

To Dance Beneath the Diamond Sky with One Hand: Writings in Disability and Music
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Welcome. It's a tremendous privilege to once again edit an *RDS* special forum. For our collections on disability and music, I'm proud to be teamed with guest editor Dr. Na'ama Sheffi, Director of the School of Communication, Sapir Academic College, Ashkelon, Israel. Contributors hail from Poland, Scotland, England, Canada, and throughout the US, from Maine to Hawai'i. As a bonus, our forum includes not only articles but also reviews of recordings and books on music.

RDS can justly claim to have originated disability studies in music in print in its 2004 premier issue and to have included music articles and reviews frequently hence. Much additional activity has ensued since that beginning, including articles, numerous conference papers at the Society for Disability Studies and elsewhere, a listserv (DISMUS-L@GC.LISTSERV.CUNY.EDU), the formation of an interest group within the Society for Music Theory (<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/disabilityinmusic/index.html>), and an edited volume (Straus and Lerner's *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music*, reviewed here). Surely there is more to come. Stay tuned.

Even in this very young subfield of the still young field of Disability Studies, research directions are clearly emerging. Much work uses traditional music disciplines such as music theory and musicology as its point of departure. Even the most (literally) conservative institutions of classical music training, conservatories, are finding time and space to educate students with all manner of disabilities. Peggy Duesenberry and Raymond MacDonald report from Glasgow, Scotland on one particularly exciting program as well as its "cousins" around the UK. Their essay is followed by Kevin Schwandt's review of the aforementioned Straus and Lerner collection, whose point of departure is the traditional musical academic disciplines.

Ethnomusicology and its parent discipline anthropology are natural if underutilized bases for disability perspectives in music. They are represented here in articles by Henry Kingsbury and Gavin Steingo. Kingsbury, long known as a pivotally important ethnographer of Western classical music (a repertoire largely immune from such scrutiny, in favor of interrogations of more "exotic" musics) focuses here on the contributions of renowned amputee pianist Paul Wittgenstein. Steingo brings an insider's knowledge to his analysis of American avant-garde composer Robert Ashley's "Tourettic" *Automatic Writing*. They are joined by University of Leeds (England) ethnomusicologist Lizzie Walker's review of the CD *Nutters with Attitude* and Sarah Schmalenberger's review of Kingsbury's book, *The Truth of Music: Empire, Law & Secrecy*.

The longstanding (and often justified) schism between Disability Studies (DS) and the clinical praxes is addressed and perhaps even partly "healed" in essays by Renata Gozdecka and Sarah Schmalenberger. Polish music educator Gozdecka bridges what has heretofore seemed an untraversable chasm between music therapy and DS. She describes the incorporation of music therapy techniques with the theories of Israeli pedagogue Batia Strauss as implemented in the

Polish public schools. Interesting and important lessons are offered for inclusive education through the application of music therapy methods to *all students* (often, though not always in Poland, in inclusive classroom settings). The idea that music therapy can benefit everyone and not only a “special” few more than illustrates the efficacy of Universal Instructional Design principles. It also challenges the notion of the “disabled other.”

Musicologist and French horn performer Sarah Schmalenberger crosses more than one culture in her essay. A breast cancer survivor who writes from the perspective of performing arts medicine, she critiques that field for having largely failed to attend to the professional needs of those like her whose injuries, unlike those that primarily preoccupy those physician-specialists, are not a consequence of their employment as cultural workers. Exceptionally “medical” for an article in a DS journal, its important presence here stems not only from its abundance of practical information, but also its subjectivity, its recognition and description of breast cancer at every stage of illness and remission, including post-therapeutic trauma, as an impairment and disability overwhelmingly impacting women.

Scholars working in fields beyond music, especially literature, have long dominated academic popular music studies. This has resulted, predictably, in an emphasis, arguably an overemphasis, on lyrics. The essays by Isaac Stein and Ray Pence transcend that limitation, extending their concerns considerably beyond verbal text.

In the next issue, psychologist Isaac Stein offers an extraordinary appreciation of the life and career of his fellow Canadian Neil Young. It is an in-depth examination of what is widely though mostly superficially known; that Young is a person with disabilities, the father of two sons with disabilities, and a passionate and dedicated disability activist. Stein’s analysis is movingly interwoven into his own disability history in which Young emerges not as a rock and roll supercrip but as heroically honest and persistent in his dedication to a cause that is literally a family affair.

Ray Pence of the American Studies program at the University of Kansas brings his interdisciplinary training to a long overdue consideration of the career of soul legend Curtis Mayfield, who late in life became a quadriplegic/diabetic/amputee, while continuing to pursue his creative work as composer and vocalist. Comprehensive, painstaking, and insightful, of particular interest is Pence’s scrutiny of the American media’s portrayal of Mayfield after the work-related accident that caused his major mobility impairments.

The music of the disability rights movement and of disability culture must be regarded as a unique case. While stylistically grounded in popular idioms, it primarily serves a small and dedicated community rather than a mass populace. RDS’s own Steve Brown, a “movement” man who is both an historian and a participant in history provides a guided tour of his picks of the best songs and artists of the disability rights struggle.

We close with essays that speak to one of the outstanding potentials of Disability Studies in music. Because music is understood within many cultural systems to be a manifestation of “talent” – extraordinary ability – its juxtaposition with disability – understood as talent’s opposite – offers an exceptional window on social praxis. Disability Studies, stationed at a

particularly busy intersection of the body and culture, offers – and delivers – exceptional opportunities for interdisciplinarity. This has been particularly true of DS in music, the latter a field whose frequent hostility to participation by people with disabilities, particularly in Western music education (Duesenberry, MacDonald, and their likeminded British colleagues notwithstanding), has left little in the way of forthrightly musical sources for research, and has mandated that its scholars look beyond traditional music writings and methodologies. University of North Carolina art historian Ann Millett’s study of the musically influenced work of deaf visual artist Joseph Grigely (he does not exclusively identify with Deaf Culture) is an example of the new subfield of DS in music drawing its materials and ways of knowing from all intellectual corners.

We close with my brief appreciation of nonagenarian guitarist Les Paul, whose diminished instrumental technique, a function of both impairment and age (perhaps a distinction but surely not a dichotomy) has left his ability to put on a good show undiluted, as he replaces the dazzle of fast fingers with the marvels of a century of wisdom and laughter. By maturing (and impairing) from primarily a player to substantially a storyteller, Les Paul’s performance makes him and the audience that embraces him role models.

I close this introduction with a note about our forum’s title. Doubtless, many readers will recognize it as a line from Bob Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man” turned poetic “amputee” with the elimination of a few words. Some, however, may not be aware that the inspiration for this classic song was Dylan sideman guitarist Bruce Langhorne, himself an amputee, with three partial fingers on his right (picking) hand. Langhorne’s legacy in Dylan’s song (and on many classic Dylan cuts) is but a fraction of the evidence offered throughout this forum of what may be its most important theme; that a richly participatory life in music is everyone’s right and entirely feasible with the equipment – and spirit – we have today.

Stay tuned.

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