Embodying Eroica: Pregnancy and Performativity on the Podium

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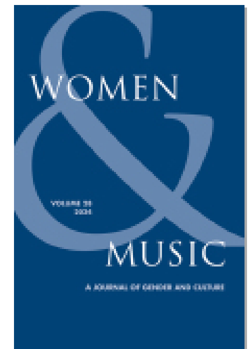

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Embodying Eroica

Pregnancy and Performativity on the Podium

Anna Wittstruck

Visibility is a trap. . . . It provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession.[1]

Orchestral conductors mediate their mortality with repertoire. *I still haven't conducted Alpine Symphony. I'll always remember my first Beethoven 9*. "Rep lists" represent more than résumé building: they tell the tale of a musician's self-consumed desire to embody those historically and culturally inculcated apexes of form and expression. There's a kind of materialism in this magpie-tendency to collect scores, and personification—even synecdoche—in the significance and intimacy through which conductors profess their fidelity to the canonical works they perform.

For me (guilty), that work was Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony no. 3 in E-flat major, op. 55 (*Eroica*). I first encountered the *Eroica* when I was fifteen years old, sitting in the cello section of a regional professional orchestra. I remember our rehearsal preparation for the piece being more serious than with other works we performed. The conductor treated the music as though it were something breakable, balanced delicately in his hands. In college, when given my first chance to conduct, I asked my professor if I could choose *Eroica* (he said no). My first independent research project compared historical recordings of the symphony against contemporaneous criticism. Concluding that the symphony was a paragon of the interpretative experience, I wrote: "This is how conducting a great symphony should feel: as if you are sitting inside a cathedral, taking in the scale of the architecture, feeling that you are part of something much greater than yourself."

1 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*: *The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 6.

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The grandiosity of my undergraduate prose and its unconscious invocation of the sublime betray layers of historiographic and pedagogical indoctrination inscribed in the conductor-score relationship. Conductors navigate a liminal space between what Carolyn Abbate terms the gnostic, that is, praxis, and the drastic, that is, the ineffable.[2] For all its physicality and gesture, the art of conducting is conceptualized as intellectual. A conductor's will to subsume themselves into the score enacts a process of disembodiment, as characterized by unmarking the body and denying performativity.[3] It stems from nineteenth-century conceptions of *Werktreue*: the call for performers to strictly and authentically adhere to the intentions of the composer, which continues to undergird rubrics for musical interpretation and interpreters today.[4] It reinforces the closely related musical work concept: music, as expounded by Carl Dahlhaus, may be distilled to an "aesthetic essence" using formal criteria that privilege its autonomy and distinguish it from the transient materiality of performance.[5] Though called into question by Lydia Goehr, among others, the work-concept paradigm continues to pervade conducting pedagogy and praxis.[6] The naturalized customs of the podium, by reifying music's autonomy and devaluing the corporeality of the performer, render conducting bodies paradoxically invisible. Through our cerebral handling of repertoire, we conductors aspire to transcend our physical selves.

My first time conducting *Eroica* in performance was a conscious milestone. But in my case, there was something that made my physical self more difficult to transcend: I was thirty-two weeks pregnant.

In this article, I examine how orchestral conductors occupy a paradoxical position of (in)visibility and (dis)embodiment within the composer-performer

2 Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 505–36.

3 The nomenclature of marked/unmarked bodies in feminist performance studies was coined in Phelan, *Unmarked*. On gender performativity, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Suzanne G. Cusick, on the composer-performer relationship, writes, "I expect to witness the subordination of [the performer's] *persona* to the *persona* in and of 'the music.'" See Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance," *Repercussions* 3, no. 1 (1994): 82–85.

4 Karen Leistra-Jones identifies authenticity as a primary objective within nineteenth-century performance culture, specifically for adherents of *Werktreue*. See Karen Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 397–436. Joshua Navon has traced how principles from *Werktreue*, which first became dominant through orchestral institutions and was codified in the curriculum of Leipzig Conservatory in the nineteenth century, created ways of appraising performance that remain today. See Joshua Navon, "Pedagogies of Performance: The Leipzig Conservatory and the Production of *Werktreue*," *Journal of Musicology* 37, no. 1 (2020): 63–93.

5 Carl Dahlhaus writes, "The meaning of a work resides in its aesthetic essence, not in its historical repercussions." Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 133.

6 Lydia Goehr's formative critique of the work concept specifically addresses orchestral conductors, many of whom she argues refuse to move past the doctrine of *Werktreue* as their modus operandi. She writes, "Despite the theoretical alternatives, mainstream conductors have not been convinced that they should dispense with the ideal of fidelity to composers and their works." She warns of the danger in conductors failing "to recognize the ramifications of their being regulated by the work-concept," which "often stems from a belief that Werktreue has somehow proved itself to be absolutely the right ideal to have." See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 275–79.

dyad.[7] Drawing from my pre- and postpartum experiences as a white cis female conductor, I explore how pregnancy challenged how I contend with performances of gender and sex, as theorized by Judith Butler.[8] Drawing also from gender studies, disability studies, and embodiment studies, I explore how asymmetries in the cultural inscriptions of bodies account for the lack of gender diversity among professional conductors, and how the racist and sexist underpinnings of *Werktreue*—as identified by Karen Leistra-Jones—continue to exclude nonwhite, nonmale bodies from the podium.[9] I argue that music's purported aesthetic autonomy, which aligns with the disembodiment of the conductor's labor, privileges naturalized masculinity: it is no accident that conducting positions have historically been assumed by white, able-bodied, cisgender men.

I also interrogate those formalist discourses that have secured *Eroica*'s place in the pantheon of absolute music. Recoding *Eroica* through mimesis, (dis)ability, performance, vibration, and timbre, how might a differently abled, overtly sexed, and gendered conducting body disrupt expectations of Beethoven's heroic style and the role of the interpreter?

Pre- and Postpartum Conducting

This study begins with two concerts, both conducted in my third trimester. The first, as mentioned, was a program I conducted at thirty-two weeks pregnant that paired *Eroica* with incidental music from Felix Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Leonard Bernstein's *Halil* for solo flute and orchestra. I performed this program with the collegiate orchestra I directed within a school of music. The second concert I conducted as a finalist for a year-long music director search with a community orchestra. For this concert, I conducted Beethoven's Symphony no. 2 in D major, op. 36, along with Gioachino Rossini's overture to *La Gazza Ladra* and an assortment of arias by Rossini and Gaetano Donizetti for mezzo-soprano and orchestra.[10] At the time of the performance, I was thirty-eight weeks pregnant.

The physical changes my body was undergoing presented challenges and gains during preparation for these concerts. I experienced fatigue, nausea, and reflux

7 Goehr notes how complex power relationships between conductors and orchestras exist alongside those between conductors and composers. She argues that conductors serve dual roles: master (to the interpreters) and servant (to the composer). Though conductors may lack awareness for the ways in which the musical work concept pervades their attitudes and approaches, Goehr argues that "making use of essential gaps of theoretical indeterminacy in the work-concept has provided [conductors] with a way to reconcile conflicting desires and descriptions of their musical duties," i.e., interpretative authoritarianism alongside subservience. See Goehr, *Imaginary Musical of Musical Works*, 273–79.

8 Butler argues that our performances of gender are mutable, not fixed. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*. More recent work in queer studies has built upon Butler's foundational argument distinguishing gender identity from biological sex. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz summarizes: "Queer theory has made one lesson explicitly clear: the set of behaviors and codes of conduct that we refer to as feminine or masculine are not slaves to the biological." See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 76.

9 Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 421–26.

10 I conducted the following arias for mezzo-soprano and orchestra: Gioachino Rossini, "Cruda sorte! . . . Già so per pratica" from *L'Italiana in Algeri*; Gaetano Donizetti, "Nella fatal di Rimini" from *Lucrezia Borgia*; Rossini, "Oh patria! . . . Di tanti palpiti" from *Tancredi*.

throughout the pregnancy. The struggle to combat tiredness was particularly foregrounded when I had back-to-back rehearsals after a full day of teaching, separated by a thirty-five-mile commute. I had to consistently adapt my conducting approach, as my center of gravity kept shifting. Given my increasing weight and swelling feet and ankles, I sat for lengthy rehearsals and my final concert. As a former dancer, I rely on my core to conduct—a part of my body that now felt alien and inaccessible. Conversely, heft and gravitas were easier to gesticulate, and I sang with more confidence (I had a newfound resonator). Teaching conducting presented its own challenges, as the fetus was more active when I was sedentary. Assessing a student's execution of mixed meter in Igor Stravinsky's *Octet for Winds* was complicated by the rhythmic dissonance that arose between irregular meters and irregular baby kicks.

Once it came time to concertize, I had nonmusical considerations as well. Gender-marginalized performers, especially conductors, contend with anxieties and press criticism over what clothes they wear on stage.[11] As a cisgender female orchestra director, I am no stranger to the ways in which my wardrobe choices infiltrate an audience's reception of the performance.[12] "What will I wear?" is a question to which, over the years, I've come up with a rotation of sartorial answers.[13] Now, with an expanding, overtly sexed body, would I choose clothing to hide my

11 In her ethnographic study, "Women Conductors on the Orchestral Podium: Pedagogical and Professional Implications," Brydie-Leigh Bartleet points to the conflation of "professional" appearance for conductors with masculine attire, and the challenge female conductors face in choosing their wardrobes, given how the objectification of women's bodies, derived from societally constructed definitions of femininity, creates dissonance in the context of conducting. Bartleet writes, "The situation of a woman standing on the podium thus presents a contradictory situation: dominant social patriarchal discourses encourage them to pursue their femininity through their bodies, while dominant conducting conventions suggest that they need to renounce their femininity and adopt a surrogate masculinity." See Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, "Women Conductors on the Orchestral Podium: Pedagogical and Professional Implications," *College Music Symposium* 48 (2008): 40.

12 In her dissertation, "Gender and the Symphonic Conductor," Anna Edwards explores the physical presentation of concert dress and footwear by female conductors as part of her ethnographic and quantitative study section. Citing a professional musician survey in which respondents' perception of leadership was affected by attire almost twice as much for female subjects as male subjects, Edwards concludes that "female conductors need to dress in a manner that presents them in the most positive light as a leader" and that "concern over 'what to wear' can be a daunting dilemma for women as they encounter additional gender stigmas." Interviews with conducting teachers and students reveal how "bringing forth a masculine presence in order to be taken seriously is a common theme." See Anna Edwards, "Gender and the Symphonic Conductor" (DMA diss., University of Washington, 2015), 68–74. For other discussions of issues pertaining to body and clothing for women and nonbinary conductors, see Loucia Lazarou's chapter on clothing in "Women Conductors: A Qualitative Study of Gender, Family, 'the Body' and Discrimination" (PhD diss., University of Durham, UK, 2016), 163–96, and Claudine Gamache, "The Voice and Body Language of Female Orchestral Conductors: Discussion, Exploration, and Tools for a Better Understanding" (DMA thesis, University of Georgia, 2017), 63–68.

13 Before my pregnancy, my concert attire strategy involved blending conventionally masculine and feminine elements in monotone all-black fabrics. One wardrobe combination involved a short jacket over a silk tunic, paired with skinny-leg ankle-cut trousers and tall heels. The other outfit paired ballet flats with a translucent three-quarter-sleeved tunic over an opaque, spaghetti-strap top, with matching loose-cut pants (involving enough fabric to resemble a skirt when I moved my feet close together). My pre-pregnancy wardrobe selections reflect how I, as a cis female conductor, at some level consciously understood the need for my concert attire to "walk the line between 'too masculine' and 'too feminine,'" as Edwards puts it. See Edwards, "Gender and the Symphonic Conductor," 74.

changing figure or show it? Would I mention my pregnant state to the audience? Outside the conventional choreography of the conductor as emcee (entrances and exits, handshakes, bows, welcome speech and/or commentary on program), I aim to draw as little attention to myself as possible, directing it instead to the music and the musicians.[14] Did I need to attend to the increasingly large elephant in the room?

There were also challenges and gains unique to my experience with each orchestra, largely based on my relationship with the two groups. With the collegiate orchestra, I was concerned about course evaluations as a pre-tenured professor, how any lapses in memory or preparation might be perceived negatively and could compromise my immediate and long-term credibility. I was cautious not to appear distracted or impulsive. I did not want students to feel like my pregnancy had jeopardized their learning, or to succumb to gendered tropes about hormone-driven volatility. It felt like the personal and the professional were on a messy collision course with one another.

This conflation did not come without its advantages; it improved what was still a tenuous relationship between the orchestra and me (I was in my second year of a newly formed position). News of the baby created a humanizing focal point that helped build rapport with the students. Previously, I had received formal criticism from students for not including personal perspectives among scholarly and musical ones (that I wasn't sharing enough of myself emotionally—imagine that grievance being leveraged on a male colleague). Now, I was confiding in my students about expecting a baby before telling my extended family.

The stakes were different with the community orchestra. As a guest conductor, I was building a relationship from scratch. I felt self-conscious coming in as the pregnant person. This was a job interview, spread over nine rehearsals and a concert, and I had limited time to make a musical impression. Soliciting feedback from players and board members, I learned the orchestra felt my rehearsals were too intense and demanding. Lightening my rapport and approach, I leaned on the pregnancy as a humorous, ice-breaking gambit. It worked: I won the job.

The programs also contrasted in tenor and scale. The concert with my collegiate orchestra was a thematic culmination of a yearlong project on transnational musical encounters. It was a technically challenging program for the orchestra on many levels: precision (particularly Mendelssohn's Scherzo), syntax (Bernstein's dabbling in twelve-tone writing), style, and stamina (it takes nearly an hour to perform *Eroica* if you take the first movement's repeat). By juxtaposing *Eroica* with the elegiac Bernstein, I meant to temper the nationalist blustering of the symphony's heroic topics. This concert was serious, academic, and long. By contrast, the community orchestra concert, marketed as "Nineteenth-Century Pops," drew on Beethoven's

14 As Christopher Small notes, this well-rehearsed ceremony of humility is widely embraced by conductors in practice. Small writes, "The humility of [the conductor's] bow is part of the drama. He is acting the role that is expected of him, that of devoted servant of the public, of the music, and of the great musicians who created it." See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 78.

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more playful and lyrical side, evinced in his second symphony. Stylistically and physically, this was lighter fare.

The performance with the community orchestra also occurred later in my pregnancy. At thirty-eight weeks, I conducted the concert while sitting on a stool. I secured a backup conductor to attend rehearsals and wait in the wings in case I went into labor. My impending labor added a layer of excitement and uncertainty for the orchestra and me in the concert, and presumably additional suspense for the audience. It also mitigated the inherent awkwardness of the performance doubling as a job interview. I was the last of three finalists to be auditioned. My approaching due date presented a conversational topic outside the search process: a way to connect to constituents of the organization regardless of whether they offered me the position. Players wanted to keep in touch to know when the baby arrived. I received the final draft of my negotiated contract while in my hospital room. The orchestra's internal statement unveiling their music director choice doubled as a baby announcement.

Winning a music director position while pregnant felt good. It felt like the model of what an orchestra director should look like and represent could meaningfully be reshaped. Perhaps there was a future where my musical and maternal personae were not separate. Postpartum, there have been professional upsides to becoming a caretaker. I have become more efficient with time because of my schedule. I feel less anxiety about music making because, relative to being a new parent, it is something I have expertise in. Parenthood particularly helped pave my relationship with members of the community orchestra, many of whom had small children. During the 2020–21 COVID-19 pandemic and our period of remote learning, I was able to lift my college students' spirits with the occasional baby-then-toddler cameo on Zoom.

But mostly, the shift from pre- to postpartum led to the migration from visible work to invisible work. Sleep deprivation, attention lapses, body-image discomfort, and hours spent breastfeeding were among the factors contributing to this challenge in the first postpartum year. I pumped milk while driving in the car between rehearsals and before or after gigs; I would spend hours working out the logistics of when and where to pump milk (and how to freeze it) while touring. Outwardly, my pregnant state was in the past; inwardly, it remained present. Gone were the obvious medical signs that my body was undergoing physical change. What lingered was new awareness of my body and the ways in which I performed, not only gender, but sex, while on the podium.[15]

Before my pregnancy, I used to hate the question: "What's it like to be a female orchestra conductor?" I resisted being seen through gender, not gesture. On the podium, I wanted to unperform my gender: to exist only as a conduit for the

15 I am grateful for conversations with Ameera Nimjee that helped conceptualize this disaggregation of gender and sex performativities with regards to conducting while pregnant.

composer's intentions.[16] I embraced the fallacy of gender blindness that permeates conducting training and pedagogy.[17]

But during my pregnancy, there was no denying that I was performing my sex. The intersectionality of my cisgender and gestating selves resulted in my pregnant body being increasingly displayed in apparent ways, every time I stepped on the podium.[18] Pregnancy presents more than physical change; it signifies reproductive function. Enlarged breasts, a growing belly, and overall weight gain were markings of my body's preparation for lactation, its hormonal mercuriality, and its incubation and development of a fetus. My physical form became synecdochal of my reproductive system, tied in my case to gender identity and sexual orientation. There was no unperforming that.

I couldn't erase my biology to subsume myself in the score. I couldn't just not be pregnant while running rehearsal. As I became more aware of my embodiment, I wondered more urgently about how gender and sex shaped perceptions of my conducting. Pre- and postpartum, why did it feel like the expectations of my profession were at odds with my physiology? Were my attempts to become a medium through which the immateriality of music might materialize futile? How might these questions relate to the continued lack of gender diversity in the field of orchestral conducting?

Naturalizing the Conducting Body

The participation of female and nonbinary conductors in the professional conducting world remains disproportionately low compared to other leadership fields. Typical gender gap rationalizations—gender bias, pipeline challenges, career-family opportunity-cost calculations—do not account for the fact that, percentage wise, gender-marginalized people are better represented professionally at top levels in finance, technology, government, and the military. In an interview with Marin Alsop in 2019, Michael Cooper noted, "Women were more likely to

16 This idea reflects questions of agency that Judith Butler raises about gender, and how gender performance involves dialogues between Self and Other. Butler asks, "Does it turn out that the 'I' who ought to be bearing its gender is undone by being a gender, that gender is always coming from a source that is elsewhere and directing toward something that is beyond me, constituted in a sociality I do not fully author? If that is so, then gender undoes the 'I' who is supposed to be or bear its gender, and that undoing is part of the very meaning and comprehensibility of that 'I.'" See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 16.

17 Interviews conducted by Edwards with conducting students and teachers reveal the pervasiveness of gender blindness in pedagogical rhetoric: comments (by male-identifying students and faculty) such as "I don't see the gender" (of the person on the podium) or "I really have never thought about gender" (in the context of teaching students to conduct). Edwards pushes against these claims, writing, "A woman's presence on the podium inevitably differs from the established male norm." See Edwards, "Gender and the Symphonic Conductor," 67–68.

18 I invoke the concept of intersectionality to address ways in which my personal experience as a white cis female pregnant person provoked reflection for me on the performativity of gender versus the performativity of sex.

be four-star officers in the United States military; they were more likely to lead G7 industrialized nations than they were to lead major American orchestras."[19]

Alsop is a person of firsts: the first woman to hold a music director position with a major American orchestra (2007); the first woman to be invited to conduct the Last Night of the Proms (2013); the first woman to be appointed to direct the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra (2018); and the first conductor (of any gender) to win a MacArthur Fellowship (2005). That her trailblazing spans decades speaks to individual achievement but also systemic barriers. In an interview in 2018, Alsop said, "I'm very honoured to be the first, but I'm also rather shocked that we can be in this year, in this century, and there can still be 'firsts' for women."[20] Her explanation for why so few women and nonbinary conductors are seen on the podium points to asymmetrical cultural inscriptions on the body. She argues that conducting requires a lot of body language, which audiences and musicians interpret differently depending on whether the gestures come from a man or a woman. As a participant in Brydie-Leigh Bartleet's 2000 ethnographic study of seventeen professional female-identifying conductors, Alsop said:

> When a woman makes a physical gesture, which conducting is, it's all about gesturing and getting a response, it's interpreted very differently societally than the same gesture from a man. For example, if I am very strong to you as a woman . . . people say, "Oh she's a bitch," excuse my language, you know, "Oh my god, she's too macho" . . . but if a man does that, people melt, "Oh he's so manly." If a woman is very . . . frilly and delicate they say, "Oh it's too light-weight, it's too feminine." If a man's like that he's "sensitive."[21]

Bartleet argues that the objectification of what Peggy Phelan calls "marked"—that is, nonwhite and/or nonmale—bodies disadvantages women and nonbinary conductors by distinguishing them as Other.[22] The female body has long been a site of controversy in this regard. According to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, the idea of the male body as normative (unmarked, natural, or transparent) derives from Aristotle's framing of the female body as deviant: a "mutilated male." "Aristotle," Thomson writes, "initiates the discursive practice of marking what is deemed aberrant while concealing the position of privilege by asserting its normativeness."[23] For centuries, women's bodies in Western culture have been defined and marked through alterity.

19 Maya Salam, "Marin Alsop Raises the Baton for Women Conductors," *New York Times*, June 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/17/arts/marin-alsop-women-conductors.html.

20 Alsop quoted in Kate Connolly, "Marin Alsop Appointed First Female Artistic Director of Top Vienna Orchestra," *Guardian*, January 29, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jan/29/exclusive-marin-alsop-appointed-first-female-artistic-director-of-orf-orchestra.

21 Bartleet, "Women Conductors on the Orchestral Podium," 41.

22 Bartleet borrows the term "marked" from Phelan, who writes, "[The male] is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it is [the female] whom he marks." See Phelan, *Unmarked*, 5.

23 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Feminist Theory, the Body, and the Disabled Figure," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 1997), 280.

Alterity bars gender-marginalized bodies from accessing nonperformativity, or, as I fantasized about in the context of my own conducting, the ability to unperform gender. In their book, *Female Masculinity*, J. Jack Halberstam identifies "asymmetries of masculine and female performativity in a male supremacist society," due to "the idea that masculinity 'just is,' whereas femininity reeks of the artificial."[24] Using the case study of drag kings to underscore the challenge of theatricalizing unmarked, transparent identities, culturally associated with white, upper-class, heterosexual men, Halberstam argues, "White men derive enormous power from assuming and confirming the nonperformative nature of masculinity."[25]

Power is an essential quality for an orchestral conductor, as the role has been culturally and historically shaped. Christopher Small describes the conductor as "the incarnation of power in the modern sense," whose value to musicians and audience is "to resolve conflicts once and for all through the exercise of unlimited power."[26] Small's exclusive use of masculine pronouns to describe the paradigmatic conductor is unsurprising. After all, Halberstam's definition of masculinity, as summarized by Heather Hadlock—a "naturalized performance of power, legitimacy, and privilege"—perfectly reflects the historically pervasive image of the symphony orchestra conductor: a white man in a tuxedo.[27]

The role of the interpreter idealized through a naturalized body privileges the normative transparency of masculinity, historically enjoyed by white, upper-class, heterosexual, able-bodied men. What results in pedagogical literature on conducting, as Bartleet notes, are discussions around the conductor's body that tacitly invoke a paradigm of whiteness and maleness, while avoiding mention of race or gender. Bartleet elaborates:

> Such discourses examine a conductor's arms, hands, neck, face, posture, and legs, and so on, without any consideration of how these corporeal regions are inscribed with societal, cultural, political and gendered significance. The unarticulated assumption here is that the body of a conductor belongs to a white, Western, heterosexual male, and hence is exempt from such analysis. This, of course, has significant ramifications for bodies that are marked by gender, race and sexuality.[28]

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24 Judith [Jack] Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 234.

25 According to Halberstam, masculine drag performances often use the markers of class or race to distinguish themselves, as "white masculinity for the drag king has to be made visible and theatrical before it can be performed." Judith [Jack] Halberstam, "Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper: Gender, Race, and Masculinity in the Drag King Scene," *Social Text* 52/53 (1997): 112. Halberstam also explains how, consequently, drag king performers gravitate toward certain archetypes as characters: "The forms of masculinity that are available for performance tend to be either working-class masculinities (the construction workers, for example), nonwhite masculinities, or explicitly performative middle-class masculinities such as the lounge lizard." See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 240.

26 Small, *Musicking*, 86.

27 Heather Hadlock, "Different Masculinities: Androgyny, Effeminacy, and Sentiment in Rossini's *La donna del lago*," in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, ed. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 171.

28 Bartleet, "Women Conductors on the Orchestral Podium," 42.

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Nonperformativity abounds in conducting pedagogy, where students are taught to develop gestural technique and an aspirational state of naturalized physicality in order to call attention not to their own corporeality but to a singular musical idea. In this sense, conducting training mirrors those methods within acting critiqued by Carrie Sandhal that invoke the metaphor of the "neutral" body, in order to excise physical deviances that might inhibit one's body from becoming a blank canvas for a new character.[29] The takeaway is an emptying of self: a gambit made by actors "to 'disappear' into the role."[30] As Karen Leistra-Jones argues, *Werktreue* adherents adopted this kind of "performative" authenticity as an interpretative practice.[31] Beginning in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the goal of the performer was to "achieve a kind of absence from himself or herself in order to take on the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of the composer or composition in question," thereby "involving a deliberate and noble kind of *kenosis* or self-emptying."[32]

In my own training as a conductor, the most frequently used words I heard to conceptualize the role of my body were vessel, conduit, channel, and medium. I remember a summer at the Pierre Monteux School (now the Monteux School and Music Festival) in Hancock, Maine, when Michael Jinbo, the instructor, accused two young conductors of bringing too much "ego" to the podium.[33] He stressed the importance of humility: our charge to serve the music, not to distract from it. In interviews with Jinbo and Pierre Monteux School participants, Anna Edwards highlights similar admonitions by Jinbo not to distract from one's conducting, particularly through the "externals of gender."[34] Gunther Schuller captures a similar idea in his book, *The Compleat Conductor*: "The conductor's first priority is to serve the music, to be a medium, a vehicle, through which the work of art is revealed and expressed . . . to explore the letter *and* the spirit of the work . . . in order to reveal its

29 Noting the ways in which such methods create barriers for and harm disabled participants, Sandhal writes, "Implicit in the various manifestations of the neutral metaphor is the assumption that a character cannot be built from a position of physical difference." See Carrie Sandhal, "Tyranny of the Neutral: Disability and Actor Training," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, ed. Carrie Sandhal and Philip Auslander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 257–62.

30 Sandhal, "Tyranny of the Neutral," 257. The phenomenon Sandhal describes recalls the practice in musical performance that Suzanne Cusick refers to as the "spectacle of disappearing Selves." See Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance," 85.

31 Leistra-Jones argues that *Werktreue* adherents' invocation of "authenticity" was performative and culturally encoded. She writes, "I treat authenticity not as a stable quality that certain musicians possessed and others did not, but rather as a performative category—that is, as an identity continually constructed through the repetition of culturally encoded performative acts." See Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 400.

32 Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 430. It does not seem coincidental that Sandhal traces the concept of corporeal neutrality in acting back to roughly the same time period: the Industrial Age, which Sandhal describes as "an age when bodies were studied and trained for efficiency, standardization, and normalcy." See Sandhal, "Tyranny of the Neutral," 262.

33 The students in question were a white male and Black male conductor.

34 In a June 2014 interview with Edwards, Jinbo said, "The ideal is to not be distracted by gender or externals when observing someone on the podium. . . . In the end, do externals define someone's abilities as a conductor? Absolutely not. But, if one is more aware of such externals than the quality of a conductor's musicianship and what he or she brings to the podium, there's a problem." Quoted in Edwards, "Gender and the Symphonic Conductor," 76–77.

essence."[35] This pedagogy assumes two things: that all interpretative bodies must be naturalized, and that the performing (living) body be subjugated and diminished to enliven the will (and, as Schuller stresses, "genius") of the (more often than not dead) composer.[36] Both interlocking hierarchies privilege masculinity and carry gendered implications: the composer over the performer, and the mind over the body.

Subjugating and Possessing the Conducting Body

Pedagogical aims to naturalize and deemphasize the performing body extend back to music curricula developed in nineteenth-century German conservatories. Joshua Navon explains how Leipzig's curriculum codified *Werktreue*'s interpretative tenet that the body (of the performer) be subject to the mind (of the composer). The physical toil undertaken by a performer to develop technical aptitude on their instrument was a means to an end: the conditioning of one's body to most effectively and efficiently execute a musical idea. Once this technical conditioning had occurred, a performer's body "could act as a transparent medium" for the composer's sound and music.[37] The body as "transparent medium" echoes Schuller's description of the ideal conductor, though Navon goes a step further by connecting *Werktreue* to the devaluation of bodies as "things to be overcome." Navon explains how "musicality," which the Leipzig Conservatory faculty valued above technical proficiency (as evinced within scoring rubrics for performance juries), was "conceived as an intellectual, spiritual, or even ethical quality, *not* a bodily one": the ineffable over the corporeal.[38] This bifurcation and ranking of interpretation over technique, mapped onto the Cartesian mind-body split, enforces what Cusick calls the "mind/body problem."[39]

Subjugation of the body has significant implications for gender-marginalized conductors and conducting students. As Cusick reminds us, the mind/body problem is a gendered one: intellectualism associated with the masculine and embodiment with the feminine.[40] For conductors, those interpretative advantages born from the impulse to transcend one's corporeality are unevenly granted. Bartleet argues

35 Gunther Schuller, *The Compleat Conductor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

36 Schuller further explains that "conductors must strive for [absolute perfection]—in order to have the right to interpret, to realize, the works of the great masters, whose genius is many, many times greater than their own." See Schuller, *Compleat Conductor*, 7.

37 Navon writes, "With Technik, students were encouraged to dedicate themselves to transforming their own bodies, while also being taught to treat that process as just a means to an end—their bodies were, in essence, things to be overcome. Once a student had acquired sufficient Technik, their body could act as a kind of transparent medium, offering no resistance when called upon to realize their conception of a musical work in sound." See Navon, "Pedagogies of Performance," 75.

38 Navon, "Pedagogies of Performance," 75, 74.

39 Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 16–18.

40 Cusick, "Feminist Theory," 17. Cusick argues that the gendered nature of the mind-body split is to account for the default assumption that a composer is male, rather than statistical realities of the canon. She writes, "The role of the composer is implicitly always gendered masculine. The composer is masculine *not because so many individuals who live in the category are biologically male*, but because the composer has come to be understood to be *mind—mind* that creates patterns of sounds to which other *minds* assign meanings."

that female conductors are conceptualized through their bodies, whereas male counterparts are seen as minds at work. This results in double standards that, for example, require female conductors to discipline their bodies so as not to show excess weight, while an "overweight male conductor's large bodily presence might even convey a sense of physical grandeur that allows him to transcend his 'rotund' body with his musicality, intelligence, and wisdom."[41] Through my pregnant body, which carried considerably more weight than it had in past performances, I felt the romance of this imagined "physical grandeur" accessed by large male bodies, but also the discomfort and distraction of its undisciplined softness: the markings of gender and sex barring admission to the privileged realm of nonperformativity.

The symbolic erasure of the conductor's body is embedded in the marketing of the Monteux School and Music Festival: a logo consisting of two hands (one holding a baton), suspended and severed at the sleeve. Monteux School, where I, among countless other conductors, received formative training, operates as the direct legacy of Pierre Monteux's conducting pedagogy and principles.[42] Monteux was a giant in the world of early twentieth-century conducting: a famous and well-respected performer and teacher. Isaac Stern describes his abilities as an interpreter as follows: "[Monteux] lived well in the skin of the music, not only his own skin but the skin of the music—very rare, especially in days that have developed since, where personalities have sometimes tended to transcend the needs of music."[43]

Stern's language is curiously tactile, evoking both disembodiment and a kind of transmogrification: the conductor's physical being supplanted by that of the music itself. His description of Monteux moves beyond metaphor to anthropomorphically assign agency, body, and desire to music in ways that recall the words of Heinrich Schenker, who, as critiqued by Cusick, suggests that "the [musical] work must breathe from its own lungs."[44] Schenker's word choice compels (or coerces) Cusick as a performer to "imagine myself as a medium transmitting meanings that originated in someone else."[45] Again, we encounter the performing body's imperative to act as a "medium": a self-emptied container. Within this framework, the true interpreter's body becomes not only naturalized, emptied, and subjugated but occupied.

Mary Hunter explores how nineteenth-century musicians and philosophers believed that great performers should not only show deference to the score (in the vein of *Werktreue*) but assume a genius-status of expression that would align the

41 Bartleet, "Women Conductors on the Orchestral Podium," 40.

42 Monteux School takes pride in the direct lineage of its pedagogical staffing: Michael Jinbo (the instructor until his death in spring 2022) was taught by Charles Bruck, who was taught by founder Pierre Monteux. Since its first session in 1943, the school has limited its musical direction (along with the occasional guest clinician) to these three men. Jinbo's teachings thus in many ways directly reflected Monteux's own pedagogies and musical philosophies. In fall 2023 Monteux School announced the appointment of Tiffany Lu, an Asian woman conductor, as its fourth music director.

43 This is an excerpt of remarks by Isaac Stern from a Conductors Guild panel discussion on Pierre Monteux in 1989. Quoted in John Canarina, *Pierre Monteux, Maître* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2003), 320.

44 Heinrich Schenker quoted in Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work of the Classical Music Performance," 88.

45 Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work of the Classical Music Performance," 88.

performing body with the soul of the composer.[46] The goal was to perform a balancing act between subservience and theatricality. Similarly invoking language of transparency, she writes, "The performer is enjoined to be simultaneously transparent to the work and vividly present to the audience on, so to speak, his own behalf."[47]

The paradox of rendering oneself both transparent and hypervisible lends itself well to the case study of the orchestral conductor. The romantic notion that a performer's body might house the composer's soul—that the performer's affinity with the composer might elevate them to authoritatively convey music's expressive content, speaks to the unique position conductors aim to occupy on the podium. James Q. Davies explores the emergence in the 1820s of conductors such as Louis Spohr, Carl Maria von Weber, and Felix Mendelssohn, whose presence on stage gave audiences something visual to focus on during concerts.[48] Given that these conductors faced the audience, not the musicians, Davies argues they had little practical impact on the orchestra's sound or ensemble playing. The idea that a conductor's gestures could actually elicit a singular musical interpretation from a group of players hinged on the Romantic period's "idealist conception of expressive voice." The conductor's role and existence, as Davies writes, were "predicated on the idea that vocal sound could be the projection of a single primordial force—the voice of the body, that is, coming to be."[49]

But a nineteenth-century performer's presumed ability to share their body with the spirit of the composer, as Leistra-Jones reminds us, had more to do with their identity than their musicianship. Leistra-Jones's research shows how *Werktreue* performers' exhibition of physical restraint developed as a strategy to legitimize their interpretative claims to German, nonprogrammatic repertoire by maintaining a performance of German identity. To do so, they had to distance themselves from sexist and antisemitic caricatures: controlling one's physical movements in performance meant avoiding allegations of "effeminate" or "stereotypically Jewish jerky gesticulations."[50] She writes,

46 Mary Hunter, "'To Play as If from the Soul of the Composer': The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 357–98.

47 Hunter, "To Play as If from the Soul," 362.

48 James Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 180. Small also notes how the conductor serves as a focal point for the audience. He writes, "For in the end the conductor's function is not just the physical coordination of the orchestra and the production of an interpretation. It lies also in his heroic stature as focus for the imagination of those who sit in the audience." See Small, *Musicking*, 86. John Spitzer chronicles how "entrepreneur conductors" between the 1840s and 1880s in Europe and the United States took on various visibilities through branding and promotion, as leaders who were individually assuming financial reward and risk via the box office. See John Spitzer, "The Entrepreneur-Conductors and Their Orchestras," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 1 (2008): 3–24. See also Fiona Palmer's research on the slower development of commercial visibility for orchestral conductors in England in "Conductors and Self-Promotion in the British Nineteenth-Century Marketplace," in *The Idea of Art Music in the Commercial World, 1800–1930*, ed. Christina Bashford and Roberta Montemorra Marvin (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 130–49.

49 Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance*, 181.

50 Leistra-Jones examines how Joseph Joachim went to great lengths, including "absorptive poses and expressive self-restraint" as a performer, to suppress his Hungarian and Jewish background, and to resist association with the racist caricature of an Eastern European Jew: stereotyped as "excitable, histri-

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> Who could claim the level of cultural and spiritual aptitude necessary to inhabit the thoughts and feelings of the master composers of the past? Ultimately, the politics of authenticity intersected with notions of nationality, race, and gender during a period in which participation in German culture was being conceived in increasingly exclusive terms.[51]

Authenticity as a masculine construct went beyond cultivating a deferential composer-performer relationship: it became a rationale for excluding female artists from concert stages.[52]

Denying the Conducting Body: The Fallacy of Music's Autonomy

We have seen how conducting pedagogy's suppression of performativity, by de-emphasizing the conducting body, privileges a naturalized masculinity associated with white, upper-class, heterosexual men. The imperative that the interpretative body be subjugated or even possessed—occupied by music's own metaphorical materiality—is doubly inscribed by explicitly exclusionary histories and cultural practices, as evinced by the hegemonic and sexist underpinnings of *Werktreue* in its late nineteenth-century manifestations. Yet anxiety about the body, and by extension non-cis male gender, prevails beyond the composer-performer dyad to reflect a broader aesthetic and historiographic underpinning of music studies, namely, the development and perpetuation of the musical work concept.

The work concept renders the musical score an autonomous and atemporal entity, distinct from embodied praxis.[53] Tracing its development to late eighteenth-century aesthetic theories, Dahlhaus writes, "Music was viewed, in the Aristotelian sense, as *poiesis* not *praxis*, i.e. as the creation of forms rather than as actions."[54] There is a connection between music history's negation of embodiment and the lack of gender diversity among conductors. The fundamental barrier that female conductors face is this: an apparently frictionless relationship exists between the atemporal, disembodied musical work concept and the naturalized white, upper-class, male interpreter's body.[55]

We may thus link issues pertaining to representation in the professional conducting world (why are there so few women on the podium?) to long-standing

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onic, agitated, effeminate, and over-the-top in his gesticulations." She also points to the example of Gustav Mahler, who, as a converted Jew, "was often caricatured and critiqued for the allegedly Semitic aspects of his conducting style." Anxiety about gender also played a role in shaping these performance practices. Leistra-Jones writes, "The assiduous control of one's emotions and physical movements was also important in constructions of nineteenth-century bourgeois German masculinity." See Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 424–25.

51 Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 401.

52 Leistra-Jones writes, "Authenticity, in these terms, was not a socially neutral category: indeed, its construction as masculine often went hand in hand with a tendency to question the ability of female musicians to apprehend the content of great music." See Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 426.

53 Goehr, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 4.

54 Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, 132.

55 I am grateful to conversations with Gwynne K. Brown, who characterized privilege to me as frictionless experience.

disciplinary and methodological challenges facing musicologists and theorists (how do we move past preoccupations with "the music itself"?).[56] Inextricable with disembodiment is the idea that music's value derives through its form: a tradition Mark Evan Bonds refers to as "the history of the idea of music's essence as autonomous, self-contained, and wholly self-referential."[57] Discourses on autonomous art music coalesce around the term "absolute music," most closely associated with Eduard Hanslick's defense of nonrepresentational, nineteenth-century instrumental music.[58] The same people advancing the interpretative and nationalist principles of *Werktreue* in the mid- to late nineteenth century, namely, Joseph Joachim and Johannes Brahms, were also the ones waging an aesthetic and philosophical defense of absolute music: music's autonomy, not just from program or occasion, but from the body.[59]

This brings us to *Eroica*: a symphony written around the time of the work concept's emergence (early 1800s), which, as chronicled by Dahlhaus, became closely associated with and representative of absolute music—even before the term existed.[60] *Eroica*, with its apparent ability to achieve narrative coherence independent of

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56 The phrase "the music itself" is one that the postwar Igor Stravinsky used to emphasize the formalist origins of his ballet, *The Rite of Spring*. See Richard Taruskin, "A Myth of the Twentieth Century: The Rite of Spring, the Tradition of the New, and 'The Music Itself,'" *Modernism/Modernity* 2, no. 1 (1995): 17. For a critique of analytical tendencies to excise and ignore cultural inscriptions of gender and embodiment in musical form, see Susan McClary, "Narrative Agendas in 'Absolute' Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms's Third Symphony," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 329.

57 Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1. As Bonds notes, the notion that music may exist objectively and remain abstracted from social or cultural contexts has materialized in various ways over the centuries: from the Pythagorean discovery that perfect intervals derive from mathematical ratios to the musical formalism that dominated the second half of the twentieth century. See Bonds, *Absolute Music*, 7–13.

58 Hanslick, in the first two editions of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854), originally sought to characterize music through tonally animated forms but also through its relation to the cosmos. Only in his final, third edition did he retract this second project, thereby framing absolute music in exclusively musical terms. See Mark Evan Bonds, "Aesthetic Amputations: Absolute Music and the Deleted Endings of Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*," *19th-Century Music* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 3–23.

59 Leistra-Jones connects preoccupations with authenticity (and its reliance on masculinity) to Joachim's and Brahms's ideological defenses of absolute music. She writes, "It was this principle of nonrepresentation, translated into an aesthetic ideology by critics like Hanslick, that was significant in the context of debates about theatricality and authenticity in music. . . . For Brahms and his supporters, then, instrumental music could function as a metaphor for the authentic self." See Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 417.

60 In his book *Political Beethoven*, Nicholas Mathew notes the historical convergence between the work concept's emergence and the time frame in which Beethoven's symphonies were written, in particular *Eroica*. See Nicholas Mathew, *Political Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18–19, 56. According to Dahlhaus, *Eroica* inspired Adolph Bernhard Marx's 1859 theory of "ideal music." Marx argued that the symphony opened a path for autonomous instrumental music. Dahlhaus writes, "According to Marx, the *Eroica* is 'that piece in which musical art first steps independently—without connection to the poet's words or the dramatist's action—out of the play of form and uncertain impulses and feelings and into the sphere of brighter, more certain consciousness.'" For Marx, according to Dahlhaus, "Music history is consummated in the *Eroica*." See Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Robert Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 11–12. More recently Daniel K. L. Chua, also summarizing Marx, linked the *Eroica* to the emergence of absolute music: "Marx could claim that Beethoven brought to fulfillment the first 'real, autonomous, free-standing' artwork. . . . For Marx, the work that defines this freedom is the *Eroica* Symphony. . . . The symphony is an act of heroic self-canonization; it gestures to its own autonomy, putting on freedom (will) as its own law of autonomy (form)." See Daniel K. L. Chua,

text or program, its massive scale—nearly twice the length of any symphony that came before it (breaking away from the proportion and balance of classicism into the sublime terrain of Romanticism), and its rejection of historical occasion (what Dahlhaus calls "event"-based history)[61] through Beethoven's anecdotal expunging of Napoleon as dedicatee, typifies the notion of absolute music as universalized and formally self-charting.[62] Daniel K. L. Chua uses *Eroica* to draw connections between musical and political autonomy: absolute music as human freedom.[63] Maynard Solomon, ascribing large-scale formal import to the initial C-sharp that interrupts the symphony's otherwise perfunctory E-flat triadic opening (what Leonard Bernstein famously called a "stab of intrusive otherness"),[64] characterizes *Eroica* as "music which appears to be self-creating."[65] Through its own conflict-traversing-and-resolving tonal procedures, the music takes on formidable, heroic agency.[66]

Eroica is that perfect storm of white, male, European myth-making: a conflation of aesthetic novelty and hagiography; a convergence of form and metaphor. With *Eroica*, male normativity multiplies not only through transcendence from embodiment as absolute music but through exemplification of Beethoven's so-called heroic style, as coined by Romain Rolland.[67] For Rolland, *Eroica* is male: dominating,

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"Revolutionary Freedom: An Image of Musical Autonomy in Beethoven," in *Theology, Music, and Modernity: Struggles for Freedom*, ed. Jeremy Begbie, Daniel K. L. Chua, and Markus Rathey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 28.

61 Dahlhaus distinguishes the concept "work" from "event," noting that the musical score's separation from people and events distinguishes music history from political history. He writes, "Events result from the interplay of actions based on various, and at times conflicting, motives, imagined goals and assessments of a given situation. . . . A work, on the other hand, represents . . . the concrete realization of an idea in the mind of an individual." See Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, 132–33.

62 Mathew connects the anecdote of Beethoven ripping up *Eroica*'s dedication page to critical reception rendering the music as nonrepresentational. He writes, "The autonomy of a work such as the *Eroica* can consequently only be measured by a disavowal of anything that it might be said to represent. This is the conceptual origin of the gesture of assertion and retraction that Beethoven left to posterity on the title page, re-enacted in centuries of critical rhetoric." See Mathew, *Political Beethoven*, 56.

63 Chua, "Revolutionary Freedom," 23. Chua writes, "In the *Eroica*, Beethoven programmes the absolute to reinforce its claims to autonomy" (30).

64 Alex Ross, "Listen to This: Crossing the Border from Classical to Pop," in *Listen to This* (New York: Picador, 2011), 6.

65 Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* (New York: Schirmer, 1998), 196.

66 Chua connects the emergence of Kantian aesthetics with music's autonomy and the heroic mold of Beethovenian symphonies such as *Eroica*. He writes, "What Kant calls the self-activity of freedom (*Selbsttätigkeit*) is realized as the self-activity of a musical process. Beethoven's contribution was to thematize this process so that his music was not merely the medium of autonomy but its heroic narrative." See Chua, "Revolutionary Freedom," 27. Even McClary appears to accept the music's formal evocation of heroism. She writes, 'Beginning with his 'Eroica,' [Beethoven] began trying to make it seem that the protagonist was inventing itself and determining from its own quirks its own tailor-made succession of narrative events, while still holding on to the norms of tonality and sonata that guaranteed intelligibility. Therein lies the revolutionary heroism of that symphony." See McClary, "Narrative Agendas in 'Absolute' Music," 336.

67 See Mathew, *Political Beethoven*, 18. Rolland's interpretation that Beethoven himself is *Eroica*'s protagonist derives from a more abstracted reading by Richard Wagner. Dahlhaus summarizes, "Wagner is convinced, using as his example the *Eroica* and its dedication to Napoleon, that . . . the 'essence' that expresses itself in music—the substance of the empirical 'appearances' such as one withdrawn into esthetic contemplation may develop—is highly revealing of the 'inner' biography of the composer." See Dahlhaus, *Idea of Absolute Music*, 133. For a critique of this commingling of Beethoven's biography and music, and the superimposition of morality on Beethoven's works, see Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ:

aggressive, and rational.[68] For Susan McClary, *Eroica* is a patriarchal domain where feminine topics are, again and again, subjugated and marginalized in order to propel the narrative of a masculine protagonist's triumph.[69] According to McClary, *Eroica*'s heroic style amplifies the "socially encoded," male-gender frame (to borrow more recent terminology from Philip Ewell) of sonata form, and—synecdochally—the symphonic genre.[70]

The implications of McClary's argument offer insights into why the conductor's podium remains a hostile place for gender-marginalized individuals. There is an affinity between "the music itself" in conversations about sonata form and heroic style and the masculinized interpreter's body. This affinity derives from two concurrent historical threads. The first, a formally encoded narrative of a triumphant masculine persona, reflects gender valuations and anxieties of the time. The second, as we have seen, is the pedagogical and cultural requisite (*Werktreue*) that emerged to counteract the perceived falseness of performativity by positioning interpretative authority in the "unmarked" performer's body, one to which white, cisgendered men had particular access.[71]

Embodying *Eroica*

Why would a cis female pregnant person choose to conduct *Eroica*? Perhaps I was looking for a way to obfuscate the sex-performance of my pregnancy. I believed that, through the naturalized privilege of a masculine-encoded, Austro-Germanic,

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Princeton University Press, 1995).

68 Rolland writes, "[Beethoven] is the most virile of musicians; there is nothing—if you prefer it, not enough—of the feminine about him. . . . He is the masculine sculptor who dominates his matter and bends it to his hand; the master-builder, with Nature for his yard. For anyone who can survey these campaigns of the soul from which stand out the victories of the *Eroica* and the *Appassionata*, the most striking thing is not the vastness of the armies, the floods of tone, the masses flung into the assault, but the spirit in command, the imperial reason." See Romain Rolland, *Beethoven the Creator*, trans. Ernest Newman (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1937), 3. In chronicling how its principles infiltrated Beethoven's aesthetic priorities in *Eroica*, Chua characterizes "revolutionary freedom" in explicitly masculine terms: "Revolutionary freedom defines itself as the unmoved against the moved; it is about action as opposed to re-action, masculine resolve as opposed to feminine feeling." See Chua, "Revolutionary Freedom," 16. Echoing Theodor W. Adorno, Chua likewise posits *Eroica*'s nonrepresentation in diametric opposition to embodiment and gender: a rejection of "the powdered wigs, frilly cuffs, and beauty spots that decorated those flabby and effeminate bodies of a decadent age prone to too much sentiment and emotion" (29).

69 Susan McClary, "Sexual Politics in Classical Music," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 69. In his biography of Beethoven, Solomon also describes the first movement of *Eroica* in terms of ambition and aggression. See Solomon, *Beethoven*, 194–95.

70 The first movement's opening theme, introduced in the tonic, establishes a musical protagonist (hero), positioning the second, feminized theme (anti-hero), to be tamed through processes of development and recapitulation. See McClary, "Narrative Agendas in 'Absolute' Music," 329–32. My use of "male-gender frame" borrows from Philip Ewell's more recent argument that white-male racial frames govern Western music theory's analytical treatment of classical forms. While Ewell's critique of music theory's epistemology extends beyond McClary's, he acknowledges his argument's indebtedness to feminist scholarship such as work by Sara Ahmed. See Philip Ewell, "The Myth of Race and Gender Neutrality in Music Theory," *Music Theory's White Racial Frame: Confronting Racism and Sexism in American Music Theory*, April 3, 2020, https://musictheoryswhiteracialframe.wordpress.com/2020/04/03/the-myth-of-race-and-gender-neutrality-in-music-theory/.

71 McClary writes, "In classical music . . . masculine high culture is regarded as transcendent." See McClary, "Sexual Politics in Classical Music," 68.

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canonical work, my own overtly reproductive body might disappear. I became more and more seduced by the interpretative allure of *Eroica*: the prospect of enacting music that is, as Richard Wagner exhorted, "the act of heroism itself."[72] On a technical level, the piece is a challenge to conduct. The first movement, Allegro con brio, feels too fast to conduct in three but too slow to conduct in one. In the funeral march, one must balance articulative care with slight forward propulsion; too often the music may come to a grinding halt. Without absolute precision and vigilant concentration, the third movement Scherzo can completely fall apart. The fourth movement, variations lifted from the composer's ballet, *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* (op. 43), requires just the right handling of timing in an obstacle course of transitions and cadences that balance fury with charm.

And on top of it all: the symphony is too long. My preconcert jitters had less to do with lingering score-study doubts and more to do with my ability to stand upright for that amount of time. My pregnant body, susceptible to nonnormative and antiheroic levels of fatigue, felt like a physical manifestation of that Beethovenian struggle to overcome. If "thirty-two weeks" was my C sharp, could I be the hero? Could my conducting *Eroica* constitute a feminist rendering of heroic style? Could I answer Cusick's call for "a resisting performance practice" by reconfiguring the music's formalism and performer-score relationship through my own embodiment?[73]

Embodied projects in musicology—many of which rely on Small's reconceiving of music (object) as "musicking" (social action)—invite us to understand music as lived experience, situated in time and place, physically created and felt.[74] In her groundbreaking book *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology*, Elisabeth Le Guin positions the body at the center of her analysis. Le Guin's question is fundamentally a poietic one, trained on the intent of the composer. But her methodology—analyzing the physical movements of her own cello playing to better understand Luigi Boccherini's compositional approach (who himself played cello and wrote his music at the instrument)—opened the door for embodied autoethnography as a means of reshaping the composer-performer (not to mention the subject-scholar) relationship.[75] In the pre–work concept era of Boccherini's lifespan, the idiosyncrasies, challenges, and physical pleasures of how one produced sound

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72 Richard Wagner quoted in Chua, "Revolutionary Freedom," 28.

73 Cusick identifies the need to redefine the relationship between performer and composer in her call for "a resistant performance practice." Critiquing the idea of the music's stable "persona" or "essentialized character," she urges performers to "refuse symbolically the hegemonic consolidation of identity against Others, and so as to refuse symbolically the construction of masculinity out of the suppression of the feminine." See Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance," 99.

74 See Small, *Musicking*. Nina Sun Eidsheim's embodied study of music vibrations as actions and pedagogies owes in large part to Small's concept of musicking. She writes, "My turning to vibration is fueled by my interest in thinking about music as practice, not object." See Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 20.

75 See Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For another embodied exploration of a composer's music and culture, see Tom Beghin, *The Virtual Haydn: Paradox of a Twenty-First-Century Keyboardist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). For an example of analytical processes based on autoethnographic movements, see SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

on their instrument invite such melding of aesthetic and poietic considerations; music had yet to be valorized for abandoning the physical concerns of performers. Such an embodied approach might seem less applicable to *Eroica*, written by a composer famed for purportedly fuming, "Do you suppose I am thinking about your wretched fiddle?"[76]

Yet the origins of *Eroica* include more traces of embodiment than the confluence of formalist analysis, work concept, and *Werktreue* would lead us to believe. Historical comingling of physical events and praxis prevent *Eroica* from transcending into an exclusively abstracted realm, despite the symphony's prominence in absolute music discourse. Nicholas Mathew collapses the historically inscribed boundary separating the ostensible universality and immateriality of Beethoven's most canonical works (such as *Eroica*) from the blustering occasionality of his commemorative ones from the same period.[77] Referring to "the militarism of heroic style" as "an open secret," based on accounts by music critics of the time, Mathew argues that Beethoven's deployment of warfare imitation in *Eroica* reflects the same preoccupations as displayed in the composer's more overtly representational pieces like *Wellingtons Sieg*. Highlighting the music's prominent inclusion of militaristic cultural topoi, Mathew substantiates Rolland's and McClary's masculine readings of *Eroica*, while calling to question the symphony's long-held standing as work concept. Troubled by the idea that "what has come to represent the highest exaltation in music should have a military accent," Mathew criticizes subsequent twentieth-century critics for whom "the heroic masterworks sublimate such historically localized militarism into something universal," or, as Chua puts it, into "universal, absolute, and eternal" music that becomes "the non-diegetic soundtrack of humanity."[78]

Mathew singles out a particular passage from *Eroica*'s first movement as the most famous example of the music "demanding to be interpreted in representational or narrative terms rather than only as elements in a quasi-architectural design": a prolonged sequence of hemiolas accented with *sforzandi* atop increasingly dissonant chords, directly preceding the development section's abrupt turn to E minor.[79]

76 Joseph Kerman, "Beethoven Quartet Audiences: Actual, Potential, Ideal," in *The Beethoven Quartet Companion*, ed. Robert Winter and Robert Martin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 16. Beghin's more recent *Inside the Hearing Machine* project, including a new recording of Beethoven's late piano sonatas, offers an embodied and historically informed response to this question. For his research, Beghin utilizes his own piano playing on Beethoven's Broadwood instrument, along with a reconstruction of the composer's hearing aid machine (developed by André Stein) for an embodied analysis. See Tom Beghin, "Inside the Hearing Machine," Orpheus Instituut, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.insidethehearingmachine.com/.

77 Mathew suggests that the difference between *Wellingtons Sieg* and *Eroica* "might lie in how Beethoven employs his musical language, rather than the nature of the language itself." See Mathew, *Political Beethoven*, 45.

78 Mathew, *Political Beethoven*, 45, 46; Chua, "Revolutionary Freedom," 23.

79 Mathew, *Political Beethoven*, 45. Formally, this is an aberrant moment, serving as the transition into a new theme, whose introduction within the development section goes against typical sonata-form schema for this period. Mathew also notes how Richard Will, in his book *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (2002), compares this hemiola passage to the cannon bursts in *Wellingtons Sieg*. See Mathew, *Political Beethoven*, 46. Chua also focuses on this passage, treating the new theme's emergence from silence as a plot twist—a fundamental rupture from the symphony's self-charting form—that invites

Mathew shows how nineteenth-century critics highlighted this moment, not for its formal significance (heralding the arrival of a new theme in a far-out key) but for its mimesis: a demonstration of music imitating physical violence. This violence is enacted by the conductor, who alternates stillness with sudden, rapidly accelerating gestures. In order to elucidate the hemiola's rhythmic displacement and strong, abrupt articulation, one slows the baton to a complete stop two beats before each accent sounds. Momentary stillness in the conducting body attracts the musicians' attention and allows the conductor to emphasize what follows: a dramatic increase in speed to convey a strong and forceful preparatory beat (like a physical blow). The physicalization of violence, picked up in early reviews noting the music's mimesis and later suppressed through absolute music discourse, is sustained through the body of the conductor.[80]

The ways in which early reception characterized these hemiolas in gestural terms not only manifests in the conducting body: it creates a through line with Solomon's physiological exploration of Beethoven's hearing loss around the time of *Eroica*'s conception, and how sudden, loud noises (like hemiolas accented by *sforzandi*) apparently elicited physical pain for the composer.[81] The hemiolas in *Eroica* assume multiple layers of embodiment: mimetic representations of culturally legible pain combined with inflections of Beethoven's bodily pain.

Beethoven's body is present in *Eroica*. According to Solomon, the symphony is a musical distillation of the composer's response to his increasing deafness, as revealed through the so-called Heiligenstadt Testament.[82] If Beethoven is the music's hero, as posited by Rolland and affirmed by Solomon, the music's prolonged tonal and rhythmic struggles become the composer's grappling with the ramifications of hearing loss.[83] Joseph Straus, exploring contemporaneous cultural attitudes toward deafness, uses the lens of disability studies to account for that which formally propels *Eroica*: the overcoming narrative. He writes, "Beethoven is understood to thematize his own deafness within his music." As Straus notes, the work's evocation

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theological interpretation. See Chua, "Revolutionary Freedom," 31–33, 36–38.

80 Muñoz ascribes masculinity to the kind of sudden movements one would use to conduct this passage of *Eroica*. Using the case study of Kevin Aviance, a Black American drag queen based in New York City, to explore intersections between drag-club dance gestures and gender performance fluidity, Muñoz distinguishes between feminine and masculine gestures as follows: "[Aviance's] movements are coded as masculine (strong abrupt motions), feminine (smooth flowing moves), and, above all, robotic (precise mechanical movements)." See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 77.

81 Describing Beethoven's onset of symptoms attributed to early hearing loss between 1801 and 1802, Solomon writes, "In the years of the crisis, 1801–02 . . . there were intermittent symptoms of 'tinnitus,' such as humming, ringing, buzzing, and other noises in the ears; there was a partial loss of the ability to distinguish high frequencies; and sudden loud noises caused discomfort and even pain." See Solomon, *Beethoven*, 121–22.

82 Solomon calls the Heiligenstadt Testament "the literary prototype of the *Eroica* Symphony, a portrait of the artist as hero, stricken by deafness." See Solomon, *Beethoven*, 121.

83 Joseph Straus suggests this correlation, while also raising Hector and Prometheus as other hypothesized heroic subjects of the symphony, in addition to Beethoven and Bonaparte. See Joseph Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59, no. 1 (2006): 113–84, 155–57.

of Beethoven's struggle with disability means that "the music is thus metaphorically conflated with the body of a fleshly human being."[84]

The music is more than metaphorically conflated with Beethoven's body. Not only was Beethoven writing *Eroica* while preoccupied by the increasing disablement of his hearing loss, he was performing the music as a conductor. While Beethoven's performance activities abated throughout his lifetime (personifying a broader historiographic split between composer and performer), in reality Beethoven kept playing piano publicly until 1810 and kept conducting into the 1810s and even led a concert in 1822 (with assistants).[85] What gets lost in *Eroica*'s co-option as work concept is that Beethoven himself conducted the piece's premiere and subsequent performances, and that his physical abilities and disabilities inflected concert preparation and execution.[86] He may not have composed the score while standing on a podium holding a baton, but his sensory experiences are built into the music.

Eroica was originally animated by a nonnaturalized conducting body. Just as the disembodiment of "the music itself" loses traction in this symphony, so too does the naturalization of ableism. While we may construe Beethoven's hearing loss as spectral and invisible, the manifestation, transmission, and reception of sound depend on physical vibrations, including those within human bodies. Nina Sun Eidsheim interrogates what she calls "figure of sound": the idea of sound as a disembodied object, rather than the result of physical interactions.[87] Seeking "a reconception of sound as event through the practice of vibration," Eidsheim writes, "I maintain that not only aurality but also tactile, spatial, physical, material, and vibrational sensations are at the core of all music."[88]

Eidsheim's theory of vibrations builds in part from work in timbral studies, where the sublimation of music as form is likewise critiqued. Emily Dolan shows how "paradoxically, music's perceived immateriality and absoluteness depended upon concrete, material changes in orchestral practice."[89] Characterizing orchestration through visibility, Dolan's argument unveils *Eroica* from the invisibility of its formalism.[90] The symphony is timbrally marked by the addition of a third French

84 Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal," 160, 155. For more recent examination of Beethoven's hearing loss, embodiment, and narratives of disability, see Robin Wallace, *Hearing Beethoven: A Story of Musical Loss and Discovery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

85 Solomon, *Beethoven*, 122, 127.

86 Solomon recounts a report of Beethoven having difficulty hearing the woodwind instruments during an *Eroica* rehearsal in 1804. See Solomon, *Beethoven*, 122.

87 Eidsheim writes, "With this term [figure of sound] I attempt to capture the process of ossification, through which I argue that an ever-shifting, relationally dependent phenomenon comes to be perceived as a static object or incident. It is precisely because the figure of sound is, by definition, a naturalized concept that inquiries into voice and music, which are baked on it, are similarly defined." See Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 2. Eidsheim also connects the fallacy of figure of sound to the broader and historiographically pervasive work concept. She writes, "I also note that the metaphysical assumptions at the base of musical inquiry arise in relation to questions about music's materiality or ineffability" (11).

88 Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 3–8.

89 Emily I. Dolan, *The Orchestral Revolution: Haydn and the Technologies of Timbre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.

90 Dolan presents timbre and form in opposition to one another, as visible and invisible. She writes, "Invisibility—whether literal or imagined—also played a crucial role in musical discourse. Indeed, it was

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horn, heralding increasingly diversified instrumentations for its genre over the course of the subsequent century. Such considerations reformulate our understanding of the symphony by eschewing, as Cusick urges, the "essentializing strategies" of formal analysis in favor of "less-valued 'sensual' features like texture and timbre."[91] Imprinted by mimesis, (dis)ability, performance, vibration, and timbre, *Eroica* may be understood not as work concept but as an array of dynamic embodiments and layered visibilities.

Conclusion

In conflict with the gendered, sexed, and differently abled (pregnant) body, there remains a hypermasculinity to heroic style, expounded by critics and theorists ranging from Rolland to McClary. Masculinity is baked into the historical and cultural conditions of the music's topoi and form; to suggest otherwise would be an ahistoricism or appropriation.[92] I hesitate to draw an analogy between Beethoven's deafness and the third trimester of my pregnancy by distilling heroic style to one's own dynamic physical state. To do so would mean succumbing to the exclusionary-based *Werktreue* doctrine that interpretations derive authority from a performer's ability to channel the soul or psyche of the composer, and to embrace harmfully ableist narratives of overcoming. Still, to consider the disability of Beethoven's own hearing loss, not as metaphor but as what Eidsheim might characterize as "extraparadigmatic" physical experience, calls into question the interpretative privilege and positionality of paradigmatic ones.

Conducting this symphony from a differently abled, gendered position resists the masculinity-privileging *disembodiment* of *Eroica* the work, as well as the masculinity-privileging *embodiment* of *Eroica* the occasion. What it affirms, instead, is skepticism about the expectation that the conductor's identity should harbor affinity with that of the composer. To ask what it means for a pregnant person to conduct *Eroica* is to ask: Who is ascribing meaning to a musical experience, and for whom? How are expectations for *Eroica* transfigured through the body of the one expecting?[93]

McClary writes, "The tendency to deny the body and to identify with pure mind underlies virtually every aspect of patriarchal Western culture."[94] We might be

when critics listened past orchestration that they could begin to speak of musical form." See Dolan, *Orchestral Revolution*, 210.

91 Suzanne G. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 76–77. In her analysis of Fanny Hensel's piano trio, Cusick also suggests interest in timbral analysis over formal analysis. See Cusick, "Feminist Theory," 10.

92 With *Eroica*, Mathew writes, "An aesthetic of autonomy might appear to safeguard the uncontaminated musical work—but it actually turns 'appropriated-ness' into its primary mode of being." See Mathew, *Political Beethoven*, 56.

93 I am grateful to conversation with Stephen Hinton for this idea and wordplay.

94 McClary, "Sexual Politics in Classical Music," 54. Scott Burnham, addressing historical hostilities among music theorists and critical theorists in his article "Theorists and 'The Music Itself,'" also suggests we pay more attention to the body. The reconciliation he imagines "would involve a shift to the role of the body, for this is at the heart of my concern about palpable prototypes and the pleasures of music theory. . . .

more accepting of seeing gendered bodies on the podium if we were more accepting of bodies in music, period. Sustained work to normalize the expectation for non-naturalized conducting bodies requires confrontation with a Western-centric, white supremacist, male-dominant, Aristotelian concept of music. The lack of gender and racial diversity in orchestral conducting connects to structures of sexism and racism perpetuated through the myth of classical music's universality, as shown through critical race and Indigenous studies. Philip Ewell critiques the epistemology of Western music theory's "white racial frame" as an objective, acultural study, prevalent across universities and conservatories.[95] His argument recalls McClary's critique of sonata form as an extension of patriarchal culture and recapitulates issues raised by Robert Walser concerning white analytical efforts to "legitimize" jazz through the lens of modernism.[96] Echoing Ewell's interrogation of institutional structures, Dylan Robinson critiques continued Indigenous marginalization within classical music.[97] Examining how Western poietic and performance conventions remain dominant within multicultural collaborations, Dylan describes the "epistemological violence through art music's audiophilic privileging of and adherence to its own values of performance and virtuosity."[98] Our reverence for genius composers and musical objects reinforces white, colonialist, and—in many cases—male-dominated frames.[99]

Perhaps we would find that music is the art form that most successfully models the human integration of mind and body." See Scott Burnham, "Theorists and 'The Music Itself,'" *Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 329.

95 Philip Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2 (September 2020), https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html. Ewell writes, "As the main musical organizational force that emerged from Europe in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, functional tonality is also racialized as 'white.' . . . The fact that many of the ideas from functional tonality appear in so many of the world's musics is a direct result of the power of colonialism and hegemony. Thus, the problem of our white frame in our music curricula concerns not only the repertoire that we study, but also the music theories behind the repertoire." See Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," 5–6.

96 See Robert Walser, "Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis," *Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 343–65. Exploring the case study of Miles Davis and his "wrong" notes, Walser writes, "Prevalent methods of jazz analysis, borrowed from the toolbox of musicology, provide excellent means for *legitimating* jazz in the academy. But they are clearly inadequate to the task of helping us to *understand* jazz. . . . They offer only a kind of mystified, ahistorical, text-based legitimacy within which rhetoric and signifyin' are invisible." See Walser, "Out of Notes," 359. Early formal analysis of jazz by theorists like Gunther Schuller privileged structural analysis over performance practices and improvisations. Brian Harker raises this issue, exploring whether coherence, which he recognizes to be "a bedrock value of Western European musical aesthetics," is an appropriate metric to apply to the formal innovations Louis Armstrong made in his solos. See Brian Harker, "'Telling a Story': Louis Armstrong and Coherence in Early Jazz," *Current Musicology* 63 (Fall 1997): 46.

97 Intercultural performance collaborations that include Indigenous and non-Western musicians may, as Dylan Robinson cautions, "just as easily take part in a representational politics that does not necessarily address the structural inequities that underpin inclusion. . . . Inclusion can just as easily participate in an elision of reciprocal relationships between collaborating partners." See Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 5.

98 Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 6.

99 To elucidate the white-male frame's colonialist underpinnings, Ewell cites Kofi Agawu, "Tonality as a Colonizing Force in Africa," in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, ed. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). See Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," 5.

It is time to acknowledge the inequity and exclusion inherited from the *Werktreue* composer-performer relationship: to call into question those methods that have privileged scores over bodies, and marginalized nonmale, nonwhite, and/or differently abled musical contributors. It is time to render the invisible visible: to accept that all bodies are worthy of making music, across cultures and contexts. As conductors and conducting teachers, we might think more critically about the assumptions we make and the values we hold in esteem. As practitioners, we might more carefully define what we do and why we do it. As scholars, we might better engage in conversations with performers and the public, so that work to dismantle structural hegemonies may become more than theoretical.[100]

The allure of music's autonomy as an aesthetic object remains strong, particularly within the symphonic genre.[101] Yet once those formal discourses upholding the myth of absolute music have been fully critiqued, and the performer centered, not subjugated, a stronger affinity may develop between symphony as complex sensory experience and the norm-resisting body. Conducting *Eroica*'s conflation of masculinities might seem anathema to the lived experience of a cis female pregnant person. Alternatively, it might deliver novel ways to access and express the joy of protest and power.

The embodied experience of conducting *Eroica* while pregnant is a paradox. It fulfills Cusick's invitation to "discover that much of the pleasure in music is afforded by the opportunity it gives us to play ourselves free of gender's rigidities."[102] Music making is creative, collaborative, and happening through the body. May extraparadigmatic bodies become the expectation, not the exception.

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100 One such platform to facilitate dialogue and engagement among scholars and performers is the Oxford Conducting Institute, whose mission through annual conferences has been "to bring together researchers and practitioners from around the world to generate interdisciplinary dialogue and promote further development in the field of conducting studies." See "Oxford Conducting Institute Conference," Maynooth University, National University of Ireland Maynooth, June 22, 2021, https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/news-events/oxford-conducting-institute-conference.

101 The sovereignty of "the music itself" appears not so easy to shake in music studies. Ultimately embracing coherence as an analytical framework for Louis Armstrong's music, Harker urges scholars not to "repudiate the *raison d'être* of cultural context: the actual music." See Harker, "Telling a Story," 77. Even Margaret Walker, in a call to decolonize music curricula, defends, to some degree, the autonomy of Western art music. She writes, "I remain unconvinced that it is the 'music itself' that supports coloniality, but believe that it is rather the narrative of evolution and consequent privileging of Western composers, works, and analytical tools that delivers this message of superiority." See Margaret E. Walker, "Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2020): 14.

102 Cusick, "Feminist Theory," 20.

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