

Deafening Music: Transcending Sound in Musicking
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INTRODUCTION

This issue is only the beginning of what we hope to be a robust discourse among our contributors and audience of nondeaf and deaf scholars, deaf musicians, sign language teachers and interpreters, and deaf people as appreciators of music.

Recently, the popularity of YouTube has raised a generation of people using the online format to produce and distribute videos of spoken language songs translated into sign and signed artistic products some classify as music. The popularity of translated songs and signed music has generated debate on social media and in professional association meetings among deaf people. Concerns are raised about the cultural appropriation of sign language and deaf culture. Some question the success of nondeaf people in monetizing signed music while deaf people continue to encounter socioeconomic barriers.¹ Teachers recognize both the benefits and drawbacks of working with signed music in teaching sign language. Music has emerged as a contested site of culture, language, identity, and belonging.

SIGNED MUSIC

The notions of deaf people and music may appear antithetical. After all, the most common trope for deafness in popular culture is silence while music is seemingly the opposite of silence. Is music not noise somehow arranged in a manner pleasing to the ear? Common attitudes about music reveals a pervasive phonocentrism and perpetuates audism. Such attitudes suggest deaf people should be pitied because music is absent from their lives or insist that no culture is complete without music. An examination of music through deaf prisms disrupts such ideas.

DEAF MUSICKING

Both nondeaf and deaf scholars have suggested deaf bodies as a site for understanding how music transcends sound as a sensory experience.² An examination of deaf musicking (the process of making music) illustrates the impulse to create such sensory experiences.³ Just as questions of language ownership are raised, so are questions raised about the ownership of sound. Deaf artists like Christine Sun Kim create with sound and musical instruments, insisting on examining deaf people's relationship with sound. Deaf musicking also serves as a space for examining how technology, language, and culture interact to challenge our ideas about the meaning of music.

¹ Irene Leigh, et al, 2016.

² Jeannette Jones, 2015; all authors in this volume.

³ Musicking suggests that music is an action, not a thing. Music can be either the action of creating music or setting something to music. For further discussion, see Christopher Small's *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*.

Deaf musicking challenges hegemonies about sound, music, and nondeaf dominion over deaf lives. Megan Malzkuhn and Andrew Bottoms' video, *Hearing Knows Best*, is a brilliant critique of internalized audism in deaf education. This is a heavily satirical video using musical video elements to embody and express linguistic resistance. Here, we have discovered how language shifts from ASL to more English influenced and English mouthing movements are manipulated to evoke a particular response, and shows us how Deaf people combine language and music as an act of political resistance.

CHALLENGES FOR DEAF STUDIES

With the increasing popularity of sign languages being taught, with more people using sign language to produce signed music, the Deaf Studies field is confronted with new questions. What constitutes Deaf Studies scholarship? Is language a reliable source for locating deaf perspectives, deaf experiences, deaf knowledges? For example, Anabel Maler (translated for this volume) published a paper on signed music using Stephen Torrance as the primary source for analysis. Torrance is not deaf, the songs he signed were lyrics written by non-deaf people about subjects unrelated to deaf people. However, his product was in sign language, and therefore crippled (added disability as a category of analysis to) the scholarship about music.⁴ This raises new questions about the boundaries of Deaf and Disability Studies scholarship and the use of sign language as a proxy for locating deaf people.

This issue begins with nine articles about signed music, deaf musicking, the deaf cultural experience of music as a sensory experience, and music as a pedagogical tool for deaf children, nondeaf students, and sign language interpreting education.

Anabel Maler explores how sign language crossed boundaries between deaf and nondeaf people, inspiring experimentation with signed music. This raised questions about how nondeaf people translated music as linguistic and sensory experiences. She uses one nondeaf person's translation of nondeaf song lyrics to show how musical elements can appear in signed language.

Renca Dunn ruminates upon music as a site of community belonging, the role of deaf musical appreciation in religious spaces, and music as a means of bridging deaf people to the spiritual realm.

Noah Buchholz offers a personal exploration of his relationship with music as a deaf student required to take a music appreciation course in a nondeaf context. He, like many others, assumed that music was naturally not native to deaf people and therefore dismissed the notion that deaf people could appreciate music, much less produce musical creations for consumption.

Jody Cripps argues for the existence of a deaf ethnomusicology through the existence of signed music and its evolution over the past century, examining the role of technologies in evolving the nature of signed music, and the emergence of the modern visual vernacular. He also tackles the question of ownership and cultural appropriation of signed music, suggesting a critical

⁴ For a discussion of how the terms *crip*, *crippled*, and *cripping* is used in this paper, we refer to "Crippling Resilience: Contributions from Disability Studies to Resilience Theory," by Emily Hutcheon and Gregor Wolbring. *M/C Journal* 16, no 5 (2013).

examination of what constitutes successful translation of spoken language music into an aesthetic that deaf people could appreciate.

Katelyn Best reflects on how Deaf hip-hop artists have created a deaf-centered expression of music inspired by nondeaf hip-hop as a site of cultural resistance, contesting popular ideas about music and belonging.

Jason Begue and Janis Cripps share their process in creating signed music videos. They discuss aesthetics of visual rhythms and best practices to manipulate film editing techniques to create a sense of musical rhythm for the viewer.

John Pirone, a veteran teacher of American Sign Language, offers a thoughtful discussion of the place of music in sign language education. He grapples with the implications of teaching song translation to nondeaf sign language students, concerned about cultural appropriation. He also recognizes the limitations confronting the sign language teaching field as few teachers have training in translation theory or music, therefore rendering a possibly popular teaching tool ineffective.

Hannah Ehrenberg and her colleagues talk about the intersection of deaf education and music education. They raise valuable questions about how to make existing music education accessible to deaf children while highlighting the musical contributions of deaf people. Divorcing music education from speech therapy, Ehrenberg and colleagues wish for educators to understand music as a natural cultural expression for deaf people while suggesting that inclusive practices in music education would benefit all children.

Summer Crider Loeffler, Rosa Lee Timm, and Jason Listman collaborate on questions about deaf musicality and the translation process. They highlight the tensions that emerge among deaf people about the place of music in deaf cultural spaces, the meaning of successful aesthetic translation of songs, and the complexities of translating music that transcends language.

Thank you for joining us as we explore those questions together. We welcome further contributions to *JASLL* on the subject of deaf music and musicking from scholars, activists, and artists. We hope to publish many more perspectives on this hotly contested site.

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