

Music History as Labor History: Rethinking “Work” in Musicology

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What if musicians were workers? This might seem like an absurd question to anyone who has ever played a gig, taught a class, run a rehearsal, or spent time in a recording studio. Perhaps surprisingly, though, musicology has been slow to join the party in making labor a central issue, especially in our teaching.¹ In contrast to disciplines like media studies, popular music studies, and folk and Indigenous studies, music history has significant room for improvement in investigating questions about labor. Indeed, addressing labor issues in the classroom and in scholarship takes on greater urgency each year. In the United States (and elsewhere) income inequality continues to grow, making questions about labor and work even more important. Headlines are dismaying for those disenchanted with neoliberal capitalism: chief executives of corporations, even those that fail to turn a profit, are rewarded with massive compensation packages including millions of dollars in salaries and bonuses, while the employees doing most of the work receive comparatively little.² Meanwhile, for many, stable employment is itself a luxury. Workers in various industries—but perhaps

I extend sincere thanks to my music history colleagues Devin Burke, Allison Ogden, and Matilda Ertz for productive conversations about course plans; to my department chair Jerry Tolson, Associate Dean Krista Wallace-Boaz, and Dean Teresa Reed, as well as the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning, for supporting pedagogical work; and to *JMHP* editor Sara Haefeli and the two anonymous reviewers for insightful feedback on this essay.

1. As noted later, work and labor are starting to become more prominent in musicological scholarship, which seems likely to increasingly inform teaching praxis. My goals in this essay are to affirm the urgency of this development and to introduce some practical ways to apply these ideas in courses.

2. Among the top 350 U.S.-based companies, average 2019 compensation for CEOs (chief executive officers) topped \$21 million, or 320 times the salary of the “typical worker.” Lawrence Mishel and Jori Kandra, “CEO compensation surged 14% in 2019 to \$21.3 million,” Economic Policy Institute report (August 18, 2020), 3. Some analysts and economists argue that such extravagance is justified in the name of competitiveness, citing the resulting tournament-like

most markedly in the arts—are struggling to make ends meet. In 2013, 16 percent of part-time workers and 4 percent of full-time employees in the U.S. were classified as “working poor”; in other words, their incomes remained below the federal poverty level.³ By 2018, that number topped out at seven million individuals, with Black and Hispanic women impacted at rates almost double the national average.⁴ Another study shows that there is not one single state in the U.S. in which a person could afford a two-bedroom apartment rental while working full time at the minimum wage.⁵ As researchers Howard and Paul Sherman put it, in “terms of income, there are two Americas: the enormous class of employees and the tiny class of capitalists.”⁶ These issues, while discussed infrequently in creative fields, absolutely underpin economic problems in the arts, many of which have only become more pronounced in light of the ongoing pandemic: issues like precarious employment, low salaries, and unequal opportunity, not to mention assumptions that musicians will work in exchange for “exposure” and other exploitative practices.

With a long tradition of focusing on “great works” (and, to a lesser extent these days, “great men”), music-historical narratives tend to emphasize the aesthetic, the formal-structural, and the lineage of influence.⁷ While numerous scholars engage in important ways with socio-cultural issues in research across the spectrum of scholarship identified as “musicological” or “ethnomusicological” or both, curricula within conservatories and schools of music almost invariably favor a study of composers and scores over other types of

environment as a means of fostering employees’ contributions to the company. Andrew D. Henderson and James W. Fredrickson, “Top Management Team Coordination Needs and the CEO Pay Gap: A Competitive Test of Economic and Behavioral Views,” *The Academy of Management Journal* 44:1 (February 2001): 98–99.

3. “Who are the Working Poor? [2013 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics],” published by the Center for Poverty Research at the University of California, Davis, <http://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/who-are-working-poor>.

4. Bureau of Labor Statistics Reports: “A Profile of the Working Poor, 2018” (July 2020), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/2018/home.htm>. See also Eileen Patten, “Racial, Gender Wage Gaps Persist in U.S. Despite Some Progress,” Pew Research Center report (July 1, 2016), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/01/racial-gender-wage-gaps-persist-in-u-s-despite-some-progress/>.

5. Elina Bravye et al., “Out of Reach: America’s Forgotten Housing Crisis,” National Low Income Housing Coalition report, March 2012, <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/2012-OOR.pdf>.

6. Howard J. Sherman and Paul D. Sherman, “Why Is This Cycle Different from All Other Cycles?,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 42:1 (March 2008): 257.

7. Given the interest in pedagogical questions, as shown through the establishment of this *Journal* and the activities of the American Musicological Society Pedagogy Study Group, this has certainly been in flux for some time. However, the content and structure of most “standard” music history and music appreciation textbooks suggest that scores, stylistic analyses, and biographies remain central to a fair number of institutions’ curricula.

musical actors and material artifacts, even well into the twenty-first century.⁸ When scholars consider emergent theories of labor, however, they are armed with useful ways to perform their own interpretive acts on the histories they study and write. The approach I propose here considers how anxieties about the labor undertaken by musicians aligns with anxieties about unrecognized (and therefore uncompensated) work writ large. More concretely, it provides both a theoretical framework and a set of pedagogical tools that educators can use to rethink, revise, and reassess our music-historical curricula.

In a survey of undergraduate music programs in North America, Margaret Walker notes that “the vast majority [of programs reviewed thus far] continue to require two or three courses covering *canonical* Western art music history.”⁹ One way to work toward greater inclusion in the curriculum, I would argue, is by incorporating labor into our courses. Notably, music history faculty have indicated interest in these issues. Respondents in 2012 found it “somewhat” to “very” important (3.14 on a 5-point scale) that students be able to “compare and contrast the economic aspects of music in different times and places, including patronage and the marketplace,” although this was ranked the lowest among nine specific objectives for a music history curriculum.¹⁰ If a majority of us expect our students not only to be able to understand economic forces, but also to have the facility to compare and contrast these forces across time and space, I would argue that we need to make a more concerted effort to foreground these issues in our own research and in the ways we structure our course plans. At its most basic level, we might ask: Who has the power? Who is doing the work? By considering a diverse array of economic issues based on those questions, we have an opportunity to reform the curriculum in ways that benefit our students and that improve the equity of our course content. In other words, this is a content issue (in that we should focus more on issues of work and labor). But this content informs a much broader outcome: by making room in the narrative for those who have historically held less privilege, our courses can become more equitable.

8. See data presented in Matthew Baumer, “A Snapshot of Music History Teaching to Undergraduate Music Majors, 2011–2012: Curricula, Methods, Assessment, and Objectives,” this *Journal* 5, no. 2 (2015): 23–47.

9. Emphasis added. Margaret E. Walker, “Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum,” this *Journal* 10, no. 1 (2020): 16.

10. Baumer, “Snapshot of Music History Teaching,” 41. The ranking perhaps reflects the space afforded such questions within music history textbooks.

Music and Labor: Research

Scholars have produced exciting new work on connections between music and labor/economics: for example, Marianna Ritchey's monograph *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era* explores the ways "contemporary classical" institutions are bound to the norms and complexities of the neoliberal present, and Will Robin's *Industry: Bang on a Can and New Music in the Marketplace* addresses the important issues of funding, marketability, and contemporary economics.¹¹ Foundational texts incorporating economic and labor issues include work by Timothy Taylor and, less directly, Richard Crawford.¹² Andrea Moore's 2016 article "Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur" marked, for me, a watershed moment that announced the arrival of labor studies within musicology; likewise, a colloquy published in *Twentieth-Century Music* in 2019, featuring valuable studies by Ritchey, Moore, Judith Lochhead, John Pippen, and Anne Shreffler, further legitimized the field.¹³

Despite this strong foundational literature, it is surprisingly difficult to find scholarship suitable for teaching on music and labor, and this suggests some areas for future research. For example, in the absence of readings about musical labor before the twentieth century, I have had to focus on more specific topics, such as patronage, military bands, and the songs of unions and other labor activism. In place of tidy articles or book chapters on musical labor in eras prior to about the mid-nineteenth century, students cobble together accounts of individual musicians to try to figure out what their work lives were like. While this activity has its own merits, I would love to see more scholarship on the working conditions at court, for example, or more information about music guilds, or even about those who work in myriad present-day music industries, such as piano tuners, theater managers, teachers, and a whole host of others. Also, within labor history in general, there are plentiful sources on activities in industrial settings and on organized labor, but relatively little on music. With a few exceptions, we are also largely missing the stories of labor performed in

11. Marianna Ritchey, *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Will Robin, *Industry: Bang on a Can and New Music in the Marketplace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

12. Timothy D. Taylor, *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016) and *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life* (New York: Norton, 2001).

13. Andrea Moore, "Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10, no. 1 (2016): 33–53; Judith Lochhead, ed./convenor, "Boundaries of the New: American Classical Music at the Turn of the Millennium," *Twentieth-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (2019): 373–455.

the home and of minoritized populations. Research in these areas would greatly enrich the scholarship on labor, both within music and without.

Given the breadth of labor-related subjects and questions throughout the history of music making, we have many ways to include these ideas in our course plans. In what follows, I explore four major labor-related issues that are particularly vulnerable to exclusion or misinterpretation, and which therefore inform my own practice: recognition of labor, the musical marketplace, ownership of musical work, and exploitation of musicians. Following a brief exploration of each of these labor-related issues, I discuss some pedagogical applications. As with most (or perhaps all) forms of “reframing” a field, there are many ways to incorporate these ideas, from adding small studies to an existing class, to revising a particular unit or assessment, to rebuilding the entire curriculum.

Recognition of Labor

The more we contextualize the creation and performance of music within its broader socio-cultural scope—including how and why participants are rewarded for their work—the better prepared our students will be to enter that world themselves. At the most basic level, I am interested in labor as a cultural practice, informed by various aspects of economic and social theory. For example, while several elements of Karl Marx’s work prove useful for music studies, its primary value is that it emphasizes sociocultural relationships. Addressing the structures of capitalism and the apparent abuses of power engendered therein, sociologist Mathieu Desan writes:

Marx’s point is to demonstrate how even apparently straightforward “economic” phenomena are constitutively social, political, and cultural. So, whereas capital may appear here as money and there as means of production, Marx’s concept of capital allows us to pierce this fetishized form and *to see capital not as a thing, but as a process*; and not just a process, but a process of exploitation; and, finally, not only a process of exploitation, but also a social totality.¹⁴The conception of capital as inherently sociocultural is key for music-historical narratives: the social, political, and cultural are not detached from economic forces, but rather are inextricably entwined. One primary issue in the arts is recognition, by which I mean perception and acknowledgment of a person’s labor, often marked by compensation, identification on concert programs and advertisements, acknowledgment

14. Mathieu Hikaru Desan, “Bourdieu, Marx, and Capital: A Critique of the Extension Model,” *Sociological Theory* 31, no. 4 (December 2013): 322. Emphasis added.

through awards, and other socially-constructed interactions. Recognition (or, more crudely, fame) may lead to greater financial rewards in the form of commissions, additional performance opportunities, and so on, and it also begets symbolic cultural prosperity. Because recognition is decidedly social, political, and cultural, it is subject to the potential inequities that shape all such relationships.

The Market[place]

Standard markets indicate a totality within which resources are allocated. Perhaps most simply, a “market” refers to a system of exchange: typically money for goods or services, although there are myriad other configurations. In a balanced market, workers are paid exactly what their time is worth and those who control the means of production ensure an even exchange of goods and compensation. While this conception of the market can inform ideas about creative and artistic labor, I contend that it works only as a metaphor. It would be unwise to insist that there is some finite quantity of artistic resources that must be allocated to participants. For example, if a given musician produces a well-respected iteration of a composition and is recognized for that performance, a second musician does not (necessarily) lose recognition in order to rebalance the market. Instead, we might think about the artistic market in the sense of an analogy: a pool of water that can be topped off when it rains or a vending machine that gets refilled regularly. In other words, rather than a standard economic market, the musical “marketplace” includes funds for commissions, ticket fees, and other concrete financial components, but also the accumulation of recognition, prestige, and power.

In many ways, what I am talking about is “cultural capital,” a concept theorized by Pierre Bourdieu and adopted by numerous scholars since, including musicologists. As Bourdieu defines it, capital is “the set of actually usable resources and powers,” as well as “accumulated labor . . . which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor.”¹⁵ Essentially, this is a conception of capital as a source of power, which reflects the imbalance central to Marx’s political economy, and reaffirms the notion that economic relations are always already political (and social, and cultural)

15. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [1979], trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 114; Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.G. Richardson, trans. R. Nice (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241.

relations. Likewise, Bourdieu's ideas can explain social relations among artists. By conceiving of capital in this broader way, we focus on questions of power and hierarchy, which will be especially important when theorizing the relationships between musicians, such as patron and beneficiary, composer and librettist, or teacher and student. Bourdieu's cultural capital is not just recognition of one's talents or social standing, it is also a component in the system of social resources—the socio-cultural economy—which inherently suggests the problem of hierarchy. Musicians have been and are subject to these power relations, and students deserve to develop an understanding of who has profited from (or in spite of) those circumstances and who has struggled because of them. It is also important to be frank with students about how power relations have shaped the music-historical narrative. We scholars are just as subject to the “cultural marketplace” as any other participant, and students can learn about the marketplace of musical knowledge by, for example, comparing the contents of older editions of textbooks, considering how particular repertoires have been taught in the past, and engaging with other historiographical work.

Ownership

As historians, we are well aware that notions of capital and labor necessarily shift over time. Marx's primary frame of reference was industrial production; now, in the information age, we are faced with knowledge as a form of—or, more radically, a replacement for—capital. Media theorist McKenzie Wark discusses this change, arguing that the group controlling information (what she calls the “vectoralist class”) is now the “dominant exploiting class,” whose “power lies in monopolising intellectual property—patents, copyrights and trademarks—and the means of reproducing their value—the vectors of communication.”¹⁶ In other words, the most powerful class is now tied to knowledge production and distribution. This is evident in companies like Google/Alphabet, Facebook (now Meta), Amazon, and other digital media powerhouses. According to this line of thinking, the concept of ownership itself has changed markedly in the past few decades; rather than being concentrated among property owners or other proprietors of business, wealth and influence are now wielded by those who control the flow of information.

We might, then, think of *musical knowledge* as a type of capital, in terms of both cultural capital and monetary value. Successful musicians become the bearers of knowledge. They are the experts, the ones who have trained and

16. McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12.

mastered the craft. This also, of course, applies to music history instructors, textbook authors, and publishers. Music faculty—studio teachers, ensemble directors, and academic instructors—shape the flow of information. Given this, instructors ought to carefully consider questions such as the following while designing and preparing courses:

- Why have I selected this piece or case study? Which concepts does it demonstrate, or what questions does it inspire?
- What factors contributed to the success (and therefore preservation) of this selection or the style it represents? What people or institutions provided financial support for it?
- Which musicians are discussed and why? Are a variety of careers, socio-economic backgrounds, classes, ethnicities, genders, and other identities represented?
- Who has historically controlled the flow of information about this musical practice, and how?

For example, my undergraduate survey includes information about composers' connections, patronage, and circumstances of training. To reinforce the contingent nature of those who have been deemed "successful," in-class discussion or quiz questions might ask students to identify the privileges that shaped their experiences. Musical ownership is shaped not only by economic forces but also by intersectional factors such as race, class, and gender, so I ask students to compare and contrast the figures historically included in anthologies and those who have gained recognition more slowly—typically women and racial/ethnic minorities. Theoretical questions like those of Wark, Bourdieu, and Marx, therefore, remind us to be on guard for issues of power and ownership, and the list of considerations above can help us frame music-historical work in relationship to those hierarchies.

Exploitation

Musicians have long felt the tension between performing "for the love of it" and earning a living wage. Because of the long history of artistic activities as hobbies for the monied classes, lines can be easily blurred between work and play, resulting in (sometimes unintended) exploitation. Among the developments of twentieth-century labor scholars, one of the most useful is a shift in

the meaning of “exploitation.” So-called neo-Ricardians, in particular, offer a critique of the labor theory of value (LTV), in which “exploitation is no longer seen as the extraction of surplus value in the production process. Instead, exploitation can be seen as the outcome of unequal exchanges between workers and capitalists in the market.”¹⁷ In other words, exploitation is no longer tied to industrial practices (e.g., factory work), but rather can elucidate any working relationships between those controlling the work and those actually doing the work. The way we use the word “exploitation” in common parlance today usefully expands it yet further by considering non-financial unequal exchange as well.

This expanded sense of exploitation as any unequal exchange of [cultural] capital aligns with exploitation of online users as generators of content. Internet users have increasingly created and posted content in countless forms: blogs, reviews, social media posts, and online scrapbooks, and have done so to such an extent that they are actually doing the work of programmers, writers, and other creative professionals. Looking back to 1999, chat room moderators called Community Leaders (CLs) made waves when they asked the U.S. Department of Labor to investigate whether they should have been paid by America Online (AOL), for whom they invested hours hosting chat sessions in exchange for free or discounted memberships to the site.¹⁸ This was perhaps one of the earliest instances of what would become a new economy of influence, creation, and other digitally-connected creative work, which has since proven to be a hotbed of exploitative practices. When that investigation was dropped, a large group of CLs brought a class action lawsuit against the company.¹⁹ More recently, other

17. Michael Rowlinson and John Hassard, “Marxist Political Economy, Revolutionary Politics, and Labor Process Theory,” *International Studies of Management & Organization* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2000–01): 89.

18. Lisa Margonelli, “Inside AOL’s ‘Cyber-Sweatshop,’” *Wired* (1 October 1999).

19. According to AOL’s own *Annual Report*, “The parties to all of the Community Leader-related lawsuits have agreed to settle the lawsuits on terms that did not result in a material incremental expense or material payment by the Company in 2009. The court granted preliminary approval of the settlement on February 2, 2010. The Company does not expect to make any additional payments related to this matter.” America Online, *Annual Report* (2009), 96, <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1468516/000119312510176095/d10q.htm>. Another report lists the settlement at \$15 million. Mark W. Batten, Elise M. Bloom, and Fredric C. Leffler, “Misclassifying Workers as Independent Contractors: The Price of Independence,” Proskauer Rose LLP, 26, www.proskauer.com/files/uploads/Images/Misclassification-of-Workers-as-Independent-Contractors.pdf. Issues around contract work have become increasingly prevalent with the expansion of the gig economy, a paradigm well-known to many performing musicians.

“volunteer” contributors like bloggers and reviewers started to band together to seek compensation for their efforts.²⁰

For musicians, the question of work is perhaps more problematic today than it ever has been previously. As musicologist Timothy Taylor has argued, the guise of neoliberal capitalism distorts, masks, and otherwise complicates perceptions of labor for creative individuals.²¹ Journalists and scholars have identified myriad issues affecting creative workers. Musicians who operate primarily online, for example, are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Students in my 2014–15 “Music and Technology” courses at Northwestern were shocked to learn about the abysmal payouts to artists by then-emergent streaming music platforms such as Spotify and Pandora.²² By 2020, streaming services accounted for the vast majority of revenue for the recorded-music industry, despite artists famously earning fractions of a cent for “plays” of their work on most commercial platforms.²³ This streaming industry primarily benefits large producers—rights holders keep about 70 percent of the revenue per stream—rather than professional songwriters and performers. As analyst Mark Mulligan notes, “Streaming works for record labels. It works for publishers. It works if you’ve got thousands or millions of songs—it all adds up. But if you’ve only got 20 or 30 or 100 songs then it doesn’t. You need scale of catalog to benefit.”²⁴ In response, some platforms are experimenting with new models of royalty dis-

20. Brendan James, “Unpaid Huffington Post Bloggers Actually Do Want to Get Paid,” *International Business Times*, February 18, 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.com/unpaid-huffington-post-bloggers-actually-do-want-get-paid-2313744>; Laura Northrup, “Yelp Reviewers File Class Action Lawsuit, Want to Get Paid,” *Consumerist*, August 12, 2014, <https://consumerist.com/2014/08/12/yelp-reviewers-file-class-action-lawsuit-want-to-get-paid/>.

21. Taylor, *Music and Capitalism*.

22. At the time, musician Damon Krukowski had recently made waves with a story on his band’s “meager royalties,” noting that “These aren’t record companies—they don’t make records, or anything else; apparently not even income. They exist to attract speculative capital. And for those who have a claim to ownership of that capital, they are earning millions.” “Making Cents,” *Pitchfork*, November 14, 2012, <https://pitchfork.com/features/article/8993-the-cloud/>.

23. Streaming made up 83 percent of the \$12.2 billion in revenue for 2020. Joshua P. Friedlander, “Year-end 2020 RIAA Revenue Statistics,” Recording Industry Association of America, <https://www.riaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-Year-End-Music-Industry-Revenue-Report.pdf>. Payouts per stream range from \$0.00074 on YouTube to \$0.019 at Napster, and this seems to be the total amount (to be divided by label, producer, songwriter, and performers), so the musicians earn just a portion of that figure. At the average rates, even artists with hundreds of thousands of streams per month are earning substantially below the U.S. minimum wage. Daniel Sanchez, “How Much Artists Make Per Stream on Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon, YouTube, Pandora, More,” *Digital Music News*, <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2018/12/25/streaming-music-services-pay-2019/>.

24. Randall Roberts, “Does Spotify Pay Artists a Fair Rate? Here’s what Musicians, Managers and Apple Music Have to Say,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2021-04-19/spotify-artists-royalty-rate-apple-music>.

tribution; however, change happens slowly, and the digital download format seems, at least for now, to offer more artist-friendly terms.²⁵

Likewise, content creators invest enormous amounts of time and effort in creating music (and other material) for so-called social media and other web-based tools, without any guarantee of financial success. Students are likely familiar with contemporary artists who are active on YouTube and TikTok (and whatever the next big platform might be), and may even have their own channels. With that in mind, it seems particularly important to discuss the conditions of employment (or non-employment) for “influencers” and other creators, whose work may be subject to the shifting whims of platforms’ investors and the algorithms on which they rely.²⁶ I have written elsewhere about the complex relationship between music, user-generated content, and the DIY ethos;²⁷ here I will simply note, echoing Christopher Leslie, that “traditional forms of exploitation” continue to exist in new media.²⁸ The creative labor of users powers a massive network of digital material, much of it uncompensated, under-valued, or unpredictably rewarded.

Even in institutions that benefit from the protections of labor unions, such as professional orchestras, musicians are in jeopardy of financial exploitation. Andrea Moore, for example, notes that “union orchestras in the United States have not been immune to widespread efforts to reduce the economic and political power of trade unions, whose economic protections of their members have been denigrated as standing in the way of economic progress, or as detrimental to workers’ ‘freedom.’”²⁹ Likewise, boards of directors for orchestras have cited waning income from investments and declining ticket sales as factors requiring them to reduce the pay and other benefits for their musicians, with even major groups like the New York Philharmonic running deficits “every season since

25. See David Hesmondhalgh, Ellis Jones, and Andreas Rauh, “SoundCloud and Bandcamp as Alternative Music Platforms,” *Social Media + Society* (October–December 2019): 1–13.

26. See for example, Julia Alexander’s discussion of the competing interests of YouTubers and advertisers, which seems to have resulted in popular channels being “demonetized.” “The Golden Age of YouTube is Over,” *The Verge*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/5/18287318/youtube-logan-paul-pewdiepie-demonetization-adpocalypse-premium-influencers-creators>.

27. Carithers, “Musical Indeterminacy as Critical and Affirmative Play,” *ASAP/Journal* (forthcoming).

28. Christopher Leslie, “Review: Trebor Scholz (ed.), *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*,” *Media, Culture, & Society* 36, no. 4 (2014): 552.

29. Andrea Moore, “Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10, no. 1 (February 2016): 36. See also Robert J. Flanagan, *The Perilous Life of Symphony Orchestras: Artistic Triumphs and Economic Challenges* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

2001–02.”³⁰ Union musicians and those who represent them have railed against such cuts. While some top orchestra members argue that high salaries are necessary to attract and retain the best performers, smaller groups are fighting even for subsistence-level compensation, and a number of organizations openly flout union oversight, landing them on the “unfair list.”³¹ American Federation of Musicians (AFM) attorney Kevin Case claims that the situation is “a full-fledged assault on protections for musicians that took decades to achieve.” He continues,

Perhaps most disturbing, however, is the response from some orchestra managers and board chairs to the argument that players, faced with these draconian measures, will pack up and leave. The message is simple and blunt: we don’t care. Go ahead and leave. After all, you’re totally replaceable; we’ll just hire one of those fantastic kids coming out the conservatories. . . . [A]nother board chairman told one departing principal that he wouldn’t care unless nine or ten players left—and then, only because it might be “bad PR.”³²

In the issues cited here, we feel the urgency of including labor in our engagements with music: without doing so, we risk further detachment from the economic conditions of musical experience, and worse yet, we enable exploitation of musical practitioners.

30. Michael Cooper, “It’s Official: Many Orchestras Are Now Charities,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/arts/music/its-official-many-orchestras-are-now-charities.html>. In Pittsburgh, which saw a two-month strike in 2016, “the symphony’s Board of Trustees Chair Devin McGranahan said in a statement Sept. 30, when the strike began, that a wage reduction was necessary to deal with a financial crisis that could force the symphony to close in mid-2017 when it would be at risk of running out of cash. Symphony officials have said they are facing a \$20.4 million deficit over the next five years.” Mark Kanny, “Pittsburgh Symphony Strike Eats into Revenue,” *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, October 23, 2016, <https://archive.triblive.com/aande/music/pittsburgh-symphony-strike-eats-into-revenue/>.

31. See <https://www.afm.org/for-members/international-unfair-list/>. Also, for example, the Hartford Symphony leadership faced a complaint from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in 2015 over a proposed cut in “guaranteed performances and rehearsals... by about 40 percent for core musicians of the orchestra, dropping their yearly salary from a little over \$23,000 to below \$15,000. Musicians would also have to be available for daytime rehearsals and performances, which would be a hardship for many musicians who have day jobs.” Ray Hardman, “Federal Complaint Says Hartford Symphony Orchestra Failed to Negotiate with Union,” WNPR Connecticut, September 10, 2015, <http://wnpr.org/post/federal-complaint-says-hartford-symphony-orchestra-failed-to-negotiate-union#stream/0>.

32. Case is a violinist, attorney, founder of Case Arts Law, and now General Counsel for the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians. Kevin Case, “The Commoditization of Symphony Orchestra Musicians,” September 17, 2012, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+commoditization+of+symphony+orchestra+Musicians.-a0331169916>.

Applying Labor to Teaching

With this cursory exploration of a few key labor issues in mind, I turn now to how these ideas might be put to use within music history courses. For reference, I teach in a School of Music within a metropolitan public research university; this is my third year in this position. Teaching assignments vary from term to term, but our program includes a required three-semester undergraduate history survey, of which I have been teaching the second and third terms (“covering” ca. 1700–1860 and ca. 1860–present), along with general education courses for non-music majors, a graduate research methods course, and graduate seminars on a variety of topics. The School of Music also, perhaps atypically, requires the courses “Music in World Cultures” and “African-American Music” for those pursuing bachelor’s degrees. The history survey classes generally enroll approximately 25–30 students per section, with the seminars and non-major courses running smaller and larger than that, respectively.

One of the easiest ways to engage with recognition of labor is to be intentional about the recordings used in class, and to make an effort to acknowledge the performers bringing the music to life. I imagine I’m not alone in relying increasingly on audio-video recordings of pieces that we discuss, which can also provide useful entry points for considerations of labor. I would argue that it is difficult to recognize what we can’t see. If we only show videos of orchestras made up of middle-aged white men, for example, students may internalize that as “normal” or acceptable. Instead, we might compare videos of, say, the Vienna Philharmonic with more gender-integrated orchestras, or a regional symphony made up of part-time players with a full-time, well-funded ensemble. This can lead to conversations about who has historically been excluded from specific forms of labor, and how (or whether) circumstances have changed over time.³³ Discussions of recognition can also focus on phenomena like fandom: why do particular musicians invite this degree of recognition? What do “fans” do for artists (and vice versa)? This opens up possibilities for new assignments that explore online fan cultures, remixes, zines, and merchandise.³⁴ These conversations can encourage students to reflect on their own goals and priorities as consumers and as musicians emerging in the marketplace.

33. Kira Thurman and Kristen M. Turner address the issue of selecting recordings in their invaluable essay, “Six Easy Ways to Immediately Address Racial and Gender Diversity in Your Music History Classroom,” *Musicology Now* (blog), July 17, 2017), <https://musicologynow.org/>.

34. One example of recent scholarship on this is Dana Plank, “Mario Paint Composer and Musical (Re)Play on YouTube,” in *Music Video Games: Performance, Politics, and Play*, ed. Michael Austin (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 43–82.

Just as historical musicians have participated in both the metaphorical artistic market and the labor market as a whole, students are doing the same. An important task for classes like the undergraduate survey—and an approach that represents a fairly significant departure from the traditional “great works” mode—is to engage in substantial discussions about musicians other than composers.³⁵ Not only is this a valuable way to include more women, people of color, and other underrepresented groups in our histories, but it also reinforces the understanding that “composer” is merely one possible path for a vocation in music. One might discuss various instrument makers and their production facilities, or patrons, or music administrators. To cite a specific assignment: in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century portion of our survey sequence, I have asked students to write a journal entry on what kind of musician they might have been at particular points in history. Many have created truly insightful reaction essays, including reflections on how their race or gender might have shaped the opportunities available to them at that time, and whether or not they would have pursued similar careers as their actual paths in the present.

I have found that the way I present musicians’ biographical information has also become more thorough and, ideally, more relevant to my students’ experiences as musicians as they find their own paths through the music industry. Where possible, we consider the following: how composers and other musicians made a living (e.g., how many students did they teach, and how much did they earn from publishing their music?); what the terms of publication were (e.g., was it a fair contract? Was there even a contract?); and to what extent particular composers have controlled their careers and to what extent have they served patrons. I also find it instructive to address issues around performer compensation and recognition. Why don’t we read about many performers in music history textbooks, apart from a select few, nor individuals in other related industries, such as instrument makers, publicists, or costumers? These ideas have the potential to lead into discussions of class, race, gender, and all manner of intersectional identities, as we consider who has historically had access to what, who has controlled the means of production and distribution (of both goods and knowledge), and how they managed their relationships with various inclusive and exclusive practices.

35. One provocative alternative is Daniel Barolsky’s call to organize courses around performers rather than composers. See the roundtable with Sara Gross Ceballos, Rebecca Plack, and Steven M. Whiting, “Performance as a Master Narrative in Music History,” this *Journal* 3, no. 1 (2012): 77–102. While I might question whether we need a “master narrative” at all, the participants raise valuable points about representation, musical literacy, and other significant issues, and the ways emphasizing performance can address those concerns.

Likewise, my own classes for both music majors and non-majors often incorporate a discussion of early opera. We talk about its stylistic predecessors, musicians who created the earliest works now labeled “operas,” and the plots and characters represented. To adapt this lesson to the framing proposed here, I have also begun discussing what changed when opera became a business. For example, moving from the space of the court to the public opera house required the professionalization of actor-singers, terms of employment for set-builders and others performing manual labor, financial elements such as revenues and expenses, and advertisements—in short, many of the same components shaping performing-arts industries today. These ideas are valuable ways to further contextualize our understanding of musical practices and the people who engage in them, and can also help our students become familiar with the forces shaping their own careers and the ways these issues have developed over time.

Along with course content, assessments and other assignments can engage with music and labor, both historical and current. As students seem to appreciate opportunities to learn from each other, one of my newer assignments is a final project for the survey course, in which students create a web page and short video that could be shared with the class and possibly beyond. The focus of each project varies according to students’ chosen specialties (and, therefore, their likely careers). Music therapy majors, for example, demonstrate ways to incorporate course content into a therapy session; performance majors create a miniature lecture-recital; music educators develop a lesson plan and teaching demonstration; and so on. Students have demonstrated great skill and ingenuity in these projects, such as incorporating class repertoire into a therapy session for trauma patients, or showing how they would teach particular concepts from our history class to their middle-school band students, for example. This tailoring fosters productive discussion among students within and across musical subfields as they learn about contemporary career paths for musicians.

Labor issues are also valuable for larger papers and projects in upper-division courses or graduate seminars. I see no reason to abandon long-established methods, such as biographical writing or stylistic analysis, but aim instead to employ these methods toward new ends: as a means to investigate power relations. Students may incorporate research on careers, financial support, patronage, and other elements throughout various historical eras and locations, and—I would argue—it is in their best interest to include such information in their work. We, as instructors, should be clear about these expectations in our assignment guidelines and grading rubrics, and perhaps include a statement like the following: “successful papers will account for the material history of the subject, including engaging with the relevant economic and logistical conditions.” Focusing on labor enables us to repurpose old tools in new ways,

thereby strengthening musicology's long-standing engagement with sociocultural issues.

Conclusion: Adoption and Expansion

In the April 2020 issue of this *Journal*, Walker considers the important question of the relationship between “decanonization” and “decolonization.” While this terminology is understandably under scrutiny from Indigenous scholars and activists, I believe Walker makes an important point: attempting “decolonization” necessarily means considering economic issues, such as exploitation and other imbalanced power structures wrought for material gain. She notes that at “the very least, we need to reflect on the role that European colonial power structures and extracted wealth have played in the creation of universities and academic scholarship.”³⁶ How can we critique (and tear down) Euro-American exceptionalism? I submit that an excellent starting point is to be sure we musicologists ask the same kinds of questions about all of the music that we teach: Who made it? What circumstances enabled or encouraged its creation? How was it supported? Who did the work, and how? These questions can usefully inform approaches to both writing music history and teaching it, and I am frequently surprised by how well courses can incorporate issues such as the power structures of recognition, market forces, ownership, and exploitation. For many music-historical questions, all four areas can provide fresh insight into the course materials.

The major accrediting body, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), provides guidelines that can be useful for those interested in integrating labor issues into the curriculum.³⁷ These parameters vary according to degree type and area of emphasis; for example, faculty and administrators might consider some of the standards for programs in which students may double-major in music and business, or otherwise complete a degree in music (Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Music) with an emphasis on the music industry. These include requirements such as:

[a] working knowledge of the multiple ways the music industry and its sectors use principles and techniques of marketing, promotion, management, and merchandising, including the development, manufacturing,

36. Walker, “Towards a Decolonized Music History Classroom,” 2.

37. National Association of Schools of Music, *NASM Handbook 2020–21* (Reston, VA, 2021), <https://nasm.arts-accredit.org/>. While not all programs/departments adhere to NASM guidelines, the organization currently has over 630 members and thus bears influence on curricular decisions at many institutions.

distribution, and retailing of musical products, [and a] functional knowledge of artist and concert management, including but not limited to promotion and production.³⁸ These standards clearly indicate the significance of understanding the various forms of labor involved in any musical undertaking. For programs with an emphasis on music industry training, this seems like a particularly suitable approach. Even for students who are not planning to pursue “industry” careers, though, this knowledge is valuable. NASM’s “Essential Competencies” for music degrees include an “acquaintance with a wide selection of musical literature, the principal eras, genres, and cultural sources including, but not limited to jazz, popular, classical, and world music”—content that could not have existed without the labor of its creators and work of its promoters and others. Likewise, the guidelines for all professional baccalaureate degrees include recommendations for students to be given the following opportunities:

1. Gain a basic understanding of the nature of professional work in their major field. Examples are: organizational structures and working patterns; artistic, intellectual, economic, technological, and political contexts; and development potential.
2. Acquisition of skills necessary to assist in the development and advancement of the careers of students, normally including basic competency development in communication, presentation, business, and leadership, all with particular regard to professional practices in their major field.³⁹

In short, most—if not all—college music students, especially those enrolled in NASM-accredited programs, would benefit from instruction in musical labor. By reframing our music history curriculum in this way, faculty could help students not only draw deeper connections across the history of music, but also understand their own roles more fully within the broad context of music-making as an enterprise.

The question of labor in, and as, music-making is crucial for rethinking the way we produce musicological work, both in writing and through our teaching. Artistic processes, including music-making, lend unique insight into myriad issues such as creative control and access. Given these components in systems

38. *NASM Handbook 2020–21*, Appendix I.E, 194.

39. *NASM Handbook 2020–21*, 102.

of labor and compensation, I suggest that reclaiming the labor of music-making might further legitimize the status of musicians and music educators as workers.

At the same time, I acknowledge that a pedagogical approach that highlights labor issues risks replicating the neoliberal context that I aim to critically examine. If I ask my undergraduate survey students to complete projects related to their major areas of study—and therefore likely career paths—am I conceding too much ground to “the practical”? If graduate students read Marx and Engels instead of (or even alongside) hagiographical writers who championed the music of past generations, are we simply reifying a different canon of ideas? If students are expected to research the material conditions of historical musical production, does this implicitly devalue musical creation vis-à-vis “art for art’s sake”? Possibly. But I would still advocate for this approach, both for the reasons discussed throughout this essay, and because I feel that it is a disservice to students to leave out those parts of the story. Throughout the histories we teach, “successful” artists have typically benefited from favorable circumstances, including those of class, race, gender, and ethnicity, shaping their access to education and other resources. It is not enough to say, for example, that women were typically excluded from composing large-scale works in the nineteenth century; it is also useful to discuss how class-based societal expectations shaped Clara Wieck Schumann’s career versus Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel’s, and acknowledge those who were left out of the process altogether.

Incorporating the story of labor into our music histories is, perhaps, a form of activism: it provides opportunities to further destabilize canonical narratives of “genius” and fosters a more inclusive approach to the discipline of musicology. It also arms students with knowledge about how they, too, fit into systems of production and consumption, and therefore empowers them to make informed choices about their own engagements with music, both in and beyond the classroom. Markets exist for all musicians, including our students. Why not acknowledge that reality? Engaging with labor history reduces the risk of turning a music-historical education into a form of exclusionary cultural capital for the privileged few. Especially in the digitally-connected environment in which musicians largely operate today, I see great value in addressing questions of recognition, the market, ownership, and exploitation. After all, aren’t musicians workers?

Appendix: Music and Labor seminar—course schedule⁴⁰

WEEK 1. Introduction/ overview

WEEK 2. Music-related occupations

Reading: Sara Royster, “Careers for Music Lovers,” *Career Outlook*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2015, <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2015/article/careers-for-music-lovers.htm>.

WEEK 3. Musical labor before 1800

Reading: none/ individual research
Response Paper 1: Musical Labor Autobiography

WEEK 4. Musical labor in the 19th century

Cirio, Norberto Pablo. “Black Skin, White Music: Afroporteño Musicians and Composers in Europe in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century.” *Black Music Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 23–40.

Carli, Philip C. “‘You Will Certainly Have Something that Will Give Great Pleasure, and Be a Marvel in Pittsburgh’: Henry Clay Frick and American Millionaires Living with Mechanical Music, 1872–1919.” *American Music* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 377–399.

WEEK 5. Musical labor in the earlier 20th century

Taylor, Timothy D. “The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of ‘Mechanical Music.’” *Ethnomusicology* 51, no. 2 (2007): 281–305.

40. This course was offered for the first time in fall 2021. I want to thank the seven wonderful graduate students who gamely signed up for this course and who all contributed to thought-provoking discussions throughout the term: Elizabeth, Isaac, Jennifer, John, Rron, Sarah, and Tanner.

Fava, Maria Cristina. "The Composers' Collective of New York, 1932–1936: Bourgeois Modernism for the Proletariat." *American Music* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 301–343.

Chybowski, Julia J. "Selling Musical Taste in Early Twentieth-Century America: Frances E. Clark and the Business of Music Appreciation." *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 38, no. 2 (2017): 104–127.

WEEK 6. Financial systems

DeFazio, Robert. "Private Music Teaching as a Business." *American Music Teacher* 62, no. 4 (February/March 2013): 35–38.

Lazo, Silvia. "Building a Cultivated Labor Identity through Art Decoration: Classical Images in the Catalan Workers' Magazine *Fruïcions* (1927–1932)." *Music in Art* 39, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 2014): 159–166.

Terranova, Tiziana. "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy." *Social Text* 63, vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 33–58.

Response Paper 2: Student Interview

WEEK 7. Work songs & music about work

Volk, Terese M. "Little Red Songbooks: Songs for the Labor Force of America." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 33–48.

Stimeling, Travis D. "Music, Place, and Identity in the Central Appalachian Mountaintop Removal Mining Debate." *American Music* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 1–29.

WEEK 8. Unionization and activism

Kraft, James P. "Artists as Workers: Musicians and Trade Unionism in America, 1880–1917." *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 512–543.

Hodge, Chelsea. "The Coal Operator's Daughter: Zilphia Horton, Folk Music, and Labor Activism." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 291–307.

WEEK 9. Workspaces

Ryan, Jennifer. "Beale Street Blues? Tourism, Musical Labor, and the Fetishization of Poverty in Blues Discourse." *Ethnomusicology* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 473–503.

Donaldson, Rachel. "Placing and Preserving Labor History." *The Public Historian* 39, no. 1 (Feb. 2017): 61–83.

Mall, Andrew. "Worship Capital: On the Political Economy of Evangelical Worship Music." *American Music* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 303–326.

Response Paper 3: Book Review*

WEEK 10. Contemporary issues

Beaster-Jones, Jayson. "Beyond Musical Exceptionalism: Music, Value, and Ethnomusicology." *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2014): 334–340.

Fairchild, Charles. "Crowds, Clouds, and Idols: New Dynamics and Old Agendas in the Music Industry, 1982–2012." *American Music* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 441–476.

Paper proposal/ bibliography

WEEK 11. Gender issues

Locke, Ralph P. "Paradoxes of the Woman Music Patron in America." *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 798–825.

Frader, Laura L. "Labor History after the Gender Turn: Transatlantic Cross Currents and Research Agendas." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 63 (Spring 2003): 21–31.

Howe, Sondra Wieland. "A Historical View of Woman in Music Education Careers." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 162–83.

Sullivan, Jill M. "Women Music Teachers as Military Band Directors during World War II." *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 39, no. 1 (October 2017): 78–105.

WEEK 12. Interpretation/ Subversive labor

Adlington, Robert. "Organizing Labor: Composers, Performers, and 'The Renewal of Musical Practice' in the Netherlands, 1969–72." *The Musical Quarterly* 90, nos. 3/4 (2007): 539–577.

Piekut, Benjamin. "When Orchestras Attack," in *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California, 2011), pp. 20–64 (excerpts).

Carithers, Kirsten Speyer. "Stockhausen as CEO: The Executive Model of Interpretive Labour." *Contemporary Music Review* (forthcoming, 2022); "Hacking the Avant-Garde" presentation.

Response Paper 4: Professional Interview

WEEK 13. Entrepreneurship

Beckman, Gary. "The Entrepreneurship Curriculum for Music Students." *College Music Symposium* 45 (2005): 13–24.

Moore, Andrea. "Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10, no. 1 (2016): 33–53.

Pippen, John R. "The Boundaries of 'Boundarylessness': Revelry, Struggle, and Labour in Three American New Music Ensembles." *Twentieth-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (2019): 424–444.

Ritchey, Marianna. "Conducting Business." *Twentieth-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (2019): 394–412.

WEEK 14. No class – Thanksgiving

WEEK 15. Student presentations/ wrap up discussion

In-class presentation

WEEK 16. Exam week

Final paper

* **Additional sources:** options for book review assignment and resources for term papers

Anderson, Tim J. *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy: Problems and Practices for an Emerging Service Industry*. New York and London: Routledge, 2014.

Ehrlich, Cyril. *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Frith, Simon and Lee Marshall, ed. *Music and Copyright*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2004.

Hesmondhalgh, David and Sarah Baker. *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*. New York and London: Routledge, 2011.

Hracs, Brian J., Michael Seman, and Tarek E Virani, eds. *The Production and Consumption of Music in the Digital Age*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.

Korczynski, Marek, Michael Pickering and Emma Robertson. *Rhythms of Labour: Music at Work in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Korczynski, Marek. *Songs of the Factory: Pop Music, Culture, and Resistance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Malone, Bill C. *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2002.

Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt, ed. *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002.

Redmond, Shana. *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*. New York: NYU Press, 2013.

Ritchey, Marianna. *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Robin, William. *Industry: Bang on a Can and New Music in the Marketplace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Roscigno, Vincent J., and William F. Danahe. *The Voice of Southern Labor: Radio, Music, and Textile Strikes, 1929–1934*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Stahl, Matt. *Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

Talbot, Michael, ed. *The Business of Music*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002.

- Taylor, Timothy D. *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Taylor, Timothy D. *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music and the Conquest of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Towse, Ruth. *Singers in the Marketplace: The Economics of the Singing Profession*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Wallis, Roger, and Krister Malm. *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries*. London: Constable, 1984.
- Weber, William E, ed. *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700–1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.