Ambivalences in Music and Democracy: Introductory Remarks

Marko Kölbl and Fritz Trümpi

Marko Kölbl is an ethnomusicologist and senior scientist at the Department of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology at mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. He is specialized in music and dance of minorities and migrant communities with an interest in intersectional, queer-feminist, and postcolonial perspectives.

Fritz Trümpi is a musicologist and associate professor at the Department of Musicology and Performance Studies at mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. His research focuses on the history of music industries and musicians' organisations, music & politics, and music culture(s) of the late Habsburg Empire and its successor states.

After Donald Trump's failed re-election as President of the United States of America in fall 2020, the Republicans' out-of-the-blue claims of "electoral fraud" is just one of countless warning signs: to varying extents and degrees, democracy is in great danger all over the world. Already in the early 2000s, Colin Croach noted a subtle but increasing demolition of—but also an increased disinterest in—political participation of the people, which he considered as main characteristics of "post-democracy."[1] However, despite the doubtlessly growing interventions (of growing severity) of political as well as economic elites against liberal and democratic values and structures, it cannot be overlooked that also resistance against limitations on the people's active participation in political life is growing and spreading. Some of these protest movements are globally connected, operating in many parts of the world (such as "Fridays for Future" or "Black Lives Matter"), while others are acting primarily on a country-by-country basis, within specific regions, or even communally.

An illustrative example of regional protests that address the broader political climate is the "Ibiza affaire," to which this book's cover refers. After the

1 Colin Crouch, ed., *Coping with Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Fabian Society, 2000).

infamous Ibiza tapes leaked,[2] the governmental crisis in Austria resulted in public protests that were profoundly shaped by music and dancing. Various musical actors provided the soundscape for political protest, spanning from post-migrant rap to activist choirs. This volume's cover photo captures a historic moment in the course of this governmental crisis. The fact that the eponymous tapes were secretly recorded at a rented *finca* on Ibiza, Spain, resulted in a sudden revival of the 1999 song "We're Going to Ibiza" by the '90s Euro Dance band Venga Boys. The song became the soundtrack of the protest, was used in TV coverage and ranked number one on the Austrian Spotify charts. It achieved definite political significance when Venga Boys performed it from their tour bus in front of the main government's building at Vienna's Ballhausplatz, where an enormous dancing and singing crowd celebrated the expected fall of the government. The song's musical qualities and its topical apoliticality—'90s synthetic club sounds dealing with partying in Ibiza—are not exactly what one would call a prime example of democratic content in music. Precisely the song's trashy aura, however, helped to point out the political critique of cheap corruption and simultaneously showcased contemporary protest culture's entanglement with club culture and party making.

While a rich body of literature has explored in recent years how individuals and groups use music as a resource to achieve social, cultural, and political participation and to bring about social change in society,[3] the present volume specifically focuses on the addressed tensional dichotomy. Its various contributions investigate the manifold ways of music's use by activists, but also by political groups and even governments, exploring emancipative processes and mirroring them with the implementation of nationalist, authoritarian, fascist, or neoliberal political ideas. Furthermore, the volume is also concerned with the promise and myth of democratization through technology in regard to music production, distribution, and reception/appropriation.

---

2 Former Austrian vice chancellor H.C. Strache and his fellow party member Johann Gudenus from the far-right party FPÖ were caught on tape initiating corrupt deals with the supposed niece of a Russian oligarch. The release of the video evoked public civil protests and resulted in the resignation of the two politicians, the dissolution of the government, and subsequent early parliament elections.

3 Above all, we would like to point on the only recently published anthology edited by Robert Adlington and Esteban Buch, *Finding Democracy in Music* (London: Routledge, 2021). Representative of many others, we furthermore point to the important and influential writings of Nancy Love, including *Musical Democracy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006) and *Trendy Fascism: White Power Music and the Future of Democracy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016).

However, the addressed dichotomy—the existence of a causal link between governmental repression and the formation of protest movements—is anything but new. A short look back to the long nineteenth century in Europe, for example, shows this, for instance with regard to the revolutionary acts around 1848 across the continent (and in other parts of the world), when (the not only but predominantly bourgeois) parts of the population revolted against the repressive *ancien régime* (which came back to power after the French Revolution had lost its claims and influence). And these revolutionaries did so not least by using music as an important tool of their political struggle: be it by singing revolutionary songs (as done, among others, by protesting students) or by performing noise ("Charivari") during protest marches, or by composing for the revolution (e.g. the *Revolutions-Marsch* by Johann Strauss Sohn, but also operas like Gustav Albert Lortzing's *Regina*, representing the genre of "opera of freedom"). The revolts of 1848 can therefore, admittedly among many other aspects, also be considered as a musical empowerment of the people, or more precisely, in predominant cases, of the bourgeois protagonists (if not of the bourgeoisie as such), as recently shown in a voluminous anthology edited by Barbara Boisits.[4]

However, the revolutionary frequently threatens to become reactionary: the claims of freedom for the people raised by the revolts' protagonists of 1848 turned soon into severe claims of nationalism, identifying people more and more as national subjects. And again, music served as an important means of communication when nationalist groups tried to press their case, for instance by the men's choral societies that had been flourishing since the mid-nineteenth century.[5] With the rise of nationalist aspirations, the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups among the population also increased, not at least with regard to the production, performance, and consumption of music (of any kind), as (for instance) Philip Bohlman showed in a long-term perspective ranging from the end of the nineteenth century up to the early twenty-first.[6]

---

4 Barbara Boisits, ed., *Musik und Revolution. Die Produktion von Identität und Raum durch Musik in Zentraleuropa 1848/49* (Vienna: Hollitzer, 2013).

5 See, e.g., Sabine Mecking, "Gelebte Empathie und donnerndes Pathos. Gesang und Nation im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Musik—Macht—Staat. Kulturelle, soziale und politische Wandlungsprozesse in der Moderne*, ed. Sabine Mecking and Yvonne Wasserloos (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2012), 99–126; Dorothea Redepenning, "'... unter Blumen eingesenkte Kanonen ...'. Substanz und Funktion nationaler Musik im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Das Andere. Eine Spurensuche in der Musikgeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Annette Kreutziger-Herr (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1998), 225–45.

6 See, e.g., Philip Bohlman, *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

After a first peak of devastating violence in the name of nationalism in World War I and the dissolution of imperial Europe, the establishment of more or less democratic-structured republics across the continent happened only hesitantly and was in many cases short lived. This, by reflecting the role of music within the fragile and ambivalent democratization, marks the starting point of the present volume. The contribution of **David Ferreiro Carballo** deals with the question of how political impacts on bourgeois music culture became implemented within this phase of governmental transition in Spain. He does so with regard to the creation of the National Society of Music, by investigating the repertoire policies of this institution.

What followed, resulting not at least from the republics' weaknesses, which were caused by fragile democratic structures, was the rise and consolidation of fascism. Implemented first in Italy by Mussolini and his henchmen, it soon covered large parts of Europe. Studying fascism shows—until today without comparison—the devastating instrumentalization of governments acting in the name of "the people" while simultaneously excluding any political participation in a democratic sense. Without a doubt, the sphere of music was highly affected by this fascization of politics and society, as numerous scholars were able to show in the recent past, mainly with regard to Nazi Germany (and Austria).[7] In this volume, **Gabrielle Prud'homme** examines the political appropriation of Giuseppe Verdi in Fascist Italy by studying the celebrations surrounding the fortieth anniversary of Verdi's death in 1941. Thereby, the author sheds light on how Mussolini's regime maintained its grip on the commemorations and disseminated a discourse entirely consistent with the fascist political and ideological agenda.

But even under fascist regimes, music did not exclusively fulfil the purposes of the official political agenda. It was, on the contrary, not uncommon to also use music for political protests (albeit for the most part in rather subliminal forms, for fear of repression and persecution); the documented performative acts of the "Swing-Jugend" (Germany) or the "Schlurfs" (Austria) under the Nazi regime may be exemplary here.[8] The same applies to political opposition movements in other totalitarian systems of rule. In her essay on the history of

7 To name only a few of the most influential: Oliver Rathkolb, *Führertreu und gottbegnadet. Künstlereliten im Dritten Reich* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1991); Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Fritz Trümpi, *The Political Orchestra: The Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics during the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

8 See e.g. Wolfgang Beyer and Monica Ladurner, *Im Swing gegen den Gleichschritt. Die Jugend, der Jazz und die Nazis* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2011).

"bootleg" sound recordings of the twentieth century, **Marsha Siefert** explores the world of *magnitizdat* (as underground music recordings in the Soviet Union were called). She does so by comparing them with "bootleg" opera recordings in the United States, considering both as a way of "democratizing" accesses to music provided by bards (USSR) and music fans (USA).

As implemented in this essay, highlighting the sphere of consumption and distribution of music as a participatory act, and thus as a specific form of artistic practice, adds important perspectives on music and democracy, complementing the more commonly used foci on composing and performing. This understanding obviously meets Christopher Small's concept of "musicking," where both the act of performing and the act of listening are equally considered to be predominant musicological research parameters.[9] In this context, we would like to point not least to the growing field of research that has been dedicated to the manifold aspects of digitalization in/of music.[10] Research on various forms of such "mediamorphosis" include, among others, investigations on the effects for democratization, including possibilities of self-representation, modes of participation for consumers, or business models in music and media. In their contribution, **Raphaël Nowak and Ben Morgan** investigate interactive commercial services within the "digital ecosystem" by placing a critical perspective on "democratization" in its ambivalence, but at the same time by understanding it as a key indicator for evaluating the distribution of music content on streaming platforms.

A few decades before online streaming platforms shaped music consumption, television shows that featured music were central to popular music distribution as well as the public discourses on popular music. These programs were inherently political, as illustrated by **Dean Vuletic** in his text. Vuletic discusses Europe's political split, defined through presumed levels of democracy building on "a longer history of West European cultural prejudice against Central and East Europe" (p. 142). The Intervision Song Contest offered a separate "Eastern" realm for presenting popular music in a competitive format while constituting an arena for the complex dynamics within the chosen regional frame of the singing competition.

Music itself often carries notions of professionalism and elitism that foster a fairly undemocratic image. Specifically, Western classical music's harsh ed-

9 Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

10 In the context of music and democracy, cf. especially David Hesmondhalgh, "Have Digital Communication Technologies Democratized the Media Industries?," in *Media and Society*, ed. James Curran and David Hesmondhalgh, 6th ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 101–20.

ucation system and its high standards of excellence and virtuosity presume a wide range of preconditions seemingly necessary for active musical expression. Similarly, the global pop music scene departs from an understanding of music that is highly professionalized and focuses on idealized individual star figures rather than the collective and social dimensions of music making. However, as a collective and inherently social expression by people notwithstanding their musical educations, instrumental or vocal capabilities, and stylistic preferences, music shows its profoundly democratic qualities. Social movements often rely on democratic ways of musicking that foreground grassroots, "bottom-up" and Do-It-Yourself approaches that help to articulate demands for social justice and challenge political hegemonies.[11] In their contribution, **Milena Dragičević Šešić and Julija Matejić** trace various scenarios of musical activism—"artivism"—in Serbia during the 1990s. The specific contemporary history of the region, the democratic upheavals, and the discussed musical and expressive styles and genres exemplarily showcase music's and art's usage in creating counterpublics, defining citizenship, and enabling participation.

As Dragičević Šešić and Matejić show, instances of musical activism often align their aesthetic preferences and content with their political message. The examples are manifold: Activist choirs that appropriate specific political histories of music for contemporary political struggle,[12] feminist and queer performance groups that contest heteronormative exclusion through musical and bodily aesthetics and/or anti-racist expressions that foreground the identity-political meanings of music and dance. India's anti-caste movement, for example, draws on musical traditions that emphasize a Dalit self-empowerment, contesting racist and classist social orders.[13]

A contrasting example of music's impact is provided by **Ondřej Daniel** in his essay. Daniel's class-sensitive discussion of hardbass, "a predominantly Eastern European electronic dance music style" (p. 158) that spread from Russia in the 2000s, shows how music relates to fast-changing political meanings. Through the example of this unique dance and fashion phenomenon—a "working class mimicry"—Daniel traces the genre's satirical beginnings, its connection to far-right politics, and its subsequent de-politicization.

---

11 See Ursula Hemetek, Marko Kölbl, and Hande Sağlam, *Ethnomusicology Matters: Influencing Social and Political Realities* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2019).

12 See also Ana Hofman, "Disobedient: Activist Choirs, Radical Amateurism, and the Politics of the Past after Yugoslavia," *Ethnomusicology* 64, no. 1 (2020): 89–109.

13 See Rasika Ajotikar, "Reflections on the Epistemic Foundations of Music in Modern India through the Lens of Caste: A Case from Maharashtra, India," in *Ethnomusicology Matters: Influencing Social and Political Realities*, ed. Ursula Hemetek, Marko Kölbl, and Hande Sağlam (Vienna: Böhlau, 2019), 135–62.

Here, music's (anti-)democratic capacities become apparent off the beaten tracks of established musical canons and the global music industry. Regional popular music forms, community-based music traditions, orally transmitted musics, and the like make up the central expressive formats of communities (however they are defined), allowing for democratic meaning within music and dance. Specifically, the music and performance practices of minorities and marginalized groups often aim to challenge and subvert dominant norms and classifications. Since power hegemonies frequently inhibit an appropriate representation of minorities and marginalized groups, the communities in question apply their own expressive agency in contesting subordination. This expressive agency of course encompasses various styles and genres of music and performing arts.

One such particular musical style—Deaf hip hop—is the topic of **Katelyn Best's** chapter. In it, Best shows how musical agency functions within a community that is commonly perceived as voiceless. Her detailed ethnographic account on musical inclusivity through this specific form of hip hop highlights music's efficacy in negotiating social exclusion and structural discrimination. As "sound in Deaf culture is signified across sensory modalities" (p. 239), Deaf hip hop expands the common understanding of music and sound and displays a powerful example of musical participation and the relationship between democracy and music.

Migration and border regimes poignantly illustrate the relationship between democracy and the aforementioned variety of musical and performing practices. Music, here, serves as a tool of diasporic relocation that contests both ethnicization and racialization as well as assimilation and the reduction of cultural rights. In migratory settings, musicking enables translation, defines dynamics of Othering processes, and simultaneously gains meaning in sociopolitical change in various settings, from diaspora to exile.[14] At the same time, music, and specifically dance, can be useful in propagating ethno-nationalist and gender-stereotypical ideas of ethnicity, as **Rumya Putcha** shows in her text. Drawing on her own positionality and own experience with the transnational South Indian dance education system, she offers meaningful insight into how this ethnically marked performance culture is bound to maintain the classist imaginaries of caste, gender, and ethnicity.

14 To name only a few central publications: Philipp Kasinitz and Marco Martiniello, eds., *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, Special Issue: "Music, Migration and the City" (2019); Jason Toynbee and Byron Dueck, *Migrating Music* (London: Routledge, 2012); Tina Ramnarine, ed., *Ethnomusicology Forum* 16, no. 1, Special Issue: "Musical Performance in the Diaspora" (2007).

The present volume gathers various and diverse perspectives on the relationships between music and democracy that are based on contributions to the international conference "Participatory Approaches to Music & Democracy," the 2018 edition of isaScience (mdw—University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna). In addition to selected conference participants and keynote speakers, this volume also includes other invited authors that we chose to adequately represent the thematic breadth of political participation, democracy, and music.

References

Adlington, Robert and Esteban Buch. *Finding Democracy in Music*. London: Routledge, 2021.

Ajotikar, Rasika. "Reflections on the Epistemic Foundations of Music in Modern India through the Lens of Caste: A Case from Maharashtra, India." In *Ethnomusicology Matters: Influencing Social and Political Realities*, edited by Ursula Hemetek, Marko Kölbl, and Hande Sağlam, 135–62. Vienna: Böhlau, 2019.

Beyer, Wolfgang and Monica Ladurner. *Im Swing gegen den Gleichschritt. Die Jugend, der Jazz und die Nazis*. Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2011.

Bohlman, Philip. *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Boisits, Barbara, ed. *Musik und Revolution. Die Produktion von Identität und Raum durch Musik in Zentraleuropa 1848/49*. Vienna: Hollitzer, 2013.

Crouch, Colin. *Coping with Post-Democracy*. Cambridge: Fabian Society, 2000.

Hemetek, Ursula, Marko Kölbl, and Hande Sağlam, eds. *Ethnomusicology Matters: Influencing Social and Political Realities*. Vienna: Böhlau, 2019.

Hesmondhalgh, David. "Have Digital Communication Technologies Democratized the Media Industries?" In *Media and Society*, edited by James Curran and David Hesmondhalgh, 6th ed., 101–20. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Hofman, Ana. "Disobedient: Activist Choirs, Radical Amateurism, and the Politics of the Past after Yugoslavia." *Ethnomusicology* 64, no. 1 (2020): 89–109.

Kasinitz, Philipp and Marco Martiniello, eds. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, Special Issue: "Music, Migration and the City" (2019).

Levi, Erik. *Music in the Third Reich*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994.

Love, Nancy. *Musical Democracy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006.

———. *Trendy Fascism: White Power Music and the Future of Democracy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016.

Mecking, Sabine. "Gelebte Empathie und donnerndes Pathos. Gesang und

Nation im 19. Jahrhundert." In *Musik—Macht—Staat. Kulturelle, soziale und politische Wandlungsprozesse in der Moderne*, edited by Sabine Mecking and Yvonne Wasserloos, 99–126. Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2012.

Potter, Pamela. *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Ramnarine, Tina, ed. "Musical Performance in the Diaspora." Special Issue, *Ethnomusicology Forum* 16, no. 1 (June 2007).

Rathkolb, Oliver. *Führertreu und gottbegnadet. Künstlereliten im Dritten Reich.* Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1991.

Redepenning, Dorothea. "'... unter Blumen eingesenkte Kanonen ...'. Substanz und Funktion nationaler Musik im 19. Jahrhundert." *Das Andere. Eine Spurensuche in der Musikgeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Annette Kreutziger-Herr, 225–45. Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1998.

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening.* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

Toynbee, Jason and Byron Dueck. *Migrating Music.* London: Routledge, 2012.

Trümpi, Fritz. *The Political Orchestra: The Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics during the Third Reich.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.