Musicology & Ethnomusicology: Student Scholarship

Musicology & Ethnomusicology

11-2018

Electronic Dance Music: Is It Art? Selected Annotated Bibliography

University of Denver

Electronic Dance Music: Is It Art? Selected Annotated Bibliography

Electronic Dance Music, or EDM, is a genre of music that has enjoyed success. Although it grew out of art music in the twentieth century, EDM is considered popular music. But, is the future of EDM confined only within popular music or is there potential for it to influence or become art music? Or perhaps, is EDM already a form of art regardless of whether or not it is commonly seen as such? In response to such quandaries, this paper will form a method of critique to analyze EDM in comparison to art music. To do so, an overall understanding and definition of what art music is or is not will be presented. In addition, the history of popular dance music influencing art music of the past as well as common musical characteristics of EDM will be presented. These factors will be considered and used to evaluate EDM as art.

Dictionary and Encyclopedia Articles

Stutton, Julia, et al. "Dance." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Edited by

Stanley Sadie and J. Tyrrell. London: Macmillan, 2001. 6: 879-908.

A researcher might establish a historical record of dance music's influence on art music in order to argue the potential of EDM's influence on art music. In order to do so, one might use the information contained within the entry "Dance" in *The New Grove*. This entry discussed the historical development of dance in the Western dance music tradition from antiquity through the twentieth century. The beginning of the entry introduced dance and established that dance occurs at some level with music. Also stated in the introduction is that the entry not only focuses on music that is meant to be danced to, but also music that is inspired by dance. Thereafter, the

entry is in six separate sections: Western Antiquity, Middle Ages and early Renaissance, late Renaissance and Baroque to 1730, 1730-1800, 19th century, and the 20th century. In each of these sections, the characteristics of dance, the music that accompanies it, as well as the music inspired by the dance music of the period is discussed and elaborated upon.

Dissertations and Theses

Butler, Mark J. "Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music." PhD diss., University Graduate School Indiana University, Ann Arbor, 2003. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

In his influential dissertation, Mark Butler examined the rhythm and beat structure along with its relationship to texture in EDM. To do so he first established a history of EDM, its method of creation, as well as its scholarship up to that point. Then he began to dissect some of the specific musical features in EDM concerning the rhythm and beat. These musical features were divided into three patterns: short patterns, short patterns in a larger context, and larger patterns. When discussing short patterns, Butler focused on the rhythmic fundamental building blocks of EDM: rhythm and meter, repetition, and texture. While discussing the short patterns in a larger context, Butler examined how those building blocks fit into a larger pattern in EDM, such as ambiguous rhythmic patterns and polyrhythms. As he explained the larger patterns in EDM, Butler discussed patterns in the groupings of measures, the structure of the tracks, as well as how rhythm, meter, and form interact with one another. A researcher might use Butler's research into the style and structure of EDM and combine it with other stylistic and structural characteristics of EDM to compare and contrast EDM with art music.

Levinson, Jerrold. "Evaluating Music." In *Musical Worlds: New Directions in the Philosophy of*

   Music, edited by Philip Alperson, 93-107. University Park Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania

   State University Press, 1998.

   In his essay, Jerold Levinson proposed the question of what makes music good, or how

one can evaluate music to determine its worth. Essentially, Levinson was asking, "Is music good

just because it sounds good or is rewarding to experience?" In order to answer this question,

Levinson proposed two basic methods of evaluating music: generally, what makes music

valuable as a whole or how it affects human life, and specifically, what makes a particular piece,

genre, or style of music valuable. Throughout the rest of the essay, Levinson focused on

evaluating the specific value of a piece of music. He presented Malcolm Budd's theory of artistic

value, critiqued, and then expanded on it. Next, Levinson took one aspect of his expanded theory

of artistic musical value and focused on one aspect of it, that of the "intrinsic-experiential" value,

from which he proposed three criteria for evaluating what he deemed the "experiential goodness

in music." These three criteria revolve around how rewarding it is to experience the music in

three ways: by following the development of music, responding to that which the music

expresses, and experiencing that which the music expresses in the context of how the music

develops. Lastly, Levinson evaluated a piece of music by his criteria. A researcher could use

Levinson's argument to bring up a broad understanding of artistic value and then perhaps use it

as a basis for evaluating EDM in comparison to art music.

Rietveld, Hillegonda C. "Dancing in the Technoculture." In *The Routledge Research Companion to Electronic Music: Reaching out with Technology*, edited by Simon Emmerson, 113-133. New York: Routledge, 2018.

In her essay "Dancing in the Technoculture," Hillegonda Rietveld, addressed the culture of dance and the social aspect of electronic dance music. She did this by examining the historical development and musical characteristics of the techno culture in Detroit, drum'n'bass, and trance. Also, Rietveld discussed the different styles of DJs through the history of EDM and their influence on the music as well as reviewing the methods that DJs and fans have used to communicate and access new works via the internet. This essay could be used by a researcher to establish or support a historical timeline of techno, drum'n'bass, trance, and the music of the DJs. Or perhaps, this essay might be used to show the important connection that dance has to the culture and music of EDM which could then be compared to the dance music that is contained or has influenced the Western art music tradition.

Journal Articles

Booth, Gregory D. and Terry Lee Kuhn. "Economic and Transmission Factors as Essential Elements in the Definition of Folk, Art, and Pop Music." *Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (1990): 411-438. https://www.jstor.org/stable/741939.

In their article "Economic and Transmission Factors as Essential Elements in the Definition of Folk, Art, and Pop Music," Gregory Booth and Terry Lee Kuhn discussed three categories of music that have been handed down from bygone times, folk, art, and pop music, and presented a means of defining each. In order to define folk, art, and pop music, Booth and

Kuhn established a method of differentiating the three categories of music: through systems of economy, how the money is made, and transmission, how the music is passed onto others and disseminated to the public. Next, Booth and Kuhn discussed how their systems of economy and transmission apply to folk, art, and pop music. Later, Booth and Kuhn examined how the systems are not stagnant; they might grow and change, or the music might switch from one system to another. Also, Booth and Kuhn discussed how music from one category is often incorporated into another, such as art music into pop music or vice versa. A researcher might adopt, perhaps wholeheartedly or with revisions, Booth and Kuhn's differentiation and definition of these three categories of music: folk, art, and pop. Then, the researcher could analyze which category EDM falls into based on the adoption or revisions of Booth and Kuhn's theory.

Hart, Adam. "Microtonal Tunings in Electronic Dance Music: A Survey of Precedent and

Potential." *Contemporary Music Review* 35, no. 2 (April 2016): 242-262. https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/07494467.2016.1221635.

In his article "Microtonal Tunings in Electronic Dance Music: A Survey of Precedent and Potential," Adam Hart examined the use of microtonal tunings in EDM and the factors that contributed to its use. In his survey, Hart gave a history of the use of microtonal tuning in EDM. Also, he discussed the technology that has been and is available to composers and how the changing technology, and the access to it, may have contributed to the use of microtonal tuning in EDM. Additionally, Hart analyzed a few examples of EDM tracks that make using of microtones as well as the possibility for their use in future works. A researcher could use the information presented by Hart to show that some producers and artists are using microtonality in their work and are encouraging experimentation in EDM. Although this is only a smaller

subsection of EDM, a researcher might be able to use this to show that EDM is open to experimentation as well as change and then compare and contrast that with their definition of art music.

Solberg, Ragnhild. "Waiting for the Bass to Drop: Correlations Between Intense Emotional
   Experiences and Production Techniques in Build-Up and Drop Sections of Electronic
   Dance Music." *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 6, no. 1 (2014):
   61-82.

   In her article "Waiting for the Bass to Drop," Solberg evaluated EDM in its concepts of "build-up" and "drop" within the context of how production techniques and emotional intensity affect listeners and dancers. She did this by examining theories of the methods of production and the listeners and dancers' experience emotionally. Also, Solberg analyzed two specific EDM tracks, "Body" and Icarus", to show the various characteristics that she argued contributed to the "build-up" and "drop" of EDM. These characteristics include: "uplifters", "drum roll effect", changes in frequency, how the bass and bass drum are used, and "breakdown". Solberg then argued that these characteristics contributes to the sense of emotional intensity that the listener's and dancers of EDM experience. This article could be used to establish additional characteristics of EDM and how these characteristics influence the listeners and dancers. Also, this article presents a possible method of analysis that the researcher could use as a basis to analyze more recent EDM tracks.

Wachsmann, Klaus P. "Universal Perspectives in Music." *Ethnomusicology* 15, no. 3 (September
   1971): 381-384. https://www-jstor-org.du.idm.oclc.org/stable/850638.

In his article "Universal Perspectives in Music," Klaus Wachsmann presented a theory on understanding what music is in a universal context. His theory was that even if music from different places do not have anything obvious or concrete in common, it does not mean that there is not some sort of resemblance between them even if that resemblance cannot be easily identified. In order to conclude his theory, Wachsmann referenced and critiqued Professor McAlester's theory of a universally common heightened experience within music. Then, Wachsmann discussed the relationship between sound and the "psyche". To do so, he referenced the relationship between speech and music as well as the creation of time in music and its relationship to its culture. Additionally, Wachsmann argued that the label "music" is often attached to that which seems similar in another culture, even though its understanding is different and the "music" is different in one's own culture. Thus, there seems to be some sort of a resemblance between the music of different places even if that music seems to be vastly different and cannot be easily determined. Wachsmann's theory could be used by a researcher, not only for developing an idea of what music is overall, but also as a starting place for developing a way in which to compare music from different cultures, traditions, and areas of society.

Wiltsher, Nick. "The Aesthetics of Electronic Dance Music, Part I: History, Genres, Scenes, Identity, Blackness." *Philosophy Compass* 11, no. 8 (August 2016): 415-425. https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/phc3.12333.

In his article "The Aesthetics of Electronic Dance Music, Part I: History, Genres, Scenes, Identity, Blackness," Nick Wiltsher explored the issue of the aesthetics of EDM. To do so, he discussed the definition of EDM as well as the idea of authenticity in EDM. Then, Wiltsher presented the history, culture, and main genres of EDM. Next, he discussed the how the culture

of the clubs and different subgenres within EDM helps to shape identity. Last, Wiltsher explored the idea of "blackness" in EDM and the recent question of whether or not the genre is "black enough". Wiltsher would not consider the question of whether or not EDM can be considered as art. However, a researcher might use Wiltsher's arguments to provide some additional background information on the history and some of the major genres of EDM and how it affects the music. Also, a researcher might also look into the recent aesthetic change in EDM that Wiltsher brought up to determine exactly what changed musically and if it has any effect on the discussion of whether or not EDM is art.

Secondary and Tertiary Monographs

Blacking, John. *How musical is man?* 1973. Reprint, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974.

In his book as he reflected on his thoughts regarding the music of the Venda he studied during his time in Africa, Blacking posed the question, "how musical is man?" If one removes the notion of "art" in music and recognizes that music is organized sound created by people in a particular social and cultural context in which that value of music lies, then the understanding that humanity in its entirety has the possibility of being musical. To what extent, Blacking gave no answer, but instead asked probing questions and presented thoughts and musical practices for the consideration of the reader in each of the four sections of the book. In the first section, "Humanly Organized Sound," Blacking argued that music and its function cannot be separated and understood apart from the social environment from which it came. In his second section, "Music in Society and Culture," Blacking argued that culture and society impacts and shapes a

person's reaction to and understanding of music. Also, Blacking argued that the music in some traditions are more "complex" than others and thus is harder to master. This results in an elite few who are able to participate in the making of music in those cultures. In this third section, "Culture and Society in Music," Blacking argued that music reflects the culture, society, and tradition from which it was created, but it is only truly effective when the audience is a part of, or perhaps can understand in some way, that society and are prepared to hear the music. In the fourth section, "Soundly Organized Humanity," Blacking argued that music, as the combination of the processes of the mind with the society and culture it is in, has the ability to affect people for good based on their experiences in their society. Blacking's arguments in this book could be used by a researcher to point out the arbitrary definition and understanding of art music in order to propose that music's value, and specifically the value of EDM, lies not within the labels applied by the 'elite' in art music and scholarship, but rather in how the music functions in society and culture and the meaning it gives to people.

Frifth, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard

University Press, 1996.

In his book, Frifth argued that popular music has value and explained how it is and can be valued. His book was divided into three major sections entitled "Music Talk," "On Music Itself," and "Why Music Matters." In the first section, Frifth focused on the necessity of understanding how value judgments are made and communicated in their appropriate social and historical situation in order to be able to discuss popular music. Also, Frifth argued that, in popular music especially, genre helps to determine what music is and the value that is placed on that music. In the second section of his book, Frifth discussed some of the specific areas in popular music in

which value judgments are made. These include: the understanding of music, sound, and silence, the assumptions and social constraints applied to popular music, rhythm and the sense of time in the music, the meaning of the music through the texts and voicing, the aspect of performance, as well as the changing sense of authority and methods of musical production. In the third section of his book, Frifth discussed the meaning of music, not only cerebrally, but also in relation to emotion, the body, dance, society, and, most especially, experience. Frifth's discussion of the value of popular music as a whole and its relation to art music could be used by a researcher to establish a framework for evaluating EDM in relation to or as art music.

Gelbart, Matthew. *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007. https://www-fulcrum-org.du.idm.oclc.org/concern/monographs/6h440s95h.

In his book, Matthew Gelbart discussed how music is categorized, how the categorization process came to be, and what it means. He demonstrated that the concept of "art" music and "folk" music did not develop until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the concept of musical classification moved from a basis of function to origin. In addition, Gelbart argued that this change in classification also altered the way musical creativity was considered and thought about. Lastly, Gelbart used the history he presented regarding art and folk music to challenge the way in which music today is considered. Before EDM is analyzed in comparison to art music, a researcher could use Gelbart's argument to enrich and expand the understanding and definition of art music.