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Research on music listening: From Typologies to Interviews with Real People

La recherche sur l'écoute musicale : des typologies aux entretiens avec de vraies personnes

Lars Lilliestam

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Research on Music Listening: From Typologies to Interviews with Real People

by

Lars Lilliestam

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Abstract: This article deals with music listening and it is based on a research project, *Music in People's Lives*, made in Gothenburg, Sweden, between 2007 and 2009 by musicologists Thomas Bossius and Lars Lilliestam. Deep interviews were made with 42 people in the ages between 20 and 95 years about their use of music. In the first part of the article I deal with previous research on music listening, focussing especially on theories of listener typologies. After a general presentation of the research project I compare these theories with what the informants say about music listening. A picture emerges that is in many ways quite distant from simple listener typologies – and much more complicated. Concepts like active vs. passive and concentrated vs. un-concentrated or background listening are questioned, and newer concepts like parallel listening, repeat listening and ecological listening are discussed. The article finishes with a proposal for future research on music listening based on multi-disciplinary studies and a combination of phenomenological, psychological and medical methods.

Keywords: *Music Listening – Music Sociology – Music and Culture Theory – Music Use – Listener Typologies*

Résumé : Cet article est tiré d'un projet de recherche, *La Musique dans la Vie des Gens*, conduit à Gothenburg en Suède, entre 2007 et 2009, par les musicologues Thomas Bossius et Lars Gothenburg. Des entretiens approfondis furent réalisés avec 42 personnes âgées de 20 à 95 ans, portant sur leurs usages de la musique. Dans la première partie de l'article, j'examine les typologies d'auditeurs proposées par certaines recherches passées. Je présente ensuite le projet et compare ces théories avec les propos rapportés par les participants à l'enquête. Un portrait de ces pratiques émerge, qui, de nombreuses manières, est très différent et bien plus compliqué que celui défini par ces typologies. Des dichotomies conceptuelles telles que actif/passif et concentré/inattentif sont mises en doute et de nouveaux concepts d'écoute – parallèle, répétitive ou écologique – sont discutés. Cette contribution se conclut sur la proposition de recherches futures sur l'écoute musicale, basées sur des études multidisciplinaires combinant des méthodes phénoménologiques, psychologiques et médicales.

Mots-clés : *écoute musicale – sociologie de la musique – musique et théorie – culturelle – usages – typologies d'auditeurs*

He sat on the tram, a young man in his twenties, half long hair, casually dressed in jeans and a light jacket. He also had a pair of headphones on. He looked slightly introverted looking out the window with his gaze lost in the distance. Apparently he listened to the music in his headphones with great attention. Suddenly he made a swaying movement with his chest and arms, just for a second, seemingly in response to something in the music, perhaps a drum roll. Then he was still again until half a minute later when he leaned over playing air guitar for a few seconds finally to return to his calm listening pose. What did he listen to? What in the music made him so concentrated and move his body like that? What did he hear? What did he experience?

From a general point of view: What happens to us when we listen to music? What do we hear and how does it affect us? Do you perceive the same musical structures as I do – and do we interpret them the same way? These questions, and the last one in particular, are remarkably overlooked by musicologists. Certainly there is an extensive research on music analysis and semiotics, but the question if listeners without music analytical schooling really understand the music in the same way as the analyst is studiously avoided even though it is fundamental. It is taken for granted that this is the case. It ain't necessarily so. On the other hand it is a very difficult problem to tackle.

How do you describe a musical experience, emotion or association or a musical structure verbally? The problems are similar with all sensory perceptions, emotions and associations and the question is of course basic in cognitional and perception

research. Nevertheless they must be confronted and dealt with. There is an abundance of research within music psychology about music and emotion and musical experiences in general and this is a rapidly growing field (Juslin & Sloboda [eds], 2001 and 2010; Gabrielsson, 2008; Levitin, 2006 and 2009; Ball, 2010).

Another direction in music research deals with listener types and listening strategies and techniques, and this research has been done by musicologists as well as scholars from other disciplines.

In this article I will firstly present some chosen studies about listener typologies and listening strategies. Secondly, I will present and compare these studies with results from a research project made by Thomas Bossius and myself from The Department of Cultural Sciences at The University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The project is called, in English, *Music in People's Lives* (in Swedish: *Musik i Människors Liv*) and was carried through between 2007 and 2010 (Bossius & Lilliestam, 2011). A closer presentation of the project is made later in this article. In conclusion some reflections on future research is discussed.

Listener types and listening strategies

It has been a tradition within musicology to make classifications of listener types or listening strategies. The basic idea is that you can divide people in typologies based on how they are supposed to listen to music. The earliest are from the late 18th century Germany. A scholar at this time

distinguished between “putative connoisseurs” and “real connoisseurs” (or in German “Kenner” and “Liebhaber”), i.e. between people who were experts and people who just enjoyed music (Rösing & Bruhn, 1993:130-136; Bonde, 2009:236). This is a basic pattern that has continued to this day.

A more recent and quite often discussed typology was presented by the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno (1976:1-20) in the beginning of the 1960's. Adorno describes eight listener types in a descending scale starting with the “expert” and finishing with “the musically indifferent, the unmusical, and the anti-musical”. Between these extremes can be found “the culture consumer”, “the emotional listener”, “the resentment listener”, “the jazz expert” and “the listener to whom music is entertainment”. The expert listener is described thus:

“He would be the fully conscious listener who tends to miss nothing and at the same time, at each moment, accounts to himself what he has heard. For a start, if a man has his first encounter with the second movement of Webern's Trio for Strings and can name the formal components of that dissolved architectonically unsupported piece, such a man would qualify as an expert.” (Adorno, 1976:4)

Adorno does not build his typology on any empirical material whatsoever, nor does he describe how he came to his conclusions, but he explains that the categories are to be seen as “ideal types”, that they “do not appear in chemical purity” and expresses various reservations and precautions about how they should be understood (Adorno, 1976:2-3). Nevertheless, and not unexpectedly, he has been heavily criticized both for having an

elitist attitude and for his reluctance to see things from another horizon than his own German bourgeois art music sphere (Martin 1995:75-125; Frith, 1996; DeNora, 2000).

The Norwegian composer Knut Wiggen in the early 1970's described, also without giving any empirical evidence, four different what he calls “listening techniques” which he describes in the following way:

1. Listening to music as a *sounding backdrop*. “You know that something is played but you don't know what. Music becomes a pleasant companion. It sounds the way it always has and that feels safe. ... our equivalence to the secure crackling of the kitchen stove and the sighing of the wind around the corner of your house.”
2. Being *intoxicated by sound*. “The trivial surroundings disappear in the inebriation that the sounding splendour put you in. The situation is not unlike the first stages of alcoholic intoxication, when feelings of discomfort are eliminated and delight is let through.”
3. *Craftmanship listening*. “... to sharpen one's ear for the general principles of compositional technique and the way individual composers put them into practice, each one in his own way.”
4. *Contents listening*. “Listening to the musical structure is not in the centre any more but rather the observation of the emotions that the musical structure gives rise to. The music then begins to ‘talk’ to you. The man behind the work and what he wants to convey to his

listeners treads to the fore in that the emotions he designed in his music are resurrected in the listener" (Wiggen, 1971:37ff. My translations).

The Swedish music sociologist Göran Nylöf in the early 1980's distinguished between what he called "comprehensive listeners" and "fragmentary listeners" which he described like this:

"The typical comprehensive listener probably has a great interest for longer works/compositions, which the fragmentary listener finds boring or 'monotonous'. The latter instead decides on short melodies or tunes, individual solo contributions, a familiar sound and the like. The fragmentary listener is probably more inclined to use music as a background for other activities. Fragmentary listening demands a lot less adaptation of the musical impressions than comprehensive listening." (Nylöf, 1982:140. My translation.)

In another study Nylöf discriminates between ways of listening that on the one hand leads to "personal development" and on the other functions as "compensation for unsatisfactory conditions of life". With that he gives the discussion about listening an ethical dimension, but his analysis suffers from weakly supported conclusions (Nylöf, 1977:63ff).

The German musicologist Helmut Rösing (1984:135) claims that between two extreme points, "inattentive listening" and "attentive listening", there are a number of different ways of listening, gradually more complex, that he calls "motoric/reflective", "pictorial/imaginative", "associative/emotional", "empathetic", "subject orientated" and "structural" reception (note that he uses the word "reception", not "lis-

tening"). In his analysis Rösing is influenced by and partly argues with the German musicologist Hermann Rauhe.

Now a few characteristics are typical of these classifications. Firstly, it is implied that people *are* a certain kind of listener type, i.e. you always listen to music in the same way alternatively use certain listening strategies that you tend to stick to. Secondly, listening tends to be seen as an activity in itself, something autonomous, without connection to person, circumstances, purposes, historical situation or culture. Thirdly, the ideal, more or less explicitly articulated, is that you should listen to music with concentration, without any simultaneous activity, and that you should focus on the musical structure rather than its emotional or associational contents. A fourth characteristic is that the classifications are not founded in empirical research but are rather speculative constructs of the scholar's own experiences and conceptions. All scholars are deeply rooted in the European art music tradition and assume that tradition as a norm.

It is interesting to note that the type of classification that Rösing advocates, "attentive" and "inattentive" listening, commonly expressed in terms like "active" versus "passive" listening or "concentrated" listening versus "background listening", has become a kind of cultural public property that is not associated with any particular scholar or scholarly line. However, when using these terms it is not common to state any intermediate positions but rather describe the ways of listening as dichotomies. Furthermore, the concepts active/passive or concentrated/un-con-

centrated, are usually not explained or defined, and the meanings of the concepts are taken for granted or self-evident.

One example is the psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, who, in his famous study *Flow*, makes a distinction between “listening” and “hearing”, where listening implies that you concentrate on the music while hearing denotes different kinds of absent-minded or non-focussed musical perception. “It is not the *hearing* that improves life, it is the *listening*”, Csíkszentmihályi writes somewhat vaguely, echoing ideas from Eduard Hanslick’s *Vom musikalisch schönen* (*On the beauty of music*) from 1854 (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990:109; Hanslick, 1854/1986 – see also Clarke, Dibben & Pitts, 2010:65ff).

There are, however, many versions of this basic model. The Swedish musicologist Alf Björnberg (1996:22) speaks of “the musician’s perspective” vs. “the listener’s perspective”, where the first is about how the music is constructed or composed and the other about what it means. Terms like “musical listening” or “analytical listening” versus “everyday listening” are also frequent (Dibben, 2001:161; Clarke, 2005:132f; Rösing, 1984; Martin, 1995; Sloboda 2010). The British music psychologist Eric Clarke (2005:144) speaks of “a continuum between structural or syntactic listening on the one hand, and affective and associative listening on the other.”

All these concepts are vague and seldom defined and they all refer to the notions that people can listen to music in more or less concentrated ways, that one can focus either on the structure of the

music or on its content or meaning, and that differing needs and skills govern which ways of listening you apply. An “everyday” listening is also assumed to be to a lesser degree directed towards the musical structure than an “analytical” listening. The sad truth is, however, that even if we think that there is a good deal in this idea we do not *know* if there really is. In practice it is impossible to draw a distinct dividing line between concentrated and un-concentrated – cf. *infra*.

It is also striking that when you speak of “background listening”, i.e. that you do something simultaneously when you listen to music, the second activity is practically always seen as primary or superior while the music is in the background. Again, this is taken for granted without any motivation. A possible reason for this is that concentrated listening is implicitly seen as an ideal, and that the listening is of a poorer quality if you do something else at the same time as you listen to music.

The Swedish musicologist Åsa Bergman (2009:43) has introduced the concept of *parallel* listening. This means that you listen to music while doing something else, but it is not self-evident which activity, if any, that is primary. Do I listen to music while I cook or do I cook while I listen to music? Which activity calls for the highest concentration? The answer is in no way self evident, and many combinations are possible. Another question is of course what you perceive of the music when you listen parallel with some other action. Does it necessarily mean that the music passes you by without notice, that it becomes a sounding wallpaper? Can you listen with concentration while doing

something else? It is reasonable to assume that different forms of parallel actions influence music listening in different ways and that different individual's simultaneous capacities when listening to music differ – but we do not know very much about this since research is lacking.

Dance, by the way, is an interesting case, usually not discussed in these kinds of analyses. When I dance, do I listen “passively” or “actively”? Obviously I do “something else” simultaneously as I listen to music. How, in general, is the activity of dancing, i.e. body movements, related to the music and to listening/perceiving?

The British music pedagogue Lucy Green (2001:23-24) emphasizes the rather obvious idea that you listen to music in different ways depending on the purpose. “Purposive listening” means that you listen to music with the aim of copying the music and then performing it. “Attentive listening” implies that you listen with attention but without the purpose of playing the music yourself. “Distracted listening” is listening to music just for pleasure or as entertainment. Green does not set these ways of listening in hierarchies but underlines precisely the purpose of listening. If you start from the needs or the purposes the music fulfils the perspective on the activity becomes different compared to if you take the sounding music itself for granted.

A related perspective has been introduced by the Swedish musicologist Ola Stockfelt, who speaks of what he calls “modes of listening” and specifically “adequate modes of listening”:

“Adequate listening occurs when one listens to music according to the exigencies of a given social situation

and according to the predominant sociocultural conventions of the subculture to which the music belongs.” (Stockfelt 1997:137)

The basis for this is that all music can be listened to in many different ways, but that in connection with a certain genre a number of “genre-normative modes of listening” have been developed, and these have changed over time in a dialectic relationship with changes both in the style of music and in social and cultural factors (Stockfelt 1997:137). In other words: you *are* not a listener type that always listens in a certain way, but an individual is supposed to be flexible and able to (learn to) listen to music in different ways depending on what the music affords, calls for or invites to and what the individual needs or sees fit in a certain situation.

Judith Becker is an American music psychologist and in a discussion of emotional reactions to music in different cultures she stresses:

“Emotional responses to music do not occur spontaneously, nor ‘naturally’, but rather take place within complex systems of thought and behaviour concerning what music means, what it is for, how it is to be perceived, and what might be appropriate kinds of expressive responses.” (Becker, 2010:129)

She then presents, with reference to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of *habitus of listening*:

“A habitus of listening suggests not a necessity nor a rule, but an inclination, a disposition to listen with a particular kind of focus, to expect to experience particular kinds of emotion, to move with certain stylized gestures, and to interpret the meaning of the sounds and one's emotional responses to the musical event in somewhat (never totally) predictable ways.” (Becker, 2010:130)

In our study we have taken the liberty to widen this concept even more by defining what we call a *musical habitus*:

“A musical habitus involves a taste or distaste for particular kinds of music, acquired habits and the ability to understand and interpret certain types of music and to manage certain types of musical actions (for instance the ability to play an instrument or to sing). A musical habitus is formed by one’s social background and experiences, what one is exposed for, becomes accustomed to, learns to like and learns to do.” (Bossius & Lilliestam, 2011:75, 308)

On the basis of our experiences we learn not only models and schemas for how music is usually constructed when it comes to form, chords, melodic shapes, rhythms and sound but also what the music “means” or associates to and its emotional contents. When we meet new musical structures or patterns these are related to what is already programmed in our brain and to memories of music we have heard in the past. The ways in which we experience and code and decode music are in this way tied to both individual and culture. Or as the neurologist Daniel Levitin claims:

“Our brains learn a kind of musical grammar that is specific to the music of our culture, just as we learn to speak the language of our culture.” (Levitin, 2006:108 – see also McMullen & Saffran, 2004 and Lilliestam, 2009:52-69)

The British music psychologist Eric Clarke talks about ecological listening, based on the theories of the psychologists James and Eleanor Gibson (Clarke, 2005 – see also Ball, 2010 and Clarke, Dibben & Pitts, 2010:65-78). The essential idea is that we listen to music much in the same way as we listen to other sounds in the environment. What

we perceive and how is a product of the music as a sounding structure, the individual that listens and her skills and knowledge and the prerequisites, demands and needs that exists in the situation in question. Basic questions when we hear a sound are: What is happening? What kind of sound is this? What does it mean? What attitude am I to take?

People permanently categorize and interpret sounds. What we call “music” is one category of sound among all other sounds in the soundscape, that we may treat as special and ascribe particular qualities just because we appoint it “music”. Stockfelt’s, Becker’s, Bergman’s and Clarke’s ways of thinking seem much more productive for developing a deeper and more realistic understanding of how people listen to music than simple typologies of listeners (see also Lilliestam, 2009:91-106; Bonde, 2009:189-217, 236ff; Dibben, 2001; Rösing & Bruhn, 1993; Cox & Warner [eds], 2005).

The project *Music in People’s Lives*

The project *Music in People’s Lives* is based on qualitative interviews with 42 people, 21 women and 21 men, in the ages of 20-95 years, mainly living in Gothenburg, Sweden. The informants have different occupations, social and cultural backgrounds and varying degrees of education – as well as musical interests. The interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2009.

A fundamental theoretical starting point is the British musicologist Christopher Small’s concept of *musicking*, slightly altered and expanded by Lars Lilliestam:

“Musicking comprises all activities of which music is a part, like listening, playing, making music, singing, dancing, talking about music, reading about music, collecting music, or remembering music silently in your own mind.” (Lilliestam, 2009: 24; c.f. Small 1998)

This means that music must be seen holistically. In order to understand how music is used and its effects you must investigate different aspects of musicking and how they interact. The significance of music is created in a process involving many different activities and ways of thinking that together produces meaning and make the music usable for different aims.

Consequently, our semi-structured questionnaire deals with topics, like music listening, playing, singing, dancing, attending concerts, reading and talking about music, buying, obtaining and collecting music, musical preferences, valuations of music, memories and strong experiences of music. The initial question in each interview has been “What does music mean to you”? From there the interviews have gone in all possible directions. We have tried to deal with every theme in the questionnaire in each interview, but this has been done in varying order and depth.

The interviews have lasted 20-90 minutes, most of them about an hour. The interviews have been recorded and transcribed and the content categorized and analysed. The informants have been chosen more or less at random. We have visited a workplace or some association, presented our project and asked if people have wanted to be interviewed. The informants are people that we have had no or very little previous knowledge about, especially not about their musical habits, tastes or

interest. We have visited a porter’s office, a literary circle (dominated by teachers), a bookstore, a group of university students and a home for elderly people.

We have also interviewed a number of people that we have encountered in our everyday – a florist, a managing director, a fishmonger, two bicycle repairers, two nurses, a warehouse worker, an administrator – again without knowing anything or very little about their musical activities. Seven informants were chosen because of their alleged strong musical interest. One has been an avid collector of live recordings of David Bowie (claiming to own more than a thousand!), and five informants are a group of fellow workers from a high technology company who used to visit concerts of chamber music at the Gothenburg Concert Hall. One informant is a professional singer and music teacher, the only informant with music as her occupation.

There is an intention behind interviewing people with varying backgrounds and musical interests. Similar studies to ours have been made with people with particular interests in music, like musicians, music students or fans of a certain artist or genre. We have, however, strived to include “musical” as well as “unmusical people”, some with a keen interest in music and some who are not very interested. Some have claimed by the interview that they really should not be there because of their weak musical interest, but we have then emphasized that this very fact is a point and that we are just as interested in what they have to say as an extreme music fan.

The focus of the study has been on behaviour, motives and reasons for certain behaviours and valuations. The foundation of the project is the answers and statements as they were given at the time of the interview. Perhaps someone forgot to recount something, remembered something some time afterwards or did not want to reveal things they felt were too personal, intimate, or awkward. These are 42 real living persons telling their stories about music in their lives. Had we spoken to 42 other informants we would have had 42 different stories – but we are very certain that many of the patterns that we have found would have been present in them as well.

There are only a limited number of studies that are in some way comparable to *Music in People's Lives*, mainly Tia DeNora's *Music in everyday life* (2000), the Norwegian Even Ruud's *Musikk og identitet (Music and identity)* (1997) and Craft, Cavicchi & Keils *My music* (1994). The latter however lacks a theoretical perspective and analysis.

The project report, *Musiken och jag (The music and me)* (Bossius & Lilliestam, 2011), is a journey from sociological discussions about relations between social factors (age, class, gender, ethnicity, place of residence etc.) and musical habits, taste and behaviour, via descriptions and analyses of musical actions or aspects of musicking to discussions about musical preferences and values, experiences and memories, self therapy, health and philosophy of life.

I will now continue with a presentation of some of the material that deals especially with music

listening and put that in relation to the research about listening presented above.

Listener types in MiPL

Listener types in the sense of the cited research cannot be discerned among our informants in the MiPL project. Noone calls him or herself an “expert listener” or claims to listen “actively” or “passively” or “analytically” – or any other term that we have seen researchers use. (However, one single informant implies a distinction between “listening” and “hearing” – see *infra*, xx) It is probably rare that people think of themselves in these kinds of categories, which are, of course, produced by scholars and analysts. Naturally we have not asked our informants if they see themselves as some kind of listener type. What follows are terms that the interviewees themselves have used spontaneously.

In truth a few types of listener categories actually appear in our material, but not the ones mentioned in previous research. Four informants call themselves musical “omnivores”, meaning that they like and listen to many different sorts of music. Possibly this should rather be seen as a taste category than a listener type – whatever the difference between the two may be. Saying that you are a musical “omnivore” is of course a kind of cliché that in reality does not say very much about either musical habits or tastes.

A male informant calls himself both an “album man”, which means that he prefers to listen to whole albums, and a “melody guy”, by which he

means that he focuses on melodies in contrast to what he calls “rhythm guys”. A female informant claims that she is a “lyric person”, i.e. she pays great attention to song lyrics.

A young man claims to be a “repeat listener”: he likes to listen to the same musical piece or album over and over many times. This pleasure is mentioned by some other informants as well. What they listen to in this way is mainly new and unfamiliar music or music that they particularly like or want to study and focus on in detail (c.f. Lucy Green’s “purposive listening” on page *supra*). A technical prerequisite for this kind of listening is the repeat function of an mp3 or cd player. Of course this kind of listening, although troublesome, was possible even in the days before digital music machinery, but digital technique have made repeat listening so much easier. (Once we were approached by a woman who claimed that when she was in her teens in the early nineties she had recorded a C90-cassette with only the Bryan Adams song ‘Everything I do’ on it, so that she could hear it again and again without rewinding the cassette.)

The pleasure of listening to the same song or album repeatedly is poorly researched. An album can be heard as either a series of songs or tracks in a certain order or as one single song or musical unit. The music psychologist Daniel Levitin (2009:113) recalls how he listened to The Beatles’ album *Revolver* “uninterrupted, hundreds of times, as though it were a song”.

The track order of an album or a mix-tape or mix-cd easily turns into an established sequence

that you get used to, and violations against this sequence may be perceived as disturbing; a certain song must be followed by a certain other, otherwise things are wrong (on uses of mixtapes, see Herlyn & Overdyck [eds], 2003 and Moore [ed.], 2004). People often testify how they have learned a whole album practically by heart, by repeated listening to the same recording. Repeated listening feeds the music into your memory, deliberately or un-deliberately, no matter if you listen “passively” or “actively” (Bull, 2000:144).

However, the opposite is also found in our material. Some informants want permanent variation and can not stand long chunks of music with the same artist or style that sounds “the same”. Variation can be achieved by the shuffle function in the mp3-player, or by using a cd-player that can be loaded with many cds and letting chance decide which tracks come up. Another way is to listen to compilations, but this is by many seen as inferior. And so we are back to valuations of different ways of listening. Some of our informants give expression to this. Lars-Bertil, 50, is a journalist and he emphasizes concentrated listening as an ideal by claiming that when you listen to a compilation record

“you do not have a real interest in the music as such. What you want is a good sound track to what you are doing. ‘Hey, that’s a good song’ and then you do something else at the same time. I don’t think you sit and listen.” [*strongly emphasizing the last word*]

This seems to strike a note with the idea of the difference between hearing and listening (cf. page xx), implying that this ideal may be widely disseminated.

Background listening or parallel listening

The most common way of listening described by our informants is, not surprisingly, to listen to music while you are doing something else, i.e. music is listened to as a background to or in parallel with some other activity. This use of music has been made easier by the development of mobile listening devices, computers and car stereos. According to our informants you can listen to music together with a variety of activities: household or working routines, cooking, washing and cleaning, doing homework or reading, working out, relaxing, driving your car, cycling or walking, travelling by public transport. This is very much in line with previous research (Sloboda, 2010: 508, Juslin & Laukka, 2004: 22, North, Hargreaves & Hargreaves, 2004; and Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001: 419).

Bengt, 66, caretaker, claims: "Just listening to music ... I can't waste my time like that ... I want to do something else at the same time". This is a very common attitude. Many informants in British sociologist Michael Bull's studies of mobile listening (2000: 60, 65, 190) see it as claiming back their own time and making it valuable again when you are dealing with dull or boring routines at work or at home.

On the other hand there are those who cannot or do not want to listen to music while they work, often depending on the task at hand. Ivar, 48, is the managing director for a small company, and he does not like listening to music without paying attention to it and especially not "in stressful situ-

ations". He says that "music takes energy and focus away from me", and he cannot understand how his children can do their homework while listening to music. He enjoys, however, music very much when he travels and finds it very relaxing.

Maria, 24, a university student, does not want to listen to music when she is out among people:

"It feels like I lose my focus. I get locked into my own world so I don't know what is going on around me. I feel slightly handicapped when I have music while I take a walk."

Alberto, 52, computer technician, loves to listen to music in his headphones while taking a stroll in the city or by the sea, but he often takes out one of the earphones to hear what is happening around him and listen to the birds and other sounds of nature. Roger, 43, engineer, enjoys music a lot when he is travelling by train, but when he cycles he wants to be observant of the traffic.

Julia, 53, music pedagogue, practices a lot of music herself but does not listen very much. Occasionally she listens to an opera at home in the kitchen while cooking, doing the dishes or laying the table. She says that she now and then likes to "sing thirds" with the singer in some aria.

In general the informants in our study are very aware of and reflexive about what happens when you listen to a certain kind of music and which music fits and works well in different contexts and situations. They definitely do not listen to any music but choose music carefully depending on circumstance, need and mood, and they seem to, in some meaning of the word, listen with concentration and pay close attention to the music – even

if they devote their time to two or more simultaneous activities. For sure music can sometimes be sonic wallpaper that you do not notice very much, but this seems to be in rather special cases.

You choose what you want to hear by listening to a particular radio station that play the music you prefer or that fits at that very moment, or you choose an album or your own cd compilation (mix-cds) or arrange digital play lists with music of your own choice in a special sequence. It is a minority who listen to whatever comes on the radio or whatever recordings that happen to be in car. The definite majority make active choices of music.

A good example is Karin, 24, university student, who in her interview systematically registers what music works in different situations:

- Working out. "I can't even work out without music, and when you run on the treadmill ... it must be the right music or I'll 'die' in two minutes";
- When she invites her friends for dinner she likes to play lounge music;
- When she drives her car home (she lives outside of Gothenburg) at night after finishing her extra work at a restaurant she listens to audio books and not to music because in that situation music makes her even more tired;
- When she goes by car to the university in the morning she listens to P4, the Swedish public service "oldies" or easy listening channel. Commercial radio with breaks for ads she finds annoying. On rare occasions when her partner

is in the car as well she may listen to one of the Swedish commercial radio channels;

- When she goes out with her friends she likes to listen to what she calls "feel-good-music" and "punchy songs", and as an example she mentions Britney Spears;
- When she drives her car alone she can listen to the same cd over and over for period of weeks, which can be interpreted as a kind of "repeat listening".

Lena, 25, university student, says "music is with me whatever I do". It is most important that she has good music in the car, and she very much likes to sing along with the songs. However, she cannot listen to music while studying because it makes her lose her concentration. The Swedish musicologist Carin Öblad's assumption that "the car is the most important concert 'hall' of our time" seems very reasonable (Öblad 2000 – on music while driving, see also Bull, 2007: 87-107 and Dibben & Williamson, 2007).

Many informants talk about how important it is to listen to music while driving, but there are some who listen to audio books or "all-talk programs" on the radio as well. Whether music or talk the sound becomes a good companion making the journey more pleasant. Öblad (2000: 8, 92) calls this an "increased sense of presence" in life. But to achieve that it is most essential that the music or sound is of your own choice.

It is very common that you choose music depending on mood or temper and that you choose music to in one way or another regulate your mood. This

is also perfectly in line with previous research. Maria says that if she is sad she wants music that can make her cry and when she is angry she likes aggressive music that she “can scream to”. But others may in contrast choose music to counteract one’s low spirits. Thus, another strategy is to amplify one’s depression even more with music, so that you at first get even sadder and then live through the emotion and in the long run come out stronger (Lilliestam, 2009: 142ff; Sloboda & O’Neill, 2001: 421; Bull, 2000: 42; Cavicchi, 1998: 128f; and Ruud, 1997). Gull-Britt, 42, fishmonger, recalls how she has used both these strategies to get through moments of personal grief, like when her father died. She listened to “depressing songs”, soft and calm songs and classical music and songs that her father had enjoyed.

A use of music that is probably as old as man is to sing while you work, nowadays often changed to listening to music while you work. There are many examples of this in our material. An outstanding case in point is Tina’s (35, operating-room nurse) account of how the surgeon in her work team likes to listen to Swedish dance band music while making uncomplicated surgery because it makes him relaxed and in a good mood. During more complicated surgery, however, silence prevails (see also Henley, 2011; Wakin, 2006).

(A fictitious parallel to this is when the main character, a brain surgeon, in Ian McEwan’s novel *Saturday* (2005) performs complicated brain surgery while listening to J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg variations* preferably in Glenn Gould’s recording from 1954.)

Concentrated listening

Now, what about that young man on the tram? Did he listen actively or passively, with concentration or without? Obviously he followed the music listening carefully as he responded to it with body movements. But, on the other hand, he did something else while he listened: he was travelling and listening to music in parallel.

It is reasonable to assume that you can listen to music with concentration simultaneously to other activities. It is, however, a strong ideal among many, especially among older scholars, that the best listening is when you do nothing but listen. But what does this really mean?

In real life no one can be concentrated any length of time. Our concentration, even when we sit in the concert hall and “listen to”, “hear” or “perceive” a symphony, flows back and forth, wanders in and out, gets stronger and weaker. Suddenly we are interrupted by unwanted thoughts. Did I lock the car? Did I turn off the plate? What are the children doing? Or a problem at work suddenly pops up. If you sit still and listen it is no guarantee that you listen with concentration (Edström, 1989: 107; Lilliestam, 2009: 93).

Only a few of our informants claim, or rather indicate, that they sometimes do nothing but listen to music with total concentration, and the picture would probably be the same if you asked a large number of people.

Lars-Bertil says that he listens to music “all the time” as soon as he gets a chance and especially when he is alone, because then he can choose

music without regard to anyone else but himself and what he prefers right then. He says: "My daily time for music, that I always have, is on the bus on my way to work. I plug in my mp3-player with ear phones." He underlines that concentrated listening is the best:

"When I am happiest and listen the best I listen with concentration. In those moments I listen to music! [*with a strong emphasis*] I do nothing besides."

Those moments are however rather rare and occur maybe once a month or so. He calls them "quality time for myself". He gives an example by recalling how he played the first record on his new audio system:

"Well, I bought new stereo equipment the other week. The first time I really listened to it I chose the vinyl version of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* side one. And I quietly 'died' in my sofa in front of a candle. ... And then I played Nick Drake after that." [*laughing*]

What is implied in the expression "dying in the sofa" is not totally obvious, but it indicates that the situation was very special and that he listened with some reverence. The music really was at the centre. But what really went on in Lars-Bertil's head, what he perceived and what he felt and experienced in this golden moment is hidden to us, and he would probably have great difficulty explaining – although he is a very reflexive and experienced listener.

The most interesting thing is perhaps that concentrated listening apparently can be applied to as diverse music as Bach and Nick Drake. It is true that we cannot know if he really listens to Bach and Nick Drake in the same way (whatever

that may mean), but it seems like he listens to them both with a marked intention.

Olle, 51, engineer, is one of the informants who attend chamber music concerts and appreciates this very much. He describes himself as a "hi-fi nerd", and he owns a very expensive and exclusive audio system. He likes to listen to classical music, like the string quartets of Shostakovich, and music by Miles Davis or Frank Zappa, late at night when the rest of the family has gone to bed. Rarely he listens to music in connection with another activity, but if that happens it could be Coldplay, John Lee Hooker or BB King ("straight" or "powerful" rock, as he says) when he is tidying his room at work or potters with his papers on a Friday afternoon.

Roger, 43, also engineer and chamber music lover, says that he "almost has a little abstinence" if he can't sit down and listen to music. "Sometimes you have to chase the family out of the room and say 'now, please be quiet!'", he says with a slight laughter. He has set up loudspeakers in his sauna in the basement of his house in order to listen to the Swedish public radio channel 2 (with classical music) while taking a sauna. (But if he really listens "with concentration" we do not really know.)

Many informants speak with great affection about going to a concert and experience music live: to be there at that particular moment, being a part of an audience and not only hearing the musicians but also seeing them and their gestures, facial expressions and glances, and maybe, if the music allows for it or encourages it, sing along. Often what

might be interpreted as some kind of concentrated listening attitude is outlined. This is an account from Nelly, 43:

“For me the real music are those occasions when I attend a concert. In those moments I listen actively and really enjoy it. I seldom listen to music at home because there are so many children and quite simply it is rarely quiet. So the qualitative side of music is tied to concerts. ... I don't really know what makes a live performance so much better, but it is ... both because of the sound and the visual contact, that you see what is going on. And I like the setting, it is positive and very relaxing ... and I like watching, and when it is chamber music you see peoples' faces and how they play.”

Per, 46, like Nelly an engineer, emphasizes the need to be well prepared and get ready before a concert:

“You can destroy a lot of good music by ‘not being there’ when it is performed. ... If I am going to a good concert I take my time and go home from work, and I lie down and have a rest for half an hour, maybe fall asleep for a moment, so I get alert and susceptible. ... If I am under stress I get nothing out of the concert. I could just as well refrain from it, because I know I won't be able to assimilate the music the way I am used to.”

Close to the music and the sounds

Doris, 60, receptionist, says that when she was a child she loved to lie *under* the radio gramophone to capture the sounds of the radio. Fredrik, 48, bookseller, tells a similar story:

“One of my early memories is when my brother and his mate had bought the single ‘I Can't Get No Satisfaction’ and I listened to that lying on the floor beside his plastic record player with the loudspeaker in the lid.”

Lying down near the loudspeakers or the instrument means that you want to get as close to the sounds as possible, taking in the music with both ears and body, feeling the music *in* your body, listening, as one informant says, “with the ears almost inside the loudspeaker”. There are occasional testimonies of this in the scientific literature. As a child music psychologist Daniel Levitin enjoyed precisely lying under the piano when his mother played (Levitin, 2006: 133; Paulsson, 2006: 286). This way of listening has been made easier by headphones. Levitin has reflected on this as well:

“Headphones opened up a world of sonic colors, a palette of nuances and details that went far beyond the chords and melody, the lyrics, or a particular singer's voice. ... Headphones also made the music more personal for me; it was suddenly coming from inside my head.” (Levitin 2006: 2)

There is a parallel to this in the pleasure of listening to live music at a great volume when you not only hear but also feel the sound as a vibrating physical sensation in the flesh and bones of your body. Erik, 23, computing student, recalls a concert by Rammstein:

“Well, I like Rammstein a lot and to see them at last in real life and listen to the music in “pure quality” ... the music itself, the bass and everything, goes right into you when you are there.”

These physical or bodily qualities of listening have hardly been studied, but it seems urgent to do so. New technical developments in music technique and media give rise to new possibilities and most likely have great effects on people's ways of listening. This is a field of research that also must be

developed, even if beginnings have been made (Bull, 2000, 2007; Williams, 2007; Bijsterveld & van Dijck [eds], 2011 and Sterne, 2003).

Listening is about people's relation to the surrounding world and especially to the soundscape. Any sound, as already stated, can be interpreted as "music". Some informants have a special fascination for concrete and everyday sounds and find them in some meaning of the word enjoyable and treat them like "music".

Inger, 54, assistant nurse, sometimes when she takes a shower puts on a record with sounds of American trains racing across the prairie. She also has a garden fountain just because she likes the sound of rippling water. Mats, 47, technician, just for fun records sounds of the everyday like birds flying by or the wind banging doors of a boat-house in the archipelago of Gothenburg. He even claims to be fascinated by the squeaking of a tram in a curve.

However, Johan, 56, warehouse worker, escapes the big city to his cabin by the sea to enjoy the silence in his little fishing boat. The necessity of silence is emphasized by quite a few informants. They long for silence and peace and quiet without music or any other sounds or noises. The experience of real silence is also an aspect of "musicking" and a basic quality of life, for far too many people a rare thing.

What do we hear?

There are very few descriptions of musical structures in our informant's statements. Most people do not speak of music in this way. Instead informants speak of songs, artists and albums without saying anything or very little about how the music sounds or its structure. The names of songs or artists become references that do not need further explanation or description.

There are a few isolated exceptions to this. One is Karl, 20, university student, who accounts for the music in the 1990 thriller movie *The Silence of the Lambs* and makes observations about the music and its role in the film:

"*The Silence of the Lambs* has no well-known songs in it, it is a score written especially for the movie. The incredible thing is that in the beginning you hear sparrows, and the main character's name is Sparrow. You hear sparrows and see her jogging. After a while, during the main titles, you hear the first note. Then that music continues more or less throughout the movie, the same theme over and over again but it never lands on the first note. It melts into the background and soon you don't pay any attention to it. But it raises the atmosphere unconsciously. And then, just when you become aware of who the killer is, that first tune returns. And then it lands."

Karl is extremely interested in both films and music but he has no schooling whatsoever in either subject. Considering that, he notices remarkably subtle details and connections that are hard to do without a trained and sensitive ear both for musical and visual details in interplay. Obviously he must have seen (and heard!) the movie many times and with deep concentration to be able to observe

these things, which he describes in an everyday language without using any technical jargon. One might wonder how his way of listening, seeing and perceiving and his descriptions of it would fit into Adorno's model, and how common Karl's way of thinking really is? It is quite possible that people have similar experiences and do similar types of interpretations but lack Karl's ability to catch them in words.

(In fact, however, Karl remembers the main character's name wrongly: her name is Starling, not Sparrow. And the birds you hear in the beginning of the movie are of many kinds. Nevertheless: even if some details are wrong it is still his interpretation of the music and the film.)

We have not specifically asked for details in people's experiences of music, as the aim of the project was to get a comprehensive view of people's use of music, and we have chosen not to discriminate any particular activity. However, to reach further into people's experiences of music, ways of listening and what they observe and pay attention to in musical sounds, different forms of detailed and deepening investigations must be made.

Ways ahead

Unfortunately, although it would be interesting, it is impossible to look into a person's brain and her mental world and experience what she experiences. Some of this inner mental world comprises musical experiences. But there are means to at least in some way get closer to the experience of music.

1. To make people describe the music they hear and the way they experience it. This can be called a phenomenological approach.
2. Measuring what happens in the brain and body when someone listens to music (Sloboda 2010; Sloboda & Juslin, 2010 and North & Hargreaves, 2008: 1-12).

As far as the first point is concerned the existing research deals with for example categorizations in styles or genres and the use of language in general, but to a much lesser extent with how sounding structures are described, even if there is some research on this as well (for instance Dibben, 2001; Widestedt, 2001; Tagg & Clarida, 2003; Gabrielson, 2008 and Lilliestam, 2005, 2009: 201-225).

There is, of course, a music analytical terminology that is established in musicology and music education, but it is practically incomprehensible to the musical layman (i.e. someone without musical education). Music analytical shoptalk is sparingly used in everyday music talk or writing even by people with very strong musical interests. In everyday conversations about music you usually notice and talk about your experiences, often with an abundance of metaphors, what the music means, its history and social or cultural context, and in general so called non-musical factors. (If you are attached to the theory of musicking it is doubtful whether there really are such a thing as "non-musical" factors – cf. *supra*.)

Nevertheless it would be interesting to address this problem for example by using phenomenological analysis of individual interviews or group conversations dealing with music and musical

experiences. By using long conversations and interviews or many recurrent interviews with the same individual(s) with varying backgrounds and types of musical interests it would be possible to get a little bit further towards an understanding of how music is understood both by people with and without musical schooling (see for instance Berger, 1999).

The second point, measurements of physical and mental reactions, is beyond my competence, so I can only give a short comment. Measurements of this kind (of pulse, breathing, blood pressure, secretion of hormones, brain functions etc.) when we listen to music have been done and are done to an ever greater extent. The general understanding of how the brain and nervous system works is growing very rapidly – and with that the understanding of what happens in the brain and body when we listen to music or play and sing. But the question is what these measurements really reveal. That a certain area of the brain is activated or that some hormone is secreted could be important knowledge, but it still must be related to an individual and his or her experiences, habits, memories, skills and knowledge, i.e. one's musical habitus. Measurements say nothing about the nature of the experiences, emotions and associations of an individual that are triggered by the music (Sloboda, 2010: 504).

Possibly different kinds of methods in combination, phenomenological, psychological and medical, could lead to interesting results. It is essential that experiments of psychological and physical conditions, if possible, are made not in a laboratory but in settings that are as natural as possible,

i.e. when people listen to music at home, in the car or at a concert or during a dance (North & Hargreaves, 2008: 1-12). Modern digital apparatus of measurement make this possible.

Multi-disciplinary research for sure has its problems. Nevertheless, co-operations between for instance musicologists, music psychologists and neurologists should lead to better research. Today, researchers and scholars in these disciplines often work in parallel and are rather uninformed (and uninterested?) about what people in other fields are doing and how. It would be much better if researchers and scholars could meet already in the planning stages of studies or experiments to avoid different kinds of pitfalls and in general have better contact to benefit from each other's work, perspectives and experiences.

Conclusions

Music listening is a complicated and multidimensional phenomenon. There are an infinite number of ways of listening, perceiving and experiencing music. The categorizations in listener types and listener strategies or techniques fail to capture this complexity and often stand out as simplified, superficial and permeated with values, often outdated. We must try to build an understanding of music listening on empirical grounds and not on non-proven notions and values.

Music listening cannot be separated from its context. An individual with a certain musical habitus and needs listens to music in a particular

situation, as a background to or in parallel with some other activity or with a focus only on the music.

Listening to music without doing something else simultaneously is rare. You can listen to music at home in the kitchen or in the living room, when you travel using an iPod, through headphones or a loudspeaker, in a concert hall, opera house or a club. How we listen, what we listen to and how we perceive the music depend, among other things, on our mood, emotional state, needs and purposes as well as on which music we have access to, know about and are familiar with. Reading about music and discussing music with others are prerequisites and necessary strategies to obtain this knowledge and should accordingly be seen as vital factors that affect music listening. The situation and the needs also affect what you *want to* hear and *can* hear. Listening to music in a concert hall or a small club, when driving your car or at home in peace and quiet give rise to and make possible very different experiences.

On top of this comes a historical dimension. Have I heard the music before or is it new and unknown to me? Do I have memories and associations to the music that are exclusively mine or are they in some way shared by others in my culture? With which expectations and pre-understandings do I meet and approach the music?

The experience of music can also be physical, something we feel and take in with our whole organism and body and that vibrates with us and plays on many senses at the same time. Music often functions as a tool for creating and main-

taining an identity, a philosophy of life or a community as well as a trigger of memories and emotions.

Listening means not just to be exposed to sound waves but is better described as a kind of “musicking” that has many aspects and is a product of many different activities – a complex holistic sensual experience. Taken together all this means that it is difficult, not to say impossible, to draw simple lines between different ways of listening.

Many old views and models of thought about listening are not valid or good descriptions but strike a discordant note with real human behaviour. Besides some models are mingled with values and notions of good and inferior ways of listening and good and bad music. Thus listening is turned into a question of ethics.

But what does listening to music really do with us? Which effects does it have? These are basic questions that often are not even asked but which are questions for speculation and sometimes answered without an empirical base to fall back on. Much of what we think that we know about this is actually unproven speculation.

One such idea is actually an implied basis for this anthology: that you listen to “popular music” in particular ways compared to other kinds of music. This is a most dubious and simplified conclusion. The same goes for speculations about what the consequences of mobile listening, the digitalisation of music and downloading really are, and how these techniques affect listening, music use and the evaluation and the experience of music.

This means: an important point of departure for future research is not to think in terms of listener typologies or strategies nor to start out from any kind of norm for good and bad ways of listening but instead without prejudice build on the arguments presented by researchers like Clarke,

Bergman, Green and Stockfelt (cf. *supra*) and the possible consequences that may follow.

Music listening is in actual fact a golden field for research. Most of it is not done yet. And we definitely *know* too little.

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