

## College Students' Attitudes Toward Music

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*The purposes of this study were to examine relationships between three listener characteristics (college major, sex, school music performance experience) and college students' (n = 300) attitudes toward nine types and styles of music. Significant differences ( $p \leq .05$ ) were found in favor of music majors (n = 100) toward classical and contemporary classical music, and in favor of non-music majors (n = 200) toward rock music. Females expressed significantly more favorable attitudes than males toward country and spiritual music. Rap received significantly higher ratings from male music majors than from female music majors, and music major and non-music major males gave significantly higher ratings to rock than did their female counterparts. Subjects with high levels of school music ensemble experience exhibited significantly more positive attitudes toward jazz than those with less experience. In addition, females with high levels of school music performance experience expressed significantly less favorable attitudes toward rap than less experienced females, and female non-music majors expressed significantly more positive attitudes than male non-music majors toward classical, spiritual, and country music.*

### Introduction

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the emerging fields of psychology and sociology added new dimensions to theoretical examinations of attitudes toward music. A psychological study of children's song preferences was published just before the turn of the century (Gates, 1898), and musical preference became a frequent topic of investigation in the 1930s (Price & Yarbrough, 1987). Broadcasting companies commissioned some of the early studies in an attempt to determine the musical preferences and behavior patterns of their listening audiences (Deihl, Schneider, & Petress, 1983). One of the best known of the early studies was Farnsworth's (1950) examination of musical taste. Since then, music education research on attitudes has burgeoned, with some 27% of studies reported in two leading journals in the 1980s employing attitude toward some aspect of music or music participation/listening as a dependent variable (Flowers & Jellison, 1990).

In recent years, researchers have drawn distinctions between attitude, opinion, and preference (Price, 1986). Attitude, the broadest concept of the three, cannot be measured directly; rather, "attitudes are inferred from opinions, behavioral intentions, and preferences" (Kuhn, Sims, & Shehan, 1981). The present study was designed under the assumption that opinions expressed by subjects represent their

attitudes toward music. Because attitude, opinion, and preference are closely related, research literature on all three concepts is reviewed below.

In his review of literature, Wapnick (1976) identified three types of variables in preference research: subject (listener), music, and situation. Similarly, LeBlanc (1980, 1982) holds that all musical preference variation can be accounted for by characteristics of the listener, the musical stimulus, and the listener's cultural environment. Despite the similarity of their models, the two authors define the listener and cultural environment categories somewhat differently. For example, Wapnick placed musical training in the situation (cultural environment) category, while LeBlanc labeled it a listener characteristic. Where the two differ, the present authors followed LeBlanc's model.

Attitude-preference studies on characteristics of listeners show that American college non-music majors and younger students prefer current popular composers (Geringer, 1982; Geringer & McManus, 1979; Jellison & Flowers, 1991; May, 1985; Pantle 1977/1978). Similarly, high school students in Macedonia claim to prefer rock over other types of music (Buzarovski, 1989).

Researchers in Europe (Schulzen, 1987) and North America (e.g., LeBlanc, Colman, McCrary, Sherrill, & Malin, 1988) have found differences in attitudes and preferences attributable to the age of the subjects. Most researchers report a decrease in favorable attitudes or preference for classical music as students age, with attendant increases in attitude or preference for popular music, at least for those with limited or no musical training (Greer, Dorow, & Hanser, 1973; Greer, Dorow, & Randall, 1974). However, some researchers report the opposite results (Baumann, 1960; Geringer & McManus, 1979), and one study showed no influence of age on musical preference (Keston & Pinto, 1955). Preference for classical music seems to increase among college-age subjects (LeBlanc, Colman, McCrary, Sherrill, & Malin, 1988).

Both Wapnick (1976) and LeBlanc (1980, 1982) believe that the listener's sex may influence musical preference, although Abeles's (1980) literature review suggests otherwise, and LeBlanc, Sims, Malin, and Sherrill (1992) found no significant differences.<sup>1</sup> Several attitudinal research studies support the Wapnick and LeBlanc position, however. In each of these studies, females expressed significantly more positive attitudes than males toward music (Baumann, 1960; Brittin, 1991; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1974; Schuessler, 1948; Valentine, 1913; Wheeler, 1985). A study by LeBlanc, Sims, Malin, and

Sherrill (1992) suggests that females, especially those of college age, pay much more attention to lyrics than do males.<sup>2</sup>

Music attitudes and preferences have also been found to be related to prior instruction and experiences (Brittin, 1991; Darrow, Haack, & Kuribayashi, 1987; Price & Yarbrough, 1987; Rubin-Rabson, 1940), including high school music experiences (Birch, 1962; Erneston, 1961/1962; Frakes, 1984/1985; Humphreys, May, & Nelson, 1992; Little, 1979/1980; Long, 1971; Noble, 1977). However, there appears to be no significant difference between music majors' and non-music majors' attitudes toward popular music (Palmquist, 1990). Finally, a unique comparative study of Japanese and American students showed preference differences seemingly attributable to nationality (Darrow, Haack, & Kuribayashi, 1987), although another researcher reported preference differences between Japanese students living in Japan and those living in the United States (Nakazawa, 1988).

In studies that focus on musical stimuli, researchers have examined relationships between various aspects of music and attitudes or preferences. LeBlanc (1981) found that some variance in style preference of children was attributable to musical style (23%), style and tempo (26%), and style, tempo, and performance medium (28%). In another study, young subjects identified melody, mood, rhythm, and lyrics as the most important musical components (Boyle, Hosterman, & Ramsey, 1981).

Tempo is the aspect of music most studied by researchers to date. Several researchers have reported that subjects prefer fast tempi (Baker, 1980; Geringer, 1976; Geringer & Madsen, 1987; Huebner, 1976; LeBlanc, 1981; LeBlanc & Cote, 1983; LeBlanc & McCrary, 1983; LeBlanc, Colman, McCrary, Sherrill, & Malin, 1988; Sims, 1987; Wapnick, 1980), although one researcher found no significant difference in tempo preference (Flowers, 1988), and another found that subjects preferred unaltered to faster tempos in popular music (Geringer & Madsen, 1987). In his review of American, British, German, and Scandinavian research, Finnäs (1989) reported that tempo, rhythm, complexity, emotional content, and other musical characteristics seem to relate to preference.

Several environmental factors have been found to correlate with, and possibly influence, music attitudes and preferences. College music appreciation courses (Jumpeter, 1985; Price, 1988; Price & Swanson, 1990) and middle school keyboard experiences (Wig & Boyle, 1982) seem to have produced immediate changes. In addition, certain teaching-learning strategies and teacher characteristics have been

found to correlate with attitudes and preferences, including positive teacher reinforcement of subjects' responses to music (Dorow, 1977; Greer, Dorow, & Hanser, 1973; Greer, Dorow, Wachhaus, & White, 1973; Steele, 1967), selected teacher characteristics (Finnäs, 1989), subjects being asked to respond positively to music that they disliked initially (Zimmerman, 1978/1979), music information, repeated listening, and participatory experiences and discussion (Bartlett, 1973; Bradley, 1971, 1972; Finnäs, 1989; Getz, 1966; Hargreaves, 1984; Moskovitz, 1992; Mull, 1957; Shehan, 1985; Trammell, 1977/1978; Wapnick, 1976), the use of analytic and figurative language (O'Brien, 1992), and teaching strategies that direct attention to specific aspects of the music (Finnäs, 1989). Positive correlations have also been observed between attitude or preference and familiarity with the composer (or perhaps composer eminence) (Farnsworth, 1969; Rittelmeyer, 1971), expectation (Duerksen, 1972), familiarity with the music (Hargreaves, Messerschmidt, & Rubert, 1980; Peery & Peery, 1986; Radocy, 1982; Russell, 1986), and social influences by peers, the media, teachers, and others (Alpert, 1982; Boyle, Hosterman, & Ramsey, 1981; Buzarovski, 1989; Dorow, 1977; Finnäs, 1989; Furman & Duke, 1988; Inglefield, 1972; Killian & Kostka, 1992; Tanner, 1976; Webster & Hamilton, 1981/1982).

Conversely, some researchers have found no preference effects from teacher approvals of student choices (Sims, 1986) or teacher approval of specific pieces (Pantle, 1977/1978). Several studies and reviews show no significant relationships between attitudes or preferences and immediate instruction (Brown, 1978; Meeker, 1971; Prince, 1974; Shehan, 1984; Smith, 1982; Yarbrough & Price, 1987), prior musical training (Buzarovski, 1989; Fulbright, 1964; Humphreys, May, & Nelson, 1992; Stewart, 1961/1962), or musical knowledge (Brown, 1978; May, 1985; Pantle, 1977/1978; Yarbrough & Price, 1987).

Finally, researchers have found that listeners' preferences may be influenced by the performance medium (i.e., synthesized versus acoustic) (Wapnick & Rosenquist, 1991), amount of vibrato (LeBlanc & Sherrill, 1986), and race and sex of the performers (Appleton, 1970/1971; Jaynes, McCullers, MacNeil, & Vafaie, 1985; Killian, 1990; LeBlanc & Sherrill, 1986; May, 1985; McCrary, 1993; Meadows, 1970/1971; Morrison, 1993; Schuessler, 1980). LeBlanc (1980) called these "media variables," which he placed ". . . between [the] stimulus and cultural input variables" (p. 31).

One conclusion drawn in many of the reviewed studies is that future research should lead toward more complete explanations of the phenomena of musical attitude and preference. The purpose of this study was to investigate college

students' attitudes toward several types and styles of music, and to examine relationships between those attitudes and three listener characteristics (sex, college major, school ensemble experience).

### Method

A self-report measure of attitudes was used in this study because the ease of administration permitted large samples. In addition, self-report and behavioral (and behavioral intentions) measures have generally been found to be moderately to highly correlated (Charboneau, 1980/1981; Geringer, 1977, 1982; Graffius, 1988/1989; Kuhn, Sims, & Shehan, 1981; Pantle, 1977/1978; Price & Yarbrough, 1987; Shehan, 1981; Wapnick, 1976; Yarbrough & Price, 1987).<sup>3</sup>

As in most previous studies (Kuhn, 1980), a rating scale was used as the stimulus measure in this study. One statement ("I enjoy listening to:") followed by a five-point scale was employed for each of nine types of music, defined by the following descriptors: "rock," "rap," "country," "folk music (authentic, ex., Indian, Chinese, Lithuanian, etc.)," "jazz," "classical," "contemporary classical," "spiritual (ex., church, gospel)," and "world music (ex., Latino-American, Italian 'canzona,' etc.)."<sup>4</sup> The scale was anchored by "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree." Pilot testing demonstrated that the musical terms and response mode were unambiguous to the subjects. The validity of the instrument is supported by the straightforward nature of the items and response mode, Cutietta's (1992) dictum that verbally expressed attitudes tend to be valid representations of "individuals' beliefs" (p. 299), and the assumption that the descriptors adequately represented the respective musical styles in the minds of subjects.<sup>5</sup>

Two listener characteristics, sex and musical training, were examined. Musical training was operationalized as two variables: academic major (i.e., music majors, non-music majors) and school music performance experience.<sup>6</sup> The performance experience variable was formed by totaling the responses to three survey items: number of years spent in school bands, choirs, and orchestras. The experience scale was divided into three levels: low (0-5 years), medium (6-15 years), and high (more than 15 years).

Following pilot testing, the survey instrument was administered to 300 students at Arizona State University, Tempe. The subjects were music majors enrolled in music education methods classes and ensembles (n = 100), and non-music majors enrolled in engineering, history, language, and music appreciation

classes ( $n = 200$ ). Both groups consisted of both graduate and undergraduate students, with undergraduates predominating in each group.

## Results

Reliability coefficients (coefficient alphas) were .57 for the nine-item music attitude subscale, .43 for the school music performance experience subscale, and .53 for the overall questionnaire. Reliability coefficients of this magnitude are typical for measures of demographic and attitudinal data.

Of the nine types of music, classical music received the highest overall mean rating, followed in descending order by rock, jazz, contemporary classical, world, country, spiritual, folk, and rap (Table 1). Not surprisingly, music majors expressed significantly more positive attitudes toward music overall than non-music majors, as can be seen from the means (Table 1) and the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) results shown in Table 2 (Wilk's Lambda = .885,  $F = 4.04$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ). However, univariate analyses revealed that significant differences by major (music, non-music) occurred for only three of the nine types of music ( $p \leq .05$ ). Music majors had significantly higher means for classical and contemporary classical, and non-music majors had significantly higher means for rock.

MANOVA results (Table 2) indicate significant overall attitude differences between the two sexes (Wilk's Lambda = .938,  $F = 2.06$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ), with females having the higher mean (Table 1). Univariate analyses revealed significant differences in favor of females (Table 1) for country and spiritual only (Table 2).

In addition to significant MANOVA main effects for major and sex, there was a significant interaction between the two variables (Wilk's Lambda = .930;  $F = 2.35$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ) (Table 2). This significant interaction is attributable to two significant univariate interactions: major  $\times$  sex for rock music ( $F = 8.65$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ) and major  $\times$  sex for rap ( $F = 9.39$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ). Contrast analysis of the cells showed that males liked rock significantly more than females in both the music ( $F = 4.12$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .02$ ) and non-music ( $F = 4.23$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .04$ ) groups. Similarly, male music majors favored rap significantly more than female music majors ( $F = 7.41$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .007$ ). There was a nonsignificant difference between male and female non-music majors' attitudes toward rap.

There was no overall difference in attitude as a function of school music performance experience (Wilk's Lambda = .909,  $F = 1.52$ ,  $p \geq .05$ ). Despite the nonsignificant MANOVA, univariate analyses revealed a significant difference in