



INTRODUCTION: “THE DIGITAL AGE OF MUSIC”

BY ROD C. TAYLOR

Few forms of art have enjoyed such widespread appeal as music, and even fewer can boast the longevity and continued vitality over the last hundred years. For example, while scholars and teachers in the western world continue to write about and teach canonical plays, poems, and paintings of the last millennium, the popularity of these modes of expression has waned over the last century in popular culture and among students. Not so with music: its popularity continues to increase, both in terms of consumption and participation. More than likely, each of you reading this introduction has with you some mechanism you can use to listen to or create music, but I doubt many of you have a paintbrush or a book of poetry on your person or in your backpack. The reason has little to do with music being a “better” form of expression. Rather, it has more to do with technological advances over the last fifty years—and even more over the last twenty—that ultimately serve music more than art forms like poetry and painting. It also connects to how the last several decades have influenced the way we think about art.

Perhaps only the Industrial Revolution saw a technological shift as drastic as that of our current age, and such innovation inevitably alters the manner in which people not only live and work but also how they think about themselves, their culture, and the art that surrounds them. In “The Conquest of Ubiquity” (1928), Paul Valery argues that any technologically advanced society “must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.” Valery’s statement held true in the early twentieth century and perhaps proves even more relevant in the twenty-first. In the same way mechanical innovations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to an epistemological shift in art in the early twentieth century, so to have the technological advancements of the digital age affected the twenty-first.

The argument here—that a direct correlation exists between technological innovation and artistic expression, consumption, and epistemology—applies easily to recorded music, which, along with photography and film, remains one of western culture’s more recent art forms. In the postmodern age, epistemological shifts resulting from technological advancements in the digital realm have significantly changed the way music is both created and consumed. For some, this shift has led to positive changes in music—providing new opportunities, new genres, and new creative landscape for musicians. Others, however, see these effects as unequivocally negative, ultimately resulting in a devaluation of authentic musicianship and artistic endeavors. Regardless, most debates on the topic of music these days turn on some effect of the digital revolution.

To aid you in your inquiry into music and the digital age, this collection of essays throws you headfirst into discussions regarding the consequences of the ever expanding technology that affects the world of music. The articles and exercises in *(E)Tunes* provide an appropriate lens through which you can first examine current conversations surrounding music and the digital age and then enter into those conversations yourself, informed and inspired. For example, Jim Roberts’s excerpt from *How the Fender Bass Changed the World* shows how technological inventions, as they relate to musical instruments, can spark musical revolutions—some big, some small. His argument regarding the bass guitar (a relatively young instrument by all standards) connects to current debates on the nature of what makes something an instrument, especially as more and more digital “instruments” emerge. Is the computer, the iPhone, or an electronic triggering device an instrument? Some say yes, some say no. Regardless, we continue to witness new genres in music emerge by virtue of these technologies, and dismissing electronic and digital devices as non-instruments has become harder as a result.

Perhaps the most obvious effect of the digital revolution on modern music concerns the manner in which we listen to it—how we purchase, consume, or own songs. While the invention of the Sony Walkman in 1979 may have begun the portable music craze, and the production of CDs proved to be the first successful mass market departure from analog recordings, the Internet and the proliferation of the MP3 from 1998 forward represent the most significant moments for music in the digital age. From record companies to artists to consumers to copyright lawyers, the digitization of music has resulted in the need to rethink the way music is approached in each of these fields. In short, anyone who has anything to do with music has been affected by this shift in medium, whether that affect is realized or not. Those born into the digital world of music might feel like it’s no big deal, but for those who had to ride out the transition, that’s another story. The evidence of the tension brought about by that adjustment can be seen in various forms in culture, and you’ll find several of the essays in this collection that pointedly address that. For example, “Steve Jobs and the iPod ‘Burglary Kit,’” by Greg Kot, provides a great starting point for getting your head around the history and importance of this revolutionary medium,

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as does Eric Harvey's interview with McGill University professor Jonathan Sterne in "Paper Trail: MP3: The Meaning of Format." Additionally, In "Shiny Shiny: A Future History of the CD Revival," Tom Ewing offers a humorous examination of the speed with which music forms are changing.

Just as the MP3 format has changed the ways that fans listen to music, so too has it changed how artists create the music we enjoy—how it is recorded, written, and produced. For example, in "Winners and Losers in Digital Recording," I explore what some highly successful contemporary producers think we have gained and lost in the switch from analog to digital recording, while in "2010: The Year John Cage Broke—Amateur Producers and Unexpected Music," Jesse Walker takes a look at how digital music has brought increased success to amateur artists, a phenomenon that continues to provide new avenues for independent musicians. One such artist is Gregg Gillis, and his contribution to modern music continues to cause tension between artists and record companies. "Mash-Ups & Fair Use: Girl Talk" takes on this controversial artist, who continues to rile record companies with the use of copyright material in his musical creations.

As you might imagine, all of these changes, while revolutionary, continue the symbiotic relationship between record companies and artists. For sure, record companies have taken a beating—both in reputation and sales—since they waged war on Napster in 2000, but music and the music business remain interdependent in that the latter both directs and responds to the digital trends in pop culture and technology. Sometimes the industry responds slowly or even ineffectually, but at other times it initiates the trends. In regards to the sale of music, record companies continue to struggle, as do independent artists, with how to sell their music. That struggle has resulted in various creative and often experimental solutions to the problem. For example, renowned British solo artist and blogger Steve Lawson takes on the notion, put forth by BBC's Ian Youngs in 2010, that rethinking the high price of albums would benefit both artists and record companies. Lawson responds to Youngs's call for a low, flat fee for all music with his blog post, "Music is Worthless," in which he argues that the financial value of music is ultimately connected to fans' gratitude toward the artists and their creations. For this reason, he supports a "pay what you can" model instead.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, artists and fans exists in a ongoing tension with record companies, and from the 1960s forward there have been a few moments when such tension reached a peak and found its way into the public arena. Often these tensions make their way into the public arena through legal battles and academic debate, as with the Napster lawsuit of 2000, but they can also express themselves via the very art form at the heart of the fight. For example, in this collection I have paired two British bands that use their album covers to make political statements, one against the record industry and the other against their own government. The first, XTC's 1978 *Go 2* record cover, contains a straightforward

rant (ironically) against the very consumerism that allows for the existence of the bands' success, while Radiohead's 2003 *Hail to the Thief* offers a critique of post-9/11 politics through common cultural signs. Some artists and critics, however, still take a more direct approach in getting their message across to record companies in the post-Napster era, as demonstrated by Adam Frucci's essay, "Record Labels: Change or Die," also included in this collection.

In the same way the MP3 significantly affected the way music is circulated and consumed, so too has the Internet affected the way in which artists share their music, their image, and their videos. The ubiquitousness of YouTube and Twitter, and the power they have to transform (or end) careers, has resulted in a new generation of artists and consumers who treat each as the first place to begin to create, consume, and disseminate music. For example, "The New Rise of a Summer Hit: Tweet It Maybe," by Ben Sisario, and Anthony Cosner's "Gotye's YouTube Orchestra Remix: The Sweetness of the Open Source Pop Star," each examine the role that the Internet and social media have played in changing the way the consumers learn about new music. And while the glory days of MTV and VH1 have long since passed, thanks to the Internet, videos still play a crucial role in generating commercial success in the music business, a reality addressed by Brian Petchers' "The Branding Power of Today's Music Video."

Of course, any book focused on the digital age of music would be remiss to not offer a sample of essays that seek to examine how pop music has adapted to phenomenon of digital music. Despite recent technological advances, in many ways, pop music today still closely resembles what it did twenty years ago. Consider this: artists like Lady Gaga, Nicki Minaj, Justin Bieber, Ke\$ha, Miley Cyrus, and Katy Perry are hardly revolutionary in their music or image. For some time now, pop music has defined itself by simple song structures, catchy hooks, and romantic themes. Additionally, over-the-top, offensive spectacle has become commonplace among the most successful pop music artists and products. Still, the digital revolution has done much to increase pop music's exposure, influence, and—some argue—its homogeneity. Such is the case put forth in a recent quantitative study by an analyst at the Spanish National Research Council, an argument that J. Bryan Lowder both summarizes and challenges in his article "Does Pop Music Sound Louder, Dumber, and More the Same? One Study Says So." Regardless of where you come down on that question, there's no denying that someone like Lady Gaga has become a massive pop star, and in "Growing Up Gaga," Vanessa Grigoriadis explores what makes this iconic artist tick, revealing how her artistic motivations are connected to older aesthetic philosophies. Continuing this pattern of asking audiences to consider a more serious approach to a genre often written off as merely commercial, Rossen Ventzislavov, in "The Time Is Now: Acceptance and Conquest in Pop Music," makes a case that the time has come for pop music to take its place alongside other, more traditional aesthetic genres.

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The proliferation of digital music over the last two decades has also led to more widespread access to various genres that have hitherto remained largely regional. That in turn, has changed the way we think of music genres. For example, if there has been a distinct area of new ground covered in pop music thanks to digital technology in the last few decades, it's been in country music. Once largely considered a regional genre, the music created in Nashville, Tennessee has greatly expanded its influence on pop culture since the 1990s through artists like Garth Brooks and Shania Twain, but no one epitomizes country music's increased genre hopping in the twenty-first century better than Taylor Swift. Along with Adele, the queen of breakup songs from Music City led album sales in 2012 and doesn't seem to show any signs of slowing down. Such genre bending is widespread and has led to a more complicated identity for the artists (i.e., is Swift country or pop?) and their fan-base (are they country music fans or just Swifties?). Some, like long time country music critic Chet Flippo, feel that country music explosion has made it difficult to locate the center of this genre. In "Nashville Skyline: Searching for the Heart of Country," he ponders the effect of the increased commercialization of a genre that once completely depended on Nashville's local record scene but whose popularity now relies more on large corporations like Wal-Mart and Target, and new digital formats like iTunes, Amazon.com, and Twitter. On that same topic, in "Paisley's Progress," veteran music critic Robert Christgau takes a look at a young male country singer's rise to fame and how his intellectual and artistic journey along the way makes it harder to pigeonhole country music when it comes to politics or background.

In the same way technology has affected the landscape of music creation and consumption, so too has it impacted music science and education. Advancements in neurology have led to a number of noted researchers' taking a vested interest in how our brains work in regards to creativity and musical taste. At the forefront of this field sits Daniel Levitin, a scientist, musician, and educator who seeks to understand how and why we create the music that surrounds us. Included in this work is an excerpt from his international bestselling book *This is Your Brain on Music* (2006)—a work in which he translates and connects recent scientific findings regarding music and taste to a wider public audience. As its title suggest, "My Favorite Things: Why Do We Like the Music We Like" examines why we prefer some songs over others and explores how sound effects our brains (and thus musical taste) from a young age—even from as far back as our mother's womb. While he acknowledges the role our social environment plays in determining what we put in our iPods, he argues for a more complicated—and scientific—explanation. More recently, Gary Marcus, a professor of Psychology and Linguistics, published *Guitar Zero: The New Musicians and the Science of Learning* (2012)—a memoir of his own journey in learning to play a musical instrument, utilizing new techniques learned from studying the brain and language acquisition. In "Learning to Crawl," he challenges the notion that one must possess a "music instinct" to be successful. In fact, he wonders whether such an instinct even exists. Rather, he argues that music and creativity is a learned behavior rather than something hardwired into us at birth.

The field of science, however, is not the only avenue for challenging traditional music education. As music technology changed in the digital age, music education was faced with new realities that traditional curriculum failed to address. Should music education classes embrace electronic and digital instrumentation? Where is the public school curriculum that teaches students how to use their computers as a musical creation platform? Would such a class best be taught in a music class or in a computer science class? Since music education has a long, established existence, the answers to these questions are not easy, but the conversation on how to adapt to digital technology has continued to grow over the last decade, as evinced in a couple of essays included in this book. In “Hip-Hop, Digital Media, and the Changing Face of Music Education,” music education professor Matthew D. Thibeault uses the story of rapper Lil Wayne to argue that hip-hop and digital media offer new ways of creating, performing, and understanding music. As a result, Thibeault writes, music education teachers around the world would be best served by attending to the mechanisms at work in hip-hop. Five-time Grammy Award winning musician Victor Lemonte Wooten also argues for a less traditional approach to music education, but he chooses to make his case through fiction rather than an academic essay. In the first chapter from his novel *The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music* (2006), the protagonist (a struggling musician) meets and begins his tutelage under an eccentric music teacher known only as Michael. Michael’s methods are far from orthodox, and through this story Wooten offers readers a new way to imagine playing and listening to music.

Each of the topics above manifests themselves in ongoing popular debates regarding music and the digital revolution. Consider Foo Fighters’ Dave Grohl’s 2012 rant against digital recording at the Grammys, the ever-evolving debate regarding the legality of mashups, or the ongoing fight to legitimize the computer as an instrument. Each represents a potential topic for your own research and writing. While many of the essays here focus on one particular aspect of music, most connect with multiple areas of inquiry and as such provide numerous starting points for further inquiry based on your personal interests. I hope that *(E)Tunes* allows you to quickly immerse yourself in a topic that interests you so that you can speak and write thoughtfully about this fascinating subject. Notice that this collection offers more than just essays *on* music; through the activities that follow the readings, it offers experiences *with* music. After each essay, you will find exercises that can guide you in your inquiry, including some that ask you to create art in your response and others that are multi-media in their focus. Don’t be afraid to have fun with it, and feel free to invent your own activities along the way, and, in the process, allow your own creativity to emerge.

Finally, in trying to understand the impact of the digital revolution on music, it helps to revisit cultural critic Raymond Williams’s explanation of how various cultural powers exist in relationship to each other. According to Williams, at any given moment in culture, dominant, residual, and emergent forces exist in tension with one another. In other words,

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a dominant force, trend, or paradigm is always present, but those that it originally fought to replace are still present in a residual fashion, and there are always new ones emerging that will ultimately resist and seek to supplant the one that dominates. When applied to music, these categories allow us to see that while the digital music revolution is presently dominating our culture, analog music—and its accompanying artifacts—function mostly as residual. For example, record players continue to spin The Beatles and Motown hits in homes across America. In fact, recent resistance to the normalizing effects of digital recording on music has led to an increased release of LP records and cassette tapes. Whether this trend is an emerging revolution or simply another retro fad connected to residual modes of listening remains to be seen, but its existence highlights that the analog age is still somewhat present in the twenty-first century. Still, the digital age of music currently dominates the manner in which musicians and their audiences approach their art, and even those resisting it are still reacting to its effects and influence. What is truly emerging as a potential rival to the digital age is up for debate, and I encourage readers to consider what might be around the next corner when it comes to music. The next musical revolution might be driven by technology—or it might be driven by resistance to it. One never knows, but this collection of essays should at least help you get started on the inquiry into finding out.



The introduction talks about how habits surrounding the consumption of music have drastically changed in the last twenty years. For many students, that time period encompasses most—if not all—of their lives. Think about the ways in which you buy and listen to music. In what ways do you think they are different from your parents' generation? Do you think current methods of acquiring music (notice I didn't say "purchasing") are superior to the older ways? Why or why not? Some people think we have lost something by music going digital. Do you agree? Can you imagine a time where your way of listening to music is outdated? If so, what do you think might change in our future to make that happen?



Take a moment to try and recall your first experience with music. Jot down everything you can remember about it. Now, compose a paragraph in which you describe the circumstances surrounding the experience (i.e., someone singing to you, hearing a song in a car, listening to a home stereo) and the impact it had on you (i.e., it made you feel happy, sad, energetic). In another paragraph, write down what you can remember about the priority music was given in your household. In other words, was music always being played, or was it seldom heard at home? Reflect on how your early experiences with music might have shaped your current view of music and record those ideas as well.