggestion that

a valuing of that which historically has been constructed as feminine, the body, is sacrificed in order to give music greater legitimacy and to represent it in ways consistent with dominant, masculinist definitions of knowing,<sup>22</sup>

I suggest that a function of the aesthetic education approach to music education<sup>23</sup> has been to legitimate music in education by appealing to the paradigms of the "hard" subjects and scientific discourse. This masculinization of music education as a mechanism for ensuring its place in educational practice of late capitalist societies is congruent with the professionalization of North American education that occurred during the 1960s as a response to Sputnik. The attempt to flip music from the hyper-feminized position it occupied within the hierarchy of modern intellectual disciplines to a hyper-masculinized one, first required removing all traces of "softness" (including the body as she who makes/performs music, listens to and experiences music) and irrationality (including expressivity, emotional excess and, I think in many cases, playfulness) to be replaced with music as philosophy (logos, mind, aesthetic education), music as science (logos, mind, cognition, behavioral psychology and behaviorist educational practice) and music as master performer (logos, mind, genius).

Women don't know what they are saying, that's the whole difference between them and me.

Jacques Lacan<sup>24</sup>

Music as male transcendent? Well, not always. As Gould points out, the educational practices of music are more diverse than the official text, often contradictory between university/conservatory professional education and

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<sup>20</sup>Elizabeth Gould, "Getting the Whole Picture: The View from Here," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 92-98.

<sup>21</sup>Lucy Green, "Gender, Musical Meaning, and Education," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 99. Green provides a more detailed argument in her book, *Music, Gender, Education* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup>Julia Eklund Koza, "Aesthetic Education Revisited: Discourses of Exclusion and Oppression," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 89.

<sup>23</sup>It is not my purpose here to account for the many critiques of aesthetic education as a philosophy of music education. I refer readers to numerous publications, particularly those by Wayne Bowman, David Elliott, or Eleanor Stubbley.

<sup>24</sup>Jacques Lacan, *Encore, Le Séminaire XX*, as quoted in Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 86.

school music classroom, and the positions of subject/object status change frequently.<sup>25</sup> In this diversity, music is not dissimilar from other disciplines because so much pedagogy weighs heavily on what happens between students and teacher when she/he closes the classroom door. A music teacher can disrupt or reinforce hegemonic practice — and those disruptions or reinforcements can themselves be disrupted or reinforced throughout the signifying chain.

So, what kind of masquerade is this? I think there are at least two potential masquerades that create possibilities for disrupting hegemonic practice within music as educational project: one being a femme-butch aesthetic, as defined by Sue-Ellen Case, and the other being gender as drag, as discussed by Judith Butler. Both of these masquerades, when applied to music education, allow a space for understanding multiple and conflicting voices and locations without glossing these differences into either a binary opposition of male/female, or a unitary subject position. In analyzing masquerade within music education through Case and Butler, I am reaching towards understanding what aspects of a femme-butch aesthetic and gender as drag are already at play within music education, even as — or especially though — they are not acknowledged. I am wondering if some kind of recognition could serve towards getting through, or at least resisting, institutional limitations while mobilizing a capacity for change and self-determination. Simultaneously, I am very aware that both of these masquerades are problematic in the way that they can be implicated in maintaining hegemonic discourse and practice.

Case describes a butch-femme aesthetic in theater (however, I believe this aesthetic stance can be meaningful in any of the performing arts) as being one in which

the performance practice, both on and off the stage, may be studied as that of a feminist subject, both inside and outside ideology, with the power to self-determine her role and her conditions on the micropolitical level. ... These are not split subjects, suffering the torments of dominant ideology.<sup>26</sup>

This statement recalls Stanley's definitions of the refusing female subject and the analytically inquiring feminist subject. To this notion Case adds a relational aspect and a playfulness that propels us "not to conflict one reality with another reality, but to abandon the notion of reality"<sup>27</sup> to an ever-shifting

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<sup>25</sup> While many scholars are concerned with identity construction through music, particularly in ethnomusicology, few others are writing about identity construction through music education, and most of those do not address subjectivity in relation to gendered identity or sexuality. Eleanor Stubley applies recent developments in anthropology to identity construction through music. See Eleanor Stubley, "The Performer, the Score, the Work: Musical Performance and Transactional Reading," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 29 (Fall 1995); "Defining Musical Performance as Subject Matter: A Phenomenological Exploration," Kansas City (April 1996); and "Modulating Identities: I as Teacher, I as Musician, I as Musician-Teacher," Bath, England (July 1997). One who has addressed some of these issues of the construction of a sexual identity within applied music lessons is Kevin Kopelson "Music Lessons," in *Beethoven's Kiss*.

<sup>26</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," in *The Lesbian And Gay Studies Reader*, 295.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

stage whereon the integrated refusing female-analytically inquiring feminist subject can act upon her conditions of existence.

It seems to me that this aesthetic frame is possible in music education because the parameters of that aesthetic are already active within music itself as well as in the practitioners of the art: the musicians and the teachers. That is, music proper is a feminine discipline within the academic hierarchy. Musical genius as personified in the composer or virtuoso is masculine, although his muse is feminine.<sup>28</sup> The music teacher of children is feminine while the master teacher of great musicians masculine. The piano teacher, choral conductor, school music teacher may be feminine, but the symphonic maestro is most assuredly masculine. The adequate teacher, the amateur musician is feminine, but the great master, the professional is masculine. Stereotypes such as these are never absolute. There are cracks in the slip-cast<sup>29</sup> duality; shifts in subject/object or self/other position. However, both resistance and pleasure are central to abandoning reality in a femme-butch aesthetic, so that these cracks and shifts do not constitute existential angst, but a way of stepping out. Adapting a butch-femme aesthetic to an educational project fosters awareness of being both inside and outside ideology, as well as the capability to determine for one's self which "role," as it were, one were playing. The apparently natural (heterosexual) or internal essential musical qualities and positions currently playing out would be interrogated rather than accepted without further thought.

From this vantage point it might be said that contemporary music education is not unlike carnival, an image of parody and excess, in the way "carnival refuses to surrender the critical and cultural tools of the dominant class,"<sup>30</sup> where its limitations can be found in "carnival's complicitous place in dominant culture."<sup>31</sup> Like carnival at its most grotesque and complicit — or maybe even opera — music education exercises the cultural tools of the dominant class, especially those that bind the young musician into hegemonic values, such as specular, exaggerated masculinity/femininity. For example, Wayne Koestenbaum cites the ways in which vocal pedagogy "staples the singer into the family, and into all the heterosexual and procreative moralities that the 'family' as prescriptive category implies ..." <sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the spectacle of carnival makes a space for returning the body to musicality and musical performance, and is not limited to a male/female duality, allowing room for contradictions and ambiguity. The performance of carnival makes it

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<sup>28</sup>For a thorough discussion of the history of genius and virtuoso as male gendered concepts, see Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Women's Press, 1989).

<sup>29</sup>Slip is a thin clay poured into molds for high volume production of plates. Pieces made from these molds are called slip-cast and are not considered as original as a handmade piece, which may have some technical flaws.

<sup>30</sup>Mary Russo, "Female Grotesque: Carnival and Theory," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1986), 218.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>32</sup>Wayne Koestenbaum, "The Queen's Throat: (Homo)sexuality and the Art of Singing," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 224–25.

possible for exaggerations, parody and excess to come into play, and yet be excused by not being recognized as “real” or “authentic.”

### Music in Drag dal segno...

In which we slip from carnival into drag, meticulously side-stepping the real slow drag.<sup>33</sup> ... Carnival, drag, and femme-butuh are not different names for the same actor. All three are distinct and incorporeal: they require bodies that breathe and move in order to be understood. All are theatrical: they are time-based concepts, and in this way especially relevant to the time-based qualities of music.<sup>34</sup> Carnival, however, does not provide the self-determination possible through the resisting femme-butuh aesthetic, while drag may be implicated in (or it may be totally absent from) that aesthetic. In an operatic costume, drag may be seen as carnival, as excess, as complicitous, but drag as a performative offers potential for resistance that subverts the realm of carnival.

According to Judith Butler, drag is not an imitation of a true or real gender, but the everyday theater of doing gender.

So, what if music is drag? To take Butler's proposal that gender is drag and substitute the concept of music for that of gender results in a paraphrase suggesting that if music is drag, then musical performance would become the expression and presentation of that drag. If music is drag, then talent is the illusory psychic necessity. If music is drag, musical performance becomes

If gender is drag, and if it is an imitation that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that *produces* the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core; it *produces* on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation), the illusion of an inner depth. In effect, one way that genders get naturalized is through being constructed as an inner psychic or physical *necessity*. And yet, it is always a surface sign, a signification on and with the public body that produces this illusion of an inner depth, necessity or essence that is somehow magically, causally expressed.

Judith Butler<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup>A real slow drag is a duple meter, stylized dance (for example, Scott Joplin's *Tremonisha*), which then suggests consideration of issues of colonization and race in music and music education.

<sup>34</sup>The discussion of femme-butuh aesthetic and drag in theater studies and cultural studies is extensive. Some of the more prominent sources include Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theater* (New York: Methuen, 1988); Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988); Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan, eds., *Acting Out: Feminist Performances* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Carole-Anne Taylor, "Boys Will be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 32–70; Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Elin Diamond, ed., *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996). For Canadian context on drag in theater and dance, see Romy Shiller, "Drag King Invasion: Taking Back the Throne (Greater Toronto Drag King Society)," *Canadian Theatre Review* 86 (Spring 1996): 24–28; R. Best, "Drag Kings: Chicks with Dicks," *Canadian Woman Studies* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 58–59; Reid Gilbert, "Chocolate and Lipstick: Gender (Re)Construction in *Dancing Docs & Dandies*," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 20, no. 2 (1995): 10–21.

<sup>35</sup>Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, 28.

the everyday theater that produces the illusion of talent as the naturalized inner necessity. Thus, music as drag necessitates physical bodies, even as illusion appears to be emphasized. Music as drag requires the skin, the ear, the mouth, the voice, the breath, the fingers, the gesture, the move, the gait in order to reproduce or reiterate a corporeal musicality that is ritually reinscribed in every performance.

From a corporeal musicality, then, it is not too great a leap to Suzanne Cusick's conclusion that "music is sex."<sup>36</sup> Since the over-riding context of this essay is music education, we're now in big trouble. Being an institution charged with public morals, education does not cope well with sex, seduction or excess. It may be that Cusick's intuitions about the western compulsion to intellectualize music away from the anxieties surrounding sex are not only accurate but necessary for the preservation of institutional power. It may be that the seduction and excess of music threaten the social and moral order educational institutions are called upon to preserve.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps this music trouble is indicative of where, how, and why the performativity of music as drag flourishes. Returning to Butler, she suggests that performativity succeeds:

only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*. What this means, then, is that a performative "works" to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force.<sup>38</sup>

This indicates to me that music as drag works only when it covers its narrative tracks, dissimulating "music is sex," even as musicians draw on that intuition to construct musical meaning and pleasure. Such an accumulation/ dissimulation pattern also highlights some very real and present dangers.

### Music in the Closet

These theoretical meanderings have gone around some possibilities for carnival, femme-butuh and drag within music, but if we return to the opening stories,

#### On Singing Women's Praises

Yes, it's true —  
I only know one song.

But that one song takes  
all the notes  
And lasts forever.

Carolyn Gage<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music," 79.

<sup>37</sup>Abel, *Opera in the Flesh*, builds on Cusick's argument in terms of opera, noting that the basis of emotional response to art is physical, sexual pleasure (Chapter 6) and "Because of opera's seductiveness, the air of immortality lingers over it. Anything so embarrassingly overdone must be a threat to the soul" (p. 26).

<sup>38</sup>Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 227. Emphasis in original.

<sup>39</sup>Carolyn Gage, "On Singing Women's Praises," in *Sinister Wisdom* 37 (Spring 1989).

we remember that these theoretical possibilities didn't work with real bodies: there was no place for a butch in music education and femme desire is in danger of being found out. The performative aspect of femme-butch and drag indicate a citation of the dominant in music. On the one hand, the failures of femme-butch and drag as positions of subjectivity illustrate the risks of complicity, as Butler clearly explains:

[T]his repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not ... determining it fully in advance.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, this is the dilemma of the closet, and not entirely a matter of individual choice. One can be "out of the closet" and still constrained by it. Philip Brett discusses musicality and the closet:

For the musician in general, and particularly for the gay and lesbian musician, there is an involvement in a social contract that allows comforting deviance only at the sometimes bitter price of self-determination. ... the musician is fully caught in the erotic double-binding effect of the closet.<sup>41</sup>

Not only is the musician caught in the closet, but *music* is caught in the closet. In order to recognize the embodied butch, femme, drag, or carnival, music would have to see its own queerness. The threat lesbians and gays make to music education's compulsory heterosexuality<sup>42</sup> is too great, especially where heterosexual hyper-masculinity and heterosexual hyper-femininity dominate in pedagogical practice as a means of denying not only sexual and gender innuendo, but also cultural, ethnic, and class ambiguities. From the position of dominant ideology, for music education to allow or encourage uncovering such queer aspects of music hidden within western duality and unacknowledged gendering would be to abandon social control.

In terms of very real lives in very real bodies the consequences for embodying the musical paradox denied through cultural and educational practice are considerable. There is no right sex or right gender for music education — all genders are wrong in this context, even as all genders potentially could be right. The framing of music through the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality ensures a continuing threat to multiple sexualities, multiple subject positions,

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<sup>40</sup>Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 95. Emphasis in original.

<sup>41</sup>Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism and the Closet," 17.

<sup>42</sup>Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *The Lesbian And Gay Studies Reader*, 227–54. I provide this reference because it is easily available; however, I became aware of this essay in its first publication in the journal *Signs* (1980).

Autobiography is not separable from poetry for me, on this ground i would call fiction-  
analysis: a self-analysis that plays fictively with  
the primary images of one's life, a fiction that  
uncovers analytically that territory where  
fact and fiction coincide.

Daphne Marlatt<sup>43</sup>

hidden behind ideals of music  
as self-expression and  
transcendence. The ambivalent  
physicality and irrationality of  
music pose a severe threat to  
masculine heterosexuality,  
such that one in that subject  
position must constantly  
demonstrate his power and

masculinity, often through violence. The madonna-whore imagery for feminine heterosexuality allows no place for female competence and self-defined artistry, leaving heterosexual women to reassure that their position proffers no threat to the musical paradigm. Both heterosexual male and female positions in music require constant reiteration of masculinity and femininity to overcome the not-masculine-enough/not-feminine-enough ambiguity of music. And because it may very well be that this malleable quality, this queerness, is exactly what attracts those of us who are not straight to music, our being "out there" threatens and underlines heterosexual anxiety in the musical paradox.

### Trouble Is Inevitable

I cannot predict a revolution in music education, nor even a substantial reform. I agree with Lucy Green's description of the pedagogical situation:

Musical meaning on the one hand, teachers' and pupils' practices on the other — inseparably and complexly these combine in classrooms to make our musical, educational transactions far from innocent. This would therefore seem to be a very bleak outlook for the role of music education. If indeed stereotypical gendered musical meanings are impinging themselves in a way which reproduces the historical precedents of men's and women's musical practices, then there would not seem to be a great deal that the school can do to intervene. Any redefinition of roles and practices would seem to be blocked by the requirement of the redefinition of musical meaning itself.<sup>45</sup>

I write,  
therefore.

Nicole Brossard<sup>44</sup>

Also, like Sarah Shulman, I can provide you with the reasons "why I am not a revolutionary," preferring acts of resistance as a method for surviving — even

<sup>43</sup>Daphne Marlatt, "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis," in *Anatomy of Gender: Women's Struggle for the Body*, ed. Dawn H. Currie and Valerie Raoul (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 245.

<sup>44</sup>Nicole Brossard, *The Aerial Letter*, trans. Marlene Wildeman (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1988), 37, originally published as *La lettre aérienne* (Montréal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1985.)

<sup>45</sup>Green, "Gender, Musical Meaning, and Education," 103–4.

thriving — and finding hope in that project.<sup>46</sup> Green, too, is hopeful when she later says, “But it is also possible to resist through music,”<sup>47</sup> — sometimes even by making music together, in relation. Refusing who we are (in a Foucauldian sense) in music education seems at the moment to be the most promising project, because in refusing music education it may be possible to teach a critique of music and music education, while still enjoying “the pleasures of the text.” It eventually may become possible to redefine musical meaning itself. Carrying out that project through a femme-butch aesthetic as a site of resistance that abandons the notion of reality, seems to me to provide some possibility for multiple framings of pedagogy with music, through what Maria Lugones calls playfulness and world-traveling, where we may find potential for freer musical response, fulfillment, and diversion, along with more independent, authentic forms of self-creation and self-representation in relation and community.

There are “worlds” we enter at our own risk, “worlds” that have agon, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos. These are “worlds” that we enter out of necessity and which would be foolish to enter playfully.

But there are “worlds” that we can travel to lovingly and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason why I think that traveling to someone’s “world” is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their “world” we can understand *what it is to them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have traveled to each other’s “worlds” are we fully subjects to each other.

Maria Lugones<sup>48</sup>

## Abstract

“Music Trouble” is an experimental paper, a linear re-presentation of the multi-media performance (which included costume, poetry, photographs, and musical scores, in addition to the paper) designed for the Ottawa Border Crossings Conference. “Music Trouble” explores identity construction through music and music education, specifically in relation to issues of sexuality. Judith Butler’s idea of “gender is drag” and Sue-Ellen Case’s “butch-femme aesthetic” are employed in conjunction with feminist auto/biography to critique current theories and practices supporting music education.

<sup>46</sup>Shulman, “Why I Am Not a Revolutionary,” 258–64.

<sup>47</sup>Green, “Gender, Musical Meaning, and Education,” 104.

<sup>48</sup>Maria Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception,” in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), 401.