



WALK TOGETHER CHILDREN, DON'T YOU GET WEARY: BLACK MUSIC JOURNALS AND THE LEGACY OF BLACK INTELLECTUAL ACTIVISM

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This essay explores the historical importance of the Black Music Journal and its role in forwarding the Black Music intelligentsia's agenda of establishing Black music as a field of inquiry during the last three decades of the twentieth century. It considers the cultural and intellectual importance of three major journals—Black Perspective in Music, The Black Music Research Journal, and Black Sacred Music—and their embodiment of the aspects of Black Power ideology that centered on institution-building and cultural nationalism.

We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

—Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"

THE first Black music journals appeared at a point when America's intellectual, cultural, and political terrain was shifting. Advanced by the intersecting racial and gender politics that underscored the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, *The Black Perspective in Music* (BPiM) and *Black Music Research Journal* (BMRJ) exemplified efforts to institutionalize Black music on a national level through the progression of Black music historiography. The cultural work of the community of Black and non-Black music librarians, scholars, performers, composers, and educators that came to form a Black music intelligentsia during the 1970s and 1980s was anchored in two streams of Black Power ideology—cultural nationalism and institution building.

This intelligentsia, which came together first in the months after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., set about creating an intellectual infrastruc-

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ture that would support these efforts.¹ It included Black Music Centers, which appeared on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominately White Institutions during the height of the Black Campus Movement (1968–1972), and Black music conferences, which nurtured and sustained the Black music intellectual community and their grassroots partners, concert series, recording projects, and Black music journals. All were central in birthing the wave of Black music historiography that reframed the study of Black music during the last decades of the twentieth century and that provided, during key moments, a platform for the community of scholars, performers, and educators who engaged in a type of intellectual activism that centered on advancing a national Black music pedagogy.² This essay explores how the emergence of the Black music journal aligned with the wave of cultural nationalism that was advanced by the Black Power and Black Consciousness Movements. It will focus specifically on four journals that emerged during the last three decades of the twentieth century as a means of furthering deeper understanding of the strategy of intellectual activism enacted by the Black music intelligentsia and its grassroots partners. Lastly, it considers the professional and cultural implications of the Black music journal in light of efforts to decolonize music curricula and the resurgence of Black consciousness inspired by the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Birthing the Modern Black Music Historiography

It becomes downright heresy to suggest that the study of Afro-American music should be of concern to musicologists. . . . Nevertheless I propose that research into Afro-American [music] must become the concern of musicologists if the definitive history of American music is ever to be written.
—Eileen Southern, “Needs for Research in Black-American Music”

In 2008, Samuel A. Floyd Jr. delivered the prestigious Robert M. Trotter lecture at the annual conference of the College Music Society, during which he recounted his years working to preserve and to promote Black music culture. As he moved through this personal history, Floyd recounted the seminal moment that shifted the direction of his work:

1. See Dominique-René De Lerma, *Reflections on Afro-American Music* (Kent State University Press, 1973).

2. I presented a version of this discussion on the identity and formation of the Black music intelligentsia and their intellectual infrastructure in the Presidential Plenary Address during the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, November 12, 2021.

In 1976, I met Eileen Southern at that year's AMS meeting in Washington, DC. I had never met her in person, although by then she had published some of my work in her journal and I had spoken with her by telephone. During our conversation, she suggested that I needed to, in her words, "institutionalize your work." That caught me off guard. I had not expected such a comment from her, nor was I interested in doing what she was suggesting. Eventually, however, I found myself working in that direction.³

In 1980 Floyd's shift in direction led to launching the *BMRJ* and three years later the establishment of the Center for Black Music Research (CMBR) at Columbia College in Chicago. Over the next two decades, he systematically worked to situate CMBR and *BMRJ* as important parts of Columbia College's institutional identity. The multitiered programmatic vision that underscored both represented the second wave of activity that focused on establishing Black music studies as part of the institutional curricula of public schools, colleges, and universities. Southern's directive to Floyd to institutionalize is significant as they aligned strongly with fundamental directives about institution building advanced by the Black Consciousness and Black Power Movements during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Institution building was rooted in the notion of creating a self-directed, Black-controlled infrastructure that focused on the promotion of Black culture and history and the protection and empowerment of the Black community. By the 1980s, the notion of community extended beyond the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and geography, centering instead on a shared consciousness and the representation and advancement of ideals rooted in an understanding and appreciation of Africa-derived people and their culture.

Eileen Southern's directive to Floyd about institutionalization reflected not only her embrace of Black Power ideology but also her engagement with a larger ecosystem of scholars and educators who transformed the Black intellectual tradition during the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴ The impact of the work of that ecosystem was significant, resulting in the advancement of new methodologies and modes of inquiry in the writing and documentation of Black history, the integration of Black studies on college campuses, and the progression of Black historiography with the creation of the first Black scholarly journal, *The Black Scholar*. All of these provided a model for the type of intellectual activism Southern and other members of the Black music intelligentsia engaged in during the last decades of the twentieth century.

3. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., "Ruminations on the Center for Black Music Research: The 2008 Trotter Lecture," *College Music Symposium* 49/50 (2009/2010): 12.

4. Robert L. Harris Jr., "Coming of Age: The Transformation of Afro-American Historiography," *Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 109.

Analogous to the women activists whose labor propelled the mid-century civil rights struggle, Eileen Southern engaged in cultural work that involved mobilizing a coalition of intellectual and grassroots entities in an effort to remediate significant omissions in America's music historiography during the 1970s. Guthrie Ramsey, contextualizing the radicalness of Southern, states that her groundbreaking book, *The Music of Black Americans (MoBA)*, published in 1971, "broke new ground in its method and scope, inspiring others (both directly and indirectly) to similar inquiry."⁵ As the first monograph dedicated to chronicling the full history of Black music making in America, *MoBA* is often credited with birthing modern Black music historiography. Two years after the publication of the book, Southern launched *BPM*, the first scholarly journal dedicated to the study and performance of Black music. This singular act not only set the course for the progression of Black music scholarship but also was significant in nurturing the voices of the Black music intelligentsia.

While *BPM* frames the earliest iteration of the Black music journal, it is important to note that it was not the first. The earliest dates back to 1903, when J. Hillary Taylor launched *The Negro Music Journal (NMJ)*, a monthly publication "devoted to the educational interest of the Negro Race in Music."⁶ Despite its title, *NMJ* was not a peer-reviewed scholarly journal but a magazine that featured specific thematic sections. Its contents consisted of musical criticism, technical articles, features, editorials, reviews, reprints, and reports on the musical activities of individuals and organizations.⁷ Although short-lived, *NMJ* provided an archetype for *BPM*. It is important to note, however, that one of the central differences between the two is how respectability politics influenced their coverage of Black music.

NMJ, which was in circulation from September 1902 until November 1903, prioritized educating its readership in a more general way regarding the musical arts than solely focusing on Black music. Black composers and musicians were notably featured but the building and cultivation of a literate, well-educated Black race was the primary goal of the publication.⁸ The narrative promoted through *NMJ* strongly reflected the politics of respectability and the ideology of racial uplift that permeated Black political thought at the turn of the twentieth century. Popular music, especially ragtime and minstrelsy, was largely framed as a deterrent to Black upward mobility. Black composers and concert artists were assailed for their achievements.⁹

5. Guthrie Ramsey Jr., "Cosmopolitan or Provincial? Ideology in Early Black Music Historiography, 1867–1940," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 11.

6. See William E. Terry, "The Negro Music Journal: An Appraisal," *Black Perspective in Music* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 1977): 146.

7. Terry, "The Negro Music Journal," 146.

8. Terry, 147.

9. See Ramsey, "Cosmopolitan or Provincial?"

BPiM challenged this narrative of cultural hierarchy through advocating for new discussions of *all* forms of Black music. Southern outlined this vision in the first issue:

The *Black Perspective in Music* is committed to the publication of news from all over the world about black musicians and their music. . . . It seeks to become a source of current history of Afro-American and African music and to provide information periodically about the past of this music. . . . In summary, how the journal develops will depend upon the active collaboration of all persons, black and white, who are interested in the activities of black musicians.¹⁰

During its eighteen-year run (1973–1990) *BPiM* extensively documented Black music making, featuring the voices of not only the Black music intelligentsia but also adjacent grassroot communities.¹¹ It also modeled a type of intellectual activism that was reflected in subsequent Black music journals. Southern acknowledged the activist undercurrent of the journal in its final issue:

Eighteen years ago there were few journals willing to accept articles about the music of black composers and performers, except infrequently in the areas of jazz and folk music. We promised you in 1973 that the *Black Perspective in Music* would provide a forum for those “engaged in research who have important (or not so important) things to say about black musicians and their music.” . . . The publications of the journal would constitute a legacy of rich and extensively documented knowledge of the music of African Americans in the past, and continuous commentary on their contemporary activities, particularly through the oral history pieces. Our promises have been kept.¹²

The activist stance and intellectual footprint established by *BPiM* was expanded in the eighties and nineties with the emergence of three new journals—*Black Music Research Journal*, *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interartistic Inquiry*, and *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology*.

Black Music Journals as Intellectual Brush Arbors

As Horace Maxile discusses in his essay for this issue, in the post–civil rights era, after 1980, the resistance work of the Black music intelligentsia expanded

10. Eileen Southern, “An Editorial,” *Black Perspective in Music* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 3.

11. For a more detailed discussion of the contents of the *Black Perspective in Music* see Ron Byrnside, “‘The Black Perspective in Music’: The First Ten Years,” *Black Music Research Journal* 6 (1986): 11–21.

12. Eileen Southern, “Editorial,” *Black Perspective in Music* 18, nos. 1/2 (1990): 5.

to include new modes of inquiry that extended beyond the boundaries of US-centric Black music and American musicology. Research on the Black diaspora as well as the integration of theoretical frameworks drawn from the fields of philosophy, Black studies, and gender studies underscored a new wave of Black scholarship. What is often unknown to contemporary scholars is the deeper professional and cultural importance of Black music journals.

They were not conceived of as being alternatives to our major disciplinary journals but were envisioned to be a site of intellectual activism, created explicitly for the remediation of the errors and omissions that framed America's music historiography. Much like the cultural space of the Brush Arbor, the Black music journal operated as the space where tradition, practices, and histories would be preserved and passed down and where an intergenerational intellectual community would be nurtured and its continuance ensured despite the exclusionary politics of academy.

The Brush Arbor, also referred to as the Hush Harbor, served as a site of resistance, perseverance, and transcendence during the period of enslavement in the United States. It was a cultural sanctuary and communal space.¹³ For the sake of discussion, I want to advance this cultural phenomenon as the lens through which to examine the praxis of resistance that underscores the modern Black music intellectual tradition. Brush Arbors were nonsanctioned, clandestine religious gatherings that birthed and nurtured Black resistance and Black liberation ideology. Enslaved Africans met under the cover of night, singing, preaching, and dancing in the spirit. These practices referenced African traditions and represented, among many things, the rejection of the religious indoctrination advanced by Southern slave owners during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was in the Brush Arbor that the enslaved reclaimed their identity as humans and claimed a proximity to and knowledge of God that challenged any notion of barbarism. Every word, rhythm, and gesture offered in the Brush Arbor exemplified the principal of "Nommo" — a belief system defined by the idea that one could change the atmosphere or their experience through the power of their words. It is this power that underscored Black expressive culture as it evolved to align with the Black lived experience.¹⁴

After Emancipation, the context of the Brush Arbor extended beyond the reference to a specific cultural space where resistance and transcendence were practiced. It also embodied a mentality of resistance that continually informed

13. For more information on the Hush (Brush) Harbor, see Albert J. Raboteau, "Slave Autonomy and Religion," *Journal of Religious Thought* 38, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1981–1982).

14. For additional information on Nommo and its importance in the formation of African American rhetorical traditions, see Socrates Ebo, "The Word in African Ontology," *Acta Universitatis Danubius* 12, no. 1 (2018); Cheryl L. Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (University of Illinois Press, 2004); and Ronald L. Jackson II and Elaine B. Richardson, eds. *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations* (Routledge, 2003).

Black identity politics, Black expressive culture, and the Black intellectual tradition. Historians have continually theorized about the cultural genealogy of the Brush Arbor through their study of Black cultural spaces (e.g., the Black Church, juke, nightclub, Chitlin' Circuit, and house party, among others). However, for this discussion, I want to posit the Black music journal as an exemplar of the cultural power of the Brush Arbor and vehicle of intellectual activism.

The history of the publication of Black music scholarship in major disciplinary journals cannot be fully discussed in this setting, but I think it is important to survey key points in order to foster understanding of the importance of Black music journals. As we readily know, disciplinary journals are not all the same, and their publication histories reflect the reception politics that framed the relationship that existed between the Black music scholar and the professional music society. Journals and newsletters in the field of music education were fortuitous in their publication of Black music research during the last three decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. The same cannot be said in regard to the fields of musicology and music theory. The paucity of articles focused on Black music that appeared in these journals is significant. Colloquies such as "Musicology Beyond Borders?," "Studying U.S. Music in the Twenty-First Century," and, more recently, "Shadow Culture Narratives: Race, Gender, and American Music Historiography" address these histories as well as the strategies undertaken to expand the scope of American musicology. In music theory, Dwight Andrews, Philip Ewell, Ellie Hisama, and Horace Maxile have been at the forefront of challenging white supremacy in the discipline.

There are also oral histories and the insular (private) conversations shared among scholars that outline the gatekeeping strategies of journal editors and advisory boards. Some speak of having their work being rejected outright without significant feedback while others recount how they were forced to endure redundant cycles of revision and resubmission in the hope that they would eventually withdraw submitted manuscripts. These actions, among others, precipitated what Samuel Floyd Jr. characterized as "intellectual splintering." The Black music journals of the 1990s factored significantly into this phenomenon.¹⁵ Operating as intellectual Brush Arbors, these journals provided a space for scholarship that contributed to the emergence of subdisciplines that were characterized as "New Musicology." This intellectual movement, which marks its beginnings in the late 1980s, was initiated by an ecosystem of scholars who advocated for the expansion of music studies into the type of interdisciplinarity that would centralize race, gender, and cultural studies as modes of inquiry.¹⁶ Three journals that were central in connecting the Black music intelligentsia to

15. Floyd, "On Black Music Research."

16. See Philip Bohlman, "Musicology as a Political Act," *Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 411–36; Lawrence Kramer, "Musicology and Meaning," *Musical Times* 144, no.

this work in the 1990s and early 2000s were the *BMRJ*, *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interartistic Inquiry*, and *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology*.

As mentioned earlier, the *BMRJ* was launched in 1980 by Samuel Floyd Jr. and expanded the intellectual footprint of the Black music journal through its exploration of Black music of the Diaspora and more “philosophical and speculative topics” in music.¹⁷ Floyd’s vision for fostering discussions between intellectuals and artists/practitioners precipitated the launch of another journal in 1995—*Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interartistic Inquiry*. Although short-lived, the journal sought to replicate the intellectual energy and cultural dialogue that underscored the Harlem Renaissance. Essays focused on the performing, plastic, and literary arts. The title, *Lenox Avenue*, was a reference to how the ethos of the Brush Harbor as a cultural space of reclamation and resistance was reconceptualized in the spatial identity of 1920s Harlem and the cultural revolution it birthed. Floyd outlines this in the first issue:

The Harlem Renaissance was teeming with interdisciplinary interaction, with writers like Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, visual artists such as Aaron Douglass, and musicians such as [William Grant] Still interacting, collaborating, and honoring the potent artistic interdisciplinarity that was the heart and soul of their quest for cultural and political equality.

For these reasons, we thought the term “Lenox Avenue” would be a suitable description of what we hope this journal will be—an interdisciplinary forum that will achieve, from a scholarly standpoint, what the Harlem Renaissance had begun but did not have the chance to complete.¹⁸

From the beginning, Floyd’s intention was not for *Lenox Avenue* to exist as a long-term, functioning journal but as a five-volume project that would support the Integrative Studies Program of the Center for Black Music Research.¹⁹ The Integrative Studies Program, over the course of nine years, convened fifteen colloquia that brought together fifty scholars and artists. These meetings fostered provocative interdisciplinary conversations that covered the disciplines of English, education, linguistics, and history as well as the fields of music, dance, literature, painting, and poetry. They also yielded over three dozen peer-reviewed articles that appeared in *Lenox Avenue* from 1995 to 1999.²⁰ Floyd was

1883 (Summer 2003): 6–12; and Susan McClary, “Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s,” *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 399–423.

17. Floyd, “Ruminations on the Center for Black Music Research,” 12.

18. Samuel Floyd Jr., “Editor’s Preface,” *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 1 (1995): 2.

19. Samuel Floyd Jr., “Editor’s Note,” *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 5 (1999): 1.

20. Floyd, “Editor’s Preface,” 1.

not the only musicologist interested in broadening the context of interdisciplinary Black music discussions. In 1987, Jon Michael Spencer (now known as Yahya Jongintaba) launched *Black Sacred Music*, a publication formed to establish theomusicology as a specific discipline. The nine volumes published featured essays that advanced a mode of inquiry that examined Black sacred music through a theoretical lens drawn from the fields of theology, musicology, anthropology, and philosophy.²¹

As a young scholar traversing graduate school in the late 1990s at the height of the debates surrounding New Musicology, I can bear witness to the importance of these journals. The *BMRJ* in particular was a beacon of hope at a time when articles on Black music were noticeably absent from musicology's flagship journal—the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (*JAMS*). During the early years of my professional career, each issue of *JAMS* that I received was a reminder of how, as a Black woman and scholar of Black music, I did not have an “intellectual home” in the field of American musicology. I figured out quickly that the *BMRJ*, other journals devoted to American music such as *American Music* and *Journal of the Society for American Music*, Black studies journals such as *Journal of Black Studies* and *Journal of Negro History*, and American studies more broadly would be landing places for my scholarship as I navigated the “publish or perish” world of academia. Publishing in these journals became a personal goal, a point of pride, and a way of connecting myself to the intellectual genealogy of the civil rights era Black music intelligentsia. It was my public acknowledgment that I was a “daughter” of Eileen Southern.

The Black Music Journal in the Age of Black Lives Matter

Many will question the motivation behind launching a Black music journal or will claim that such actions are counterproductive to the fight for disciplinary expansion and inclusion being waged in our professional music societies. My response is grounded in the knowledge that the quest for inclusion is an ongoing, multitiered endeavor. The contemporary Black music intelligentsia is not forging a revolution but precipitating another wave of intellectual activism in the long fight for civil rights and social change. Discussions of a culture of disciplinary expansionism and decolonization of music studies have pervaded our major professional societies for decades. And while we have seen some change, there is still much work to be done.

21. *Black Sacred Music* was published from 1987 until 1995. Its archive consists of nine volumes with two issues published each year. For more information about the archive, see “Black Sacred Music Archive,” Duke University Press, accessed September 12, 2025, <https://dukeupress.edu/information-for/librarians/electronic-products/black-sacred-music-archive>.

In recent years, a number of our professional music societies have worked to expand disciplinary and racial diversity through their conference programs, journals, and leadership teams. However, these efforts have not represented major shifts in the molecular identity of these organizations, as most minoritized groups continue to establish their voices and advance their intellectual platforms in the insularity of ghettoized study or interest groups. While the work that is nurtured in these groups has started to appear in our flagship journals, the reality is that the current publication infrastructure is not substantial enough to ensure the production and dissemination of the material culture needed to precipitate sustained changes in our music curriculum. We need additional platforms and journals that will sustain new waves of Black music research and will foster new interdisciplinary conversations. Timing for the creation of these platforms is crucial given the current shift in our political and social culture.

Anti-Black rhetoric and policies are pervading every aspect of our personal and professional lives. You need only log onto social media or read recent special issues of disciplinary journals to see that there is considerable resistance against challenging the status quo in our professional music societies, in the concert hall, and in our departments. The entities that have traditionally been central to fostering community in our professional organizations—organizational listservs—have in recent years become sites of intellectual violence where vitriolic conversations regarding the need to protect Eurocentric disciplinary frameworks and the Western canon, or conversations about a perceived reverse racism that has impeded the upward mobility of white composers, musicians, and scholars, thrive. And a so-called replacement theory is now being weaponized as a means of challenging any intellectual inroads that have been made by historically underrepresented scholars, composers, and musicians.

This is further exasperated by the fact that we all face deeper existential threats, as attacks on the humanities have grown exponentially in the past decade. The elimination of university programs; the enactment of laws that ban the teaching of critical race theory, gender studies, and ethnic studies; and the surveillance of faculty research and teaching have turned our colleges and universities into intellectual war zones. The current anti-DEI movement that has spread in the past three years is representative of how the period of racial reckoning precipitated by the deaths of Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd in 2020 is truly over.²²

The coordinated effort to suppress the teaching of concepts related to race, gender, racism, and privilege, especially in Republican-led states, has the potential to undermine disciplinary expansion and faculty research. In June 2021, 135

22. Fabiola Cineas, "The 'Racial Reckoning' of 2020 Set Off An Entirely New Kind of Backlash," Vox, June 3, 2024, <https://www.vox.com/policy/351106/backlash-politics-2020-george-floyd-race>.

scholarly associations signed a petition protesting legislative efforts enacted to restrict the teaching of racism in American history courses.²³ Subsequently, a number of states have not only passed similar laws but have also sanctioned the banning of books deemed to be subversive. One of the most overt cases involves recent events that have taken place at New College in Sarasota, Florida. This small public liberal arts college has become ground zero for the anti-DEI movement in the academy. In addition to shuttering the university's DEI office and the gender studies program, this summer, college administrators approved the destruction of hundreds of books focused on race, gender, and sexuality. While these actions were focused on gender and sexuality studies, it is important to note that books focused on ethnic and cultural studies were also destroyed in the purge. To borrow the words of Sherrie Tucker, we are definitely in a "moment of danger."²⁴

Rather than retreat, it is imperative that we look to the model of intellectual activism and institution building that our intellectual forebears engaged in. We must, as the title of this essay says, "walk together, and not get weary," because freedom is a constant struggle. Now is the time to embody a radical mindset of resistance that ensures the progression of Black music scholarship and the new Black music intelligentsia. We must do what marginalized communities have always done to ensure their survival—use the insularity of our communities to create entities that will foster intragenerational dialogue, preserve our history, and ensure the progression of our intellectual communities. Black music journals have served as one of the incubators of this type of resistance culture. In closing I want to again draw on the words of Sherrie Tucker, who in the article "U.S. Music Studies in a 'Moment of Danger,'" outlines a strategy of resistance and intentionality. I hope that we "will use this moment to reaffirm our commitment to socially engaged interdisciplinary networks. I hope we will remember to teach our students the passageways that connect us and how to find new ones and never forget what it took to get us to the crossroads where we stand today."²⁵

23. See "Educational Gag Orders," Pen America, November 8, 2021, <https://pen.org/report/educational-gag-orders/>.

24. Ryan Quinn, "New College of Florida Is Dumping Books—and Losing Professors," Inside Higher Ed, August 20, 2024, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/08/20/new-college-florida-dumping-books-and-losing>; and Sherrie Tucker, "U.S. Music Studies in a 'Moment of Danger,'" in the colloquy "Studying U.S. Music in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 703–8.

25. Tucker, "U.S. Music Studies," 708.