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### Double the Vocation, Double the Awe: An Examination of Vocational Awe in Music Librarianship

Z. Sylvia Yang

*DePauw University*, [zouayang@depauw.edu](mailto:zouayang@depauw.edu)

Emily Vickers

*Eastern Washington University*

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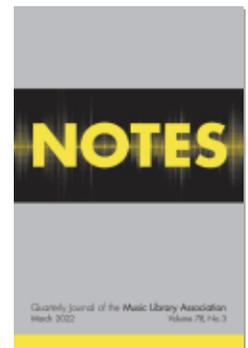
Double The Vocation, Double the Awe: An Examination of  
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Emily Vickers, Zoua Sylvia Yang

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# DOUBLE THE VOCATION, DOUBLE THE AWE: AN EXAMINATION OF VOCATIONAL AWE IN MUSIC LIBRARIANSHIP

BY EMILY VICKERS AND ZOUA SYLVIA YANG



As defined by Fobazi Ettarh, vocational awe refers to “the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in the belief that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to shielding the institution from critical examination, Ettarh argues that this framing of libraries and library work as inherently good and sacred is in fact detrimental to libraries and library workers it purports to celebrate.

If the library is assumed to be a good and sacred institution, it positions those who work in libraries as fulfillers of a sacred calling, or vocation.<sup>2</sup> The religious language here is not merely a coincidence, as Ettarh demonstrates in her analysis of the historical enmeshment of the Western library and Christian church.

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Emily Vickers is the Performing Arts Librarian at Eastern Washington University. She primarily holds responsibilities in information literacy instruction, collection development, reference services, digitization of institutional recordings, and has also designed and taught a seminar for EWU’s First Year Experience program. She has published and presented on information literacy and collection development, and is active within the Pacific Northwest chapter of and national Music Library Association. Emily holds an MLS and MA in Musicology from Indiana University, and a BM in Music Education from Chapman University. Zoua Sylvia Yang is the Music and Performing Arts Librarian at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. In addition to her responsibilities in collection development, reference services, and access services, Sylvia teaches a sequential, course-integrated information literacy program for DePauw’s School of Music. She regularly presents at regional and national conferences and is active within both the Midwest chapter of and national Music Library Association. Thank you to Katie Buehner for using the phrase “double the vocation, double the awe,” which inspired the title of the article. Winston Barham, Katie Buehner, Morgan Davis, Joy Doan, Vaughan Hennen, Emily Vickers, and Sylvia Yang, “Change the Tempo: Dismantling Vocational Awe in Music Librarianship,” (panel presentation at the Music Library Association annual conference, Norfolk, VA, 27 February 2020). Acknowledgement to the panel: We would like to express our deep gratitude to our colleagues, Winston Barham, Katie Buehner, Morgan Davis, Joy Doan, and Vaughan Hennen, for sharing their experiences with vocational awe during the panel presentation “Change the Tempo: Dismantling Vocational Awe in Music Librarianship” at the Music Library Association’s Annual Meeting in Norfolk, VA (27 February 2020). Although this article can’t address the full spectrum of vocational awe, we hope this article reflects the bravery and vulnerability each of you brought to this panel.

1. Fobazi Ettarh, “Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, 10 January 2018, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/> (accessed 20 February 2020).

2. “Vocation: a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action (especially a divine call to the religious life).” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “vocation,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vocation> (accessed 30 May 2021).

Serving in a vocation rings differently than working at a job. It implies a sense of lifelong devotion to a sacred cause that is rooted deeply within the soul, within one's sense of identity. It both extends the institutional shield of goodness against criticism to the library work itself and establishes an expectation of the performance of quasi-religious devotion, or passion, on the part of the library worker. When passion is the metric by which we determine our success as librarians, those of us who are unable to ascribe to this zealous standard of devotion are marginalized and positioned as dispassionate "bad librarians."<sup>3</sup> Although this expectation of devotion can be seen to override our own wellbeing, in the context of an institution with official core values that include democracy, service, and social responsibility,<sup>4</sup> it feels unnatural, unappreciative, and disloyal to point it out—even in the pursuit of upholding the values our profession espouses.

At this time, scholarship on vocational awe is continuing to evolve—from public library discourse,<sup>5</sup> to cultural blogs,<sup>6</sup> to examining vocational awe as it intersects with low morale,<sup>7</sup> critical race theory, the library's long-standing relationship with neutrality, or systemic oppression<sup>8</sup>—and remains a concept that resonates with many who find themselves in service oriented roles. This is not a comprehensive article, detailing all of the various ways in which scholars have examined vocational awe. Rather, building upon Ettarh's call to dismantle vocational awe in librarianship, this article aims to outline the shared components of Western libraries and Western music that lay the groundwork for vocational awe in each of these institutions and explore the ways in which vocational awe uniquely manifests for workers in the interdisciplinary field of music librarianship.

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3. Fobazi Ettarh, "Becoming a Proud 'Bad Librarian': Dismantling Vocational Awe in Librarianship," (presentation at the Association of College Research Libraries conference, Cleveland, OH, 13 April 2019).

4. American Library Association, "Core Values of Librarianship," <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues> (accessed 30 May 2021).

5. Suzanne LaPierre, "Resisting 'Vocational Awe' During the Pandemic," *Public Libraries Online*, 27 March 2020, <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/03/resisting-vocational-awe-during-the-pandemic/> (accessed 8 July 2020).

6. Anne Helen Peterson, "vocational awe," *Culture Study* (blog), 6 September 2020, <https://annehelen.substack.com/p/vocational-awe> (accessed 8 July 2020).

7. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, "Low Morale and Vocational Awe," *Renewals: Promoting Empathy and Self-Preservation in the Workplace* (blog), 22 January 2018, <https://renewerslis.wordpress.com/2018/03/21/low-morale-vocational-awe/> (accessed 8 July 2020).

8. Anastasia Chiu, Fobazi M. Ettarh, and Jennifer A. Ferretti, "Not the Shark, but the Water: How Neutrality and Vocational Awe Intertwine to Uphold White Supremacy," in *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies Through Critical Race Theory*, ed. Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021): 49–71, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11969.003.0005>.

### VOCATIONAL AWE IN LIBRARIES

Ettarh draws explicit parallels between librarianship and the Christian church in their historical roots, physical spaces, and mythological narratives of goodness, each of which serves to invoke a sense of awe for the institution. Many of these parallels can be mapped directly to Western music.

- She first points to the early Western bookmakers and keepers: the monastic scribes who copied and bound manuscripts to preserve and disseminate liturgy. In these same scriptoria, chant was inscribed alongside liturgical text, and this fusion of music and text played a significant role in the practice and expansion of the Christian church.
- The second parallel is in the physical spaces of libraries and churches, the designs of which often inspire wonder. Notably, more than a few libraries are visually indistinguishable from cathedrals, with grand Gothic-style arches and stained-glass windows. In the realm of musical spaces, the secular concert hall also echoes the magnificence and resonance of these religious structures, instilling awe through the visual and sonic extravagance of the architecture.
- A third parallel examines the heroic, self-sacrificing narratives of individuals in these institutions. Ettarh points to St. Lawrence, the patron saint of libraries and archives, who stands at the literal intersection of library and church, and achieved sainthood through the act of lying over coals on a gridiron rather than give up the church archives.<sup>9</sup> The film, *The Public*, portrays a contemporary image of the library as sanctuary, and librarians as de facto saviors of the people in need of safety.<sup>10</sup> The mythology of the tortured musical genius who creates in spite of (or as a result of) adversity is threaded throughout popular and academic discourse, and reveals a similar romanticization of suffering and sacrifice for something greater than the self as part of musical practice.

Ettarh makes the argument that these components serve to create a narrative of sacred goodness around libraries, and elicit a mixed emotion of adoration, fear, and wonder, or awe.<sup>11</sup> Vocational awe effectively shields the institution from critical analysis of its past and ongoing forms

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9. Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship."

10. *The Public*, directed by Emilio Estevez (2018; Greenwich Entertainment, 2019), 1 hr., 59 min., DVD.

11. Interestingly, similar language has been used in research on music ensemble power dynamics, with ensemble members observed to experience a mixed sense of trust, respect, and fear, "almost awe,"

of harm to society, patrons, and library workers, including library segregation, policing practices in libraries, increased reliance on libraries as a catchall resource for structural social failings, and the violence of white womanhood as an agent of White supremacy. Having obscured the systemic factors at work, this awe is easily weaponized against library workers through the enforcement of the idea that librarianship is a calling to serve something greater than the self, in which suffering is a natural and requisite component. Narratives surrounding music mirror the themes of Christianity and vocational awe witnessed in librarianship.

### THE NARRATIVE OF MUSIC'S GOODNESS

Music's goodness narrative is grounded in commonly expressed claims for music's social, intellectual, physical, academic, professional, health, and capitalistic benefits.<sup>12</sup> Music is celebrated as the "universal language" that transcends cultural, linguistic, and geographic space to unify humanity. It lifts the spirit, and serves as a force capable of restoring neurological, emotional, and physical health where other methods fail.<sup>13</sup> This limited framing of music solely as an awe-inspiring source of connection, healing, and growth serves as a facade that repels critical examination of music, undermining what could be a constructive examination of the impacts of music's well-documented history as a mechanism of control, oppression, discrimination, violence, and trauma.

For example, music's utility at a macro level to signify and impose authority and control over others is readily seen in standard telling of Western music history. It's a central feature in the undergraduate music history narrative of Louis XIV, in which the French king "projected an image of himself as in supreme control, using the arts as propaganda" in order to signify and inscribe absolute power.<sup>14</sup> This utility has been more recently employed in the systematic erasure of Indigenous cultural identity and tradition through residential schools. In these institutions, the music curriculum was intentionally designed to "teach [Indigenous] students how to exhibit what administrators considered to be the proper expressive culture of whiteness."<sup>15</sup>

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when engaging with their conductor. Anna Bull, "Gendering the Middle Classes: The Construction of Conductors' Authority in Youth Classical Music Groups," *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 4 (November 2016), 865, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12426>.

12. National Association for Music Education, "Important Benefits of Music in Our Schools," <https://nafme.org/20-important-benefits-of-music-in-our-schools/> (accessed 4 July 2020).

13. See more on music as it relates to restoring neurological, emotional, and physical health in Andrew Schulman, *Waking the Spirit: Musician's Journey Healing Body, Mind, and Soul* (New York: Picador, 2016).

14. J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music*, 9th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 352.

15. John W. Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music 1879-1934* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 115.

At the micro level, the emotionally resonant properties of music are perceived to enable positive states of mind. At the same time, music is recognized as equally capable of causing emotional and psychological trauma.<sup>16</sup> Physical trauma in the pursuit of musical proficiency is not only recognized, but glorified and normalized within institutional music culture. Henry Kingsbury points out that “the semitragic role of the virtuoso performer whose career is ruined by such a maiming of the hand takes on heroic grandeur in the person of Robert Schumann, [who] irreparably injur[ed] his hand in a mechanical contraption designed to enable him to increase the independence and strength of his right ring finger.”<sup>17</sup>

Physical trauma is not limited to the mythology of eminent canonical musicians, as all practicing musicians are susceptible to injury. The trauma that can result from the extensive practice necessary to develop mastery includes carpal tunnel, hearing loss, damaged vocal cords, chronic muscle tension, and tendonitis. As observed by Kingsbury, “such problems are not endemic, but neither are they extraordinary. They illustrate the fact that the importance of mastering musical performance skills is such that musicians sometimes dangerously, indeed destructively, go beyond the physiological limits of their own body. These injuries are indices of the intensity of these people’s commitment. In connection with the discussion of the contemplative nature of such practicing [sic], the word ‘devotion’ would also be appropriate to their roles as musical performers.”<sup>18</sup>

The entwining of injury and artistic devotion normalizes pain as part of music work and facilitates an ambiguous practice of using individual willingness and capacity to press through voluntary suffering for the sake of music as a metric to determine one’s potential. This serves to de-emphasize systemic/institutional factors at play such as toxic culture, power relationships, socio-economic inequities, etc.

A narrative that centers entirely on music’s goodness—that capacity to heal, connect, and inspire—blankets over a much more complex reality. This narrative is enmeshed in our greater socio-political and cultural fabrics, as well as the cultures of institutional communities of music study, creation, and performance. As professionals that work and have largely been trained within these communities, we are exposed to the goodness narrative over an extended period of time, and our employment in music effectively requires our active investment in the narrative. Anne Gross

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16. Erin Seibert, “How Music Can Be Harmful,” *Music Therapy Time* (blog), 23 February 2017, <https://musictherapytime.com/2017/02/23/how-music-can-be-harmful/> (accessed 8 July 2020).

17. Henry Kingsbury, *Music Talent and Performance: Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 133.

18. Kingsbury, *Music Talent and Performance*, 134.

and George Musgrave illuminate this in their study on the wellbeing of working musicians within the greater music and entertainment industry. They not only identify musicianship as being a “‘calling’ similar to that of religious beliefs,” they note that “music makers are encouraged to take part and believe in the myths—the myth that taking part is a good thing, the myth that you are in control, the myth that the environment is democratic. . . . Musical ambition is rooted in the idea of signing up, taking part and believing the myths.”<sup>19</sup> In addition to believing and participating in the myths, advocacy also becomes a common facet of musical work—not only because music is something that music workers deeply care about and believe in, but because of the practical necessity to secure resources to support that work.<sup>20</sup>

Ettarh makes it evident that vocational awe directly impacts the wellbeing of library workers, stating that “if the language around being a good librarian is directly tied to struggle, sacrifice, and obedience, then the more one struggles for their work, the ‘holier’ that work (and institution) becomes. Thus, it will become less likely that people will feel empowered, or even able, to fight for a healthier workspace.”<sup>21</sup> That the mechanisms of vocational awe may be observed within librarianship and within music situates music library workers at an intersection of disciplines where we may be particularly susceptible to this phenomenon. In fact, we are likely to adopt harmful practices and narratives as core tenets of our personal and professional identities long before librarianship is considered as a career.

#### MANIFESTATIONS OF VOCATIONAL AWE IN LIBRARIANSHIP MEET MANIFESTATIONS IN MUSIC

Music librarianship as a profession is deeply rooted in the formalized study and practice of music. Even a brief glance at job postings indicates the majority of positions in this field require pre-existing musical knowledge and skill, which take years of practice to develop. Membership in the musical community can be seen to serve the practical purpose of facilitating a shared understanding with patrons within the musical community, which in turn enables trust and relationship-building in the

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19. Anne Gross and George Musgrave, *Can Music Make You Sick? Measuring the Price of Musical Ambition* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020): 140, <https://doi.org/10.16997/book43.f>.

20. Jane Edwards notes this issue in her critical examination of music being framed as inherently good in the field of music therapy, stating that “therapists and educators are increasingly required to make arguments for music’s easily accessible goodness in order to ensure the continuation of their work and service.” See Jane Edwards, “A Music and Health Perspective on Music’s Perceived ‘Goodness,’” *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* 20, no. 1 (February 2011), 98.

21. Ettarh, “Vocational Awe and Librarianship.”

endeavor to meet unique music information needs. Proof of community membership—of this shared knowledge and experience—is commonly required in job postings in the form of a music degree. On paper, the requirement may extend only to a bachelor's degree, with master's degrees occasionally listed as "preferred." However, in a competitive and saturated job market, a secondary master's degree in music is arguably a baseline necessity, regardless of its official inclusion in a posting. The path to acquiring these signifiers of membership is distinguished from many specialty areas by how early in life one must begin cultivating the necessary subject expertise to acquire the requisite degrees. Through the years-long process of formalized music training, in which the practice of vocational awe is readily identifiable, a future music library worker is primed to carry this practice into the library profession.

The manifestations of vocational awe in librarianship are numerous and varied, but for the purpose of this article only four specific manifestations will be examined: an inability to develop work-life balance, job creep, low morale, and inequitable compensation. Ultimately, all of these categories lead to burnout, which, via the mechanisms of vocational awe, disguises systemic issues as an individual failure. In addition to recognizing its manifestations, it is critical to understand that vocational awe doesn't simply cause burnout, it redirects attention from a toxic infrastructure that paves the way for burnout in the first place.

In order to truly examine all four manifestations, one must understand how parallel institutional cultures of practice in both librarianship and career musicians establish and sustain this behavior. As seen in Table 1, established institutional cultures of practice, such as paying out of pocket for professional development or performance opportunities, create an environment for vocational awe to thrive. Valuing cultural practice to the point of exclusion directly results in feelings of inadequacy or failure for those who are unable to meet the demands of accepted practice.<sup>22</sup>

#### **"MARTYRDOM IS NOT A LONG-LASTING CAREER."<sup>23</sup>**

If librarianship is analogous to the Western church, then librarians are the martyrs; constantly suffering for the sake of principle, for *goodness*. Musicians are already primed to believe in this goodness; we were

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22. Carli Agostino and Melanie Cassidy refer to this feeling of inadequacy as a "failure to launch," pointing to a perception of failure that influences our sense of self and our professional identities. See Carli Agostino and Melanie Cassidy, "Failure to Launch: Feelings of Failure in Early Career Librarians," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 14, no. 1 (June 2019), <https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v14i1.5224>.

23. Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship."

Table 1. Institutional Cultures of Practice and Vocational Awe

Manifestation of Vocational Awe	Institutional Cultures of Practice	
	Music	Librarianship
Inability to develop work-life balance	Insular nature of the music community results in professional, social, and personal identities revolving around music identities (no boundaries between work, study, and free time)	Librarianship fosters dedication to service that instills a need to respond and complete tasks outside of hours compensated
Job creep	Ghost credits or non-credit bearing courses (to allow for ensemble participation on top of a maxed-out credit load); performing for “exposure”	Adjustments in staffing levels resulting in responsibilities changing without formal process or reassessment  Job descriptions that explicitly include other duties as assigned messaging
Low morale <sup>a</sup>	Exclusionary practices, such as learning only canon-focused repertoire (e.g., Norton Anthology of Western Music, Suzuki Method)  Isolation, practicing alone, 1:1 apprenticeship with single teacher that can last years potentially enabling intensive relationships with power imbalances that can enable abuse <sup>b</sup>  Myth of meritocracy <sup>c</sup> as a path to success, when advancement is often more likely to be influenced or determined by extrinsic factors (e.g., socio-economic capital, <sup>d</sup> networks/connections, flexibility, support system)	Neoliberal approach to information literacy and value of information  Isolation—working in a silo, being the only person in your area/subject, being self-reliant  Myth of meritocracy as a path to success, when advancement is often more likely to be influenced or determined by extrinsic factors (e.g., socio-economic capital, networks/connections, flexibility, support system)

*(continued on next page)*

Table 1. Institutional Cultures of Practice and Vocational Awe (*continued*)

Manifestation of Vocational Awe	Institutional Cultures of Practice	
	Music	Librarianship
Inequitable compensation	<p>Unpaid and underpaid performance work</p> <p>Working as an adjunct at multiple institutions; piecing together gig work<sup>c</sup></p> <p>Paying out-of-pocket expenses for professional tools and opportunities (e.g., instrument purchase/ insurance/ transport, travel and lodging for auditions, gigs, masterclasses/lessons)</p>	<p>Part-time positions; emphasis on volunteer work; temporary grant-funded positions; reliance on non-monetary compensation (e.g., a CV line or letter of recommendation)</p> <p>Working beyond compensated hours; working through legally allocated breaks; taking on responsibilities outside predetermined workload (e.g., serving on task forces, committees, fundraising efforts, etc.)</p> <p>Paying out-of-pocket expenses for professional tools and opportunities (printing posters for poster sessions; internships; workshops; courses; organization membership; conference travel/registration; books)</p>

<sup>a</sup>Although not explicitly discussed in this piece, our understanding of low morale comes from the work of Kaetrena Davis Kendrick. Learn more about Kendrick's work through her interview with Webber-Bey following her award of the Association of College Research Libraries 2019 Academic/Research Librarian of the Year. See Deimosia Webber-Bey, "Kaetrena Davis Kendrick on Low Morale Among Academic Librarians," *Library Journal*, 22 August 2019, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=kaetrena-davis-kendrick-on-low-morale-among-academic-librarians>.

<sup>b</sup>Helena Gaunt explores the complex dynamics of one-to-one instruction in music, noting the intimacy of such relationships to resemble "personal or therapeutic relationships more than conventional teaching/learning relationships . . . Furthermore, the characterizations of these relationships also demonstrated the significant dynamics of power invested in them. As two teachers described in relation to their own previous teachers, the power of a teacher could be perceived by a student to be almost overwhelming." Helena Gaunt, "One-to-One Tuition in a Conservatoire: The Perceptions of Instrumental and Vocal Teachers," *Psychology of Music* 36, no. 2 (April 2008), 239, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735607080827>.

<sup>c</sup>Alison Davies' study on students' disparate relationships with the professed meritocratic values of a British musical conservatory serves as one example of inquiry into how musical success or potential is determined in formal music education. Her findings prompted her to argue that the institution "fails to deliver what it claims in practice, because students who do not form part of the performing elite at the beginning of their course experience a discriminatory system of musical training which excludes them from the same professional opportunities as those students considered to have the most 'talent' and dedication [as determined at the onset of their coursework]." Alison Davies, "Preparing Professional Performers: Music Students' Perceptions and Experiences of the Learning Process at Birmingham Conservatoire," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 17, no. 6 (2004): 805, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839042000256466>.

<sup>d</sup>Rosie Perkins offers a focused examination of the role of various forms of capital in the hierarchical social and learning space of UK conservatories. Rosie Perkins, "Hierarchies and Learning in the Conservatoire: Exploring What Students Learn Through the Lens of Bourdieu," *Research Studies in Music Education* 35, no. 2 (December 2013): 197-212, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X13508060>.

<sup>e</sup>In this context, we define gig work as commitments that exist outside of continuous, long-term employment, including one-time performances, subbing in performances, and other kinds of freelance work.

already taught to gloss over music's capacity for harm in favor of its benefits, which may make those who enter the field of music librarianship more susceptible to institutional or vocational awe. How can we recognize vocational awe in ourselves? How can we analyze and acknowledge institutional cultures of practice? How can we dismantle this cycle of self-sacrifice and exploitation?

There is no one answer but reflecting upon the four specific manifestations of vocational awe (see Table 1) may inform your practice. We offer the following reflective questions for your consideration:

- Examine your relationship with musicianship and librarianship—what values and practices have you adopted from these disciplinary cultures?
- How do these values or practices play into your work, and how you treat yourself, your colleagues, and your students?
- How do you set boundaries in order to create work-life balance? Do you work outside of your scheduled or compensated hours? Are you expected to respond to emails, answer calls, or attend meetings outside of your regular schedule—and do you expect this of others? How do you preserve your personal time (e.g., Do you schedule your lunch breaks? Do you set a calendar reminder to start ending your work day?)? If you are teaching, mentoring, or supervising, how do you model a balanced life to your students, mentees, and employees? What sort of cultural shifts are necessary to allow for a balanced life?
- What does job creep look like in your role? Are you able to work collaboratively and collectively to address staffing, institutional, or policy changes? When you assume additional duties does your job description change to reflect those duties?
- How do you see low morale manifest and what might the causes be? What do your communities of support look like? Do you have mentorship opportunities?
- How does inequitable compensation manifest? How do you engage in uncompensated labor? What precedent are you setting for others when you engage in uncompensated labor? Are you expected or encouraged to attend conferences or other professional development opportunities without institutional support? Are you expected or encouraged to produce scholarship in addition to your day-to-day role in the libraries without being able to specifically dedicate time to research and writing?
- What barriers to addressing vocational awe are created by the cultural practices of your institution?

Many employed within music find themselves in a position in which part of their work is justifying the value and necessity of music and the practical purpose of securing resources to fund music education, performance, and study.<sup>24</sup> It is understandable, therefore, that music library workers are hesitant to point out faults in their profession. Yet embracing criticism of their beliefs and practices is healthy and necessary, as is exploring the underlying urges of resistance to such thoughtful appraisal.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

The conceptualization presented here of music as a mechanism of harm is hardly new; discourse related to its capacity for harm within moral, medical, political, spiritual, and psychological spheres extends back centuries. This previous discourse, however, is primarily grounded in a binary framework in which certain types of music facilitate order, harmony, and morality, while others incite corruption, disease, and sin. Within this binary, musical harm is openly recognized, but rather than being used to address this harm and dismantle oppression, it has been strategically weaponized as a tool to uphold systems of power. This weaponization is evident, for example, in “the Nazi appropriation of the idea of pathological music, something that had not amounted to much more than a music critic’s foible or a psychiatrist’s hobbyhorse until the 1930s, which helped create a form of ‘musical hygiene’ as sometimes lethal state policy. Music fitted into a wider context of Nazi thinking on culture, which brutally subjected the arts to the ends of ‘healthy’ racial purity and political advantage.”<sup>25</sup> Across the Atlantic in the United States, a similar weaponization of pathological music, fortified by the rhetoric of scientific racism, was utilized to frame jazz music as a medical and moral threat to society.<sup>26</sup>

More contemporary discourse suggests musical harm can be considered through a different lens—one that facilitates critical examination

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24. It is important to understand how current events impact the manifestation of vocational awe. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your practice? How has your life, personal and professional, been impacted by isolation, working from home, political climate, and budgetary constraints? As Kaetrena Davis Kendrick states, “Before the pandemic, resilience narratives and vocational awe were not tangible—you talked about them in these kinds of abstract terms. But now we see [librarians are] not being offered cleaning supplies, or personal protection items, so now we see how these tangible results of resilience narratives and vocational awe play out. They’re literally not being given the tools they need to be safe.” See Deimos Webber-Bey, “Kaetrena Davis Kendrick on Low Morale Among Academic Librarians,” *Library Journal*, 22 August 2019, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=kaetrena-davis-kendrick-on-low-morale-among-academic-librarians>.

25. James Kennaway, “Pathological Music, Politics, and Race: Germany and the United States, 1900–1945” in *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease* (London, Routledge, 2016).

26. Kennaway, “Pathological Music, Politics, and Race.”

of music's narrative of goodness, thereby creating a more expansive, constructive space for music and our relationship with it to be considered in their full and messy complexities. Recent endeavors, for example have focused on the negative impact of the music industry on professional musicians' quality of life,<sup>27</sup> the use of music as a tool for behavioral manipulation,<sup>28</sup> as well as the ramifications of people "lov[ing] music to the point of hurting one another."<sup>29</sup> These scholars demonstrate that it is not only possible to love music *and* critique the practices associated with it, but that it is a constructive and beneficial practice. Their work provides valuable and illuminating insight as to how we may examine our relationship to the narrative of music's goodness and vocational awe within music.

As Ettarh makes it clear in regards to libraries, "the ideals of librarianship are not ignoble, and having an emotional attachment to the work one does is not negative in itself . . . the problem with vocational awe is the efficacy of one's work is directly tied to their amount of passion (or lack thereof)."<sup>30</sup> The goal of this article is not to frame the experience of loving one's work as something inherently toxic, nor is it to claim that growth, learning, and labor should be free of difficulty. It is to prompt critical examination of music librarianship as an intersection of disciplines subject to vocational awe in unique and reinforcing ways, and to strip the veneer of goodness that smooths over jagged realities in the music library community and its endeavors. It is one of many calls to reflect on the structures and cultures of the institutions we work in and have been trained in, to learn to recognize harmful practices and values that have been normalized, and to take steps within our power to address them within our institutions and within ourselves.

The discussion presented here rests intentionally at the surface of what could be explored within this topic. Hopefully, this can serve as another step towards deep investigation into the many facets of vocational awe as it may be observed in music, the various branches of the performing arts and other "passion-based work," and music and performing arts library work as an intersection of disciplinary cultures and practices. In setting the scope to primarily focus on the questions of how and why vocational awe can manifest in the day-to-day experience of music library workers,

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27. See Gross and Musgrave's study of contemporary working musicians for an investigation of the manifestation of music's goodness and harm within the broader music and entertainment industry. Anne Gross and George Musgrave, *Can Music Make You Sick? Measuring the Price of Musical Ambition* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020).

28. For a collection of perspectives on music's capacity as an effective manipulative force in emotional, economic, political, and ideological spheres, see Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten, eds., *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

29. William Cheng, *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020): 5.

30. Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship."

there remain lines of inquiry unaddressed in this article that would undoubtedly add valuable layers of understanding and perspective to this conversation.

### ABSTRACT

Building upon Ettarh's call to dismantle vocational awe in librarianship, this article outlines the shared components of Western libraries and Western music that lay the groundwork for vocational awe in each of these institutions and explores the ways in which vocational awe uniquely manifests for workers in the interdisciplinary field of music librarianship. The article explores the narrative of music's goodness, disciplinary training, and manifestations of vocational awe as they appear in the institutional cultures of practice of music and librarianship: inability to develop work-life balance, job creep, low morale, and inequitable compensation. In naming this phenomenon as it is situated within music and music librarianship, we critically examine how it may affect our own narratives and values. We seek to empower those in music library work to become mindful of and address the presence and influence of vocational awe at individual and institutional levels.

