

JEANETTE BICKNELL AND JOHN ANDREW FISHER

Introduction: Making a Space for Song

The topic of song, songs, and singing extends across a vast number of art forms and genres back into prehistory. It stands astride the high-low art continuum, ranging from classical music to popular and folk music. Unlike other art forms that include both high and low genres (such as movies and novels), song and songs have always had multiple functions other than being objects of aesthetic appreciation. The uses of vocal music range from the sacred (*sung* as hymns as well as *heard* as masses, anthems, and so on), to communal (campfire songs and soccer fans' chants), to ceremonial (*Jerusalem* sung at public events, Barber's *Agnus Dei* performed at memorials), to music for entertainment and for dancing; unlike other art forms, songs and singing play a role in everyday life. Ellen Dissanayake remarks that anthropological studies of "small-scale societies amply illustrate the ubiquity (and complexity) of communal singing during most daily activity."¹ When Dick Clark said, "Music is the soundtrack of your life," he was undoubtedly referring to songs.

Because of the universality and centrality to human culture of song, our topic is very different from other topics that have expanded the purview of aesthetics in recent years. Our topic is not a novel art form emerging from new technologies (video games, computer art), nor a new form emerging from popular culture (reality TV shows), and it is certainly far from a new avant-garde art form, such as conceptual art. On the contrary, vocal music is an ancient and familiar element of every culture and central to music itself. Yet song has been passed over by philosophers of art who otherwise have been intensely interested in both music and literature. Instead, philosophy of music has tended to limit its scope to a subclass of Western art music, largely focusing on issues concerning instrumental music. There

are historical reasons for this tendency. One was the attraction of the concept of "absolute music" developed within nineteenth-century romanticism and idealism. This concept embodies the philosophically intriguing claim that the masterpieces of the emerging instrumental canon, such as Beethoven's symphonies, possess a unique transcendence and profundity. Such claims directed attention away from vocal music forms and toward the problem of accounting for the meaning, emotional expressiveness, and value of purely instrumental musical works. When this was followed by twentieth-century modernism, with its focus on autonomous artworks and formal innovation, there was little reason to turn philosophical attention toward the less pure forms and multiple uses that populate the realm of vocal music.²

Indeed, a significant reason to broach the topic of song is that it highlights the narrowness of aesthetics as it was practiced through much of the twentieth century. Arguably, no artistic engagement is more commonly experienced than the experience of song, not only listening but also singing: individually or in groups, singing along with a singer on the radio or singing a song in one's head. It is so fundamental to human culture that some hypothesize that singing predates or is coextensive with the origins of language.³ Speculation connecting the origins of song and language has always been rife.⁴ Given its prominent place in human society, it is not surprising that songs and singing have unique philosophically interesting features. For example, songs in performance can have referential dimensions that other art forms do not have (as Theodore Gracyk's article in this issue shows).

In what follows, we sketch the crucial ways that vocal music differs from most other art forms. These explain why, with the possible exception of

opera, vocal music has tended to be overlooked until recently in philosophy of music. Conversely, these differences are what make vocal music, especially songs, an exciting topic for aesthetics and the philosophy of music.

I. ARE SONGS FIT FOR AESTHETIC JUDGMENT?

No attempt will be made here to define songs or singing; both are enormously complex as phenomena and as evolving concepts. Although singing is not limited to vocalizing text, for the purposes of this issue we can safely assume that it is. In the same spirit, “song” will be taken to include all music that involves singing text. By far the most difficult and complex concept is “songs,” and hence any generalization about songs has to be understood as limited to some particular historical–social context and some particular category of songs.⁵ Still, it is useful to distinguish art song from non-art song because non-art song is the more philosophically challenging category. The category of art song is typically taken to refer to vocal works in classical music and includes art songs, such as lieder, as well as opera, cantatas, choral works, and so on. If we treat the classical music tradition as beginning when such music began to be considered a fine art, that is, became “serious” music, which is around 1800 according to the view propounded by Lydia Goehr, we would be forced to leave out much that is literally serious vocal music, especially religious music (from Pérotin and Palestrina, through Cherubini, and so on).⁶ However, even if we move the vague boundary of art song back to the beginning of the common practice period, around 1600, this leaves important categories of earlier high-culture song in limbo. For example, there were songs written by musicians going back to the Middle Ages, such as the troubadours and minnesingers, as well as by famous composers before 1600.

We can safely leave such boundary questions undecided because the most interesting aesthetic questions about songs apply to non-art songs (hereafter “vernacular” songs) of whatever category. There are many important subdivisions of this overly broad category. In particular, there is a significant distinction between, on the one hand, popular songs, which are ubiquitous in every society, and, on the other hand, folk or ethnic songs.⁷ Vernacular songs present a variety of problems

both for aesthetics and for philosophy of music that art songs do not.

The legacy of Immanuel Kant’s *Third Critique* looms large in the history of music. His influence deeply affected both the field of aesthetics and the ideology surrounding the practice of classical music.⁸ The Kantian picture of aesthetic judgment in particular helped to invert the relative status of vocal and instrumental music. Whereas instrumental pieces tended to be regarded in earlier times merely as sources of pleasurable, but meaningless, sounds and vocal music carried the burden of possessing important meanings and hence value (or disvalue), after 1800 the instrumental works of the romantic composers came to be regarded as truly great art on a par with literature and the plastic arts.⁹ Vernacular songs, by contrast, were firmly relegated to the emerging concepts of popular and folk music, and as such, were considered lacking in artistic status.

The Kantian characterization of pure aesthetic judgments promotes a particular model of aesthetic appreciation. Several features of this framework are especially salient for understanding the relegation of vocal music. Pure aesthetic judgment is to be a disinterested appreciation of an object. The pleasure received in the experience signals that the object is beautiful only if it is based on the form of the object and not on other motivations or causes. This provides a basis for finding purely instrumental musical works aesthetically valuable. Moreover, pure aesthetic judgment is based neither on an emotional reaction nor on the related motive of finding that the object satisfies one’s desires, for example, to express a belief. In short, to achieve the universality that Kant sought for an aesthetic judgment, the object cannot provide pleasure in virtue of gratifying one’s conception of what is good, right, or true. Rather, the object is to be judged solely in itself, separated from any function it might perform. The Kantian idea is that whether an object is beautiful is independent of what it does for us or of any emotional effect it has on us or any commitments we have; objects are immediately beautiful or not.

To what sort of ideal of the artwork as aesthetic object does the Kantian model lead? Above all, this is an ideal of artworks as autonomous objects, divorced from practical life, made to be appreciated in themselves. This picture privileges instrumental musical forms, such as string quartets and symphonies that lack representational

content; these have accordingly become the paradigm forms of musical masterworks. They are simply formally rewarding, beautiful in themselves as objects of musical delight.

Although these requirements are at best idealizations that do not fit any type of art perfectly, they are especially inapt for the complex world of non-art songs. Vocal music has representational content, and it often has an intended effect. It famously has the power to move people emotionally. Traditional folk music frequently has a primary function of telling an important story or reinforcing an important value; popular music of past centuries often expressed social and political commentary (compare broadsides), protest songs were intended to move people to certain beliefs and actions, and so on. Given the representational content of vernacular song, the primary intention of such songs is usually to elicit a combination of emotional, intellectual, and bodily experience. Thus, in spite of the power and beauty of early songs, such as a Child ballad (for example, “Edward”) or an African American spiritual (“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”), they lack the art for art’s sake status that is the Kantian legacy, and this remains true of contemporary popular songs (for example, Curtis Mayfield’s “People Get Ready” or even Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies”), which may intend to have various effects that listeners find affecting as well as entertaining.

We do not mean to suggest that a more inclusive account of aesthetic value could not include popular songs, but rather to acknowledge that songs have dimensions that challenge the traditional boundaries of aesthetics.¹⁰ Now that aesthetics has begun to erase the distinctions between fine art, craft, and entertainment, space has been created for examination of popular songs. The attention to rock music in recent philosophy of music, a topic in several articles in this issue, demonstrates that this examination has begun.¹¹

II. DO VERNACULAR SONGS FALL WITHIN THE RANGE OF ARTWORKS?

A second important issue for vernacular songs derives from the very notion of an *artwork*. As a temporal art constituted by ephemeral elements (see Justin London’s article), music, like dance, has always presented ontological problems. Simply put: What is it? Does it divide into units, the individual

works that are the basic objects of critical interest in the philosophy of art, a field that has been built on a foundation focusing on a tradition of masterworks? Stepping out of our tradition, the problem becomes clearer. As Philip Bohlman points out, an “ontology derived from understanding music as an object is foreign to many music cultures in the world, where, for example, there may be no equivalent linguistic category for affording identity to pieces and works.”¹²

We can distinguish two important senses of our modern Western concept of a musical work. One sense—call it the “broad” concept of a musical work—designates the product of some sort of creation, by an individual or a group, that is solidified over time to the point of being named by a referring expression. (This is consistent with the possibility of its properties changing over time.) It is an artifact that is sung or played on musical instruments. This requires at a minimum linguistic habits, linguistic technologies, such as musical notation, and cultural institutions (such as church, court, or guild) that identify and preserve the products over time, institutions that identify and reidentify performances as performances *of* the same work. This broad concept of a musical work allows for the work to change over time and over performances, as parts are added or dropped out, lyrics are changed, different arrangements are made, sections are eliminated, and so on.

The second more historically limited sense—call this the “romantic” concept of a musical work—expresses the regulative concept of a musical work delineated by Goehr.¹³ According to Goehr, this concept came into play in Western classical music around the time of Beethoven, and subsequently it governs many aspects of how the products of composition in the classical music tradition are treated and regarded, for example, what counts as creating and performing a musical work. In the paradigm case of composition, a composer creates a definite artifact, giving it final form in musical notation, and subsequent performances of the work are to be guided by the details and overall parts of this score. The composer is conceived of as an artist with something unique and original to say, not principally an entertainer or an artisan, and the work is to be respected, performed, and preserved in its original form. Unlike the broad concept, the romantic musical work usually remains in a fixed form (or is destroyed; compare Brahms and Sibelius). Performances of classical

music governed by the romantic concept are intended to preserve the composer's thoughts and are not intended to be vehicles for free-wheeling virtuosity (unless it is specified in the score) or for independent manipulations or uses by subsequent arrangers and performers.¹⁴

The romantic concept of a musical work not only governs our thinking about classical musical works, but also affects our assumptions about what musical works count as artworks. The fact that vernacular songs are musical works in the broader sense, and hence much more fluid over time (often products of a folk culture or collaboration and often vehicles for reinvention by performers at later times), makes them elusive objects for aesthetic assessment by the standards of the romantic concept. In Stephen Davies's terminology, vernacular songs are very "thin" works; they are minimally specified.¹⁵ As such, they afford a wide scope for arrangements and interpretations.

In light of music history, we can view vernacular songs as coming into focus as artworks through a series of developments. First there was music printing—even for popular songs—then collecting and publishing folk and popular songs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and finally copyrighting songs in the twentieth century. This progression tended to fix more of the form of a song compared to earlier times when lyrics were changeable and melodies often simple and repetitive and used for many different lyrics.¹⁶ Even early twentieth-century composers of popular music (such as Tin Pan Alley songwriters) were not regarded as artists, and their products were principally seen as entertainment. But at least there was now a definite object regulated (more loosely and differently than for classical music) by the sheet music and copyright law. Nonetheless, such a score is still very thin compared to the score of an art song, which determines many more features of a performance. This history helps to explain why philosophical and critical attention has recently come to be especially centered on recordings. This focus is reflected in articles in this issue as well as in recent philosophical discussions of rock and jazz. The recording of a song—for example, Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away"—takes the final step toward becoming a definite eternally unchanging object. Insofar as the song "Not Fade Away" has been performed and rearranged hundreds of times, it remains an elusive object (see Franklin Bruno's article), but the recording has

a fixed character, and as such, some have argued that it should be regarded as the primary work of art in rock music. (See articles by Bruno and Michael Rings.)¹⁷

III. THE DUAL FORM OF SONG

Finally, there is the issue of the dual form of vocal works: a text wedded to a musical structure. This combination can be regarded as either a hybrid of two independently evaluable structures or as an organic whole emerging from these two dimensions working together. Historically, the text has been the dominant object of interest, given that it is the bearer of linguistic meaning, and, accordingly, the text has tended to be viewed under the category of poetry. For example, folk songs were discussed as "folk poetry" in the early collections of folk songs.¹⁸ Furthermore, the music of popular songs until the twentieth century was often simple and predictable, and thus it did not appear worthy of serious consideration as significant art by itself. Hence, the burden of interest tended to fall on the text for vernacular songs and on how the text was transformed for art song. The tension is explicit in this comment by Mark Booth: "Song text is poetry; then again song is not poetry as we usually understand poetry."¹⁹ Nonetheless, he presses on "to ask what meaning and what value can be located in song text."²⁰

In the case of both art songs and vernacular songs, there has been a tendency to what might be called the "propositional" model—the view that the music is merely an emotional enhancement to the text.²¹ That this is inadequate as a general model for understanding the relationship of lyrics to musical structure in popular songs has become increasingly obvious since the advent of rock music and singer-songwriters. Even when the music of a song is considered an equal partner to the lyrics, however, it is all too easy to view songs as the additive result of the music and the lyrics considered independently of each other. A more complex view is that a successful song possesses an appropriate mirroring relation between words and music. This implies that the result, the song, is not due to mere addition, since it is a function of a relation between the two dimensions. Such a model may work for art songs, where the lyrics are usually a preexisting poem. But it still implies that the text and the music can be usefully viewed in

isolation from each other, and this raises problems for adequately understanding popular songs.²²

IV. THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

Appropriately, the core problem of song's dual form is the topic of the first article in this issue, by David Davies. Traditionally, the fundamental problem for the aesthetics of vocal music has focused on the relation of the text to the music. Which one predominates, or, if that is the wrong question, when and how do they succeed together to form a successful unified musical work? Davies notes that there are many great songs with lyrics that seem lame, even ridiculous, if isolated from the whole song. He proposes to solve this problem by drawing on a larger theory of artistic communication. What differentiates artworks in general from artifacts that merely communicate is that artworks have distinctive ways of communicating content, calling "for a distinctive kind of regard on the part of the receiver" (p. 16). These distinctive ways vary from art form to art form. Just as what Davies calls the "vehicular medium" for poetry is language, but language used differently than for prose, so the media of songs, which he describes as a "compositionally composite" art form, are not everyday language or even poetry, on the one hand, or ordinary musical sounds or themes, on the other, but sounds and lyrics that are fabricated to work together when sung. Put another way, "when we attend to the words of a song, it is different properties of those words that play a role in the articulation of content"; in short, we do not listen to lyrics as poetry any more than as prose (p. 20).

Music is a performance art: there are two dimensions to any musical performance, the work performed and what the particular performance brings to or adds to the work. Vocal music adds to instrumental music dimensions of meaning at both ends of this exchange; the text and the musical structure define a work with semantic meaning as well as formal properties, but the particular performance can add to both the musical properties and the meaning of the lyrics. This is most especially true for popular and folk songs, in contrast to art songs (lieder, opera) and religious works (cantatas, hymns, and so on) that appear to have more determinate meanings. Gracyk's article develops a broad ontological framework within which to ac-

count for the properties of musical works and the properties of their performances. Although this is a contribution to the ontology of musical works in general, it has particular salience for songs, that is, musical works with texts.

The basis for Gracyk's account is the parallel between sentences and songs. He applies the standard distinction in the philosophy of language between semantics and pragmatics, the implications that are added in the uttering of a sentence. Just as sentences are uttered, songs are performed. Gracyk proposes, in common with other philosophers of music, that musical works are types and performances are tokens of those types. Songs are "thin" types that allow for considerable variation from performance to performance. In addition, he argues that songs, and indeed "many musical works," have "semantic content through their association with specific linguistic structures or because their syntactical structures function symbolically due to musical conventions" (p. 25). However, the semantic content of a song is to be distinguished from the pragmatic implications of its performance; these involve what is referred to and what meaning is intended and accomplished in a specific performance. Indeed, he argues that *only* individual performances rather than musical works have pragmatic content. As he puts it, a musical work is not a structure *in use* but a structure *for use*.

Pragmatic implications can override the semantics of a sentence when it is uttered in a particular context, for example, to establish a particular reference. Just so—and here Gracyk gives several actual examples—pragmatic implications of a song as performed can determine the reference and, accordingly, the meaning of a song. The performance, not its semantic content, determines the pragmatic implications of a song. He illustrates these abstract claims by examining several cases, most notably Jimi Hendrix's famous performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock and Dylan's 1974 performance of "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)," in which Dylan's line "(E)ven the president... Sometimes must have/To stand naked" is generally taken to refer to Nixon's Watergate scandal. While such flexibility of meaning may be relatively rare for pure instrumental works, it is a common dimension of popular songs.

The focus on performance continues in Jerrold Levinson's article, a philosophical analysis of

jazz singing. Drawing on his earlier distinction between “critical” and “performative” interpretation, Levinson explores a cluster of issues related to jazz singing and, in particular, to the role of the singer.²³ He writes, “In many modes of art making it may be possible for the artist to more or less hide from his or her audience. That is, it may be possible for viewers or listeners to understand and appreciate what is offered artistically and yet form little idea of the personality, or at any rate the persona, of the artist” (pp. 41–42). But jazz singing, he suggests, is not one of those modes. Jazz singers enjoy greater freedom of interpretation than do singers in classical traditions, and they typically engage in these freedoms to a greater extent than do singers of rock and popular music. (Indeed, as Levinson claims, to sing a song without interpreting it is arguably not to sing it in a jazz manner at all.) Levinson asks what a vocal jazz performance can convey; that is, what might jazz singers communicate without intending to do so, both about the songs they sing and about themselves? He has a “hunch” that in most cases an interpretation will convey more about a singer’s musical or performing personality than about the song.

Levinson’s article raises the issue of what we could tell about a singer’s personality by her performance of a jazz standard. According to London, much of why we value Sonny Boy Williamson’s recording of “Little Village” is for its portrayal of “Williamson-the-bluesman.” London calls “Little Village” an example of “musical bullshit” but does not, in doing so, mean it real disrespect. While “Little Village” was produced with “thorough-going indifference,” it succeeds as a showcase for Williamson’s attitude and style, in other words, for aspects of his performing personality.

London’s article examines “one of the most infamous episodes in Chicago blues history” as a window into issues of musical ontology and aesthetic value (p. 45). Williamson’s “Little Village” is notorious for the profanity-laden exchange between Williamson and producer Leonard Chess at the beginning of the track, and the recording is greatly prized by blues aficionados. But what kind of work is it (if it is a work at all) and how best to appreciate it? London offers a taxonomy of works, according to whether the work itself and its medium are more or less durable or ephemeral. Durable works may be encountered on numerous occasions, while ephemeral works are typi-

cally seen or heard only once. There are (relatively) durable works in (relatively) durable media, such as stone sculptures and painted canvases; and there are durable works in ephemeral media, such as songs. Songs are “durable” because we can encounter them on numerous occasions in different performances; yet the medium of live musical performance is ephemeral—it is time itself. Also possible are ephemeral works in ephemeral media; for example, musical works that are composed with the intention of being performed at a special occasion and only on that occasion.

London argues that “Little Village” belongs in another ontological category. It is an ephemeral work (an improvisation according to a schema) that has been captured in a durable medium (recording technology). London’s taxonomy may prove to be fruitful for thinking about musical improvisation more broadly.

The next two articles, like London’s, consider ontological issues raised by songs. Rings’s article is a discussion of genre-reset cover versions in rock music and how listeners appreciate them. “Generic resetting” is the presentation of a song in a different genre than that of the original recording. Rock music has a particularly rich range of examples, likely because of the centrality of recordings in the rock tradition. Rock fans come to form strong associations between songs and particular recordings of them in a way that is arguably less germane for fans of music in other genres. These associations are then ripe to be reinforced, challenged, or undermined as listeners’ expectations are violated by hearing familiar songs “dressed up in the clothes of a new genre” (p. 56). Listeners get pleasure in hearing the progress of a recognizable song through an unfamiliar stylistic landscape. To explain how the process works, Rings draws on Kendall Walton’s now familiar distinctions between the standard, contra-standard, and variable features of artworks.²⁴

One of the key points of Rings’s arguments is that the genres (or subgenres) of rock are not only formal, stylistic categories, but also culturally significant groupings, representing different attitudes, historical contexts, and perhaps even political ideologies. (If you are skeptical, contrast the political and cultural meanings implicit in a hard-rock rendition of a song with its generically reset version in bluegrass or ska.) The same song performed in different genres can provide listeners with very different aesthetic experiences. In

doing so, genre-reset covers also prompt us to think about the relationship between words and music in song and how performance styles play a crucial role in creating meaning—a theme we saw explored earlier in Gracyk’s article.

Cover versions also play a role in the next article, by Bruno. What is the musical work in rock? That is, what is the *primary* artwork that is created in rock music, the primary focus of critical attention? Bruno disputes what he takes to be the current consensus among philosophers concerning this question. This view, attributed to Gracyk, Fisher, Davies, and Kania, is that the primary work in rock is the recording; for example, Presley’s echo-laden “Mystery Train” or the Beatles’s heavily edited “Strawberry Fields Forever.” This view does not deny that rock recordings provide renditions of songs in the traditional sense, but that the songs so instanced are too “thin” to be the primary musical work in rock. Bruno describes six different sorts of counterevidence to this consensus. One important type of evidence comes from covers, which Bruno asserts, *contra* Kania, are central to rock. Bruno takes covers of songs to be *prima facie* evidence for the importance of the songs themselves as musical works and for their importance to rock musical thinking and critical discourse. This position should be compared to that of Rings, who treats covers as generic re-sets of specific *recorded* works. Bruno goes on to question arguments that take the greater “thickness” of the recording to imply that the thinner entity, the song, is not also an artwork. He expands the argument with a spirited defense of the status of popular songs, even simplistic ones such as “Not Fade Away,” as artworks in their own right over and above their renditions in individual recordings. He ends by noting that we need a more nuanced account of how the identity of the popular song is fixed given that actual practices with popular songs diverge in several ways from the stricter model of works and their performance instances derived from practice with Western classical music.

The next two articles, by Peter Kivy and Nina Penner, examine songs and singing within the context of longer narrative forms: movies for Kivy and opera for Penner. Kivy addresses the status of “realistic” singing in the movies (fictional spoken cinematic drama), drawing on the work of Edward T. Cone. Realistic singing is understood by the audience as singing, rather than as a stand-in

for speech. Kivy distinguishes between four types of realistic songs. The first three are differentiated according to how well the musical event is integrated into the film’s dramatic structure. “Ornamental” song performances are merely decorative and perform no dramatic function, “embedded” songs echo a theme of the movie, and “integrated” songs are pervasive and embedded in the very heart of the drama. The fourth type of song Kivy considers is “music track” song—singing that is heard by the film’s audience but not by its characters. Kivy finds the function of music track songs to be analogous to that of a Greek chorus. The songs emphasize what we as the audience already know, tell us how things are, and hint at what is to come. He offers the intriguing suggestion that this way of understanding the songs of a film soundtrack may provide a way of understanding the music track as a whole.

Penner draws on and extends earlier work by Kivy and Cone to address the question, “What is fictionally true about the ontological status and authorship of the music in opera?” (p. 82). In contrast to much recent scholarship in opera theory, Penner argues that an opera’s music is an “inextricable part” of the ontology of its fictional world and that song is the normative or “default” mode of communication in that world. Penner’s position is in explicit disagreement with that of Carolyn Abbate, who has argued that an opera’s music is not part of its fictional world and indeed arises from outside that world. Penner offers several illustrations where denying opera characters epistemic access to the musical portion of their utterances raises problems of interpretation. She also questions the tendency of poststructuralist narrative theory to degrade real authors and composers in favor of fictional authors, arguing that recourse to fictional authors is frequently a less fruitful interpretive strategy. Penner concludes that “opera is only irrational if one refuses to approach it on its own terms” (p. 89).

The final four articles take us beyond the nature of song and songs in art to broader concerns of ethics, politics, and community. Interestingly, each article takes as its focus a form of American popular music. A recurrent narrative concerning American popular music involves the charge that whites have consistently appropriated black musical forms; commercially successful rock, jazz, and blues performed by white musicians has involved reaping financial rewards that should have

gone to black musicians as well as, so the critique goes, producing music that is less original, less authentic than its models in African American culture. Lee B. Brown begins with a notable example of possible appropriation by comparing two icons of popular vocal music in the 1920s and 1930s: Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong. Is Armstrong the true originator of jazz singing and Crosby merely a white appropriator of his style? Brown explores the general issue of appropriation by focusing on a current theory of cultural appropriation, the minstrel hypothesis. This hypothesis in general form “claims that all American popular music is indebted to blackface minstrel theater” (p. 92). Central to this account is a general white “impulse” to identify with the cultural “other,” that is, blacks. Barry Shank has applied this theory to Bob Dylan’s music; Shank claims not just that Dylan is *influenced* by black musicians but that he aims at, to quote Shank, “personal transformation, whereby a young white male attempts to remake himself through performing black music . . . the *classic trope* of the great American tradition of blackface minstrelsy” (p. 94). Brown deconstructs the idea that Dylan’s music and more generally all of popular music is based on the identifying mechanisms of minstrel theory. Brown interprets the function of identification, on this theory, as a search for authenticity. The minstrel hypothesis in whatever form raises a number of issues of interpretation: (i) is there a subterranean (or analogical) *representation* of black culture in Dylan’s songs or popular music generally (just as minstrel shows literally, if condescendingly, represented black culture) and (ii) is there a hidden expression of a desire to identify in such music as has been influenced by black precursors?

Brown goes on to show that Crosby and Armstrong influenced each other and both contributed to the creation and evolution of a new sort of singing, jazz singing. Brown details Crosby’s contributions to the use of the essentially intimate microphone and the use of “jazz inflections”—holding notes and playing with the time. This, along with Armstrong’s ability to swing and scat, appears to represent a different aspect of jazz singing than Levinson’s focus in his article on “interpreting” jazz standards. Such stylistic innovations, as pioneered by Armstrong and Crosby, appear to have more to do with transforming singing into jazz music than they do with interpreting

songs (many of which, of course, were far from standards worth interpreting).

Brown also raises the issue of ethicism—should aesthetic judgments be affected by our moral responses to the songs?—by not only noting instances of minstrel references in performances by both Crosby and Armstrong, but also the more problematic blackface performances by Astaire and Crosby in movies. He also considers a contrasting ethical critique based on minstrelsy: Wynton Marsalis’s criticism of rap music as “ghetto minstrelsy”—that is, Marsalis hears *black* blackface minstrelsy in rap, “From Zip Coon to the guy from the ghetto who’s going to threaten you” (p. 96). To analogize rap to minstrelsy certainly puts a different face on rap music.

In contrast to several other articles in this anthology that spell out what individual singers and performances bring to the meaning and character of a song, David Goldblatt’s account of doo-wop emphasizes what a community brings to a whole genre and what groups brought to individual songs. Rather than being a minor moment in a presumed monolithic evolution of commercial popular music, doo-wop, in Goldblatt’s account, proves to be a useful antidote to the many assumptions and indeed criticisms of popular music promulgated by Theodore Adorno and many others.

Goldblatt shows how the doo-wop genre is distinctively determined in both structure and content by its social origin and physical setting, which was singing on urban street corners. Conceptually, this places doo-wop at the intersection of popular and folk music, if one assumes the traditional definition of folk music as music that has evolved primarily through a community’s creative impulse and its process of selection. Goldblatt stresses the point that the musical genre was created by young singers in neighborhood street corner settings, a cappella groups, not bands, prior to being pulled into the domain of commercial music. In doo-wop, “songs for commerce and monetary consumption are preceded by singing embedded in ordinary lives, in great frequency and in public spaces, and outside the domain of professionalism” (p. 101).

Goldblatt praises doo-wop, suggesting that the genre should be evaluated by different aesthetic criteria than those derived from the classical music tradition. For example, in “In the Still of the Night” when “the lead sings, ‘I remember’ in the line ‘I remember that night in May,’ the backups

repeat the words ‘I remember’ throughout the refrain, words that do have independent content but add nothing to the ongoing ‘story’ expressed in the lyrics. Make no mistake, I am *praising* this aspect of doo-wop as a kind of virtue” (p. 106). Similarly, concerning authenticity, he argues, “Authenticity in doo-wop was not simply a result of growing out of a teenage culture; it was a central ingredient in its composition . . . Its criteria should be drawn from the subculture that it helped to generate” (pp. 108, 109).

John Carvalho’s article focuses on one extraordinary song, “Strange Fruit,” and the extraordinary performances of that song by Billie Holiday, who became identified with the song for reasons that Carvalho explores. He views this song through the philosophy of music of Jacques Attali.²⁵ “Strange Fruit” is a song that is almost painful to hear, and that is its point; it was written to motivate social change, to highlight the social injustice of racism and its violent enforcement by lynchings. For Attali, music is central to civilization and its origins; he asserts that it is “a way of perceiving the world” and an “instrument of understanding.”²⁶ On Carvalho’s reading of Attali, music implicitly models the violence that is required by civilization. Attali describes music as a “channeler of violence, the regulator of society.”²⁷ He views noise as violence and music as the channelization of noise and, in its origin, as a “simulacrum of the sacrifice” required for civilization.

Carvalho applies this rich and complex theory to “Strange Fruit.” This song was intended by its progressive white composer, Abel Meeropol, to highlight the racist horror of lynchings. However, Carvalho finds it to have a darker side in Holiday’s performances. He argues that the “good intentions of the song’s composer and arranger were unable to undo the structural violence in the music and in the culture for the presentation and reception for the song itself” (p. 118). Carvalho argues that there is violence throughout the song, in its lyrics, in the way it is narrated, and in Holiday’s performance. However, for white audiences he argues that the lyrics and the melody “get under our skin, but they don’t get in our heads. They satisfy our need to feel profoundly, but they don’t spur us to action” (p. 115). Holiday’s white audiences were encouraged to hear “this Black woman channel the calamitous, shouting, screaming, ‘civilizing’ noises of racial violence as beautiful music” (p. 116).

Carvalho’s examination raises the question of whether songs highlighting injustice could ever successfully motivate, on Attali’s view, because the implicit violence of the propositional content is channeled by the art form. Carvalho suggests an important distinction, however, when he says that “Black audiences could identify with Holiday’s experience of being lynched in the very singing of the song” (p. 115). For the white audience the song was used “to absolve their guilt,” but for the black audience the song was something much deeper.

If Attali is correct, and if music does (at some level) model the violence that is implicit in social control, what are the implications for rap music, in which performers declaim rather than sing? Is this an attempt to make explicit the violence that singing in a pitched system suppresses and “civilizes”? Perhaps this mode of performance was an attempt by the earliest rappers to reject (or at least criticize) their social situations. Taking as his central example an explicitly violent rap album, Aaron Smuts evaluates the morality of our engagement with songs and, in particular, with the mode of listening that occurs in “singing along.”

Smuts argues that such engagement with songs is morally different from our engagement with other narrative art forms, including film, literature, and theater. Crucially, listeners who sing along assume the persona of the speaker. If the songs in question celebrate cruelty and suffering (as does the material that Smuts considers), then singing along encourages listeners to imagine doing evil and, furthermore, to *enjoy* imaginatively doing evil. As he puts it, singing along with such material allows listeners “to eloquently express anger and pronounce on their own fierceness with style” (p. 123). If it is intrinsically bad to enjoy evil regardless of whether that evil results in harm (as Smuts argues) and if our engagement with fictional narratives is a kind of guided imagination, then those narratives that encourage us to imagine doing evil with enjoyment are morally problematic.

V. CONCLUSION

From the point of view of philosophy of music, instrumental and vocal music have performed an intricate *pas de deux* over the last three centuries. In the eighteenth century, purely instrumental

musical works began to interest music theoreticians. By the nineteenth century, such works by the great composers largely supplanted vocal music as higher art in the minds of philosophically inclined thinkers. Undoubtedly, understanding the nature and metaphysics of autonomous instrumental musical works involves challenging philosophical issues. Yet it would be a mistake to regard this historical progression as charting a journey from attention to something that is not art (songs) toward something that is (sonatas). In reality, these are two broad types of music, each calling for philosophical attention.

To concentrate solely on musical works without texts removes music from its important place in social life. The articles in this issue indicate what can be gained by adopting a wider perspective that encompasses vocal music. Not only do they illustrate the metaphysical issues raised by songs, but they also begin to point toward a way that philosophy of music can connect to political, social, and ethical issues. At the same time, vocal works raise purely aesthetic questions. Vernacular songs raise questions of identity over time due to their “thinness” and openness to the variable determinations of performance and context. Both art and vernacular songs raise the challenge of analyzing this hybrid art form and of understanding how to appreciate and evaluate it. Moreover, the embodiment of popular songs in recordings has proven to be especially intriguing relative to the traditional ontological scheme of score, work, and compliant performance. In addition, the use of song in dramatic narratives, such as operas, musicals, and movies, raises puzzling questions about mimesis: what precisely is being represented when performers sing? As these formulations show, some issues reflect canonical issues in aesthetics, some are endemic to song, and some may shed new light on traditional aesthetic questions, such as what counts as an authentic performance or an interpretation of a vernacular song?

Increased philosophical attention to song does not require examining new or unfamiliar art forms. It merely requires examining familiar art forms with a philosophical eye.

JEANETTE BICKNELL
Toronto, Canada

INTERNET: bicknellj@hotmail.com

JOHN ANDREW FISHER
Philosophy Department
University of Colorado–Boulder
Boulder, Colorado 80309

INTERNET: jafisher@colorado.edu

1. Ellen Dissanayake’s review of *The Singing Neanderthals*, in *Evolutionary Psychology* 3 (2005): 375–380, at p. 377.

2. For an argument that the focus in philosophy of music on purely instrumental music is justified, see Andrew Kania, “The Philosophy of Music,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/music/>.

3. See, most recently, Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005).

4. “Herder held that the origin of speech and song were one.” Philip Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 40.

5. In line with our focus on sung text, we will treat songs as a subclass of the category of song, and hence ignore the contemporary sense of ‘song’ used to refer to purely instrumental works, such as Monk’s “Epistrophy” or the Ventures’ “Walk, Don’t Run.”

6. Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 121.

7. While it is notoriously difficult to provide any precise definition of “popular” music, we can say that it is neither limited to “pop” music nor to music that is widely liked. See John Andrew Fisher, “Popular Music,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 405–415. For the joint emergence of the concepts of folk music and popular music in the nineteenth century, see Fisher, “Popular Music,” pp. 408–409.

8. Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum*, pp. 168–175.

9. Herbert Schueller notes, with reference to Adam Smith, “Expression is meaningfulness, and to most writers (one thinks of Adam Smith), instrumental music was generally an unmeaningful art, one that cannot imitate since its ‘unmeaning and inarticulate sounds’ are not exact.” Herbert Schueller, “‘Imitation’ and ‘Expression’ in British Music Criticism in the 18th Century,” *The Musical Quarterly* 34 (1948): 544–566, at p. 557.

10. These boundaries have been attacked by Richard Shusterman in *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) and “Form and Funk: The Aesthetic Challenge of Popular Art,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 31 (1991): 203–213, as well as by David Novitz, “High and Popular Art,” in *The Boundaries of Art* (Temple University Press, 1992), chap. 2.

11. Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Duke University Press, 1996) and *Listening to Popular Music* (University of Michigan Press, 2006).

12. Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 6.

13. Goehr does not promote this concept; she merely describes it. In fact, she expresses how inappropriate it is

for much music: "Consider, finally, how cynical classical musicians tend to be of popular music, on the grounds that a given song has a simple form or that the music 'doesn't last,' or that popular music is expressive of infantile emotions. Why should all music meet the conditions imposed by romantic aesthetics?" Lydia Goehr, "Being True to the Work," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1989): 55–67, at p. 59.

14. An important discussion of this concept and how it came to overshadow the broader concept (still operating in Rossini's practice) is Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (University of California Press, 1989): "The difference between these 'twin musical cultures' which Beethoven and Rossini stand for . . . points to nothing less than a far-reaching rift in the concept of music. . . . The distinction between opera and instrumental music . . . was a major, if not the decisive, factor in the resultant duality of styles" (p. 8). See also Leo Treitler, "History and the Ontology of the Musical Work," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 483–497. Treitler shows the inadequacies of the romantic concept even for classical music, and he is critical of its appeal to philosophers.

15. For 'thick' and 'thin' terminology, see Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

16. Bohlman mentions that the ballad "Edward" (Child 13) exists in "many versions" and "countless variations," including German versions and settings by Schubert as well as many Appalachian versions. Philip V. Bohlman, "Herder's Nineteenth Century," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 7 (2010): 3–21, at p. 4.

17. For a discussion of the musical work concept, Goehr's account, and popular music, see Michael Talbot, "The Work-Concept and Composer-Centredness," in *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* (Liverpool University Press, 2000).

18. Bohlman, "Herder's Nineteenth Century," p. 12. For example, *Das Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806/1808) was one of the first anthologies of folk music. It was an "[a]nthology of 'folk poetry' lacking melodies, but with texts that would become the canon of Central European folk song in the 19th century." Bohlman, *World Music*, p. 33.

19. Mark W. Booth, *The Experience of Songs* (Yale University Press, 1981), p. 23.

20. Booth, *The Experience of Songs*, p. 25.

21. See Jeanette Bicknell, "Song," *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 439.

22. For discussion of such views, see Jerrold Levinson, "Song and Music Drama," in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 42–59, and Aaron Ridley, *The Philosophy of Music: Theme and Variations* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), chap. 3.

23. Jerrold Levinson, "Performative versus Critical Interpretation in Music," in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*, pp. 60–89.

24. See Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 334–367.

25. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

26. Attali, *Noise*, p. 4.

27. Attali, *Noise*, p. 13.