

DeNora, Tia. 2003. *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Reviewed by William G. Roy

For musicologists who are interested in what sociologists of music have to contribute to the study of music, there is no better place to look than the work of Tia DeNora. Her *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius* (1995) explores how the social dynamics of turn-of-the-century Vienna gave rise to the concept of musical genius, a role Beethoven not only appropriated but also helped to foster. In *Music in Everyday Life* (2000), she reveals through ethnography what people *do* while they are doing music, from shopping to sex to aerobics to deliberative listening. Most recently, her study *After Adorno* offers a theoretically grounded program for music sociology. The fundamental theme in all her work, fully articulated and elaborated in this volume, is that the distinction between music and society is merely analytical at best. Taking a step beyond Christopher Small's 1998 prescription that music should be understood more as a verb than a noun—more as an activity than a thing—DeNora observes that musicking is inherently social. *After Adorno* seeks to develop this proposition.

Theodor Adorno, widely acknowledged as the towering figure of twentieth-century sociology of music, provides the agenda. DeNora argues that despite Adorno's frequently noted shortcomings, the philosopher provides a solid foundation for theorizing the relationship between the musical and the social, emphasizing the relationship between sounds, texts, and recordings, on the one hand, and the social practices that create and consume those materials on the other. In DeNora's innovative reading, however, we are now after Adorno—Adorno serves as an inspiration, a fount of insight, but only a beginning. Adorno's work is valued more for its agenda and its metatheoretical insights than for any specific analysis. His interpretations of jazz, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, for example, are secondary to his deeper demonstration of how to *think with* music, of how to show that music embeds social relations within itself. Adorno's greatest insight was that, in DeNora's words, "Music is thus not about, or caused by, the social; it is part of whatever we take to be the social writ large. Music is a constitutive ingredient of social life" (151).

DeNora's book is structured around a series of essays, the first of which treats Adorno and his place in music scholarship. Next follow chapters on topics that illustrate the relationship between music and society: the

musical event, music as cognition, music's channeling of emotions, and "music and 'control.'" The author concludes with a bold reconceptualization of music sociology. Indeed, the book's major contribution is DeNora's own theoretical approach to the relationship of music and society. Eschewing both social reductionism and facile musical autonomy, DeNora demonstrates the reflexive relationship between music and society while affirming the analytical integrity of both.

DeNora's main criticism of Adorno is that he never concerned himself with the small-scale social practices of music, but instead focused on the macrocultural structures and power relations that organize music production and consumption. In contrast, DeNora examines how music organizes social processes and how social relations define and problematize musical activities. How people relate to the presence of music helps define what the social relationship is. Conversely, music (i.e., performances, compositions, and recordings) is created, revised, and problematized by the social relations and contexts of musical activities. Thus composition, performance, listening, criticism, and various other modes of participation in music are all equally social and require attention.

Though *After Adorno* is a theoretical book, DeNora is ever mindful of the necessity of concrete examples, and she illustrates her concepts with "musical events." A "musical event" can be anything from an act of composition to walking with an iPod, but it also includes some of the preconditions that lead up to the event, the social relations of the event itself, and the time after the event when outcomes become evident. The musical event, for DeNora, serves as a template for examining social relations around music, and this approach allows her to consider such issues as the division of labor among musicians, conductor, and listeners at a concert; the mutual silence of passengers in a music-filled car; the exclusion of other people when listening to one's iPod; and the coordinated calisthenics of an exercise class.

DeNora considers the subject of music and cognition, using Adorno both as a source of ideas and as an exemplar of how to "think with music." Adorno challenged us to consider how the way we listen connects to the way we perceive the world. For instance, for Adorno the distinction between Schoenberg's music and popular music involved a contrast between a deep engagement with music and mere casual exposure to it, and in this difference the philosopher claimed to discern listeners' varying degrees of engagement with society. It is not that the music causes engagement or passivity, but rather that musical activities entail social relationships. DeNora is especially interested in extending this insight to the concept of memory. Music's power to evoke the past has often been noted, but DeNora's compelling arguments about how music shapes the way we think about the

past go beyond generalizations about nostalgia to present a more dynamic relationship between past and present. We use music to remind ourselves of the past, to frame our understanding of it, and to signify which groups own it. Because DeNora's approach to cognition is fundamentally social rather than psychological, it is always informed by the shared values and practices of a community. She understands that memory always involves not only recognition, but also a repositioning of the subject relative to the social boundaries of race, gender, class, and generation. For instance, while African American spirituals may evoke memories of the slave era, their use in more recent times—in performances by the Jubilee Singers, in freedom songs, and in rap music—destabilizes the relative political and cultural status of blacks and whites.

From investigating music's evocation of memory and the past, DeNora moves to an examination of the embodied present of music and emotion. Music's emotional power is often understood in terms of its temporality, its unfolding in the present. But DeNora questions the claim that music "captures" emotion, as though music and emotion were two different levels of experience. Both music and emotion are temporally present, embodied forms of social interaction. By attending to the full range of emotion and bodily activity, including emotional and physical stillness, DeNora shows the inseparability of emotion and music in settings ranging from raves to classical performance and in contexts such as aerobics and making love. Rather than conceptualizing music as something that evokes emotion, she prefers to think of it as emotion-in-the-making. As the author's earlier work has demonstrated, people use music to create and alter their emotional states. People are not just emotionally influenced by music, but rather, they actively choose music to achieve various emotional states, whether that involves wallowing in their misery or climbing out of a funk. DeNora's chapter on emotions takes inspiration from Adorno's own research agenda while offering conclusions that problematize and reconsider his thinking. Adorno raised the issue of how emotions are related to music, but he proposed an elitist typology of listeners: the expert, the good listener, the culture consumer, the resentment listener, the jazz listener, the entertainment listener, and the musically indifferent. All of these, DeNora points out, denote a solitary listener, excised from social context.

DeNora advocates using the term "music sociology" in contrast to the "sociology of music." Although musicologists may have little stake in that issue, they should consider her reasoning: the phrase "sociology of music" mistakenly implies that music and society are separate entities and that those who study it should seek the social in the musical. In recent years musicology has increasingly addressed such sociological topics as race,

## Current Musicology

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gender, class, and globalism, often contributing theories and insights that social scientists should incorporate into their work. If Adorno paved the way for the disciplines of sociology and musicology to come together, DeNora has brought this interdisciplinary scholarship to a new level of sophistication, showing that the dialogue between musicology and sociology is still a two-way street.

### *References*

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