

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST TAKES ON MUSIC

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SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST TAKES ON MUSIC

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION – POPULAR MUSIC IN EVERYDAY LIVES

The Couch-Stone Symposium in 2014 was a joyous celebration of scholarly conversation, with a backdrop of Texas Hill Country comfort and – what else? – plenty of live music. The Center for Social Inquiry in the Department of Sociology at Texas State University hosted the symposium in San Marcos on March 27–30. The symposium began with a welcoming party at Hays County Bar-B-Que, designated by Texas Monthly Magazine as one of the fifty best BBQ restaurants in Texas. The highlight of the evening was a live jam performed by Maggie Colleen Cobb and Robert Owen Gardner on bluegrass guitar, Lori Holyfield on guitar and soulful vocals, Gene Halton on haunting blues harmonica, Jeffrey E. Nash and Dina C. Nash singing barber-shop classics, Christopher J. Schneider on drums, Dallas Foster on folk guitar, and an assortment of others – including John Johnson, Thaddeus Atzmon, and Rachel Romero – on triangle, egg shaker, and harmony.

We got down to serious business Friday morning with presentations on music and self-identity, including the impact the Beatles had on European youth in the 1960s (Vessela Misheva); the process of songwriting and identity construction among folk musicians (Maggie Colleen Cobb); imaging the meanings of music (John Johnson); negotiating fan identities in K-Pop music culture (J. Patrick Williams); and fallen rock ‘n’ roller Lou Reed as a resource of meaning for life (Thaddeus Müller).

The next session focused on the social organization of music, including a socio-cultural history of the Austin music scene (Alan Turley); networking in festival music scenes (Robert Owen Gardner); Music Videos on YouTube: Exploring Participatory Culture on Social Media (Christopher J. Schneider); and the urban organization of musical production (Nick Dempsey). The session was completed with an inspirational, multi-media presentation of the San Marcos Hispanic musicians’ oral history project.

This Latino theme was extended to lunch, as we feasted on Texas-Mexican cuisine hosted by the Center for the Study of the Southwest. A special treat was the joyful Tejano music performed live by “Los Brillantes.”

We got back to work after lunch when our special guest, Tim Dowd, the chair of the culture section of the ASA, presented the keynote address on

the contributions made by symbolic interactionists to the sociological understanding of music. The next session showcased interactionist takes on music styles ranging from gendering in barbershop singing (Jeffrey E. Nash and Dina C. Nash) and the place of music in the porn industry (Michael Dellwing) to musical pastiche in the music of Matisyahu (Thaddeus Atzmon) and the Christian hip hop music scene (Jonafa Banbury).

After a full day of scholarly discussion, we enjoyed dinner at the Gruene River Grill, overlooking the Comal River, then walked down the street to the historic Gruene Hall for the (sold out!) concert by Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Famer Leon Russell.

Saturday morning began with a discussion of mundane music experience in everyday life, led off by a stunning autobiographical essay by Eugene Halton on the living moment of music. Andrea Baker described the ticketing and concert experiences of Rolling Stones super fans; and Katie Kapurch discussed the lasting impact of the Beatles on contemporary girl culture.

The final session of the symposium investigated the place symbolic interaction has in nurturing interdisciplinary studies of music in justice studies and social work (Scott W. Bowman and Raphael Travis’ treatise on empowerment through rap music) and musicology (Jeffrey van den Scott’s ethnographic description of the accomplishment of throat singing in Canada’s North).

The papers published in this special issue of *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* are revisions and refinements of some of the more exciting presentations at the symposium. They illustrate a natural progression in scope of symbolic interactionist work in understanding the role music plays in making sense of, managing, and designing our everyday lives. I want to thank Christopher J. Schneider for taking the lead in organizing and editing this special issue of *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, and for sharing his great knowledge and understanding of popular music.

In closing the symposium, I cited a poetic truism: that science sees things as ordinary, whereas art sees them as special. To the degree to which symbolic interaction is an art form, we too see the ordinary people we interview, observe, hang, or celebrate with as not merely audience members, consumers, musicians, or subjects. They are all active and creative participants in their music experiences. All our respondents are stars.

Joseph A. Kotarba
Editor