

INCORPORATING A MUSICAL ICONOGRAPHY COMPONENT INTO A MUSIC RESEARCH COURSE

Incorporating a Musical Iconography Component into a Music Research Course

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Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. I've been the music librarian here at George Mason University since 2005, and have also during this time been the instructor for MUSIC 662, Introduction to Research in Music. This is a three-credit required course for all the Master of Music students. Most Schools of Music require such a core course, and it

is usually taught by a music librarian or a musicologist.

This course must describe the basics of a variety of investigatory areas in music, their customary tools and techniques, and direct attention to information sources, typical research areas, and various objects of study. Other instructors might give only a cursory nod to musical iconography as a research area without delving into great

detail. This might be because scholarly research often requires dual expertise in both music history and art history. I am admittedly not an art historian, and perhaps I am marching in where angels fear to tread, but you all look friendly, so I will proceed. I'll describe my brief unit on this topic, one component out of many in MUSIC 662.



The heart of the iconography unit is a series of ten images, part of a 30-minute slide show, which exemplify some issues or topics in musical iconography, or suggest relationships between music and images more broadly. I'll not show all ten of them this afternoon, but we can quickly look at three.

If you're looking for a "claim" or "thesis sentence" for this presentation, here it is: "An art history librarian could partner with a music librarian to introduce university music students (undergrads and grads) to scholarly research in musical iconography."

Music Iconography
 = scholarly, interdisciplinary study
 (interpretation, contextualization) of
 visual representations that include
 musical subject matter

Major divisions of this area of research:

- **Organology** (history and technology of the development of musical instruments)
- **Performance practice** (and socio-cultural aspects of music-making)
- **Symbolic or allegorical uses of musical imagery**

First, here are some of the basics. Musical iconography is, of course, **visual representation that includes musical subject matter** and the scholarly, cross-disciplinary study of such representations to explore context and to provide interpretation. Such study is often used to (1) illuminate organology, the history of musical instrument manufacture, to (2) provide hints on performance practices or broader social aspects of music-making, or

to (3) suggest the role of pictured musical objects in an artwork's symbolism or allegory.

MUSIC IN ART
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR MUSIC ICONOGRAPHY

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Principal scholarly journal:
Music in Art (published by
Research Center for Music
Iconography at CUNY)

Principal scholarly
organization: Association
Répertoire Internationale
d'Iconographie Musicale
("RIdIM").


Some LC subject headings and
subdivisions:
MUSIC IN ART
Art and music
Art in music
Synesthesia in art
Ekphrasis
Intermediality
— -- Pictorial works
— -- Portraits

Répertoire
International
d'Iconographie
Musicale

For the record, the principal journal for this field is **MUSIC IN ART** and the principal organization is called “RIdIM” for short – one of the “Four R” projects of international musicology. Students will already have had a quick look at the journal as part of an in-class assignment that I call “periodicals speed-dating marathon,” and will also have had a very quick demonstration of RIdIM’s website, which indexes music-related artworks in

museums around the world. I also review the major subject heading **MUSIC IN ART** and its classification range ML85-ML89, as well as some more broadly related headings or subdivisions. The term ekphrasis originally applied to the rhetoric of describing a painting in words, but the meaning has come to include the translation of an artistic expression from one medium to another, such as expressing a painting in music or a musical work in painting.

The Slide Trumpet as Missing Link
(Accurate, vs. Approximate, vs. Fanciful, 1)



One of the biggest challenges facing a musical iconographer is determining whether a depiction is accurate in every detail. What was unimportant to the artist might be very important to a musicologist.

Figure 1. Angel playing a trumpet. Detail of *Five Musical Angels*, painting by Hans Memling, 15th century, Musée Royale des Beaux Arts, Antwerp.
Source: Art Museum Image Gallery, Accession Number PCD_AA344992, Internet (accessed January 12, 2010).

Here’s one of the ten images from the slide show that I mentioned. It’s a detail from a 15th century painting of angels playing musical instruments. As the first image in the series, it introduces the fundamental challenge in applying iconography to organology: is the depiction accurate? What might be an unimportant and loosely drawn detail by the artist might perplex a musicologist. Students will have previously discussed a journal article

questioning the existence of the slide trumpet in Renaissance music, with arguments pro and con from iconography.

The Other Side of the Coin: Tap-Dancing Through Broadway

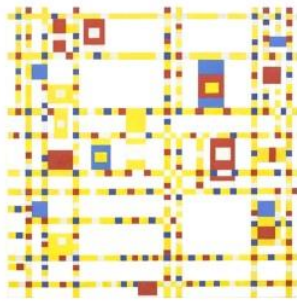


Figure 5. *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. Painting by Piet Mondrian, 1942-43, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Source: MoMA: The Museum of Modern Art, Internet (accessed January 12, 2010).

While art can inspire music (such as Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*), music can also inspire art.

After showing Paul Klee's "Twittering Machine" as an example of art that has inspired numerous musical compositions, we look at Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie Woogie" to see how **music has inspired art**. Mondrian loved to dance, enjoyed the rhythms of ragtime and jazz music, and punctuated this painting with syncopations that some say represent the rat-a-tat of tap-dancing.

19th-Century Big Oil's Genteel Spin

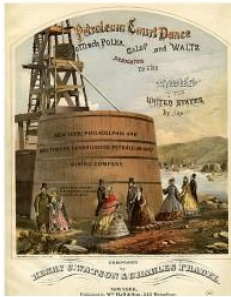


Figure 7. *Petroleum Court Dances* sheet music cover, Henry C. Eno, lithographer, music by Henry C. Watson and Charles Fradel, New York, Wm. Hall & Son, 1865.

Source: Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music (Box 34, Item 55a), Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University; Internet (accessed January 12, 2010).

There was an explosion of songs and piano music on every imaginable topic in 19th-century USA; brilliant cover art is now found much more interesting and revealing than the sometimes tedious music inside.

Two very productive music-graphic genres for interdisciplinary research or cultural studies are **record-album cover art** and **sheet music cover art**. In the latter case, scholarly interest has arisen in the lithographed covers of 19th century American sheet music. There were songs or piano pieces on every imaginable topic, and while the music itself could be quite pedestrian, some of the covers are

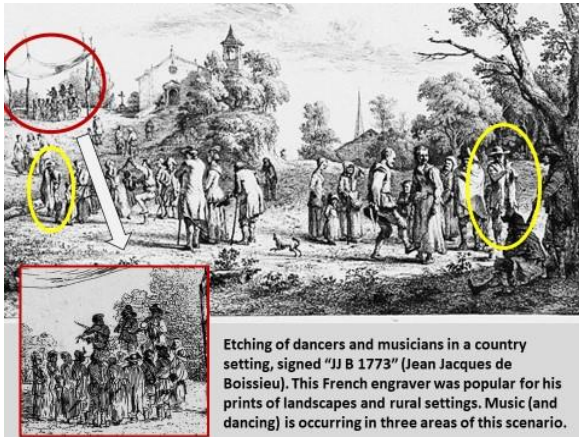
fascinating. Here, the Consolidated Petroleum Company has printed up four dances—a schottisch, a polka, a gallop, and a waltz—especially for the ladies. Genteel couples in elegant apparel admire one of the new "Tarbell Tanks" for storing crude oil. Perhaps they are stockholders! In reality, everything in the vicinity of this operation would have been filthy and sticky and stinky, and not fit for a promenade.

Some prints and drawings in Mason Libraries' Special Collections Research Center are worth examining. Here's a *Bildmottet*:



Osculetur Me Osculo Oris Sui / Marten de Vos, inventor; C. J. Visscher excudit. Antwerp? 1610. The motet is by Flemish composer Andreas Pevernage.

We've seen three of the ten images from my class's iconography lecture. On another night of the course we visit Mason's Special Collections Research Center for a different unit, on the history of music printing and publishing, that includes inspection of various antiquarian musical rarities that illustrate that history. In addition to manuscripts and printed scores, I usually include two items of iconography. This one is a **Bildmottet**, an engraved rendering of a religious subject that includes a completely notated musical composition. In this case, we see the biblical King Solomon with a retinue singing from a giant part-book that features a musical setting of a verse from the Song of Solomon. The Bildmottet art genre was a precursor to stand-alone music engraving. This five-voice motet was composed by Andreas Pevernage.



Etching of dancers and musicians in a country setting, signed "JJ B 1773" (Jean Jacques de Boissieu). This French engraver was popular for his prints of landscapes and rural settings. Music (and dancing) is occurring in three areas of this scenario.

This item, also from the Special Collections Center, is an 18th-century etching by Jean Jacques de Boissieu, whose engraved prints of landscapes and rural scenarios were popular in his time. This appears to be some kind of festival or celebration outside a country church, with a trio of musicians playing under a canopy at upper left near the building, but also a bagpiper with two dancers on the left, and a musette player with two dancers on the right. Perhaps the little dog in the center is howling along.



Students seem to enjoy looking at pictures during music class! Gets their imaginations going.



As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and students seem to become imaginatively-stimulated and thoughtfully-provoked after their attention has been drawn to examples of music iconography, even if for just 30 minutes. You will probably recognize this image at the very center of Raphael's Vatican fresco "The School of Athens." While it has nothing to do with music, I actually use this image in one of the lectures to

illustrate the centuries-old dialectic between induction and deduction. Old guy Plato on the left is pointing upwards to signify the source of top-down deduction from general principle to predictable cases, while young guy Aristotle on the right gestures toward the ground to signify the source of bottom-up induction from observation to theory. This is our philosophy lesson for today.

A handful of music students have pursued art-related interests:

- "John Gibson's *Resting in the Peace of His Hands* for Band, And Its Inspiration"
- "Symbolism in Music and Art: Eino Rautavaara's Angels"
- "Bach's and Bernini's Baroque Aesthetic"
- "Scriabin: A Synthetic Synaesthete"

And, I gave a paper at an international conference of music iconography scholars a few years ago:

- "Behind the Benign: Contextualizing a 1933 Photo of Girls Playing Recorders"

Finally, there has been a handful of students in the course who actually pursued successful research projects dealing with music and imagery. One student analyzed a composition for band inspired by Kaethe Kollwitz's 1936 sculpture "Rest in the Peace of His Hands" as an example of ekphrasis. Similarly, another student showed how musical devices in Finnish composer Eino Rautavaara's piano piece "Archangel

Michael Fights the Antichrist" mirror the balanced tension in the actual orthodox church icon which inspired it. Another student, in exploring what "Baroque art" and "Baroque music" might have in common, imaginatively compared a Bach harpsichord concerto to Bernini's "Ecstasy of St. Theresa" sculpture. One student who set out to draw connections between Scriabin's reported sound-color synesthesia and his music concluded that the synesthesia was probably faked. And I myself gave a paper at RIDIM interpreting a likely socio-political context of a 1933 photograph of purported Hitler youth musicians.

That's all I have, and I thank you for your kind attention.