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How to Dance to Beethoven in Freetown

The Social, Sonic, and Sensory Organisation of Sounds into Music and Noise

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Abstract

Different people perceive sounds differently. Though a seemingly obvious insight at first, these differences lead to questions about how sounds are organised into patterns perceived to be music or noise. Drawing on fieldwork in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, this paper tackles this conundrum. I start with some acoustemological vignettes about Freetown's sonic environments, juxtaposing these explorations of 'sonic sensibilities' with reflections on how sounds become perceived as noise. Building upon works from anthropology, musicology, and cognitive science, I then turn to a closely related question, asking what makes sounds become music. In the last part, I show that, within Freetown's social and sonic relationships, a main defining feature determining whether or not sounds are labelled music is the ability to dance to them. Ultimately, the danceability of Freetown's music takes me to matters of loudness because, more often than not, dance music audiences favour extensive uses of volume.

Introduction

As I sit on my flight back to Sierra Leone from a visit to Ghana, a Nigerian trader sitting next to me starts cursing about Freetown. 'This place is such a noise! When I come to Freetown, I cannot hear my own thoughts.' When I tell him that I am doing a study on popular music in Freetown, he laughs at me, 'So, you are studying noise?'

The opinion the Nigerian trader holds about the sounds of Freetown is no exception. Most expatriates and visitors I have talked to share similar perceptions. They perceive Freetown as loud and noisy. In their opinion, music does not make much difference to Freetown's sonic environment. Rather, music is considered noise itself, thus adding noise to the noise. In a conversation I had with a musically inclined Canadian NGO worker, she connected the city's noise to the fact that music is always played at full volume. 'People here don't play with timbre and dynamics. No crescendo-decrescendo-crescendo, it is just always loud. Fortissimo forever. Just like the city.' These remarks give a sense of how sounds are perceived differently by different people. Although seemingly obvious, these differences lead to questions about how sounds are organised into patterns perceived to be music or noise.

Drawing on seven months of ethnographic research I conducted in Freetown between August 2009 and February 2010, my paper attempts to tackle that conundrum. The original focus of my research followed from Charles Keil's (1998: 303) playful metaphor that 'interacting sounds constitute the abstraction "music" in the same way that interacting people constitute the abstraction "society"'. Hence, what I aimed to explore were the connecting and competing 'disseminations' of people and sounds; the conjunctures of social affiliations and music practices; and the diverse intersections, interactions, and contradictions between Freetown's social polyphony and its musical counterpart.

My primary ethnographic tools were conversations, interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation mainly among 'young' Freetonian men and women (aged between around fifteen and thirty-five years), but also among locals of more advanced ages, as well as among foreigners of diverse professions (expats, volunteers, businesspeople). I complemented this focus on listenerships through interviews with Freetown's music sellers, producers, DJs, and musicians. The analysis of the relationship between music, noise, volume, and identity I develop here includes both a cross-section of ethnographic materials from interviews and conversations, as well as participatory experiences gathered via sustained immersions into Freetown's music life, mainly through listening and dancing.

I start with some acoustemological (Feld 2012) vignettes about Freetown's sonic environments, juxtaposing these explorations of 'sonic sensibilities' with reflections on what makes sounds to be perceived as noise. Building upon works from anthropology, musicology, and cognitive science, I then turn to a closely related question, asking what makes sounds become music. I show in the last part that, within the coordinates of Freetown's social and sonic relationships, a main defining feature of sounds to be labelled music is the ability to dance to them. Ultimately, the desirability of danceability in Freetown's music takes me to matters of loudness because, more often than not, dance music audiences tend to favour extensive uses of volume.

The Sound of the Other

A German saying ascribed to Kurt Tucholsky states that noise is the sound of the other. Noise is a difficult concept to define. At the same time, conceptions of noise tell us much about the relationships of humans to the world, and to its sounds. Besides being a counterpart to silence, noise can be understood as a possible sonic antipode to music. The lines of demarcation, however, are relative and socially constructed. The dichotomising categories of music and noise map out but two variables within a vast spectrum of quotidian aural experiences. Much of what we hear on a daily basis does not belong to either category, but stands somewhere in-between the two (e.g. speech, breath, wind). Still, in terms of acoustic markers of identity and alterity, very few (if any) other labels of sound occurrences bear a comparably pronounced function for discriminating and polarising between self and other.

Sounds can bring about affinity, sympathy, and solidarity (e.g. Durkheim 2001) or antipathy, hostility, and division (e.g. Cohen 1972). Different people have different ways of dealing with sounds and with the respective meanings sounds are invested with. In the underlying processes defining what value and significance a sound is ascribed, different 'ways of listening' emerge (Clarke 2005; see also Erlmann 2004).¹ As I will discuss in more detail below, these processes, while being contingent on a broad range of individual

¹ This is not to reproduce simplistic notions of 'cultural difference' by construing an isomorphism of space, place, and 'hearing culture' (to paraphrase Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 7). Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Stasik 2012), Freetown's history as a major West African harbour town can be adduced as a prime example against the figment of a discrete, spatially-confined (or 'discontinued') culture. Namely, since its establishment as a colony of freed slaves at the end of the eighteenth century, its 'cultural fabric' was built on a plurality of groups of (displaced) people that straddled far-flung connections between the Americas, Britain, large parts of West and Central Africa, and the Upper Guinean forests.

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experiences of listening and hearing, are influenced significantly by factors of history, technology, and economy, among others. The categories of music and noise 'speak' of these many-faceted negotiations of the meanings of sound in a most genuine manner.

The main difficulty in defining noise in a generally applicable way follows from the utterly subjective character of its perception. What one person may perceive as music in one instance another person may perceive as noise, while the respective perceptions may well reverse in another instance and with other sounds.² Christopher Small (1998: 121) gives an operational definition of noise as 'unwanted sounds – sounds, that is, whose meaning we either cannot discern or do not like when we do discern it'. Following Small, we can thus conceive of noise as an audible perturbation to our meaning-making of the world; an 'obliteration of meaning', as Simon Reynolds (2006: 66) has it.

During my first weeks in Freetown, I stayed in a cheap downtown brothel-cum-hotel, right next to Freetown's most bustling intersection, the so-called PZ. PZ appeared to me as an area of sonic havoc; an anarchic and perpetual orchestral work materialised through the medley of humans and animals, of trolleys, cars, motorbikes, buses, and trucks. The stalls of some two-dozen music sellers frame PZ's roundabout. Each stall is equipped with a stereo playing out latest hits at full volume. In addition to these musical sounds, the cacophony of the place is further fuelled by the honking of cars, the muezzin's call, the varying decibels of white noise produced by parlours broadcasting European football matches, and, not least, the diesel generators fuelling their transmissions. The area around the PZ roundabout resembles the scenario of a rampant competition for audible attention. Here, Freetown's urban symphony tends to be played in steady fortissimo indeed.

Outsiders – whether short-term visitors, expats, or newly arrived researchers – are prone to misunderstand, or simply not to discern, the messages and meanings transmitted in a given sound. That is not to say that local residents (or 'insiders' in this regard) would discern and understand all sounds 'correctly'. The difference between aural competences is gradual, rather than definitive. Still, while the residents' skills of aural sense-making are mainly shaped and honed by the particular acoustic ecology (Wrightson 2000) of local sound relations, the outsiders' assumptions about the world and its sonic relationships, as well as their faculty to

² The delineation of this discrepancy along generational lines figures prominently in studies in the sociology of music (e.g. Bennett 2000; Epstein 1993).

make sense of them, stem from other contexts. In Freetown, the sources of potential sonic perturbations to their sensorial and reflective attempts to understand the new context, along with its relationships and meanings, are ample. Accordingly, the outsider's need to re-adjust his or her aural sensorium to the city's sonic realities demands many active attempts and, not least, patience and aural stamina. For, whether in a small drinking spot or a large dance bar, at private gatherings or public events, in a shop selling miscellanea or at bustling PZ, if there is a stereo playing music, the music is usually played at full volume. To the ear of the outsider, the volume at which the music is played may regularly seem to contradict the apparent function of the place, to disturb rather than attract potential visitors or clients.

At the Goat Soup Bar

This putative contradiction struck me first during a visit to a small bar in the West End of the city, famous for its goat soup. Particularly during weekends, many come by to eat this speciality. The place is an ordinary 'chop bar', a rudimentary concrete structure with a tin roof, a couple of plastic tables and chairs, and a kitchen separated by an improvised wooden wall. People come here to eat. They eat goat soup, enjoy a beer, and chat while eating. And they leave again after having eaten. When the soup for the day is finished, the place remains empty until the soup for the next day is prepared. The goat soup bar appears to be about goat soup, and there is no apparent indication that anyone would come here to listen to music or dance. However, at the goat soup bar, music is played at deafening levels. Two large loudspeakers frame its small space while the cook serves simultaneously as a DJ. When I asked him why he plays the music that loud, he replied with another question, asking me whether I did not like the music.

This sort of misunderstanding is paradigmatic. What I perceived as an audible perturbation to the meaning-making in the (for me new) world of the goat soup bar was an accustomed and known sonic reality to the bar's owner and apparently also to other guests. Throughout the following weeks, I kept on asking the same volume-question in various other 'noisy' locales. The answers I collected were all disappointingly vague. 'Because we like it.' 'For people to hear.' 'Why not?' What I perceived as loudness and noisiness, locals did not perceive as too loud, noisy, or disturbing.

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In fact, during the seven months I spent roaming about Freetown's places of music consumption, only twice did I see people complain that the volume of the music being played was too loud: one time at a vernissage at the British Council where a local DJ played for an audience comprised mostly of Freetown's expat community; the other time at a casino night in an expensive hotel where a Freetonian band provided the musical backdrop to the Freetown Chinese community's monthly gambling-session. During the many parties I attended and at which locals made up the audience, complaints directed to the DJ were, if at all, grumbling about the volume being not loud enough. In Freetown, Tucholsky's 'noise as the sound of the other' appears to assume a storybook character.

That volume-enigma began dissolving during a quiet afternoon I spent with a retired musician, Daddy Loco. We were sitting at his compound, chatting, and waiting for the heat to pass. Suddenly, a blast of frenzied music-sounds pervaded our tranquillity from a neighbour's yard. My host, however, made no sign of annoyance whatsoever. Seizing the moment, I posed the volume-question to him. And for the first time, I received a more gratifying answer. 'You people in Europe', he began,

you all have your own radio playing for you alone. Here, not everyone has a radio. Even more so in the olden days. Back then, only few people could afford to buy a radio or the latest records. And if you'd had the stereo and you would sit alone in your room with closed windows, listening to the music quietly and all to your own, people would call you selfish. They too want to share in your music. And no one likes to be called selfish.

Daddy Loco's explanation, laconic as it appears, opens up a whole range of perspectives on relevant factors related to Freetown's music volumes. Clearly, the effects the combined factors of historical, technological, and economic developments have on interpersonal relations figure most prominently in his rationale. The register of extra-musical influences sketched out by Daddy Loco can be expanded by a number of other, closely related factors.

One reason music is played at full volume on a stereo is because it attracts attention and enviers. It creates curiosity and disseminates novelty. It signals action, exchange, encounters, special occasions, and wealth (however factual). In so doing, music figures as a form of symbolic and acoustic redistribution. And the louder it is played, the further it sends out these meanings. This connection between loud music-sounds and settings

of wealth, exchange, opportunity, and special occasions provides an explanation for most outsiders' perceptions of Freetown as noisy because most of Freetown's expats and foreign visitors move in exactly these kinds of wealthy, opportune, and 'special' settings. Further yet, the loud volume of music seems to serve the fairly pragmatic function of drowning the unmusical (and noisy) sounds of the diesel generator, which is used to fuel the musical sounds in most of the places of condensed exchange and acoustic redistribution.

Taking the point of music technology a bit further, we may consider a kind of sonically adapted technological imperative in the sense that, once the music technology and its prerequisites (mainly electricity) are available, people will 'inevitably' make full use of it. Small, battery-run radio receivers have been imported and sold in quantity since the early 1980s. These radios, however, emitted sounds of moderate volumes only. This changed from about the late 1990s, as the availability and affordability of larger – and louder – electronic playback devices (comprising primarily of cassette, CD, and VCD/DVD sets) in Freetown increased significantly. This kind of 'stereophonic democratisation', as compared to the earlier monophonic sounds of small radios, has been spurred by the concurrent spread of technologies for distributing and duplicating music, which, in turn, has been advanced by Freetown's many music pirates.

That most of the music heard around town today is played-back recorded music appears to further *amplify* the impression of excessive loudness, quite literally so. Unlike music played live on instruments, which in Freetown has become a form of music-making activity that is increasingly restricted to particular ceremonies, above all funerals and church services, recorded music is much more inclined to produce unwanted effects of distortion. Far from being neutral, the medium through which music is played has a decisive role in qualifying sounds as distorted or noisy. As stereo equipment in Freetown is usually of low-fi quality – with mostly pitifully battered loudspeakers – the sounds they produce often appear markedly distorted, particularly to the ear accustomed to played-back music of higher fidelity. Writing about the religious use of loudspeakers in Nigeria, Brian Larkin (2014) coined the notion of 'techniques of inattention'. The kind of hearing without listening implied in this 'technique' appears a much desired skill in Freetown, too. Keeping in mind these, as well as Daddy Loco's explanations, let me now turn to related questions about how sounds become organised into patterns recognised as music.

What is Music and What is Not Music

Music – similar to noise – is a difficult phenomenon to define. The question of what music is and is not has been tackled by many authors. To name but a few (German) examples: some approach music as a rational science based on numbers and algorithms, thus as pure theory (Leibniz); others see it as pure praxis (Novalis); yet others emphasise music's nature as a subtle expression of our connectedness to the transcendental (Schopenhauer), as the concurrence of Apollonian and Dionysian ethics and aesthetics (Nietzsche), or as a coherent expression of society's contradictions and paradoxes (Adorno).³

With regard to these antithetical approaches, we might conclude that music is actually not to grasp at all, not coherently at least. Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 80), writing about the inscrutable nature of art ('a sort of symbolic gymnastics'), framed the following trenchant sentences about the unique ineffability of music: 'music, the most "pure" and "spiritual" of the arts, is perhaps simply the most corporeal. Linked to *états d'âme* [...] it ravishes, carries away, moves. It is not so much beyond words as below them'.

Being a phenomenon 'below words', definitions of music are inevitably of a provisional character. Following an arbitrating approach, it might be stated that some definitions of music are useful for some purposes, while others are useful for other purposes. Let us briefly consider some selected approaches useful for our purposes relating to matters of identity, alterity, and volume.

Music, as the evolutionary sciences teach us, is inherent to human nature. Every human being, barring deafness due to accident or handicap, is endowed with the gift of music. Music is inscribed into our evolutionary history. In every human society, there is music; or, formulated more technically by John Blacking (1995: 224), 'every known human society has what trained musicologists would recognise as "music"'. As the human capacity to make music is universal, music thus connects humanity. As put by Adorno (1975: 186), music is indeed a universal language, and yet – as he quickly adds – it is no Esperanto.

While music connects, it also bears the potential to disconnect humans from each other. Music is, paradoxically, a universal and a non-universal phenomenon. Ian Cross

³ For a selection of central texts in English translation, see Hermand and Gilbert (1994).

(2003a) therefore proposes the odd-sounding term 'musics', for musics 'resonate with the histories, values, conventions, institutions and technologies that enfold them; musics can only be approached through culturally situated acts of interpretation' (2003a: 19). And these acts 'unveil a multiplicity of musical ontologies, some, or most of which, may be mutually irreconcilable: hence a multiplicity of "musics"' (2003a: 19).

Small (1998), in turn, cautions us not to think of music as a thing. Or as he writes, music 'is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do' (1998: 2). Music is action, a performance in which all those present are involved – those who play the music, if present at all, just as those who listen and dance to it. To omit the trap of reification that, according to Small, characterises many scholarly approaches to music, he introduces a new word: the verb *to music*, with *musicking* as its participle, and with it, its definition: 'To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing, or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing' (1998: 9).

Small's emphasis on music as an activity corresponds with the seminal anthropological approach proposed by Alan Merriam (1964), who defines music as socially accepted patterns of sound and behaviour. Since music inevitably takes place within social actions, and eventually is social action, it involves behaviours of individuals and groups of individuals. As a unique form of behaviour in which sounds are organised into a phenomenon recognised as music, it demands social concurrence of people who decide what it is and what it is not. Herein, too, lie the defining distinctions between, as listed by Richard Waterman (1963: 86), 'what is music and what is not music, between what is proper music and what is improper music, between what is our music and what is someone else's music, between what is good and meaningful music, and what is bad and inept music'.

The relation between social concurrence and music behaviour, however, is not marked by a one-sided imposition of socially accepted patterns onto sounds. The process is in fact strikingly dialectical. Social concepts shape the perceptions of sounds as music, while music, in turn, feeds back onto the concepts held about sounds as music. Given the significant features in the processes of musicking – play, performance, invention, improvisation, imagination – the realms which music occupies in society are marked by constant change of both sounds and behaviours. Kofi Agawu (2001: 7) dubbed this realm the 'hollow space' in which 'active listeners and interpreters are invited to play, to invent, to dream, and inevitably, to lie'. Society,

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apprehended as music audiences writ large, is thus in a constant process of negotiating and reasserting the meanings of music; while the realms created through music provide spaces to negotiate, and to reassert, the social meanings shared by its performers and participants.

This dialectic not only relates to the basic elements of melody, harmony, and rhythm, but also concerns the dimensions of volume and loudness. That is to say, the interplay between sounds and behaviours not only determines what is accepted and desirable as music but also what levels of volume the music is played at are acceptable and desirable. Extra-musical factors further contribute to the distinctions between what musical sounds – and volumes – are desirable. Again, the combined variables of history, technology, and economy can be seen as exerting about the greatest leverage in that regard.

The scene at Daddy Loco's yard described above is a case in point here. Scarcity of technological means (particularly of playback devices), in turn caused by economic strain, gave rise to a kind of ethics in which the desire for auditory participation in music novelties takes precedence over possible nuisances induced by musical sounds. As the acoustic redistribution of novel music-sounds is not only accepted but also ascribed a particular kind of social prestige or, conversely, as 'listening to music all to your own' is considered selfish and scorned, social control comes to serve as a mechanism for regulating volume – that is, for turning up the volume. Whether or not the recent democratisation of electronic playback devices and the concomitant proliferation of loud played-back recorded music will bring about a change in the volume-ethics held by many Freetonians remains to be seen. So far, there are no apparent signs of change.

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Against this background of a multiplicity of connecting and disconnecting musics, along with the diverse musicking behaviours organising them into meaningful sounds and desirable volumes, let us now return to our particular case: Freetown's music and some of the grounding categories by which my Freetonian interlocutors partition sounds into non-musical and musical. A short vignette from my fieldwork serves well to illustrate the contours of one main category.

Agnes and Angela are two students from Freetown. After being introduced to them, I was keen to find out about their music preferences and practices. When I asked them about their music, Agnes handed me her laptop, on which, as she said, I could find all their music. While all I found was, by Freetonian standards, a fairly unexceptional selection of up-to-date music hits from the US, the Caribbean, and Anglophone Africa, one track protruded from the rest of their collection: Beethoven's 'Fifth Symphony'. When I asked them whether they liked Beethoven, I received a puzzled look in return and was asked to play the track. After a few moments of listening, Agnes laughed at me, asking whether the name of the musician was really Beethoven since that was a dog's name. After a few more moments of amused bafflement, she asked me to turn it off, adding, 'You call this music? How do you dance to this?'

Neither she nor Angela had listened to it before, at least not consciously, and, if at all, not with the association of music on their minds. The fragment of Beethoven's symphony came into Agnes' music collection as a pre-installed demo song on her computer. That Agnes associated the name Beethoven with a dog was probably because she saw the Hollywood movie starring a St. Bernard with that name. While these two points touch upon other relevant aspects discussed above (of recent changes in music-related technologies and of new channels of media dissemination in contemporary Freetown), the main point for our concern here lies in Agnes and Angela's bafflement about Beethoven's sounds and their explicit refusal to call them 'music'.

Apparently, the sounds did not fit the concepts and conventions Agnes and Angela hold about music. Beethoven was, so to speak, 'out of the frame' that defines their ideas about musical sounds and separates them from non-musical sounds. And that frame – formed by the social and sonic realities and relationships Agnes and Angela share and co-create with their Freetonian contemporaries – is calibrated on one deciding feature: danceability. It is, however, not the question whether Agnes and Angela always have to dance to patterns of sounds in order to qualify them as 'music'. The question is whether music is something that is potentially danceable.

Of course there are exceptions. On the one hand, Freetown's diverse socialities bear a broad diversity of different music styles, traditions, influences, and, by this, also of music-defining conventions. In the course of my fieldwork, I also encountered Freetonians who were most familiar with Beethoven and the Viennese classics, some of whom would refer

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to it as their favourite music. In this sense, surely not all Freetonians would consent with Agnes and Angela's condition of danceability. Yet in view of the music tastes of the vast majority of my interlocutors (irrespective of age, gender, and socioeconomic background), and of the music heard around town (irrespective of whether it is played in public or private settings), the number of dissenting voices (and tastes) appears to be fairly negligible.

On the other hand, there are genre differences that Freetonians draw between different forms of music. Within these different genres, not all patterns of sounds of a musical kind that fall into the superordinate category of music are necessarily defined by being danceable. Hymns and sacred chants, which are played, sung and listened to in Freetown's churches, are among the clearest examples of patterned sounds that are not required to be danceable in order to be labelled music. However, the inflationary spread of charismatic sects in Freetown, whose services are characterised by highly danceable – and loud – songs and music, further narrows down the already narrow genre of non-danceable church music.

As I asked Agnes and Angela whether all music has to be danceable in order to be labelled music, they conceded that this must not always be the case. In a way, they also recognised Beethoven as some sort of music by speaking of it as 'your music' (that is, mine), but not 'theirs'. While there is space for non-danceable music as well, this 'space' is of a notional rather than habitual kind. That is to say, non-danceable music can be both imagined and acknowledged (possibly as a mere act of politeness, though), yet the music that Agnes and Angela, as well as most of their contemporaries, select, play, practice, listen to, and enjoy is but music that facilitates or accompanies 'swit dans' (literally, 'sweet dance'), as a popular local expression has it. Clearly, there was an irreconcilability of 'musical ontologies' (Cross 2003a: 19) and it followed from the distinction between danceable and non-danceable 'musics'.

The Social, the Sonic, and the Sensory

So, what is it about music and dance, and how does volume play into it? Coming back to Cross, it is intriguing to note that he – as a musicologist with a strong inclination towards cognitive science – treats music as indistinguishable from dance, as well: 'music and dance are simply two sides of the same coin' (2003b: 80). Music and dance are inseparable in terms of their evolutionary origin and measured areas of brain activity. As Cross (2003b: 79) writes,

the necessity of a link between music and overt action [i.e. play, performance, dance] is obscured in the (fairly recent) social practices of western art-music which involve drawing clear distinctions between 'active' performer and 'passive' audience, and by very recent technological developments that enable 'music' to be 'caused' by purchasing a phonographic roll or downloading an MP3 file.

William Benzon (2001: 46) adds to it: 'much if not all of music's neural substrate will be found in structures that evolved to serve other behaviors'. Quoting Jude Tramo (2001), he continues: "'There is no music nervous center in the brain, no grossly identifiable brain structure that works solely during music's cognition.'" [...] brains make music by using old structures and systems in a new way' (Benzon 2001: 46). The connection of music and dance and the ability to do 'it' evolved from our evolutionary raw material in relation to our evolutionary needs and deeds (see also Cross and Morley 2009).

Further yet, the acts of musicking together provide fertile grounds for the creation of collectivity and of a collective's cohesion of emotional coordinates. Benzon developed a theory about musicking as not only a (abstract) bonding force of social beings, but also of physical brain structures and neural formations. Through musicking, our brains and bodies align with those of others. Benzon (2001: 23) writes of musicking as a 'medium through which individual brains are coupled together in a shared activity', a means for 'interactional synchrony' (2001: 25). Dance plays a central role in these synchronisations. In line with Benzon, William McNeill (1995: 27), in his exploration of dance as a form of *keeping together in time*, writes:

Moving together rhythmically for hours on end can be counted upon to strengthen emotional bonds among those who take part. [...] What we may think of as the human scale of primary community, comprising anything from several score to many hundreds of persons, thus emerged, thanks to the emotional solidarities aroused by keeping together in time.

Corresponding to these entanglements of music and dance in evolutionary perspective, it is also very difficult to discriminate between music and dance, or to disentangle them, in analytical terms. Both are deeply personal, as every musicking participant potentially evolves his and her own ways of interpreting 'it' – whether by way of listening or by producing individually patterned dance moves. At the same time, both are also highly

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social, as it is in the social realms that conventions about what music is (and is not) are established and that individual dance moves are coordinated along a timeline of patterned sounds founded on social conventions about these sounds as music.

We do perceive sounds alone, in the narrow space between our ears and within our corporal being, making it thus a thoroughly intimate experience. At the same time, the perceptions of sounds as music are formed in the non-finite spaces outside our ears and bodies – in the universes of our social worlds, that is. This division between (musical) matter and (musical) mind, which evokes a Cartesian music-dualism of sorts, is resolved lucidly by Tim Ingold. Sound, Ingold (2011: 137) writes, 'is neither mental nor material, but a phenomenon of *experience* – that is, of our immersion in, and commingling with, the world in which we find ourselves'.

Ingold's phenomenological averment (corroborated more substantively in his critique of essentialising depictions of vision and hearing; Ingold 2000) corresponds with L.S. Lloyd's (1953) more technically inclined approach to the volume of a sound, which, in itself, has no loudness to it. For, 'loudness is not a property of the sound-vibration. Nor indeed is the pitch or the quality of a musical note. These are attributes of the sound-vibration, and they are attributed to it by our hearing faculty, the co-operation of ear and brain' (Lloyd 1953: 243). And as musicking brains are coupled together in 'interactional synchrony', immersing in the *shared* experiential patterns of musical sounds and practices, the musical world (or 'ontology') they inhabit emerges as both the source and the product of their engagements.

Here, then, through the medium of the sensory, the dialectic between social and sonic relations comes full circle. The brains, ears, and bodies involved in the sensory structuring of musical sounds are at once formative elements in the social organisation of sounds into music. While practice patterns experience, experiences in turn feed back onto practices. Again, this concerns the kinds of music as much as it does the volumes the music is played at.

Dance music, taken by its inherent trait of strengthening collectivity and emotional and perceptual cohesion, appears especially predestined to 'amplify' these feedback cycles between the social, the sonic, and the sensory. Surely, one might dance on one's own (for rehearsing some dance moves, for instance) and with only moderate uses of volume (or with headphones on). Yet, more often than not, dance takes place

in some kind of collective setting and with extensive uses of volume. In Freetown, this 'rule' by far outdoes possible exceptions to it. For many if not most Freetonians, music inextricably relates to dance. Dancing, in turn, implies dancing together. When joining in the dance, one not only joins in a shared pattern of movements coordinated along a jointly perceived timeline, but also in a shared experiential realm that patterns perceptions of sounds as music – and of volumes as desirably loud or undesirably noisy.

Towards the end of my seven month fieldwork, I experienced what Markus Verne (2013: 5; referring to Rice 2008), writing about methods in the anthropology of music, calls a 'reconfiguration of the fieldworker's personality'; that is, a reconfiguration pertaining primarily to my 'sonic sensibilities'. Having immersed myself in an extensive schedule of Freetonian parties and dances, I no longer perceived the city's musical sounds as inappropriately loud or noisy. The volume-riddle dissolved, as if by itself. This, however, did not follow from a kind of music-induced hearing loss; at least, no such damage was indicated by a later hearing test. Rather, it was indicative of my progressing perceptual attunement to Freetown's sonic and social relations, which in turn followed from my commingling, listening and dancing with Freetonians.

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