

Music as Evil: Deviance and Metaculture in Classical Music*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to apply the sociology of deviance and the concept of metaculture to the sociology of high-art and music. Examples of classical music criticisms over time are presented and discussed. Music critics have engaged in metaculture and norm promotion by labeling certain composers or styles of music as negatively deviant in a number of ways. Composers or styles of classical music have been labeled as not music, not worthy of being considered the future of music, a threat to culture, politically unacceptable, evil, and even criminal. Critics have linked composers they are critical of with other deviant categories, and ethnocentrism, racism, and other biases play a role in critics' attempts to engage in norm promotion and affect the public temper. As society changes, musical norms and therefore deviant labels concerning music also change. Maverick composers push musical ideas forward, and those music critics who resist these changes are unable to successfully promote their dated, more traditional norms. Implications of the findings for the sociology of deviance and the sociology of music are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The sociology of deviance has generated a large number of ideas, concepts, and theories that are used in other concentration areas within sociology, such as medical sociology, race, ethnicity, and gender studies, criminology, social problems, and collective behavior, among others (Goode, 2004). My task here is to introduce Urban's (2001) concept of metaculture (defined as culture that is about culture) and concepts from the sociology of deviance (such as positive and negative deviance, stigma contests, norm promotion, and the like) to the sociology of music, and specifically the high-art and culture of classical music, by examining music reviews by critics over time. The sociology of deviance understandably focuses on marginalized groups, but here the focus is on a debate that largely occurs among the elite and others interested in high-art and culture.

Goode (2004) is one of a handful of scholars who has written about how the sociology of deviance could be revitalized. One way to re-energize the sociology of deviance is to "... try to understand how some definitions of deviance and respectability win out over others" (Goode, 2004, p. 55). The analysis reported here examines negative reviews of classical music composers that appeared in the past during a composer's lifetime. These composers are now deemed geniuses and master innovators, so we are exploring the failures of some critics (many of whom were famous in their day) to influence definitions of deviance and respectability in high art. The definitions of deviance and respectability forwarded by critics in these instances did not survive; however, these failures to influence high culture were not immediate. There was no collective foregone conclusion that Wagner, Brahms, Beethoven, and others were master composers penning music that should be the standard for the future.

The sociology of music often examines "... the various ways in which music is *used* in a whole range of social situations, and the consequences of this" (emphasis in the original) (Martin, 2006, p. 1). The sociology of music has produced a lot of work on how music provides meaning to different groups, how this meaning is constructed, how music can be a status marker, and how some composers have managed to become influential. However, arguments over the direction music should take have not been addressed in terms of the use of deviant labels to delegitimize competing arguments adequately. While scholars have written about music being demonized over time (such as discussions over rock and rap lyrics) theoretical concepts and ideas from the sociology of deviance have not been used to analyze this demonization, particularly when discussing high art. The sociology of deviance and the concept of metaculture can help provide a rich analysis of these debates over the future of music. As with other areas of the sociology of art and music, definitions of deviance and respectability ought to be placed within the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which these definitions emerge and decline (Martin, 2006).

DEVIANCE AND MUSIC CRITICISM

Heckert and Heckert (2002) developed a typology consisting of four types of deviance: negative deviance, deviance admiration, rate busting, and positive deviance. Negative deviance is under-conforming deviant behavior that brings about a negative reaction from groups, and is the kind of deviance typically discussed in the field, such as murder, drug abuse, sexual violence, and the like. All of the reviews presented in this paper are examples of the negative deviance label. Deviance

admiration, on the other hand, is under-conforming deviance that elicits positive reactions from others. An example would be the glorification of certain outlaws, gangsters, serial killers, and other criminals (Heckert and Heckert, 2002). Rate busting involves the stigmatization of over-conformity. For example, an overly bright individual can be called a “nerd” or “dork” for going beyond what is expected among members of a certain group (Heckert and Heckert, 2002, p. 461). Finally, positive deviance is over-conformity that elicits a positive response from groups. Examples include altruists and Nobel Prize winners.

Composers seen initially by some as deviant (and later lauded as geniuses) can be explained by the terms outlined by Heckert and Heckert (2002). Clearly, those ingenious composers that have stood the test of time would be examples of positive deviance, but critics in the examples below labeled some composers now seen as positive deviants as negative deviants. These constructs of deviance can be temporally fixed and subject to change and the social context changes. Certain composers push the boundaries of music in an influential way, and over time their ideas become normative.

Erikson (2005) argued that deviance serves a function in society. Those in authority define deviance as a way to solidify social consensus. Using the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay as an example, Erikson (2005) noted that in times of social disruption due to a shift in religious focus, witchcraft mania occurred as a way to relocate boundaries in society. The same could be said during periods of stylistic change in classical music. New styles compete with traditional styles, and this leads to attempts by traditionalists to label the new forms of music as deviant in order to relocate musical boundaries and restore order. These transitions from one style to the next can happen within the context of a particular composer’s own career or from one musical period to the next. Transitions or new stylistic movements can be defined as crises by music critics, and these critics may try to define high art by promoting their musical norms and pointing out musical deviants. Slonimsky (1994) argued that art is a work in progress and that objections leveled at musical innovators over time by critics are all derived from “non-acceptance of the unfamiliar” (Slonimsky, 1994, p. 3). Barzun (1953) concurred with Slonimsky. Unfamiliar music can offend (Slonimsky, 1994), and can therefore be demonized and labeled as negatively deviant.

DeNora (2000) discussed Antoine Hennion’s famous work entitled *La Passion Musicale* (1993), and according to DeNora, Hennion argued that the interpretation of music should be a topic of investigation in musical sociology, instead of simply a resource for investigation. Hennion argued that music criticism is a discourse on the meaning and value of musical works, and researchers can relate discourse on value, authenticity, and meaning to musical materials (see DeNora, 2000, pp. 30-31). Music is a part of social life, a form of social action, and a medium for action and social change (DeNora, 2003). Music is therefore an instrument for the social construction of reality, and control over the distribution of musical resources is politicized and a means for establishing social order (Adorno, Mitchell, and Blomster, 2003; Becker, 1974; DeNora, 2000). There is a finite capacity for the distribution of music, so different groups forwarding a particular aesthetic style compete to define a consensus on value in a politicized system (Becker, 1982).

As with conceptions of deviance in general, music criticism must be placed in its historical, cultural, political, and temporal contexts. Swingewood (2005) notes that

musicologists have increasingly recognized the need to analyze music such as opera “in terms of its historical, social, and cultural contexts by focusing on politics, cultural history, and gender studies” (p. 139). Because culture and taste are in flux and undergoing change, opinions over time regarding the quality of various styles of music will also change. Definitions of deviance also change over time, vary by culture, and are therefore relative. In addition, musical taste is relative and open to debate by those with the specialized knowledge to define taste. Debates concerning musical taste are embedded within larger debates regarding culture, notions of right and wrong, and the like, as will become evident in the samples of music reviews outlined below.

A critic’s engagement with the music he or she is listening to is dependent on the “preconditions” of the past, including observable conventions of composing or musical style, biographical associations that a particular piece of music may hold for critics, and other aspects of the critic’s background that inform reactions to the music (DeNora, 2003, p. 50). Because musical taste is related to other elements of culture, nationalism, and the like, critics might defend their musical norms and chastise certain composers as deviant while sometimes also displaying ethnocentrism, racism, nationalism, and various conceptions of morality. Critics will utilize these extra-musical ideologies to enhance and solidify the boundary maintenance they are engaging in via music criticism.

Critics attempt to determine whether something is worthy of being labeled high art, and do this by concentrating on aesthetic issues that are important in high culture (see Gans, 1999, p. 103). According to Urban (2001) we need the knowledge and expertise of critics to assess the actual value and worthiness of something, because the price of an artwork or the cost of admission to a music recital is not reflective of the true value of a work of art; and people often do not trust their own judgments or those of their friends or relatives (see also Honigsheim, 1989). Critics become liaisons between composers or artists and various publics by providing readers rationales for how to interpret the music (Sorokin, 1985). Critics therefore can be important in defining taste, which is within Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” (Urban, 2001, p. 187).

A distinction must be made between taste and quality, however. Critics do try to promote a particular form of social order, making music an integral part of political and cultural discourse, but they are engaging in a discourse more on taste than on quality. One could argue that Bach and Beethoven will survive because of the quality of their compositions, irrespective of whatever prevailing musical taste is present in society. So, throughout this discussion, we must keep in mind that critics are not the standard bearers on quality, even though they can have an influence on taste.

The influence of critics can also be undermined because composers can be uninterested in the same questions that critics are interested in. Composers can push the boundaries of music when they find the current aesthetic style too limiting. Charles Ives and Richard Wagner were two examples in classical music. Becker (1982) called these individuals “mavericks,” and they often get a hostile reception (and labeled negatively deviant) when they present their work to others, especially when they do not participate in the conventional art culture. These mavericks, however, can help shape the future of music as those in the conventional art world find the innovations of mavericks useful and of aesthetic value (Becker, 1982). There is a parallel between mavericks in art and deviant scientists outlined in Ben-Yehuda’s

(1985) work. There are numerous examples in science where scientific ideas were initially rejected and later accepted, such as continental drift theory (Ben-Yehuda, 1985). As in science, the definition of proper art is politically and culturally contested.

Music critics are engaging in what sociologists of deviance call “norm promotion”, which is the relative ability to successfully promote one’s norms over competing norms (Clinard and Meier, 2004). The norms in question involve musical taste and the definition of proper high art and culture. Pfohl’s (1994) term *stigma contest* would apply here, because critics are competing over what styles of music and which composers deserve praise and which ones deserve condemnation and rebuke. Composers and styles of music that are condemned by critics can be viewed as being outside of the boundaries of social life and common sense, while those that are praised by critics are supposed to be seen as good, normal, and acceptable.

In this norm promotion process, music critics are engaging in what Urban (2001) calls “metaculture,” which is “culture that is about culture” (p. 3). While Urban was largely writing about film reviews, music reviews would apply similarly. Those in music criticism “... apply aesthetic systems to specific art works and arrive at judgments of their worth and explications of what gives them that worth” (Becker, 1982, p. 131). Critics try to help move culture forward by defining how the past links with the present and how cultural change is taking place, making reference to a range of prior and seemingly disparate cultural elements in order to do this (Urban, 2001, p. 5). Critics can be particularly influential when they explain what a previous standard was, and how a new work shows that the previous standard was too limiting (Becker, 1982).

Critics usually don’t describe the plot of a movie or the notes being played in a musical score. Instead, critics provide the kind of information that allows an assessment of the newness and quality of the work relative to earlier pieces of artwork or music (Urban, 2001). As metaculture, reviews are forward looking, and tell readers what is to come in the future (Urban, 2001). Urban (2001) also points out that reviewers assess the “truth” of an artwork and whether or not it fits reality (p. 216). Critics attempt to practice metaculture in such a way that their views on art or music create a consensus by facilitating interaction among the populace. This interaction can create what Durkheim (1965) called the “public temper”: collective definitions of right and wrong, or deviant and non-deviant (p. 102). One must understand, however, that critics can usually only fight a rear-guard action against what they don’t like, or praise what they like. Composers, particularly mavericks, are usually ahead of the critics, and this limits the effect critics can have on a larger audience over the long-term. This of course hasn’t stopped music critics from attempting to influence the public temper of high culture by defining various composers or styles of music as deviant in various ways. As we will see below, critics have unsuccessfully attempted to stop the changes occurring in music and musical styles by seeing newer forms of musical styles or composers as a threat to what they saw as the proper movement of culture through time and space. These critics attempted to restore normative boundaries during these periods of change in music.

METHODOLOGY

The data come from negative music criticisms compiled by Slonimsky (1994) in his famous book, *Lexicon of Musical Invective*. Slonimsky (1994) compiled reviews that

were “biased, unfair, ill-tempered, and singularly unprophetic judgments” (p. 3). In his review of Slonimsky’s first printing of the book, Barzun (1953) noted that Nineteenth-century historians would be well acquainted with many of the music critics found in the book (for example Eduard Hanslick), so these reviewers were not unknown or unimportant. Nonetheless, the arguments presented here are relying on Slonimsky’s subjective decisions about what to include in his book as “invective.” Slonimsky (1994) gathered magazine and newspaper reviews from numerous libraries and private collections. Most of the reviews came from the Music Department of the Boston Public Library, the archives of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the New York Public Library, and the Carl Van Vechten Collection at Fisk University (Slonimsky 1994, p. 35). Reviews from French and German sources were printed in their original languages along with an English language translation.

In order to examine the ways music critics framed their critiques as a way of defining a composer or style of music as deviant, the author first engaged in open coding, allowing any potential themes related to deviant labels to arise from the text of the negative reviews in Slonimsky’s (1994) book. Notes were made in the margins of the book and various sections were underlined. Through this process the author identified six themes (described below). The critiques were then re-read and coded based on the six guiding themes (Berg 1995; Esterberg 2002). Due to space constraints, the author selected the criticisms that best articulated these themes for inclusion in this paper.

RESULTS

Based on the sample of reviews presented in *Lexicon of Musical Invective*, the author has identified six different metacultural processes (themes) music critics have used to attempt to define classical music as deviant over time: 1) It’s not music, 2) It is a threat to culture, 3) It’s politically inappropriate, 4) It’s not the music of the future, 5) It’s evil, and 6) It’s criminal. As we will see below, these definitions of deviance do not just concern musical aesthetics. The cultural, political and other contexts surrounding these reviews place them in a particular time and place. As the social context changes over time, so do the nature of the reviews. Because of the contextual nature of these reviews, theme-overlap will be apparent in a number of the reviews, but the primary arguments presented in the reviews did reveal these mutually exclusive themes. For example, not all things considered evil are criminalized, and numerous acts or beliefs have been criminalized but not because they were considered evil. Each of these descriptive themes will be discussed in turn, and within each theme, largely in temporal order.

IT’S NOT MUSIC

Some critics simply argue that what they heard was not art or music. Part of the process of metaculture is assessing the truth of an artwork, and in the following examples the pieces of music critics heard did not fit the construction of reality the music critics wished to promote. Based on the reviews below, one can see that the critics believe that these particular composers and their music cannot be part of the future of music because what is composed is not music. It is ugly, dissonant noise, and unintelligible, rather than new, creative music with beautiful melodies that could move culture forward.

We first turn to Ludwig Van Beethoven, known as one of the greatest composers, and also as one of the “great disruptive forces in the history of music” (Grout and

Palisca, 1996, p. 560). During his first decade of composing in Vienna, musical life and ideas surrounding musical value changed (DeNora, 1995). Elites that supported orchestras wanted to maintain their status in light of a growing middle class. They changed their musical ideology from one that supported simple musical works and Italian operas to supporting music that was labeled by these elites as more complex and serious (DeNora, 1995). Beethoven skillfully created music that conformed to this change so that he would garner increasing cultural significance. He was able to influence changes in music, with the help of elite aristocrats and a complex network of musicians, composers, and others pushing this fresh idea of serious music (DeNora, 1995).

Beethoven's music was not universally well received early in his career, but he became more popular and significant over time thanks to the increasing support of cultural elites, as well as the influence he had on future musicians (DeNora, 1995). Stravinsky, known as one of the great 20th Century composers, is quoted by George Seferis (1970) as saying that the last string quartets of Beethoven "are a charter of human rights... A high concept of freedom is embodied in the quartets" (p. viii). By 1803, Beethoven's reputation and name were well known and many saw Beethoven's genius (DeNora, 1995), but this does not mean that everyone saw his genius, or agreed with the particular changes going on through Beethoven's compositions. August von Kotzebue of *Der Freimutige* in Vienna wrote about Beethoven's *Fidelio* on September 11, 1806,

... all impartial musicians and music lovers were in perfect agreement that never was anything as incoherent, shrill, chaotic, and ear-splitting produced in music. The most piercing dissonances clash in a really atrocious harmony, and a few puny ideas only increase the disagreeable and deafening effect. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 42]

The *Zeitung für die Elegante Welt* (Vienna, May 1804) had the following to say about Beethoven's Second Symphony: "Beethoven's second symphony is a crass monster, a hideously writhing wounded dragon, that refuses to expire, and though bleeding in the Finale, furiously beats about with its tail erect." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 42] Finally, we hear from A. Oulibicheff, who wrote in Paris in 1857 on the transition to the last movement of the Fifth Symphony,

Here you have a fragment of 44 measures, where Beethoven deemed it necessary to suspend the habeas corpus of music by stripping it of all that might resemble melody, harmony and any sort of rhythm... Is it music, yes or no? If I am answered in the affirmative, I would say that this does not belong to the art which I am in the habit of considering as music. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 49]

Other composers such as Franz Liszt received the same kind of treatment. The Boston *Gazette*, quoted in Dexter Smith's Paper in April 1872, wrote the following on Liszt: "Liszt's orchestral music is an insult to art. It is gaudy musical harlotry, savage, and incoherent bellowings." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 113] Eduard Hanslick, in 1873, wrote the following about Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*: "Liszt simply turns all natural laws of music upside down. Incapable of creating the beautiful by his own means, he deliberately builds up the hideous." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 114]

Two reviews written in the same decade on two different composers equate the ugliness of a composer's music to the ugliness of the composer himself. First we turn to James Huneker of the *New York Sun*, who on July 19, 1903 wrote the following screed at Claude Debussy:

I met Debussy at the Café Riche the other night and was struck by the unique ugliness of the man... he looked more like a Bohemian, a Croat, a Hun, than a Gaul. His high, prominent cheek-bones lend a Mongolian aspect to his face. The head is brachycephalic, the hair black... Since his *Don Quixote* there has been nothing new devised – outside of China – to split the ears of diatonic lovers... If the Western world ever adopted Eastern tonalities, Claude Debussy would be the one composer who would manage its system... Again I see his curious asymmetrical face, the pointed fawn ears, the projecting cheek bones – the man is a wraith from the East; his music was heard long ago in the hill temples of Borneo; was made as a symphony to welcome the head-hunters with their ghastly spoils of war! [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 92]

Another composer deemed ugly was Max Reger. Paul Rosenfeld, in *Musical Portraits*, New York, 1920, wrote:

This Reger is a sarcastic, churlish fellow, bitter and pedantic and rude. He is a sort of musical Cyclops, a strong, ugly creature bulging with knotty and unshapely muscles, an ogre of composition. In listening to these works... one is perforce reminded of the photograph of Reger which his publishers place on the cover of their catalogue of his works, the photograph that shows something that is like a swollen, myopic beetle with thick lips and sullen expression, crouching on an organ-bench. There is something repulsive as well as pedantic in this art. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 141]

This section ends with a critique of Aaron Copland. The following editorial in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, February 5, 1927, criticizes Copland's Piano Concerto. "The Copland Piano Concerto is a harrowing horror from beginning to end. There is nothing in it that resembles music except as it contains noise... Copland's music is not 'new music.' It seems to be dissonance for the sake of dissonance. It is of all sounds the most illogical, the most anti-human." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 87]

The critiques in this section do more than just claim that a particular piece was not music. Proper metacultural discourse requires the critic to go further. The music of these artists was not considered music because it did not fit the reviewers' constructions of reality (it was illogical, or didn't resemble melody, harmony, or rhythm). These artists (particularly Beethoven and Stravinsky) purposefully violated musical norms of what music is or should be. As a result, their music was seen as deliberately anti-human and violated natural law. Reger's and Debussy's entire beings were called in to question, as their own ugliness mirrored that of their music.

A THREAT TO CULTURE

The following reviews see the composer in question as a threat to culture and standards of decency. In varying ways the critics, as part of the process of metaculture, argue that if the music they review becomes part of the wave of the future, the high culture readers are used to will be ruined by outsiders and/or foreigners. The music is said to lack the needed level of taste and morality expected of high art. One will also notice that ethnocentrism, racism, and religious intolerance play a prominent role in many of the reviews outlined here, showing that it is not just the music itself that is considered deviant. The deviant music, to many of these critics, represents a larger threat to a particular country's religious, racial or national dominance in high culture. These extra-musical issues are mapped onto music so that the critics can engage in cultural boundary-maintenance.

Piotr Tchaikovsky's music seemed to threaten *The New York Post* (February 1, 1890), which wrote of him, "The Fourth Tchaikovsky Symphony proved to be one of the

most thoroughly Russian, i.e., semi-barbaric, compositions ever heard in this city... If Tchaikovsky had called his Symphony 'A Sleigh Ride through Siberia' no one would have found this title inappropriate." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 209]

A London newspaper, July 13, 1900, wrote the following on Puccini's opera, *Tosca*:

There may be some who will find entertainment in this sensation, but all true lovers of the gentle art must deplore with myself its being so prostituted. What has music to do with a lustful man chasing a defenseless woman or the dying kicks of a murdered scoundrel? It seemed an odd form of amusement to place before a presumably refined and cultured audience, and should this opera prove popular it will scarcely indicate a healthy or creditable taste. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 135]

The *Evening Post* (New York, February 5, 1901) also wrote of Puccini's *Tosca*:

It has been supposed by many that music is an art which should be devoted largely to the exploitation of rare, subtle, higher emotions. The Italian composers of today, however, believe differently. Their idea is that the promised land into which music should take us is the land of savagery, where lust, attempted violence, stabbing, shooting and suicide rule the day. These are the leading motives, the only motives of Puccini's opera *Tosca*, and they seem even more gross and barbarous than they do in Sardou's play, because the action is more concentrated and the horrors follow one another more promptly. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 135]

The London Times of April 28, 1924 writes of Maurice Ravel's music as primitive and culturally backward:

To hear a whole program of Ravel's works is like watching some midget or pygmy doing clever, but very small, things within a limited scope. Moreover, the almost reptilian cold-bloodedness, which one suspects of having been consciously cultivated, of most of M. Ravel's music is almost repulsive when heard in bulk; even its beauties are like the markings on snakes and lizards. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 138]

Rudolf Louis, of *Die Deutsche Musik der Gegenwart* in Munich (1909) wrote the following critique that foreshadowed the philosophy of the Nazis while critiquing Gustav Mahler:

If Mahler's music would speak Yiddish, it would be perhaps unintelligible to me. But it is repulsive to me because it *acts* Jewish. That is to say that it speaks musical German, but with an accent, with an inflection, and above all, with the gestures of an eastern, all too eastern Jew. So, even to those whom it does not offend directly, it cannot possibly communicate anything. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 121]

Another anti-Jewish review was written by T. Stengel and H. Gerigk, of the *Lexicon der Juden in der Musik*, Berlin, 1941. They wrote about Arnold Schoenberg: "Schoenberg's tendency to negate all that was before him is the old tested Jewish tactics which are always put into practice, at an opportune moment, to destroy the cultural values of the host peoples in order to set up their own as the only valid ones." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 163] Edwin Schloss of the *Philadelphia Record*, December 7, 1940, wrote that Schoenberg reflected bad taste as well:

A regular Friday audience, 90 percent feminine and 100 percent well-bred, sat stoically yesterday through thirty minutes of the most cacophonous world premiere ever heard here – the first performance anywhere of a new Violin Concerto by Arnold Schoenberg... A handful of dowagers, however, gave up the fight and walked out, noses in the air... Yesterday's piece combines the best sound effects of a hen yard at feeding time, a brisk morning in Chinatown and practice hour at a busy

music conservatory. The effect on the vast majority of hearers is that of a lecture on the fourth dimension delivered in Chinese. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 163]

This section ends with two highly influential and controversial composers that definitely fit Becker's (1982) conception of a maverick, namely Wagner and Stravinsky. Igor Stravinsky was one of the most influential composers of the Twentieth century (Grout and Palisca, 1996). His *Le Sacre du Printemps* (the Rite of Spring) is about the sacrifice of an adolescent girl ordered to dance herself to death, and is famous for its use of primitive folk sounds and melodies. The piece provoked a riot at its first premiere (Grout and Palisca, 1996). Deems Taylor, in *The Dial* (New York, September 1920) wrote of Stravinsky's famous work, "Of course, it sounds like cacophony because I'm not used to it, and it probably sounds all alike for the same reason that Chinamen all look alike to me: I'm not well acquainted." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 198] The *Musical Times* in London, August 1926, wrote, "The music of [Stravinsky's] *Les Noces* flouts Western civilization. Western civilization will probably return the compliment, for our musical functions provide no frame to fit the work... But the music is a first-class curiosity, one of the documents of our hapless age." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 202] Lazare Saminsky, in *Music of Our Day* (New York, 1939) writes, "Stravinsky is the father of the rebarbarization of music. He has transformed music into a collection of qualified noises. He has reduced melody to the primitive, inarticulate refrain of a Zulu, and has converted the orchestra into a gigantic rattle, the toy and mouthpiece of the new savage." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 204]

Richard Wagner is one of the crucial figures in the history of nineteenth-century music (Grout and Palisca, 1996). His impact on music is too broad to mention here, but a major debate in the music world (sometimes called the War of the Romantics) was between the followers of the more radical style of Wagner and those who preferred the traditional style of Johannes Brahms, another influential German composer. The heated arguments over the movement of culture during this time are highlighted in the reviews, with each side engaging in a stigma contest (Pfohl, 1994) to promote their norms over the future of music. In brief, the traditionalists favored what they thought was pure music, with conventional forms, while the radicals wanted to use more innovative harmonies (increased chromaticism), and create operas with one long stream of continuous music rather than in the traditional format that alternates recitatives and arias. Wagner wanted to create a *gesamtkunstwerk* (universal or total art work) by combining all of the arts (drama, stagecraft, music, and literature for example) into one coherent singularity where no one medium is considered more important than another. Brahms wrote no operas, but Wagner wrote almost nothing but opera, calling his operas musical dramas. Wagner's operas combined music with literature and elaborate stage sets, and broke many traditional musical rules now seen as ingenious. The criticisms of Wagner and Brahms found below should be seen within the context of this larger debate.

In London, *Musical World* (June 30, 1855) wrote, "Look at [Wagner's] *Lohengrin*... It is poison – rank poison. All we can make out is an incoherent mass of rubbish, with no more real pretension to be called music than the jangling and clashing of gongs and other uneuphonious instruments with which the Chinamen, on the brow of a hill, fondly thought to scare away our English 'blue jackets.'" [Slonimsky, 1994, pp. 225-226] Heinrich Dorn, in *Montagszeitung* (Berlin, April 1871) wrote, "We cannot describe the barbarous brutality of this latest Wagnerian outburst (the *Kaiser March*) as anything else but an insult against the exalted Majesty of the German Emperor." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 236] Friedrich Nietzsche also entered the debate in his book, *Der Fall Wagner* (1888):

Is Wagner a human being at all? Is he not rather a disease? He contaminates everything he touches – he has made music sick. I postulate this viewpoint: Wagner’s art is diseased... And just because there is nothing more modern than this collective illness, this sluggishness and oversensitivity of the nervous machinery, Wagner is a modern artist *par excellence*, the Cagliostro of Modernity... Wagner is a great corrupter of music. He has discovered in it a means to charm tired nerves – he has thereby made music sick. [Slonimsky, 1994, pp. 246-247]

A number of the reviews presented in this section argued that cultured audiences would never want to sit through such immoral pieces of music. The attacks on the subject matter of *Tosca* mirror present-day attacks on various forms of popular music (particularly heavy metal and rap), as both occasionally depict murder, lust, and the like. The ethnocentrism and racism of the day were on full display in these reviews as well. Stravinsky, Wagner, and Tchaikovsky were said to have written barbaric music, and Jewish composers were demonized in the area of art at the same time that Jews in general were being demonized during the same period for economic and social problems. Stravinsky’s music doesn’t fit reality, is unfamiliar, insults Western civilization, and uses orchestras as tools to return culture to barbarism. Wagner is a disease on music, poisons culture, and insults the “exalted” German Emperor. As metaculture, the critics writing these reviews felt that the music they heard did not fit reality, represented all that was wrong with the rapid changes occurring in other areas of social life, and deserved the same amount of censure.

POLITICALLY INAPPROPRIATE

The following reviews appear to be more political than musical, and metaculturally reflect the political and economic differences between Soviet Russia and the capitalist West. The music reviewed here is seen as a deviant threat because it might promote the ideas of an ideological enemy with a deviant political and economic philosophy. Something produced by this enemy could not possibly be considered art or music and therefore should not be seen as part of the wave of the future. The critiques of Russians or those considered communists are presented first. P. –B. Gheusi, of *Le Figaro*, in Paris (January 7, 1932), wrote the following about Maximilian, one of Darius Milhaud’s more conventional operas:

We went to the Opera to hear music of the vanguard, *Maximilian*, by Darius Milhaud. We clutched our chair. But we were hurled out of it by such a hurricane of wrong notes that we found ourselves, half dead, on the stairway, without knowing how we could fall down quite so far. The composer knows the grammar, the spelling and the language; but he can speak only Esperanto and Volapuk. It is a work of a Communist traveling salesman. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 126]

Philip Hale of the Boston Herald (October 22, 1927) wrote of Prokofiev, “It has been said that *Le Pas d’Acier* may properly be called a Bolshevik ballet. The music by itself will not make converts to the Soviet cause.” [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 134] Warren Storey Smith of the *Boston Post* (October 25, 1952) critiqued Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony by writing, “It can... be urged that the playing by America’s major symphony orchestra (the New York Philharmonic) of a work designed to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Soviet Russia is giving aid and comfort to those who seek to destroy us.” [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 177]

The Russians had their own arguments against composers of the capitalist West, and two critiques of Arnold Schoenberg are presented here. G. Schneerson, in *Music in the Service of Reaction*, Moscow, 1950, writes:

Camouflaged behind the grandiloquent phrases about progressiveness and innovation, [Arnold] Schoenberg and his disciples among atonal composers constitute in actual fact an arch-reactionary sect that has played a sinister role in the destruction of contemporary musical art in several countries of Western Europe and in America... The stillborn theories of Schoenberg, calculated to destroy melody and harmony, can lead only to retrogression, not to progress in art... They serve as a convenient springboard for propaganda of anti-democratic cosmopolitanism supporting the principles of imperialist esthetics. We believe that it is not by accident that Arnold Schoenberg, with his decaying individualistic philosophy of a frightened bourgeois, has found a fertile soil for his propaganda of perverted pathological experimentalism in the United States where art is completely subordinated to the bestial laws of capitalist society. [Slonimsky, 1994, pp. 165-166]

I. Ryzhkin, in his *Arnold Schoenberg, Liquidator of Music*, in *Sovietskaya Musica* (August 1949) wrote that Schoenberg is:

... the creator of a system of musical composition that leads to the liquidation of music as an art... This proliferation of Schoenberg's anti-people heresy is a symptom of the most profound decline and disintegration of the spiritual culture of capitalist society... Indeed, Schoenberg has attempted to portray the mad despair of a petty bourgeois of Western Europe, mainly Austrian and German peoples thrown out of their customary routine by socio-historical conflicts of tremendous dimensions. From this despair and anger on the part of petty-bourgeois artists arose individualistic contempt for listeners. [Slonimsky, 1994, pp. 315-317]

Clearly, these reviews are situated within the social and political contexts of their day. The music itself is not criticized nearly as much as the fact that the composer reviewed was a member of the enemy, demonstrating the metacultural mixture of music criticism and political gate-keeping. The composer is an artist, but deserves the same censure and deviant labels as the political leaders of the capitalist West or Soviet Russia. Milhaud isn't French because he is a communist, and the music of these composers is either Soviet or capitalist propaganda.

NOT THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE

Metaculture is about the movement of culture, linking the past and the present. Many of the critics quoted here directly discuss whether or not a particular composer should be part of the future of music, and many of the critics note that others in the art world see these composers as part of the wave of the future. We first start with a critique of Richard Wagner (and Liszt, a follower of Wagner's), who along with Brahms was central to the war of the romantics as mentioned above. J.W. Davison of the London *Times* (December 11, 1854) wrote of Wagner, "If the general ear of 'the future' is destined to be affected with such music as this, it is to be hoped that charitable posterity will institute some extra hospitals for the deaf wherever Herr Wagner and his compositions are allowed to penetrate." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 223]

George Templeton Strong's November 19, 1870 diary entry on Liszt reads: "The Liszt Concerto is filthy and vile. It suggests Chinese orchestral performances as described by enterprising and self-sacrificing travelers. This may be a specimen of the School of the Future for aught I know. If it is, the future will throw the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven into the rubbish bin." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 113] W.F. Apthorp, in the December 23, 1880 *Musical Review* based in New York, wrote about Liszt's Faust Symphony: "It may be the Music of the Future, but it sounds remarkably like the Cacophony of the Present." [Slonimsky 1994, p. 116]

The supporters of Wagner fought back. A number of the critical reviews of Brahms quoted in Slonimsky's book charge that Brahms's music is unintelligible. While many were known at the time to think that Brahms was writing the music of the future, others, such as the Wagnerians, disagreed. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* of October 31, 1882, argued that "Musical people, as a rule, have not as yet got 'educated' by the 'music of the future' up to the point where they may enjoy passage after passage bereft of all tonality." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 70] The *Boston Evening Transcript* of December 9, 1888 opined that...

In the Brahms C minor Symphony, every note draws blood. It has been plausibly questioned whether Brahms's music will ever become popular... That it is not popular now and in Boston is pretty evident, for our audiences listen to it in a silence that speaks more of dismay than of veneration." [Slonimsky, 1994, pp. 75-76]

Edgar Kelley of the *San Francisco Examiner*, on May 9, 1894 wrote:

After the weary, dreary hours spent in listening to the works of Brahms I am lost in wonder at the amount of devotion accorded him and the floods of enthusiasm with which he is overwhelmed... Mistaking Brahms's un-beauty for a new line of thought, his followers amuse themselves with seeking in what a variety of means they, too, can twist and torture a series of commonplace tones and chords. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 78]

Finally we turn to Richard Strauss. J.F. Runciman, in a London correspondence in the *Musical Record* (Boston, March 1, 1898) writes of Strauss, "His is indeed the music of the future... when man has lost all his healthy instincts, his faculty of divine emotion, his sense of beauty, his brains, his common sense... If ever this kind of music becomes acceptable to the people at large, then may I not be here to see and hear." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 184] Paul Rosenfeld of *The Dial* (New York, 1920) wrote that Strauss is "the false dawn of modern music." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 195]

The reviews in this section all argued that particular composers should not be part of the wave of the future, but these arguments came in two different forms. One was that the music is so bad that it certainly will not be accepted as the future of music. The other was that it was in danger of being the music of the future, and that this future would indicate that people have abandoned the proper norms regarding musical melody, tonality, and other important aspects of music. Either way, the critics were practicing metaculture by trying to promote their norms regarding taste and what the future should be or should not be.

EVIL MUSIC

Some music critics go so far as to say that certain pieces of music are evil, particularly when a piece of music is concerned with battle between good and evil in general. Through the process of metaculture, critics deemed these pieces of music as worse than just simply bad taste, and therefore could not be allowed to be part of the wave of the future.

Georges Bizet's *Carmen* is considered a major landmark in the history of French opera (Grout and Palisca, 1996), but the *Music Trade Review* in London (June 15th 1878) wrote the following:

If it were possible to imagine His Satanic Majesty writing an opera, *Carmen* would be the sort of work he might be expected to turn out. After hearing it, we seem to have been assisting at some unholy rites, weirdly fascinating, but painful... The heroine is an abandoned woman, destitute not only of any vestige of morality, but devoid of

the ordinary feelings of humanity- soulless, heartless and fiendish. Indeed, so repulsive was the subject of the opera, that some of the best artists of Paris declined to be included in the cast. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 64]

The traditionalists in the war of the romantics also described the works of Liszt and Wagner as evil. The New York *Sun* (April 4th, 1870) had the following to say on the music of Liszt's *Dante's Hell and Purgatory*:

Having lived through that hour of agony, during which the symphony lasted, and escaped with reason not overthrown, we can safely bid defiance to Liszt, Wagner, and their fellow madmen of the school of the future... It was like playing one of Beethoven's symphonies backward... The tortures of the damned were to be illustrated, and his congenial theme gave Liszt a famous excuse for unheard of bewilderment of his orchestra... It seemed as though Beelzebub, prince of devils, must have stood at the composer's right hand while he scored this work... The wonder is the Liszt's familiar spirit did not inspire him to compose for each class of instruments in a separate key. The effect of demoniac confusion and horror at which he aimed would then certainly have been attained, and his audience sent howling with anguish out of the house... The doors might then be closed on the audience, the orchestra tied down to their seats, and all the clergymen of the city invited to witness the result. [Slonimsky, 1994, pp. 112-113]

Max Kalbeck, in *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 28, 1880) wrote, "Wagner is the Antichrist incarnate of art," [Slonimsky 1994: 242] and J.L. Klein, in *Geschichte des Dramas* (Leipzig, 1817, col. VIII, pp. 738-739), wrote:

The wild Wagnerian corybantic orgy, this din of brasses, tin pans and kettles, this Chinese or Caribbean clatter with wood sticks and ear-cutting scalping knives... Heartless sterility, obliteration of all melody, all tonal charm, all music... This reveling in the destruction of all tonal essence, raging satanic fury in the orchestra, this demoniacal, lewd, caterwauling, scandal-mongering, gun-toting music, with an orchestral accompaniment slapping you in the face... the diabolical din of this pig-headed man, stuffed with brass and sawdust, inflated, in an insanelly destructive self-aggrandizement, by Mephistopheles' mephitic and most venomous hellish miasma, into Beelzebub's Court Composer and General Director of Hell's Music – Wagner! [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 237]

This section ends with J.F. Runciman's *Saturday Review* critique of Puccini's *Tosca* in London, July 1, 1900:

Doubtless Puccini is a very estimable and charming person; doubtless he works honestly for what he considers good art. Nevertheless he represents an evil art-Italian music, to wit – and his success would have meant the preponderating influence in England of that evil art. Wherefore, it has been my duty to throw back the score of *Tosca* at him. Puccini: may you prosper, but in other climes! Continue, my friend, to sketch in scrappy incidental music to well-known plays. But spare England: This country has done neither you nor your nation nearly so much harm as she has done other nations. Disturb not the existing peaceful relations! [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 135]

The composers reviewed in this section are labeled as tools of the devil, and in one case the argument is that Italian music is evil and should therefore not be allowed in London. In the 1980s it was fashionable to argue that heavy metal records played backwards would contain satanic messages, but in the late 1800s one reviewer equated what he thought was satanic music with Beethoven's music (now considered good, lawful music) played backwards. The stigma contests between the followers of Brahms and the followers of Wagner went far beyond conceptions of good music. The devil helped write the music of Wagner and Liszt, according to the

traditionalists, and Wagner is even considered none other than the antichrist himself. Throughout history, therefore, critics and invoked the stigma of evil while practicing metaculture. The critics argue that the future simply cannot be allowed to contain evil music.

IS IT CRIMINAL?

It is argued by functionalists that laws are created to represent collective sentiments regarding a society's most important or powerful norms. If a composition violates norms so fiercely that it really isn't music, is a threat to culture, or is evil, should it be made criminal? If a piece of music or a composer are deemed criminal, perhaps scores would be destroyed and performances banned, making it less likely that the art work(s) could become part of the wave of the future. A couple of critics attempted to address these issues in classical music (displayed below), but today the discussion of musical criminality is found more commonly in efforts to ban popular music albums in the United States and elsewhere. On November 30, 1850, *National* (Paris) wrote on Wagner's *Tannhauser*, "His work seemed to us nothing but a very noisy accompaniment to an absent melody. After all, there is no law prohibiting to write when one has no ideas whatsoever. The work of Monsieur Wagner is therefore perfectly legal." [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 222]

To end all of the criticisms we examine a critique of Schoenberg disciple Alban Berg. While the above criticism of Wagner argues that just because something is legal doesn't mean one should do it, the following critique of *Wozzeck* by Paul Zschorlich of the *Deutsche Zeitung* in Berlin on December 15, 1925 is a perfect example of defining a piece of music worthy of condemnation and criminalization:

As I left the State Opera last night I had a sensation not of coming out of a public institution, but out of an insane asylum. On the stage, in the orchestra, in the hall, plain madmen. Among them, in defiant squads, the shock troops of atonalists, the dervishes of Arnold Schoenberg [note: Berg's teacher and founder of 12-tone music]. *Wozzeck* by Alban Berg was the battle slogan. A work of a Chinaman from Vienna. For with European music and musical evolution this mass onslaught of instruments has nothing in common. In Berg's music there is not a trace of melody. There are only scraps, shreds, spasms, and burps. Harmonically, the work is beyond discussion, for everything sounds wrong. The perpetrator of this work builds securely upon the stupidity and charity of his fellow-men, and for the rest relies on God Almighty and the Universal Edition. I regard Alban Berg as a musical swindler and a musician dangerous to the community. One should go even further. Unprecedented events demand new methods. We must seriously pose the question as to what extent musical profession can be criminal. We deal here, in the realm of music, with a capital offense. [Slonimsky, 1994, p. 54]

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper was to introduce various ideas and concepts from the sociology of deviance as well as the concept of metaculture to the sociology of high-art, and classical music in particular. Negative music reviews are examples of deviant labels that attempt to restore traditional normative boundaries and to repel new styles of music that challenge the status quo. The labeling of styles of music or composers as deviant mirrors that of the labeling of other status quo-challenging phenomena as deviant, such as the Puritan leadership labeling those with alternative religious ideas as deviant and worthy of death or banishment in Massachusetts Bay (Erickson 2005).

By examining these reviews we see that it is not just that critics think that the music they reviewed is aesthetically bad and should not be the music of the future. As an attempt to successfully define taste, the critics argue that a certain composer or style of music represents a higher level of threat that readers can identify with. Readers then may be compelled to discuss the ideas of the critic with one another. The criticisms presented in this paper would label composers as not creating actual music, as a cultural or political threat, as not part of the wave of the future, as evil, and even as criminal. Because critics wanted to influence the future of music, engage in norm promotion, and define the parameters of stigma contests, these critiques were written in a style to capture the attention of readers and to argue persuasively that a particular composer or style of music was deviant. Critics therefore engage in a reciprocal process of boundary maintenance by making references to various salient cultural concepts while critiquing music or composers.

Goode (2004) wrote that the sociology of deviance can move forward by examining how some definitions of deviance win out over others. This study can only offer tentative conclusions, but it is apparent, as Slonimsky (1994) and Barzun (1953) argued, that the critics quoted above were too resistant of change for the larger public, and therefore failed to successfully define certain styles or composers as deviant. The various works of the mavericks were ahead of their time, and the unfamiliar, boundary-pushing music violated the stagnant and traditional norms that some reviewers continued to try to promote. As societies change, norms concerning art and music change as well, and these critics may not have changed with the times, even if the aesthetic quality of the composers they chastised was later deemed undeniable. While practicing metaculture these critics held too rigidly to conservative or traditional conceptions of music, and in some cases tried to protect their perceived culture from a nationalist and ethnocentric perspective, occasionally chastising and condemning a composer not necessarily for his art but for what the composer represented in terms of nationality or political philosophy.

One modern example that comes to mind is from Paul Johnson's famous early-1960s screed against the Beatles entitled "The Menace of Beatlism." His arguments against the Beatles were similar to those highlighted earlier in this paper the thought that certain composers were a threat to culture, and that cultured audiences would not be seen listening to such music. While the Beatles are listened to by people of all social classes and are lauded as the most influential pop band of the 20th century, Johnson argued that well educated people should not pander to the idea that the Beatles, or Jazz for that matter, are worth listening to, and that when he was a teenager he couldn't wait to hear Beethoven's 9th symphony (Rusbridger, 2000). According to Rusbridger (2000), Johnson continues:

Are teenagers different today? Of course not. Those who flock round the Beatles... are the least fortunate of their generation, the dull, the idle, the failures - a fearful indictment of our education system. The boys and girls who will be the real leaders and creators of society tomorrow never go to a pop concert. They are, to put it simply, too busy. They are educating themselves.

Attempts to have an influence in these politicized battles for control over the future of music involved engaging in metaculture. Metaculture involves gauging the future by linking the past with the present while making reference to a range of various cultural elements. The critics were trying to tell readers what it would have been like to be at a concert, and many discuss whether or not a composer's music is worthy of being part of the wave of the future. Critics hope to successfully link music or

composers they don't like to these larger cultural, social, or political threats readers are familiar with in order to influence the public temper.

As with other deviant labels, those concerning music are often placed within the context of other cultural and social debates, are temporally fixed, and change as the social circumstances change. Other non-musical acts, beliefs, or conditions that are labeled as deviant have also been characterized as evil, unnatural, criminal, and politically and socially backward, but because reviews are a type of metaculture these definitions of deviance from outside the music world are brought into it. Critiques of composers that happened to live in enemy countries during the cold war were rebuked not necessarily because of their music, but because the country from which the composer resided was a political threat. The ethnocentrism, racism, nationalism, and other biases of the day played a role in definitions of deviance, as we have seen with a number of the reviews displayed here. German attacks on Mahler were part of the attacks on Jews and Jewish culture in general, and British and American critics thought that the content of Italian opera was scandalous and evil. As societies and musical styles change, the norms concerning what art is and the definitions of deviance based on them also change. The war of the romantics between the followers of Brahms and the followers of Wagner are no longer relevant to the music world. A number of critics reviled Beethoven in the early 1800s, but by the 1900s Beethoven was the standard by which new composers were being judged. Clearly, these criticisms show that music is an instrument for the social construction of reality, and that control over the distribution of musical resources is politicized and a means for establishing social order.

Critics are not the only ones, of course, with the ability to influence the future of music. Maverick musicians such as Beethoven, Stravinsky, and Wagner help move high art and culture forward, and oftentimes critics can only react to the maverick behaviors of musicians trying to create new music by attempting to influence the public temper by praising or rebuking the new music. It requires more than just great music to successfully rebut deviant labels from critics, however. As DeNora (1995) found in her research, artists such as Beethoven had the support of relevant elites, as well as the support of various networks of musicians, fellow composers and others that could help promote the norms of these mavericks at the expense of the weakening norms of the traditionalists.

This study has implications for the study of both deviance and music. Scholars in the sociology of music can further demonstrate music as a part of social life, a form of social action, and a medium for action and social change by utilizing concepts and theories from the sociology of deviance and Urban's (2001) concept of metaculture. Scholars could apply concepts such as positive deviance, rate busting, and negative deviance, and so on to the study of high art and culture and popular art and music as well. For example, there are most certainly instances of composers writing on their fellow composers in an envious way (such as Salieri chastising Mozart out of envy), exhibiting the act of rate busting. While most scholars of deviance and sociology in general understandably concentrate on marginalized groups, we must also fail to neglect the world of the privileged and highly educated and how they see the world and help shape norms and social institutions. Placing denunciations of popular music within the context of deviance and Urban's (2001) concept of metaculture would also be beneficial, particularly if there are patterns in the negative reviews and deviant labels between music of the past and music of the present regardless of the style of music being examined.

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