Evers-Hillstrom, Lena: The Instrumental Music Community

Research Proposal -

I have played the clarinet since I was in fifth grade, and continue to play as an adult. At this point, playing is a part of who I am and is most definitely a community I am apart of, whether I'm playing casually with friends at home, or as part of a group at Geneseo. For my project I am interested in how the construction of gender and what Judith Bennett termed gender performativity may impact instrumental music in ways that the casual observer might never see, beginning with the instruments students pick and the way instruments themselves can have different gender connotations. In "To Tanzanian music, Imani Sanga (2017:355) writes about "the ways through which music participates in regulating individuals’ gendered behavior and in disciplining those who disrupt or do not conform to societal gender norms" (Sanga 355). I think that this could easily apply to instrumental music in my own community, and I think that oftentimes gender filters into the way people perform in a literal sense, without the audience even knowing.

Due to my focus on instrumental music, observation and sound are especially important to my project. As Heider points out on his chapter on the attributes of ethnographic film, narration and other additions can lead to a film in which more is told than shown. While terminology and thus telling are very important to the understanding of musical performance, I plan to incorporate this aspect of the musical community in through interviews, and create a cohesive whole through interviews and performance. I like the theoretical perspective you have adopted here. Keep developing it.

References Cited please list in American Antiquity style.

Butler, Judith.


Heider, Karl G.

2006 Ethnographic Film. University of Texas Press.

Sanga, Imani.


Proposal is about 250 words: yes no

Proposal outlines the goals of the project: strong good adequate needs work

Proposal outlines the methods of the project: strong good adequate needs work

Reference to course readings: strong good adequate needs work

Reference to scholarly/peer-reviewed anthropological works: strong good adequate needs work

Video - Instrumental Music and Gender

Background

In my discussion of women and instrumental music, I chose to focus on the ways that people unknowingly affirmed gender norms. In order to see gender norms as something all add hyphen encompassing, I chose to expand my focus into a more broad discussion of musical experience, beginning with childhood and progressing into adulthood. Here I found Judith Bennet’s Butler’s (a bit frustrating given that I pointed this out in class) Gender Trouble to be useful because of the view it espouses that gender performativity is something that isn’t removed into isolated in certain parts of our lives, but is something that seeps into various phases of life where we might not expect it. I was also influenced by the film Finding Oscar in this respect, because of how it represented both a journey through time and people’s emotional responses in relation to their communities through its interviews.

I was also influenced by Guardians of the Flutes because of the way that it let sound speak as a point — for instance, the minimal amount of narration surrounding the drums and the initiation ceremony itself. I agree with Heider (1976) in his chapter “Attributes of Ethnography” that point of view is impossible to avoid in ethnographic film and that it is also impossible to avoid in sound/narration as well. As a result, instead of beginning with the sound of a Clarinet Choir performance, I put it in the middle of the film to allow it to complement the larger points of the film. I did not attempt to be objective because I think this goal is impossible given my closeness to the subject matter, especially in a world where the meaning of “objectivity” itself has become more subjective. Instead, I tried to convey to the viewer through my process and end product that I clearly have a relationship with this issue, as it is a community I am a part of. While it is possible to be “reflective without being reflexive,” as Ruby (2000:154) notes (Ruby 2000:154), I tried to also explore my personal relationship with the making of this film as well, and include an element of reflexivity.

However, if I had to characterize a mode of representation, I would say that my film is more expository in that it “generally serves to establish and maintain rhetorical continuity more than spatial or temporal continuity” (Nichols 1991:35), where the interviews are “subordinated by an argument offered by the film itself” (Nichols 1991:37). This was in part due to my personal relationship with the subject matter, but also due to constraints on the anonymity of my subjects that resulted in an inability to show video footage of my interviews. Because I couldn’t show people and couldn’t use people’s voices for all of the quotes, I chose to use voice over to maintain both continuity and anonymity.

With my scholarly research, I first found articles that were different in origin, but provided useful perspectives from which to approach gender and music. For instance, in her study of Slovenian folk music Mojca Kovacic (2015) notes how male domination over certain areas of folk music became institutionalized in society. An article about the T’boli in Southeast Asia discusses the association between the sounds of instruments themselves and gender (Mora 2008). And among the Potosi in Bolivia, the discouragement of women playing instruments like the pan flute was intimately linked with gender roles in society (Stobart 2008). From each of these ethnomusicalogical perspectives I found important elements that each researcher studied — the importance of looking at how institutions and communities can reinforce gender performativity, and the importance of the specific instruments and different sounds/genres themselves to gender roles. good
In my video I tried to look at these elements of music and gender studied by ethnomusicologists and study them in relation to American society. Specifically, that the American understanding of choice as a distinct narrative that is intimately tangled with gender and music. I think that Americans have a very distinct understanding of personal freedom and the American Dream, and we all think of ourselves as giving other people the option to pursue their life choices and specifically musical choices that they want to. But in practice, I found that societal and institutional discouragement among my interviewees not only reinforced gender norms, but showed that this narrative of choice was a lot less straightforward than a lot of people think it to be. Musical experience can be more of a zig zag than a straight line, from the ways in which institutions view female performance as lesser (Howard 2012), to the ways that communities and leaders reinforce gender norms through instruments and genre, thus discouraging women from venturing into areas like jazz (McKeage 2004).

Overall, there were various scholarly sources that influenced how I framed my film and the wording and quotes that I ended up using. Gender theory and the work of ethnomusicologists ended up influencing what aspects of music and culture I chose to study, and my relationship with the community that I chose to studied ended up influencing my filming methods as well.

Nice companion to the video

References Cited

Butler, Judith


Heider, Karl G.

1976 The Attributes of Ethnographic Film. In Ethnographic Film, pp. 46-117. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Howard, Sandra A.


Johansson, Mats


Kovai, Mojca


McKeage, Kathleen M.


Mora, Manolete


Nichols, Bill


Ruby, Jay


Schmutz, Vaughn, and Alison Faupel

Written Reflection

In hindsight, I should have tried to incorporate a more observational element in conjunction with my video. In my proposal, I had planned to include observations of people playing, and focus on how the different ways that people played could be unintentionally influenced by gender. I was unable to accomplish this due to the discomfort of my subjects in being filmed, but I still could have included written observations. For instance, in his discussion of the film Polka, Loizos (1997:92) describes how the film played different music to different people to see how they described/understood different music — this was an alternative tactic to understanding gender in music that I could have utilized to both convey my original proposal and to add to the argument of the film.

I also think that my shift in subject matter to music more generally was successful in conveying something equally important, which is that music can be a journey full of different layers, as Loizos (1997:85) says on his chapter on narration. I think this is something that the film accomplished that is less present in the wiki. At the same time, I wonder if some of the quotes from journal articles in the film could have been omitted and simply put in the wiki. While these quotes do add to the impact of the point I was trying to make, I also packed a lot of information into the film when it could have been more based around participant quotes. In her discussion of narration, Sherman (1998:218) makes the point that in many ethnographic films the participants almost became the narrators, leaving additional information to be put in a study guide for reference.

Ultimately, in terms of my objective I think the wiki conveyed my thought process well, but that some of the extra information put in the film could have perhaps been left in the wiki. My project ended up changing a lot from my proposal to the finished film, but I think that the choices I made were useful for my end product.

References Cited

Loizos, Peter.


Sherman, Sharon R.