

# PRIhME

## Assembly 3

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Dear participants  
of the PRIhME Stakeholder Assembly,

as we are approaching the Third PRIhME Assembly related to the **importance of socio-economic background and special needs of students, teachers as well as staff in Higher Music Education** (HME), we are happy to share with you the material meant to introduce you to the overarching topics of the Assembly and prepare you for participation in the coming discussions.

The central part of this brief brings to you the expert paper *Socio-Economic Background and Today's HMEIs* by [Sam de Boise](#), a Senior Lecturer and Docent in Musicology at the School of Music, Theatre and Art at Örebro University (Sweden). Sam's paper provides a rich and informative insight into recent studies on the impact of socio-economic background on experiences of studying and institutional culture of contemporary Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEI), with special focus on Britain and Sweden. He discusses the influence of social class on potential students both in regard to the parental home as well as based on admission data to HMEIs. In addition, he discusses whether certain degree programs are chosen according to class background and what the consequences are. Finally, Sam outlines developments aimed at reaching broader social strata at HMEIs.

The reminder of the brief provides you with additional material covering **diversity** and its individual categories such as **race/ethnicity**, **ableism /disability** and **socio-economic background/class**.

Whenever the material we are providing excerpts from (videos, graphs, academic papers and books, newspaper articles) is available for reading/watching online, we have added links so that you can access it more easily.

Diversity is a broad category, and we are aware that you will only be able to touch upon some of its dimensions during the Third Assembly. We are, however, sure that your discussions will be interesting and that you will learn from each other and gain a greater understanding of how power relations are influenced by these different categories, especially socio-economic background.

We are looking forward to your results since these have very often challenged and stimulated our thought processes and discussions within the Editorial Board.

**The PRIhME Editorial Board**

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[expert paper]

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**Sam de Boise**, School of Music, Theatre and Art, Örebro University, Sweden

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# Socio-Economic Background and Today's HMEIs

**Sam de Boise**, Associate Professor in Musicology  
School of Music, Theatre and Arts, Örebro University, Sweden

## Introduction

Children from very wealthy (privileged) backgrounds are overrepresented at Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEIs) in Britain: in 2022, applicants from the most economically deprived group<sup>1</sup> only made up 6% of applications to HMEIs. The most wealthy (and thus least deprived) group<sup>2</sup> constituted 28% of all applications<sup>3</sup>. This division has remained stable over time (see also Born and Devine 2015). Scharff (2015: 8) indicates that some 25% of those attending traditional HMEIs in Britain come from fee-paying private schools, whilst, on average, only 7% of children nationally attend fee-paying private schools. Measures of deprivation as well economic inequalities vary across Europe, but there is evidence that class divides are present in other countries' HMEIs as well (Bull et al. Forthcoming).

As with higher education (HE) generally, the academisation of HMEIs has led to a quantitative increase in the number of students and a proliferation of courses and programs. Despite this, there is clear evidence that socio-economic status (SES) continues to be a significant factor determining which students choose to study at HMEIs. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how SES or class can impact attendance at HMEIs. It explores issues of exclusion and SES in higher music education (HME), focusing on both cultural and material aspects. These contribute at different stages of the process towards excluding both prospective students as well as those who to study at HMEIs.

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<sup>1</sup> POLAR quintile 5. POLAR, which stands for "the participation of local areas" is the UK's measure of measuring different forms of deprivation according to the index of multiple deprivation (IMD). These take into account postcodes in order to ascertain the likelihood that students come from more or less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. There are five groups ranging from the least deprived (1) to the most deprived (5).

<sup>2</sup> POLAR quintile 1.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/ucas-conservatoires-releases/2022-cycle-applicant-figures-1-october-deadline>

## The Path to Higher Music Education

There is conflicting evidence about how music is valued in secondary education amongst those from different SES backgrounds and therefore the relative likelihood of different groups applying to HMEIs (see also Albert 2006). In a study from Australia, McPherson et al. (2015) note that high-school pupils from lower SES backgrounds were actually *more likely* to value learning an instrument than students from higher SES backgrounds as they progressed through school. This did not, however, mean that these pupils were more likely to be formally trained nor to go on to study music in HE. However, in a study of dedicated extracurricular music services by one local authority in the UK, Purves (2017: 358-359) found that SES was *the* main factor influencing uptake of services. An increase in fees associated with these services led to a decline in their uptake amongst children from lower income backgrounds.

Parental influence is of great importance in a child's decision to study an instrument, though again, how this relates to class is less clear. In a cross-national study of 19 primary schools from seven towns in Serbia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, Biro et al. (2020) demonstrate that students whose parents have higher levels of formal education are statistically more likely to play an instrument. In a study from Germany, Krupp-Schleußner and Lehmann-Wermser (2016) conducted a multi-factor analysis of a project (*Jeden Kind Ein Instrument* or „Every Child An Instrument“) designed to increase participation of economically disadvantaged children who continued playing music from ages 11-13 (Grades 5-7). Their study suggests that prioritising instruments at home was *the* biggest factor influencing whether a child continues to play an instrument later in life, rather than parents' socio-economic class<sup>4</sup>. They subsequently note that a migrant background<sup>5</sup> was also a major factor.

Krupp-Schleußner and Lehmann-Wermser's study has also been supported by Jeppson and Lindgren (2018), who looked at SES in extracurricular „*kulturskolor*“ (municipal arts schools) in Sweden, often considered a precursor to the „*folkhögskolor*“ (folk high schools), and later to HMEI attendance. Their study showed that having a parent who played an instrument was the single biggest factor in explaining attendance at the municipal arts schools. Whilst Lindgren and Jeppson claim that these schools favour middle class parents, their study does not necessarily show a statistical link between SES and attendance at the schools. Previous research conducted in the 1990s made the link between the class and municipal art school attendance in Sweden more explicit

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<sup>4</sup> Though they estimated class and parents' educational in a slightly idiosyncratic way. They asked children to estimate the number of books on their parents' bookshelves and if they had certain household possessions.

<sup>5</sup> Whether or not one has a first or second-generation "migrant background" is often synonymous with class in Germany and Sweden, where there is an ongoing discussion on the racialisation of poverty and class.

(Brandstrom and Wiklund 1996; Brändström 1999). Hall (2018) similarly observes that the role of mothers of choirboys in Australia – and in particular the time they dedicated to their children’s music lessons – proved vital in determining continued study by these choirboys. In this case, parental dedication is not simply a matter of „culture“ (of attitudinal willingness) but also a matter of how material factors influence time constraints. Parents from lower income backgrounds who work multiple jobs are less able to dedicate time and resources to their children’s musicianship.

Finally, studies indicate that teachers treat students from poorer backgrounds, and specifically ethnic and racial minorities less favourably (Starck et al. 2020; van den Bergh et al. 2010), which impacts on grade attainment. Low grade attainment is one of the main reasons for the comparatively low number of students from lower-income backgrounds who apply to HE generally – especially in Britain (Chowdry et al. 2013). This means, in essence, that there are both *cultural* and *material reasons* why children from lower SES backgrounds do not continue to pursue a formal music education, although children from lower SES backgrounds are generally just as interested in playing music.

## Admission to Higher Music Education Institutions

Whilst conservatoire participation among different social groups has obviously increased since the 1700s<sup>6</sup>, a substantial barrier for those from working class backgrounds are the costs associated with a three or even five-year performing arts program. The instrumentalization (pun not intended) of higher education generally has played a role in this. There is some evidence that student loans deter students from lower SES backgrounds from making the choice to apply to university (Callender and Mason 2017) and influence what they choose to study (Velez et al. 2019). However the differences between middle and working class students is less pronounced (Marginson 2018) than those between upper and middle class students. HE tuition fees shape students choices, with students from economically marginalised backgrounds more likely to choose subjects offering a more secure future career pathway (Baker 2020; Hillmert and Jacob 2003: 31; Lehmann 2009; Ma 2009: 223).

Entrance exams also constitute one of the most significant factors affecting conservatoire attendance. We already know that auditions have been historically biased against women (Goldin and Rouse 2000). Gender plays a large role in instrumental preferences (Abeles

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<sup>6</sup> According to Attali (1985) the Paris Conservatory (formerly the National Institute of Music) was the first to be founded in the world in the wake of the French Revolution in 1794. Though the Swedish Royal Conservatory was established twenty-three years prior to this in 1771. Despite the prominence of German-speaking composers from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards in canonical music histories, the Leipzig Conservatory began in 1843.

2009; Wych 2012) and in orientation of conservatoire studies (Casula 2019; de Boise 2018). Class bias may therefore also play a role in auditions where students do not display an attitude which is „appropriate“ to the institution to which they are applying. Economic factors play an additional, more direct role, in student preparation for entrance exams. In Baker’s (2020: 773) study, she cites the experiences of two prospective British students from lower SES backgrounds who had to travel overnight rather than stay in hotels before their drama school auditions. These prospective students were at a distinct disadvantage in terms of tiredness during the audition because they were unable to pay for a hotel the night before and had to travel through the night to attend the auditions.

Repertoires and music theory tests vary by country, institution, and study-orientation, but there is generally a focus on reading notation developed in Euroclassical<sup>7</sup> traditions. Pupils and students who learn to read music at a young age and are familiar with Euroclassical traditions therefore have an advantage. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) already demonstrated a relationship between social class and music preferences in 1960s-70s France; Göran Nylöf (1977) made the same case in Sweden at roughly the same time. Findings from 1960s France or Sweden cannot be generalised today to all of Europe and the global North. Current middle- and upper-class people in the global north do not still listen predominantly to Western art music and HMEIs have expanded the repertoires they offer. Though, even if repertoires are „updated“, distinctions between „high“ and „low“ exemplars in a particular genre are still shaped by cultural distinction as much as musical proficiency. There is still a relationship between music preference and SES even if the styles of music considered „highbrow“ have changed (Savage 2006; Savage et al. 2015).

Passing HMEIs entrance exams also requires playing instruments to a particularly high standard, which requires tuition as well as time and space to practice. Private tuition, on average in the UK costs £40 an hour in London and £30 an hour outside of London<sup>8</sup>. The average median weekly wage in the UK, in 2020 however was £553 (outside of London) meaning that private music lessons for one child per week accounted for 5% of average weekly income (see ONS 2021) but 10% of the median household income for those in the bottom quartile. For parents with multiple children desiring private tuition, this figure doubles or triples. The UK has seen large cuts to public funding for extra-curricular music activities over the past 10 years (de Boise 2017). Private tuition generally provides a significant advantage to access to HE (Henderson et al. 2020). By contrast, Swedish *kulturskolor* are built on systems in which students (though more likely parents) pay

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<sup>7</sup> Following Philip Tagg I use the term Euroclassical to denote that there are classical traditions in other parts of the world which are not taught in Western HMEIs.

<sup>8</sup> These prices are similar in other Western European countries. In Germany the average cost per hour at the *Musikschulen* was higher than other countries at €113 in 2016 (<http://kostenkiste.de/was-kostet-musikunterricht/>) whereas the costs were 375 SEK (c. €35) for private tuition in Stockholm in Sweden and 300 SEK (c.€30) outside of Stockholm, for private piano lessons, in 2019.

nominal fees so students can access tuition relatively cheaply<sup>9</sup>. In addition, there are fee waivers available for those who cannot pay. However, parents pay per child, and the level of tuition required to pass entrance exams requires extra training.

Finally, time, access and the physical home environment play a role in whether or not pupils can dedicate the practice time needed to pass entrance exams. Children or adolescents living in smaller homes are less likely to have the space to practice instruments without disturbing others. Similarly, children and adolescents caring for sick or disabled parents or siblings, in situations where parents work multiple jobs or night shifts, are less likely to have the time, space, or inclination to dedicate to musical practice outside their formal education. These children almost always tend to be economically disadvantaged. The cost of instruments is also a factor. While the costs of basic guitars and basses, woodwind and string instruments have decreased substantially thanks to transnational corporations producing instruments cheaply (often in East Asia), brass and larger percussion instruments are still relatively expensive to purchase. Purves' (2017: 358-360) study found an almost direct relationship between income, consumption, uptake and duration of uptake of local authority music services<sup>10</sup>. These structural factors all contribute to the likelihood that those from working class backgrounds able to access education will play certain instruments and therefore certain types of music.

## The Role of SES in HMEI Experiences

In Britain especially, there are clear class divides in those who attend universities which were founded in education reforms after 1992, those which were founded in the 1800s („Redbrick universities”) and elite universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. The same is true of those who attend Harvard and Yale in the US (Jerrim et al. 2015; Ro et al. 2018). Reay et. al. (2005) demonstrated that despite the removal of economic barriers to UK HE in the form of tuition fees<sup>11</sup>, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often felt as if they did not fit at universities and were less likely to attend as well as far more likely to leave. Reay et al. (2005) drew on Bourdieu's work to explain why working class students attended high-prestige universities in lower numbers and why their drop-out rates were higher when they attended high prestige institutions. They explained that those who feel entitled to study or at ease in environments where the majority are middle or upper class,

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<sup>9</sup> In Sweden, a term costs c. 300 SEK per pupil with a maximum of 500 SEK per family.

<sup>10</sup> These "Music Hubs" are extra-curricular music activities provided by volunteers, local councils or arts organisations which are funded by the Department of Education. Music Hubs apply for funding on an annual basis with "90% of the funding is distributed based on each local authority's share of the total number of pupils registered on roll and the remaining 10% is distributed based on their share of the numbers of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)" (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/music-education/music-education-hubs#section-1>).

<sup>11</sup> Which were reinstated at £1100 pounds per year from 2001 and are now a maximum of £9250 per year.

like them, are more likely to feel at „home“ because these reflect similar codes and implicit rules to the environments they grew up in. Essentially, feelings of comfort or discomfort, are dependent on whether one has a tacit „feel for the game“ which is an effect of social class (Bourdieu 1990: 52).

While Bourdieu never studied HMEIs, others have applied his work to students' HMEIs experiences to investigate whether institutions have an implicit class bias. Dibben's (2006) study found in a qualitative study among students who have been admitted to a HMEIs in the UK that students from lower SES backgrounds did not report *feeling* excluded or marginalised. However, in a quantitative study at a Turkish conservatoire, Kömürçü and Mohan Kömürçü (2021) note that socio-economic background appears to play *the* most significant role in student perceptions of comfort, discomfort, and performance anxiety in particular. Dibben's study did indicate an overrepresentation of students from higher socio-economic groups in one particular HMEIs (which is characteristic of HME in the UK). Students with a supplementary job achieved statistically significant lower grades than those who received higher parental contributions to their living costs. Put bluntly, students who must work to support themselves have less time to dedicate to their studies. This means that, once again, those from lower SES backgrounds are often at a material as well as cultural disadvantage.

Scharff (2015), and Bull and Scharff (2017; 2021) have suggested that the Western Art music profession is a distinctly middle class one. The middle class institution of the HMEI contributes to this through the implicit emphasis on class-based hierarchies of value. Bull and Scharff (2017) note, for instance, that Western Art Music practitioners often grow up listening to Euroclassical music, thereby making it seem more natural for them. Interviewees emphasised the complexity and „emotional depth“ of Euroclassical, in contrast to other music forms. They implicitly suggest these cannot be grasped by those growing up listening to other genres. The idea that music's complexity and its separation from everyday life, should be the measure of music's value, has been important in sustaining the authority of Euroclassical music more generally (Goehr 1992). The *implicit* attitudes of those who attend HMEIs therefore contribute to a general sense that HMEIs are arbiters of taste and thus middle-class values.

There is also evidence of a class divide in the types of courses and programs chosen by students at HMEIs. Born and Devine (2015) identify a clear class divide between music technology programs (MT) and what they call „traditional“ music (TM) degrees<sup>12</sup>. MT degrees are undertaken more often by those from more deprived backgrounds whilst TM degrees are taken from those from more privileged backgrounds<sup>13</sup>. They cite the relative prestige attached to newer music technology courses, perceived as more vocational and

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<sup>12</sup> By this they mean music performance and musicology degree programs rather than folk or traditional music.

<sup>13</sup> As measured by the POLAR index (see Footnote 1).



tied to industrial scale songwriting or technical work, as opposed music performance and musicology degrees which are not construed to be primarily career oriented. Born and Devine also note an overwhelming gender divide in these programs, with men making up c. 75% of music technology course students as opposed to c.50% of TM programs.

As noted above, students from lower SES backgrounds are generally more likely to choose HE programs and courses which are explicitly linked to a vocation (Baker 2020; Hillmert and Jacob 2003: 31; Lehmann 2009; Ma 2009: 223). Higher SES students choose to study the arts and humanities generally in larger numbers. Though medicine and law are still heavily stratified by class across countries (Codioli McMaster 2019; Van de Werfhorst et al. 2003). These trends are more obvious in countries where tuition fees are high. In a world where there are few jobs as professional musicians and a huge number of aspiring musicians, the impact of future career planning and debt-levels undoubtedly influence the decision to study music as well as which music degrees to study.

## Attempts to Change Conservatoire Cultures

Widening participation programs have focused on training pupils who would not otherwise be familiar with Euroclassical music repertoires. In the UK, widening participation programs have been established to support the inclusion of those from economically and racially marginalised backgrounds, particularly in Western Art music (BCU 2021; HEPI 2019; Orchestras Live 2021; RCM 2019). There have also been attempts to (quantitatively) „democratise“ access to HME in almost all countries which have HMEIs by expanding degree programs on offer. Krupp-Schleußner and Lehmann-Wermser (2016) note that in Germany, having a „migrant background“ or not appeared to impact the likelihood of pupils continuing formal music lessons. When they factored in music activities which have not historically been taught in HMEIs (such as rapping, music production or beat making), they found that pupils who had migrant backgrounds were more likely than other pupils to engage in these activities. A focus on inclusion into „traditional“ types of music making only may miss a range of active music makers whose talents are not covered by HMEIs curricula. This suggests a need for HMEIs to expand their curricular/program scope.

There have been attempts to introduce historically newer genres like hip hop and electronic dance music into HME curricula in Sweden, Germany, the U.S., and the UK. Here too, however, there is a need for caution. Music preferences, are not *determined* by class. The idea that class relates directly to music tastes fails to explain why white middle class kids love hip hop or why jazz is taught in German, Dutch, Swedish or UK HMEIs, almost exclusively staffed by white teachers. The expansion of programs and repertoires on offer in HMEIs has undoubtedly led to a wider variety of students engaging

with HME curricula, but this does not necessarily lead to more socio-economically diverse institutions. For example, jazz became considered a „high-art“ form during in the 1960s, leading to its institutionalisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Lopes 2000) as jazz fans and practitioners became conservatoire teachers. Through its institutionalization, jazz has adopted many of the same elitist connotations once reserved for the Euroclassical traditions. Since the 1960s, Sweden has adopted a popular music curriculum in schools (Georgii-Hemming and Westvall 2010), but this has not necessarily resulted in more socio-economically diverse HMEIs. The inclusion of hip hop in HMEIs curricula may appear to be a significant development, but if it is not supported financially and culturally beforehand to counteract inherent conservatoire tendencies, it will follow the same trend as jazz.

## Conclusion

Those from lower SES backgrounds are significantly less likely to attend HMEIs. The reasons for this are material and cultural, but they interconnect with each other in various ways. There are, however, also hierarchies of prestige between institutions and between music degrees which mean that high-prestige institutions and music-performance programs are more segregated by SES. The evidence also indicates that there is not an inherent class preference for making music in secondary education even if music interests of lower SES groups are perhaps less well-represented in HMEIs. Class does not determine music preferences and participation but cultural and material factors does heavily influence both.

There are similarities across countries. However, to date, there is no quantitative data on the percentages of students who attend conservatoires from different socio-economic backgrounds, and no comparative cross-cultural comparisons broken down by country. Such data would indicate the extent to which national factors influence admissions and applications. This would help to ascertain the extent to which subsidised state-funded music or art schools have an impact at the national level. To date, there is also no solid evidence on the relationship between socio-economic factors and performance in music theory exams. Though, clearly, a grounding in music theory, and familiarity with the repertoires used is a clear benefit. Cultural changes in institutional cultures are necessary. Nevertheless, without economic and financial support earlier on in students' lives, these changes are unlikely to be sufficient.

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# Recommended further reading / watching / listening

## Diversity

- **What does diversity do?**

**(book excerpt)**

Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On Being Included. Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham – London: Duke University Press.

What does diversity do? What are we doing when we use the language of diversity? ... These questions can be asked as open questions only if we proceed with a sense of uncertainty about what diversity is doing and what we are doing with diversity. Strong critiques have been made of the uses of diversity by institutions and of how the arrival of the term "diversity" involves the departure of other (perhaps more critical) terms,

including "equality", "equal opportunities" and "social justice". A genealogy of the term "diversity" allows us to think about the appeal of the term as an institutional appeal. We might want to be cautious about the appealing nature of diversity and ask whether the ease of its incorporation by institutions is a sign of the loss of its critical edge. (1)

- **Attempts at representing key concepts visually**

**(online resource)**

**Equity vs. Equality – What's the Difference?**

<https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/>



[click to access](https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/)

**(online resource)**

**Gardenswartz and Rowe – Four Layers of Diversity-model**

<https://www.gardenswartzrowe.com/why-g-r>



[click to access](https://www.gardenswartzrowe.com/why-g-r)

## • Addressing Privilege

(video)

**Any Other Questions** (University of Art and Design Linz, 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDrYULUZ5mU>



click to play

(article excerpt)

Preston Leonard, Kendra. 2017. **Music Privilege Walk Statements.**

<https://kendraprestonleonard.hcommons.org/2017/04/01/music-privilege-walk-statements/>

Many of you are familiar with the idea of the [Privilege Walk](#), in which a mediator reads statements relating to privilege and asks participants to step forward or backwards to indicate their relative positions in society as defined through those privileges. [...]

I've been creating and asking for sample statements related to music (mostly reflecting US music experiences and the privileges that may be present in people's formative years in regard to music-learning and music-making); in specific, statements that allow music professors to understand their own privilege or lack thereof and that of their students. (...) Here are the collected statements from the Privilege Walk I led as a session on Privilege at the 2017 Spring meeting of the AMS-Southwest chapter at Sam Houston State University.

- If your parents/guardians could pay for your instrument or you had use of a free school instrument, step forward.
- If you had access to a professional quality instrument before age 18, step forward.
- If you experienced physical and/or psychological/emotional abuse by a music teacher, step backwards.
- If you experienced sexual harassment by a music colleague, step backwards.
- If you could afford to travel more than 4 hours for post-secondary school auditions, step forward.
- If your parents/guardians could afford the time off to drive you to auditions, step forward.
- If you went to summer music programs, step forward.
- If you owned a metronome, tuner, music stand, instrument cleaning supplies, and method books (in your language), step forward.
- If the language spoken in your high school music rehearsals was your first language, step forward.
- If you had a reliably quiet place to practice, step forward.
- If your high school offered Music Theory AP, step forward. [...]
- If you had a reliably safe space to store your instrument when not playing it, step forward.
- If your parents/guardians attended your concerts, step forward (some have to miss for work or other things).
- If you had a piano or keyboard in your house growing up, step forward.
- If your musical instructions conflicted with other extra-curriculars, like sports or scouting, step backwards.
- If the music that is your passion is written down, step forward.
- If the music that is your passion is communicated primarily through an oral tradition, step backwards. [...]
- If your religion/culture prevented you from singing/playing (certain instruments or all), step backwards.
- If you could afford to buy new music (not copy it from library, etc.), step forward. [...]
- If you did not own a tux/black concert wear and/or had to borrow it because you couldn't afford it, take a step backwards.
- If you could read more than one clef before entering college, step forward.
- If one of your family members played an instrument while you were growing up, step forward.
- If you have a hearing impairment, take a step back. [...]
- If you grew up in a house with more than 25 recordings, take a step forward.
- If assigned an instrument because it corresponded to outdated ideas about your gender, step back.

## • Diversity / Difference in Music Scholarship

### (book excerpt)

Bloechl, Olivia, Melanie Lowe and Jeffrey Kallberg, eds. 2015. *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Difference is a broadly relevant concept, so what do we mean when we invoke it in thinking about music? In the humanities and social sciences, the most common critical usage refers to differences among and within groups, and the cultural meanings and values that attach to these differences. A basic musicological proposition is that differentiation affects musical dispositions and capacities as well as choices and actions, such as creation, listening, or judgment. [...]

Viewing identity via a critical concept of difference involves conceiving it temporally and contingently, as a particular understanding of a self, another person, or a group that is formulated relative to others. This bare definition needs development in order to be meaningful, but we are already far from theories of identity as stable essences (although we are not yet speaking of them as constructs). The **contingency of identity** may be **linguistic** (designation as “this, not that”), **psychological** (emotional identification with or against others), **social** (identification as like or unlike others), or **historical** (identification with or against a particular past or ancestry). These and other domains have been important sites for humanistic and social scientific reflection on identity, but most contemporary discussion has focused on social identification on the basis of religion, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and so forth, as well as on the cultures particular to some identity groups. [...]

One predominant strand of American critical musicology has posited a close relationship between identity and musicality and has advocated sympathetic, authentic understanding of plural musicalities – and, thus, of difference – as an ethical good. Witness Philip Brett’s cautious recommendation in 1994 that musicologists

cultivate a queer “sense of difference” as “**valuing, exploring, and trying to understand different things, people, and ideas, in terms that are closer to the way in which they perceive themselves.**” This pluralist musicological ethics is typically joined to a political claim – sometimes explicit, more often not – that **institutionalized exclusion, devaluation, and neglect of certain differentiated musical subjects or objects are forms of injustice.** [...]

Generally speaking, difference-focused musicological critique has been driven by efforts to remedy misrecognition in music history, historiography, and to a lesser extent professional life, although it has also sometimes addressed maldistribution or malrepresentation. One example of misrecognition, familiar in the wake of US multiculturalism, is the tacit expectation by many scholars that musicologists who are visible racial minorities will study “their own” musics (e.g., musics racialized as brown, black, Native, or just non-white) rather than musics attributed to white European and Euro-settler groups.

As has often been pointed out, this expectation is non-reciprocal: scholars who are visible majorities are generally licensed to study whatever musics they like and face little sanction for crossing racialized genre boundaries. Misrecognition, in this case, involves a racialized “description,” based partly on a perception of physicality that “makes a difference in the way its bearer is treated”: specifically, that denies respect for intellectual autonomy, typically lowers status (especially if “white” genres carry greater prestige), restricts disciplinary participation, and thus limits agency and freedom. (4-9)



# Disability

To think of disability not as a physical condition but as a way of interacting with a world that is frequently inhospitable is to think of disability in performative terms – as something one *does* rather than something one *is*.

(Sandahl and Auslander 2005:10)

(video)

Judith Butler & Sunaura Taylor – *Examined Life*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0HZaPkF6qE>



click to play

(video)

Evelyn Glennie – *How to Truly Listen*

[https://www.ted.com/talks/evelyn\\_glennie\\_how\\_to\\_truly\\_listen/](https://www.ted.com/talks/evelyn_glennie_how_to_truly_listen/)



click to play

- **Conceptualizing Disability (in Music)**

(article excerpt)

Howe, Blake at al. 2016. "Introduction". In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*. Blake Howe et al., eds. Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1-11.

The word *disability* forges a binary between what one can do (ability) and what one cannot do (disability). Indeed, disability throughout history has often emerged as an antithesis to some other desirable standard. Before the nineteenth century, this standard was often imagined as an idealized body: the body of God, Adam before the Fall, the King, the cosmos, or some other perfection, from which all human bodies were poorly fractioned and morally compromised. This is **the moral or religious model of disability**, in which bodily differences are stigmatized as deviant from some elusive ideal. Beginning in the nineteenth century, this "ideal body" was usurped by the "normal body." Normalcy, a concept popularized by the rise of statistics, imagines human morphology on a bell-shaped curve: most people are of average height, while some are too tall, and others are too short. This is **the medical model of disability**, in which disabled people are cast as outliers,

requiring either rehabilitation by medical science or elimination by eugenics.

More recently, **the social model of disability**, advocated in politics by the disability rights movement and in scholarship by Disability Studies, has argued for the value of bodily difference. Under this model, disability is not a fixed, medical condition; rather, it emerges from a society that chooses to accommodate some bodies and exclude others. As Davis 2002 explains, "An impairment involves a loss or diminution of sight, hearing, mobility, mental ability, and so on. But an impairment only becomes a disability when the ambient society creates environments with barriers" (41). Indeed, Strauss 2006 defines disability as "any culturally stigmatized bodily difference" (119): bodies themselves are neutrally defined, accruing their stigma only through cultural reception. A wheelchair user is disabled by curbs,



but not by sloped curbs. A deaf person is disabled by oral language, but not by sign language. Noting the ubiquity of accommodation that all bodies (disabled or nondisabled) receive, some scholars have recently sought to reconceive bodily

### (interview excerpt)

Necula, Maria-Cristina. 2021. "Joseph Straus: Disability in Music – Rethinking the Standard". *Classical Singer*.

#### How does disability impact a listeners' relationship with music?

Everybody in the world makes sense of their world essentially through their bodies. You understand the things that you see and experience because you have some prior bodily understanding of the experience. Music listening is not a passive, neutral thing where one brain is communicating directly with another brain: there's no such thing as pure listening. It's an embodied experience. Even when you're sitting in a concert hall, you're moving, you're feeling it, things are happening in your body as part of the listening experience. So, if the body plays a central role in the listening experience, as it does with any kind of experience, then the configuration and nature of your body are going to have an impact. Exactly what the impact is varies a lot from individual to individual. [...]

#### Do you think that enough is being done in schools to further the understanding that performers, listeners, and composers with disabilities can engender new ways of making sense of music?

That's a really hard, interesting question. In many ways, the present moment is a kind of golden age for disability in general; at least for many disability conditions, the stigma has started to relax a bit. It's an age where the segregation that so much characterized disability conditions in the past has begun to break down. Children now are legally entitled to an appropriate education in the least restrictive possible setting. As a result, people with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, are able to lead full and fulfilling lives outside of institutions in a way that would have been inconceivable 20 or 30 years ago. What I would like

difference without hierarchy. For example, Davis 2013 seeks "a new category [of identity] based on the partial, incomplete subject, whose realization is not autonomy and independence, but dependency and interdependence" (275). (1-2)

to see, in a more utopian way, is an acknowledgement that disability is not a deficit. Rather, it's a difference that should be valued and celebrated on its own terms – not seen as medical pathologies that reside inside the individual bodies and are a tragedy for them and their families. Instead, it's an opportunity, an opening, an aspect of biodiversity. Disability is a central aspect of what it means to be human. Everybody has a body, and everybody's body deviates from standards of perfection – just as everybody's mind deviates in some way. We should learn to celebrate those differences and not to draw hard lines between people who are not living with a disability and those who are.

#### Where do these standards actually come from?

Such a great question! These are the cultural stories that we tell ourselves and each other – stories that are enshrined in our literature, movies, media – and that get rehearsed generation after generation and century after century until we think it's all perfectly natural and scientific and not worth discussing. So, the goal of scholars like me is to say, "This is not natural, this is a human creation: these distinctions between disability and nondisability, distinctions between black and white, between men and women, between cisgendered people and gay people – all of these things are fictions, constructions." The beauty of thinking that way is that once something has been constructed, it can be reconstructed. It's not permanent, and we don't have to think about disability in a stigmatizing way, just as we don't have to think about queerness in a stigmatizing way. **The standards can be rethought, retaught, and relearned.**

- **Normal(izing) Performance Body**

**(article excerpt)**

Howe, Blake et al. 2016. "**Disabling Music Performance**". In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*. Blake Howe et al., eds. Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 191-209.

Just as curbs and stairways permit the movements of some bodies while disabling those of others, so do **certain conventions of music performance have the power to include and exclude**. These conventions, constituting a "constructed normalcy" of music performance, may audibly disable performers whose bodies do not conform. For example, musical instruments and scores – plus performance practice, or the cultural expectation that they should be performed in a particular way – work together to imply the bodily shape of their intended performer. This normal performance body usually possesses all limbs, with above-average hand and finger size, lung capacity, and strength, among other qualities. Most violin designs imply a two-handed, two-armed, and multifingered performer with a flexible neck. Brass instruments similarly imply a one- or two-handed, multifingered performer, whose mouth is capable of forming a strong, airtight embouchure; tubists must also have the strength to lift their heavy instrument. The length of a vocal phrase in an aria implies the lung capacity of its intended singer, and a wide chord implies the hand size of its pianist. A conductor's baton implies the sightedness of its followers. All of these features constitute the **normal performance body, which, like all forms of constructed normalcy, establishes a template that real human bodies must strive to match**. Performers who do not conform to this normal performance body (for instance, those with fewer hands, fewer fingers, weaker muscles, smaller lungs, or less vision than their instruments and scores require) have performance impairments.

Without adequate accommodation, these impairments may musically disable a performer.

In such circumstances, the performances of disability and music are intertwined so as to become indistinguishable – indeed, **music performance can amplify or even generate a disability that otherwise would have remained inaudible or unrealized**. Many performance impairments are functionally neutral bodily features in most life activities. Amusia – a newly formed diagnostic category describing an inability to distinguish between pitches (i.e., tone deafness), acquired congenitally or from brain trauma – is a specifically musical disorder; it is profoundly disabling for some musicians but otherwise mostly irrelevant to a life outside of music. Similarly, focal dystonia – resulting in the loss of fine motor skills in a specific part of the body, often a finger – may affect the highly coordinated motions associated with piano performance but not with those associated with more mundane tasks, like opening a door. More broadly, small hands or fingers – usually unremarkable bodily features – may severely limit and even exclude participation in certain instrumental repertoires. Standardized piano keys, plus piano compositions with parallel octaves, plus cultural performance practices that require adherence to a score's demands, imply the span of a large hand; many hands, inevitably, will be too small. Notably, **the normal performance body is much more regulated than other social forms of constructed normalcy: even the tiniest deviations** – a sore knuckle, a swollen lip, mild sinus congestion, a shortened pinky – **can audibly impair a body during music performance**.

- **Challenging ableism – from theory to practice**

**(online article)**

Baptiste Grandgirard et al. 2020. "**Spotlight on: Inclusiveness**". In *How are diverse cultures integrated in the education of musicians across Europe?*[online resource].



[click to read](#)

**(online article)**

Baptiste Grandgirard et al. 2020. "**Spotlight on: Accessibility**". *How are diverse cultures integrated in the education of musicians across Europe?*[online resource].



[click to read](#)

**(online article)**

Hannie van Veldhoven and David-Emil Wickström. 2021. "**The Inclusion of seeing-impaired staff and students at HKU Utrecht and Popakademie Baden-Wurttemberg**". *How are diverse cultures integrated in the education of musicians across Europe?*[online resource].



[click to read](#)

**(online article)**

Breslin, Brendan. 2021. "**The Le Chéile Project and the Open Youth Orchestra of Ireland: the first national youth orchestra for musicians with disabilities (Royal Irish Academy of Music)**". In *Artistic Plurality and Inclusive Institutional Culture in HME*. Clara Barbera et al., Brussels: AEC, 62-66.



[click to read](#)

**(online article)**

Thomson, Katja. 2020. "**Musicians with disabilities teaching on the music pedagogy course at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki**". *How are diverse cultures integrated in the education of musicians across Europe?*[online resource].



[click to read](#)



# Socio-Economic Background

## (article excerpt)

Bull, Anna and Christina Scharff. 2017. **“McDonalds’ Music’ Versus ‘Serious Music’: How Production and Consumption Practices Help to Reproduce Class Inequality in the Classical Music Profession”**. *Cultural Sociology*. 11(3): 283-301.

This article has focused on class inequalities in contemporary classical music practice. By drawing on empirical data from two separate research projects, it has linked inequalities in production and consumption in three ways. First, we explored the **role of family socialisation in classical music production and consumption**. For middle-class research participants, classical music was practiced and consumed at home. Engagement with classical music was perceived as ‘natural’, suggesting that classical music was valued, and that the attribution of value was uncontested. By contrast, research participants from working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds reported that classical music was unfamiliar; it was not listened to at home and research participants struggled to garner their parents’ support. [...]

As the second empirical section showed, **class inequalities also come to the fore in practices of performing and listening to classical music**. Feeling comfortable and confident in grand spaces, as well as wearing appropriate dress, is not something that seems to be equally available to musicians from different class backgrounds. There is continuity between middle-class culture, the spaces that classical music tends to be performed in, and the dress code, especially for women. This also highlights the role of cultural institutions as spaces where inequalities of production and consumption may influence each other and be reinforced. Thus, class inequalities also manifest themselves in the consumption of classical music. [...]

The research participants’ value-judgements, which we discussed in the third empirical section, revealed hierarchies where classical music was, through non-explicit mechanisms, situated at the

top. ...However, this hierarchy of value often remained invisible. Arguably, this hierarchy is so taken for granted that individuals do not name it explicitly. In discussing our empirical data, we foregrounded the **unspoken and uncontested value of classical music and how this seems to map onto middle-class culture, albeit in non-direct and complex ways**. Classical music was ‘naturally’ practiced and listened to in middle-class homes where the status of classical music remained uncontested, even if it was not pursued professionally. The attribution of depth to classical music gestured at a seriousness and importance that differed from other genres. The unspoken value of classical music was highlighted in listening practices, where classical music was not consumed for fun or for embodied leisure practices such as jogging, but was associated with people’s identities and sense of self. ... Based on these examples, we argue that the uncontested status of classical music plays a key role in the ways in which class inequalities manifest themselves in its production and consumption.

... for the purposes of concluding this article, we continue with the theme of the uncontested status of classical music and broaden it out to classical music funding. **Historically and today, classical music has received disproportionate levels of state funding compared to other genres of music** (Hodgkins, 2013; Laing and York, 2000; Monk, 2014). [...] The question about the beneficiaries of public funding relates back to our concern with inequalities and the communities who are being served and excluded through cultural policies. If the value of classical music remains uncontested, existing inequalities in classical music production and consumption may become even greater.

**(article excerpt)**

Banks, Mark. 2017. *Creative Justice – Cultural Industries, Work and Inequality*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.

... in this chapter, I want to make two arguments. The first is precursory, outlining the position that while people are capable subjects, with their own objective capacities, **the idea of creative talent is as much social as it is personal or innate**. By this I mean that a ‘natural aptitude’ might exist, but it is extremely difficult to separate it from the social context in which it appears, to the extent that it is perhaps impossible to isolate its discrete influence in the making of creative persons. Secondly, and more substantively, **even if we accept that ordinary people may possess their own creative talents** (regardless of whether we believe these to be innate or socially learnt, or some combination of the two), **there is no guarantee that such attributes will be recognised and rewarded because established patterns of social inequality tend not to permit it**. More simply, we might say that the socially disadvantaged are less likely to be regarded as ‘talent’ because they lack the resources necessary to compete in markets for prestige and recognition. (67)

The formalised and ritual demands of the [admission] process served to strongly define the parameters of what constitutes a demonstrably talented student. And having the dispositional confidence and ease, as well as the schooled ability, to demonstrate one’s apparently innate skills, immediately puts such candidates at an advantage relative to those others (local working-class and ethnic minority students in the case of this study) who often lack such dispositions and

abilities, and so tend to look more awkward, and perform less confidently at audition — and so are less likely to be selected. (81)

... we observe how, **in arts education, the capacity to express talent is not straightforwardly linked to an ability to sing, dance or play a musical instrument, but rests on routine demonstration of a preferred history of socialisation and training, an appropriate set of cultured dispositions and a resourcefulness and commitment borne largely from the possession of an established social and economic advantage**. (82)

In this respect, talent can never be reduced to an innate skill or aptitude, or a concrete capacity to do something (though, as I’ve suggested, such qualities might objectively exist) but must also be recognised as a set of social dispositions, partly defined and constructed in the performative contexts of their expression and evaluation. When, as happens in creative arts education, selectors rely less on traditional academic qualifications as evidence of merit, and more so on combinations of aesthetic judgements, as well as implicit (or explicit) homophilic and dispositional prejudices, then pedagogic authority becomes irresistible, and symbolic violence is enhanced. **When selectors insist on the right to their own ‘implicit, diffuse criteria’** (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 162) **then the objective basis of selection becomes almost impossible to isolate, and so the basis of rejection becomes more difficult to oppose**. (85)

**(video)**

Dyson, Jane, Craig Jeffrey, Gyorgy Scrinis – *Student Hunger: A Silent Crisis*  
<https://vimeo.com/675691841>



**click to play**



# Race

**A specter lurks in the house of music, and it goes by the name of race. For most observers, it hovers and haunts barely noticed, so well hidden is it beneath the rigors of the scholarly apparatus.**

(Radano and Bohlman, 2000:1)

## (video)

Nate Holder – *If I were a racist...* (2020)

<https://www.nateholdermusic.com/post/if-i-were-a-racist>



[click to play](#)

## (video)

Juliet Hess – *Problematizing “Diversity”, “Inclusion” and “Access” in Music Education* (2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ytxe9YTyR8>



[click to play](#)

## (book chapter excerpt)

Radano, Ronald and Philip V. Bohlman. 2000. **“Introduction: Music and Race, Their Past, Their Presence”**. In *Music and the Racial Imagination*. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, eds. Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1-53.

A specter lurks in the house of music, and it goes by the name of race. For most observers, it hovers and haunts barely noticed, so well hidden is it beneath the rigors of the scholarly apparatus. The racial specter, nonetheless, has an enormously powerful, nearly palpable effect: welling up from the depths of the discipline of musical scholarship, it casts a shadow across this putatively “objective” enterprise. The specter of race is not the edifice of “black music” to which the musical disciplines, when acknowledging the racial, reflexively turn. It is, rather, the ideological supposition that informs this reflex. The specter of race is neither the root cause of the music historian’s enduring commitment to the sameness of European studies nor the reason for the ethnographer’s preoccupation with the performance of difference. It is, rather, the commonsense opinion that what distinguishes the musically racial from the not-

racial is as simple as telling the difference between black and white. (1). [...]

In the New Europe at the end of the twentieth century, there may be no better evidence that music is more intensely present than ever in the European racial imagination than the tendency to look beyond the borders of Europe for race and racism. Just as history – and music history – provide a rhetoric of displacement, they also have the power to identify the rupture that displacement leaves. Historically, Europe has been implicated as no other place in the ways music has been employed to construct race and to undergird racism. **Music and race interact far too often in the history of Europe and in the history of Western art music to sustain attempts to deny race and to silence the ways in which music calls attention to racism.** (27-28) [...]

Why music?... Is race embedded in music and related expressive practices, such as dance, in particularly powerful ways? Does music mark race? Or does music reproduce the traces of race, thereby perpetuating the racial imagination itself? For many it may seem that making a case for music's culpability in the reproduction of racial stereotypes is empirically unsound because music is music, not race. Music is, one might argue, no more than a non-signifying, free-floating, essentialized object. But the question "why music?"

is particularly unsettling precisely because of its banality. **To dismiss music as non-signifying is possible only when one ignores the power that accrues to musical practice.** Music acquires power because it can be used to attribute and ascribe multivalent meanings. The moment when it seems not to signify, music becomes most significant; music acquires its very powerlessness as an object. (43)

### (article excerpt)

Amaechi, John. 2020. "What is white privilege?".  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zrvkbqt>



[click to read](#)

We've been engaged in a global conversation about race and racism. You've probably had discussions at home, at school or at work, and in those conversations, you've probably heard the term white privilege. You maybe even had this term used in a way that felt like an insult or an accusation. Others will have told you that it's all just made up to make white people feel bad... and none of this is right.

Privilege is a hard concept for people to understand, because normally when we talk of privilege, we imagine immediate unearned riches and tangible benefits for anyone who has it. But white privilege and indeed all privilege is actually more about the absence of inconvenience, the absence of an impediment or challenge, and as such when you have it, you really don't notice it, but when it's absent, it affects everything you do.

There are lots of types of privilege out there, the privilege of being born into a wealthy family versus a poor family is kind of obvious, but then there's the privilege of being able-bodied versus having or acquiring a disability that most of us take for granted. I have two very close friends who are wheelchair users and I'll be honest, when I first met them I was completely ignorant about the everyday ways their lives are made harder through no fault of their own. Some of these ways are simply

thoughtless, but some of them are just the way we live, just the way we build infrastructure, just the way everything works that just makes their life harder than mine. That's just one of the ways that I am privileged and understanding that, embracing that, doesn't make me a bad person, but ignoring it raises the chance that my friends will be excluded in ways that are not obvious to me and as their friend I can't allow that.

There's a good chance, as a white person watching this, your life is already hard. Every day you have to overcome some difficulty or challenge just to get by, but you can still have white privilege. White privilege doesn't mean you haven't worked hard or you don't deserve the success you've had. It doesn't mean that your life isn't hard or that you've never suffered. It simply means that your skin colour has not been the cause of your hardship or suffering.

There is nothing but a benefit to understanding our own privileges, white and otherwise. It brings us closer to those who are different. It helps us be vigilant about the ways we treat others different than us. It helps us make a society that is fairer and more equal. Having white privilege doesn't make your life easy, but understanding it can help you realise why some people's lives are harder than they should be.

## Further reading

Huxtable, Jason. 2021. "Pragmatic White Allyship for Higher Education Popular Music Academics". *IASPM Journal* 11(1): 94-99.

[http://dx.doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871\(2021\)v11i1.10en](http://dx.doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2021)v11i1.10en)

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