Twentieth-Century Music 20/1, 2–5 © The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press
doi: 10.1017/S1478572222000445

Introduction to the Special Issue on Music and Democratic Transition

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The so-called 'third wave of democratisation', commencing with Portugal's Carnation Revolution in 1974 and extending to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in the 1990s, was widely received as marking an inevitable process towards liberty, even (to use the resonant prediction of Frances Fukuyama) 'the end of history'.[1] Yet historical research has more recently demonstrated that the processes of transition from authoritarianism undergone by countries around the world was troubled and incomplete, and marked by sharp conflicts over what democracy was to look like. In this, they reflected Pierre Rosanvallon's diagnosis of democracy as representing both a promise and a problem for a society: 'a promise insofar as democracy reflected the needs of societies founded on the dual imperative of equality and autonomy; and a problem, insofar as these noble ideals were a long way from being realized'.[2] As we prepared this issue for submission to *Twentieth-Century Music*, Russia – once brandished as the crown jewel within this third wave of democratization – embarked upon an unprovoked military invasion of a neighbouring country and a repressive domestic crack-down on independent media and free speech, confirming a democratic collapse that is now widely regarded as two decades in the making. There could be no clearer symbol of the risks that accompany processes of democratization, and the tendency for new democracies (and indeed old ones that were once new) to retain imbalances of power from previous political arrangements.

As political science has shown, democracy is an inherently contestable category. History evidences many different ways of imagining 'rule by the people', and any particular realization of core democratic principles carries costs as well as benefits, and reflects some interests in preference to others.[3] This contestability is especially apparent in the political context of the transition to democracy after an authoritarian regime, often giving rise to a pronounced struggle between different ideas and practices of democracy. Reflecting this, our special issue of *Twentieth-Century Music* examines how musical practices in different national contexts formed ways of imagining democracy, and how these practices participated in the wider social struggle to define freedom and equality in the late twentieth century. Taking as a historical premise Samuel Huntington's notion of the 'third wave of democratisation',[4] the issue explores case studies from Greece, Spain, the German Democratic Republic, South Korea, South Africa, and Chile. How did musical practices instantiate ideas of democracy in these contexts? Inversely, how did different ideas of democracy inform musical practice? How

1 Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16 (1989), 4.

2 Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

3 David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

4 Samuel P. Huntington, *Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572222000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

did musicians negotiate between creative autonomy and social responsibility? And more broadly, what is the role of musical culture in a transition to democracy?

As this issue demonstrates, these debates over what democracy should look like were conducted not just by politicians, activists, and the media, but also by artists. Indeed, musicians did not remain as spectators to the imagining of democracy, but were primary agents, contributing to the refashioning of political culture in numerous ways – for instance, by rethinking working relations within their field; by the experimental creation of compositional 'models of democracy'; and by collaboration with activists and politicians eager to advance their idea of democracy through musical means. Examining such roles across a range of geopolitical contexts helps to highlight both the varied forms in which democracy was imagined in different situations and the different ways in which music and musicians participated in the process of transition – whether by articulating kinds of belonging, experimenting with governance structures, proposing foundational values, or by exploring possible relationships of self and other.

This issue also highlights the imperfections of democratization as imagined during this 'third wave'. Any democratic arrangement reflects particular interests and entails particular exclusions. Theorists of democracy have frequently argued that no basis exists for the organization of democratic society that is independent of a particular, partisan standpoint.[5] This has been an especially prominent motif in studies of the so-called 'third wave of democratisation', where it has been argued that democracies emerging from authoritarian regimes were 'gamed' by existing political and economic elites to ensure their own advantage in the new political arrangements. These 'gamed' democracies, powerfully described in Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo's 2013 book *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy*, represent a specific manifestation of the limits that attend all democracies, limits determined by the ways in which the demos is defined, the kinds of mandate that are granted, the systems implemented for collective decision-making, and so on.[6]

Jung-Min Mina Lee and Anna Papaeti both address the role of song in pro-democracy movements. Lee traces how songs performed by student groups opposed to South Korea's authoritarian regimes of the 1970s and 1980s articulated several different relationships with ideas of egalitarianism, ranging from the informal, participatory performance settings of campus song clubs, to an interest in the horizontal society ostensibly realized in socialist North Korea. Throughout, the relationship to America – both musical and political – forms a continuous thread, giving rise to unexpected paradoxes as a genre originating from US folk music reoriented itself towards a state typically seen as existing at the polar opposite to American democracy. Papaeti's concern is with the potential of song to create a mythical collective memory that belies actual historical complexities. Focusing on the 1974 documentary film *The Songs of Fire* by Nikos Koundouros, which interweaves footage from three

5 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000); Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2014).

6 Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo, *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

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concerts that took place in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Greek dictatorship with documentation of political demonstrations and testimony from torture survivors, she explores how the need for social unity widely felt at the point of regime change could also serve to establish a collective memory of resistance that obscured the messy realities of life under the regime. Constructing the political subject as a singing one, the film highlights group singing both as a powerful expression of the voices of the people and as a force that enabled the continuing legacies of dictatorship to taint the new political arrangements.

Elaine Kelly and Daniel Party attend to how popular music contributed to the contestatory articulation of new democratic arrangements. Kelly examines musical responses to the collapse of the German Democratic Republic from parties that regarded the moment as an opportunity to reset the goals for socialism. These 'reform socialists' regarded western European models of democracy with disdain, and sought instead formulas for new anti-capitalist arrangements that stressed both the unique forms of creativity that had sprung up within the faltering East German state and the potential for international solidarity with artists of the global South. Both approaches proved unsustainable because of the rapid spread of western European consumer culture, and also because of the element of German exceptionalism that characterized these models of collectivity and ultimately prevented them from offering a compelling vision of an alternative socialism. Daniel Party documents the explosion of commercially supported popular music in Chile, creating a scene of expanding diversity. Political sensitivities remained in play, however, as musicians attempted to recuperate dictatorship-era styles, dissident singers returning from exile encountered a radically changed, even alien cultural landscape, and new generations marked out distinct and sometimes controversial relationships to the pre-democratic era. A theme throughout Party's essay is the capacity of Anglo-American styles – which had been rejected by the proponents of *nueva cancion* – to carry a contestatory message within the new political dispensation.

Igor Contreras Zubillaga and Juliana Pistorius examine the potential of experimental and art music practice to 'imagine democracy' in situations where a shared understanding was yet to be settled. In both cases, ironies abounded as diverse actors sought to yoke musical performance to the articulation of democracy in frequently contradictory and incoherent ways. Contreras Zubillaga focuses upon the years immediately before and after the fall of Franco in Spain. A vibrant experimental music scene engaged fully and with enthusiasm in ideas of public participation and freedom of expression, but struggled to escape criticism from across the political spectrum that their artistic manifestations acted to support the regime rather than critique it. Notwithstanding the rather specialist nature of some of these experiments by composers and performers, their work testifies to the lively debates of the period about how governance by the people was best to be enacted. Pistorius takes as a case study a 2004 production of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, staged at the former apartheid prison complex on Robben Island, to mark the tenth anniversary of democratic rule in South Africa. The work's narrative of imprisonment and freedom lent a particular relevance to the choice of venue, but at the same time the production articulated elements of the new democracy that remained unsettled or ambivalent. This was evident both through the privileged nature of the audience granted admission to the performance itself and through the sometimes

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conflicting ways in which the historical values of European opera were invoked to support the aspirations of South African democracy.

Despite the democratic imperfections traced across these articles, few among those active at the time would have swapped the emerging democratic arrangements for the oppressive and violent regimes that preceded them. Theorists sensitive to the limitations of democracy argue that these limitations are no reason to give up on the ideal; what is essential, rather, is to be continually alert to the ways in which particular democratic arrangements continue to exclude and to favour. In this picture there is still a place for new emancipatory visions that challenge and unsettle established conceptions of democratic process. Democracy, as political theorist Wendy Brown has argued, represents an 'unfinished principle – it specifies neither *what* power must be shared among us for the people's rule, *how* this rule is to be organized, nor by *which* institutions or supplemental conditions it is enabled or secured'.[7] As public concern grows about the present state of democracy, what role might musicians again play in suggesting us to alternative ways of enacting 'the rule of the people'?

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7 Wendy Brown, 'We Are All Democrats Now. . .', in *Democracy in What State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 45.

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