

# Musical Personae

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Traditional musicology, often characterized as worshipful of the musical work and disdainful of performance, has been undergoing a “performative turn” in recent years, a development well-documented by Nicholas Cook in “Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance” (2001). As someone committed to finding ways of discussing musicians as performers, whose primary discipline is performance studies, I am cheered by this development and grateful to Cook both for his careful mapping of disputed territory and his advocacy for the “music as performance” approach.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there are aspects of his analysis I find troubling—I will use a discussion of those aspects as a platform from which to suggest an alternate approach.

Fundamental to Cook’s formulation of the question of the relationship between musical works and musical performance is what he calls “the basic grammar of performance”: the fact that the verb *to perform* demands a direct object. “You perform *something*,” Cook emphasizes, “you give a performance ‘of’ something” (2001:par. 2; emphasis in original). For Cook, the direct object of musical performance, the thing performed, is a musical work; the relationship between work and performance, product and process, thus becomes the central point around which his discussion revolves. After entertaining critical objections to the reverence for textual authority engrained in musicology, Cook offers his own reasoned objections to some of them. He points out, for example, that countering musicology’s traditional privileging of the musical work by privileging performance over text simply reverses the polarity of the argument without challenging its basic terms.

Ultimately, Cook arrives at a proposition: “to understand music as performance is to see it as an irreducibly social phenomenon [...]” (2001:par. 14). To this end, he suggests that we call pieces of music *scripts* rather than works or texts:

whereas to think of a Mozart quartet as a text is to construe it as a half-sonic, half-ideal object reproduced in performance, to think of it as a script is to see it as choreographing a series of real-time, social interactions between players: a series of mutual acts of listening and communal gestures that enact a particular vision of society. (2001:par. 15)

Cook goes on to suggest that musical works are not delimited textual objects but open-ended fields of written and performed instantiations. He concludes that such a view ultimately makes it impossible to sustain a clear distinction between work and performance: “process and product, then, are

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1. Cook makes useful distinctions among three different ways of thinking about the relationship between musical texts and performance: performance *of* music, music *and* performance, and music *as* performance. Whereas the first two approaches tend to treat musical works and performances as separate entities, the third seeks an identity between them.

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not so much alternative options as complementary strands of the twisted braid we call performance” (2001 par. 20).

Although I find much to admire in Cook’s approach, I am not persuaded that his renaming of the work as a script really makes much difference. Cook’s description of the musical script as choreographing a set of social interactions maintains the idea that the musical work provides the design that underlies and thus determines the performance.<sup>2</sup> In describing a musical work as a set of parameters for a social interaction among musicians, rather than an ideal object to be reproduced through performance, Cook goes against the grain of the musicological tradition. But his positing of the musical work as that which is performed ultimately leads to a privileging of the work, now renamed as a script, which remains consonant with that tradition.

Another problem that arises when the question is framed in terms of work and performance, process and product, is that the important relationships are between abstractions rather than human beings. The concept of performance thus becomes curiously disembodied and participants are deprived of agency. In Cook’s description of the Mozart quartet, for example, the script is the grammatical subject that choreographs the players’ social behavior. As a result, both the composer’s agency as the one who created the script, and the performers’ agency as those who embody it through actions and gestures—and who undertook, for whatever reason, to play it in the first place—are left out of the picture. The audience is not mentioned at all.

I return to Cook’s initial formulation of performance’s grammatical transitivity as the point of departure for a different approach to thinking about music as performance, one that I hope will avoid the dead end to which discussing the issue in terms of the work/performance dichotomy inevitably seems to lead. As Cook acknowledges, the disciplinary lens of performance studies provides a fresh perspective from which to view the question, since performance studies denies ontological priority to texts and emphasizes that one must examine the totality of any event as well as its contexts.<sup>3</sup> But the more salient point is that performance studies embraces a notion of performance far broader than those found in the traditional performing arts. From this vantage point, it does not necessarily follow that simply because the verb *to perform* demands a direct object, that the object of performance must be a text such as choreography, a dramatic script, or a musical work. Many other things can be understood as performative constructs: personal identity may be seen as something one performs, for instance. One can speak of performing a self in daily life just as readily as one speaks of performing a text in a theatre or concert hall. In short, the direct object of the verb to perform need not be *something*—it can also be *someone*, an identity rather than a text.

The analysis I propose entails thinking of musicians as social beings—not just in the sense that musical performances are interactions among musicians (as Cook suggests), but also in the larger sense, that to be a musician is to perform an identity in a social realm. In describing the various forms an actor’s presence can assume, David Graver differentiates the actor’s presence before the audience as a publicly visible person from the character portrayed and calls this kind of presence the actor’s *personage*. Graver is at pains to stress that “this personage [...] is not the real person behind [...] the character. Personage status is not a foundational reality but simply another way of representing oneself or, rather, a way of representing oneself within a particular discursive domain” ([1997] 2003:164). It is easiest to provide examples from the realm of celebrity actors. For instance, there are at least three Jack Nicholsons layered into any of his filmed performances: the real person, the celebrity movie star (Graver’s personage), and the actor portraying a character. As Graver

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2. Cook agrees with those who argue that the musical text underdetermines performance. In this context, however, his unmarked shift from a dramatic metaphor (text) to one based on dance (choreography) is noteworthy, not least because choreography is sometimes considered to be even more determining of performance than a play script.
  3. Although I champion performance studies as a useful disciplinary perspective from which to reexamine the “music and/as performance” issue, I have also critiqued the field for its neglect of musical performance heretofore (see Auslander 2004:1–4).

suggests, the audience inevitably reads character through personage: we do not just see the character Nicholson portrays—we see “Nicholson” portraying a character. The “Nicholson” personage is not simply equivalent to the real person; it is the version of self Jack Nicholson performs in the discursive domain of movie stardom. It is important, however, that Graver also insists that the concept of personage is not restricted to celebrities: watching any actor perform, we have the sense of being in the presence of a liminal phenomenon that mediates between the real person and the character.

The concept of personage requires a bit of translation when applied to musicians rather than actors, most obviously because musicians do not usually portray fictional characters.<sup>4</sup> I argue, however, that when we see a musician perform, we are not simply seeing the “real person” playing; as with actors, there is an entity that mediates between musicians and the act of performance. When we hear a musician play, the source of the sound is a version of that person constructed for the specific purpose of playing music under particular circumstances. Musical performance may be defined, using Graver’s terms, as *a person’s representation of self within a discursive domain of music*. I posit that in musical performance, this representation of self is the direct object of the verb *to perform*. What musicians perform first and foremost is not music, but their own identities as musicians, their musical personae.<sup>5</sup>

I wish to emphasize that I intend the concept of a musical persona to apply in principle to a wide variety of musicians, perhaps to all musicians. My examples here will be drawn primarily from contemporary rock, jazz, and classical music, the practices with which I am most familiar, but I suspect that what I say here could be extended to other cultural contexts and musical practices. I suggested in an earlier essay, and will reiterate here, that all kinds of musicians (i.e., singers, instrumentalists, conductors) in all genres (i.e., classical, jazz, rock, etc.) enact personae in their performances (Auslander 2004:8).<sup>6</sup> In some instances, musical personae are closely analogous to movie star personages: in performances by flamboyant rock stars, opera singers, and conductors, among others, our perception of the music is mediated by our conception of the performer as personage. But even self-effacing musicians, such as the relatively anonymous members of a symphony orchestra or the invisible players in a Broadway pit band, perform musical personae. In these two instances, the musicians’ very obscurity is a defining characteristic of the personae they perform in those discursive domains.

The addition of a third term, persona, to the original work/performance dichotomy outlined by Cook, significantly alters the debate over the primacy of those terms in musical performance. It is no longer a question of arguing either that performances should be faithful (and therefore, essentially superfluous) representations of musical works or, alternately, that “performance does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform” (Small 1998:8). In the schema I am proposing, both the musical work and its execution serve the musician’s performance of a persona. The concept of musical persona therefore does not depend on a definition of musical performance in terms of a normative relationship between a work and its execution. To the contrary, it allows readily for the possibility that work and performance assume different relationships within different discursive domains of music. While it is generally assumed within the domain of rock, for example, that performers (at least the most

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4. My analysis here encompasses nondramatic musical performances and does not address genres such as opera and musical theatre.

5. Although I find Graver’s concept of a personage congenial, I prefer the term *persona*, which I use to describe a performed presence that is neither an overtly fictional character nor simply equivalent to the performer’s “real” identity. In earlier work, I have used persona as a heuristic in discussions of performance art, experimental theatre, and stand-up comedy; my continued use of it here thus allows me to suggest a vector of continuity among different genres of performance.

6. Although this earlier essay and the present one belong to the same general project, the earlier essay focused primarily on popular music and proposed a framework for understanding the performance of popular music for the purpose of performance analysis. The purview of the present essay is not restricted to popular music and I wish here to provide a more general theoretical framework for thinking about music as performance.

prominent ones) write much if not all of the music they perform, such an assumption clearly would be nonsensical in the domain of classical music (though not necessarily that of New Music). Performing simultaneously as musician and composer therefore serves far better as an aspect of a rock musician's persona than it would serve a classical musician's persona.

The concept of musical persona that I am putting forward here has a kinship with Stan Godlovitch's idea of "personalism." In his philosophical account of musical performance, Godlovitch characterizes a standard position as "plac[ing] a frame of protocol around the delivery of sound such that, once we learn to attend strictly to perceptibles bound by the frame, we are thereby party to all the content pertinent to appropriate aesthetic judgement and experience" (1998:139). Personalism, by contrast, takes into account perceptibles that lie outside this frame; it is alive to "the individualistic in performance, the person-centred particularities of performance and manner," including not only musicians' techniques but also their facial expressions and gestures, the attitudes they convey, what the audience knows of their lives outside the performance context, and so on (140). In sum, "Personalism reminds us that performance is a way of communicating, not especially a work or a composer's notions, but a person, the performer, through music" (144).

This last statement cuts very close to the bone as far as I am concerned. The analysis I am suggesting here is, like Godlovitch's, unabashedly performer-centric and takes the presentation of the performer, not the music, to be the primary performance. But there are crucial differences between Godlovitch's position and mine. Whereas Godlovitch is interested in musical performance as the expression of a personality, I am interested in seeing it as the performance of a persona that is defined through social interaction and not necessarily a direct representation of the individual musician's personality, though it may be. In fairness, I have to acknowledge that whereas Godlovitch derives his model for musical performance from a single type—solo recitals by classical musicians—I am striving for a more general approach that could encompass the self-effacing kinds of musical performance I mentioned earlier, as well as those that encourage the display of personality. But even concerning the latter, I differ with Godlovitch. Whereas he posits musical performance as a form of self-expression, I am suggesting it is a form of self-presentation, again with the understanding that some presentations of self may be perceived as personally expressive while others may not.

Finally, Godlovitch seems to suggest that the expression of the performer's personality is the ultimate content of musical performance, as perhaps it is for the kind of performance on which he focuses. Godlovitch would not count playing in a Broadway pit orchestra, for example, as musical performance, because it does not meet his condition that the audience attend exclusively to the music as its primary object of attention. Nor do musicians who play at weddings or cocktail lounge pianists engage in musical performance, as he understands it (1998:44–49).

In the interest of a more comprehensive approach, I wish to include in the purview of musical performance all instances in which musicians play for an audience. This broader perspective demands a contextual approach to the question of content. In some cases, the focus of the performance will be on displaying the musician's persona through musical sound, while in others the persona may be subordinate to the sound. In all cases, the personae musicians perform will reflect the priorities of the performance context.

At the end of his study, Godlovitch draws a conclusion with which I heartily concur: "performance is probably most fully understood in a domain of study much broader than aesthetics can ever encompass" (1998:144). I have already suggested that the field of performance studies is such a domain. In fleshing out my ideas in the remainder of this essay, I will draw on the work of Erving Goffman, whose micro-sociological examinations of everyday behavior have been highly influential in performance studies. I hasten to add that what I propose here is not in any sense a sociology of music. It is, rather, a further step toward a performer-centered theory of musical performance.

I have already surreptitiously paraphrased the title of one of Goffman's best-known books, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). I choose to address musical performance using ideas he developed for the analysis of interactions in everyday life rather than theories of acting because

musicians usually appear as themselves, playing music. In Michael Kirby's terms, musical performance is normally nonmatrixed—it is not subtended by matrices of fictional time, place, and character (1965:14–16). It therefore seems to make sense to treat the playing of music as one of the routines, to use Goffman's term, that musicians perform in the course of their lives. As Goffman suggests, we perform ourselves differently in our different routines (I do not present myself in the same way to my students in the classroom as I do to my departmental colleagues at meetings, for instance). Therefore, there is no reason to suppose that musicians perform the same identity when playing music as in their other life routines. The version of self that a musician performs *qua* musician is what I am calling the musical persona.

Before turning to the specifics of this analysis, I propose to address some of the most basic definitional questions concerning musical performance through Goffman's later work, *Frame Analysis* (1974). For experience to be intelligible it must, for Goffman, be perceived through a *frame*. Frames are the socially defined “principles of organization which govern events” that individuals internalize as cognitive structures (Goffman 1974:10). Any experience is likely to be framed by multiple, layered frames, the most fundamental being primary frames, of which there are two types: natural and social. A natural frame suggests that the experience under consideration was produced by something other than human volition; a social frame suggests that the experience is best understood as a product of human agency (Goffman 1974:22).

I argue that *music* is a primary social frame. Goffman describes the actions that take place within primary frames as “untransformed, instrumental act[s]” (1974:157). Manipulating musical instruments or vocalizing are such acts, which are produced and perceived as music by virtue of their primary framing. To perceive a sonic event as music is to understand it as intentionally produced by a human agent operating in relation to a given social group's understanding of what music is.<sup>7</sup>

The actions involved in producing musical sound, and its recognition as such, are the sum total of what takes place within the primary frame—any further refinement of the understanding of what is going on reflects the imposition of further levels of framing. Goffman refers to two principles of framing as “keying” and “transformation” (1974:41–44). Someone could produce musical sound in order to entertain herself, to perform for an audience, to practice the playing of a piece, to demonstrate to a student how that piece is to be played, and so on. Each of these constitutes a different keying of the primary action, and each established keying can be nominated as a frame within which the activity takes place: the practice frame, the rehearsal frame, the public performance frame, the teaching frame, and so on.<sup>8</sup> Transformations are cases in which the framing of the original event involves its alteration. A recording of a live musical performance that is mixed or edited in such a way as to be nonidentical with the performance itself is a transformation of that performance, necessitated by its insertion into the recorded music frame.<sup>9</sup>

7. It is, of course, possible to frame any action or sound *as* music; this is a favorite gesture of experimental and avantgarde musicians (e.g., the *bruitism* of the Italian Futurists, *musique concrète*, John Cage, Fluxus, Frank Zappa, and so on).

8. Cook characterizes the conventional view of the text/performance relationship in music as holding “that the role of performance is in some more or less straightforward manner to express, project, or ‘bring out’ compositional structure,” a view he critiques as excessively narrow (2001:par. 22). The concept of keying provides a partial alternative to talking about musical performances in this way, as Cook implies (without using Goffman's vocabulary) when he suggests that words like “quotation, commentary, critique, parody, irony, or travesty” could be used to describe how a musician treats a composition (2001:par. 23). In considering a performance such as John Coltrane's 1960 recording of “My Favorite Things,” for instance, one could say that he keyed as jazz a song previously known as a show tune from a very popular Broadway musical rather than saying that he brought out its compositional structure or even that he interpreted it. The significance of Coltrane's act of keying such a song as jazz, and the manner in which he did so, would become objects of analysis rather than the relationship of his performance to the composition's formal characteristics.

9. This concept of transformation raises an interesting question about the use of sound-mixing in live concerts. In a sense, the mix, even when performed live, is a transformation of the actual performance produced by the musicians. In such a case, the audience has no practical access to the “real” event, but only to its transformed version.

Like most aesthetic performances, formal musical performances such as concerts or recitals are *bracketed*—they are set apart from the flow of ordinary life by means of signs that indicate their special status (Goffman 1974:251). Arguably, however, music is more continuous with ordinary life than the other performing arts, especially if one accepts the expanded definition of musical performance proposed by Christopher Small in explaining his conversion of the noun “music” into a verb: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (1998:9). Small’s specific instances of “musicking” include hearing Muzak in a supermarket, listening to music on a Walkman, and singing to oneself while doing chores, alongside more conventional instances of musical performance (1–2). It is difficult to imagine versions of theatre, opera, or even concert dance that are as integrated into daily life as music seems to be; and in performance art, life is often integrated into art rather than the other way around. It may well be that we experience music across a broader range of bracketed and unbracketed events than other art forms.

The specific means through which music is conveyed constitute further levels of keying and framing. As a musician, I may choose to perform for an audience by giving a live concert, or by making a recording. The vehicle I select becomes a *lamination*, a frame imposed on the already present frames (Goffman 1974:82). In my analysis, a recording of a live performance of music involves the following framings: an activity of human sound production is perceived (by both its makers and its audience) within a primary frame of music making. This activity is then keyed as a performance for an audience other than the musician, rather than as practice, for instance (first lamination). The recording of the performance constitutes a transformation (second lamination); both the musician and the listener must understand their respective relationships to the sound in relation to recording (that is, they must know what it means to produce or listen to a recording of live music rather than the live performance itself).

To translate into the language of frames, our ability to understand a sonic experience as a live recording of music involves at least three frames, two laminations, and one transformation: the music frame, the performance frame, and the recording frame. Goffman refers to “the outermost lamination as the *rim* of the frame [...] which tells us just what sort of status in the real world the activity has” (1974:82; emphasis in original). The final lamination, then, is decisive in determining the identity of the event. In this case, the recording frame is the rim, and we understand the reality status of the event as that attributed to a sound recording.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to stress that these frames constitute understandings on which members of a social group can generally agree, rather than the idiosyncratic perceptions of individuals. As individuals, we usually operate within the frames provided by our society rather than frames we create for ourselves. It is the availability of common frames of reference that makes mutual understanding and, hence, dialogue among human beings possible. For instance, we have to share an identification of a particular sonic experience as a live recording of music, and an understanding of what a live recording of music is, before we can talk about it. As Goffman suggests, the achievement of agreement among individuals on basic definitions is usually unproblematic because those definitions are socially determined and built into the frames of reference employed by members of a social group.

I suggest further that musical genres and subgenres constitute crucial laminations over the basic experience of music.<sup>11</sup> I shall refer repeatedly to the idea of genre here; for the moment, I wish to emphasize that our social experience of music is radically incomplete if we do not have a

10. The reality status of recorded music is not a simple matter, however. Whereas some commentators insist that a musical recording must be perceived as a document of a performance that took place at another time, others experience such recordings as performances taking place at the moment of listening (see Auslander 2004:5).

11. One way of understanding the relationship between genres and subgenres is that subgenres are keyings of basic genres, each of which operates somewhat like a primary frame. So, psychedelic rock, glam rock, punk rock, and so on can be seen as different keyings of the activities that take place within the basic rock frame.

sense of what *kind* of music we are experiencing. To perceive a particular sonic event through the jazz frame is quite different from perceiving it through the classical frame, for example. If I understand a given musical work to be in the jazz idiom, I hear certain parts of it as improvised. If I understand a given work to be in the classical idiom, I generally hear it as fully composed and not open to the kind of improvisation in which jazz musicians engage. Misidentification (misframing) could lead to serious misunderstandings and inaccurate evaluations.<sup>12</sup> Misframing a through-composed piece as jazz could lead me to dismiss it as very poor jazz, for instance, and that critical act might lead a fellow jazz aficionado to conclude that I do not really understand jazz at all.<sup>13</sup> Genre identification has implications for other frames and the limits of what is acceptable within them. The editing of sound recordings to produce idealized performances is far less controversial in rock than it is in jazz, for instance: genre-framing influences the limits of the recording frame.

Having identified aspects of Goffman's frame theory that may be brought to bear on a general understanding of musical performance, I turn now to an analysis of formal musical events. Goffman suggests that the selection of a frame through which to perceive and comprehend an emerging event precedes the "definition of the situation" made by participants in it; once we have a sense of what kind of thing a particular event is, we can develop an idea of what we are going to do in relation to it (1974:10). In *The Presentation of Self*, Goffman divides interactants into two teams—performers and audience—and indicates that both teams enter an interaction with definitions of the situation; successful interaction involves negotiation between the two sides to arrive at a "working consensus" as to the real terms of the interaction (1959:10, 92). Understood in this way, musical performance is social not only in Cook's sense, that the musical work may be said to script an interaction among performers that represents a vision of social life, but also in the larger sense, that the musical event is produced through interaction between two groups, performers and audience, who must arrive at a mutually satisfactory *modus vivendi* for the duration of the interaction.

Goffman defines "performance" itself as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (22). The fundamental purpose of performance, so understood, is to influence the definition of the situation through what Goffman calls "impression management": the performer seeks to create a certain impression on an audience, and to have the audience accept that impression as part of the operative definition of reality for the interaction. The performer:

can influence [his observers] by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others that it is in his interests to convey. (1959:4)

This scheme is applicable to any musical performance. Consider, for example, Small's description of the entrance of a symphony orchestra at the start of a concert:

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12. Goffman distinguishes misframings from other categories of error (such as mistaking a kite for a bird [misperception] or adding a column of figures incorrectly) on the grounds that misframings lead to "systematically sustained, generative error, the breeding of wrongly oriented behavior" (1974:308). Misframings are not specific misunderstandings or errors but misconstruals of the underlying structure of what is going on that make it impossible for the interactant to participate successfully in the unfolding event.

13. Musicians frequently play with and challenge the limits of genre frames. The maverick jazz clarinetist Don Byron, for example, issued an album in 1997 entitled *Bug Music*, on which he included music associated with John Kirby's band of the 1930s and compositions by Raymond Scott, alongside pieces by Duke Ellington. Kirby's band often played arrangements derived from light classical music and emphasized scored parts over improvisation. Raymond Scott was a musician and technological bricoleur who wrote music for his quintet, also in the 1930s, which was subsequently used in Warner Brothers cartoons. By insisting on continuities between jazz and music that shares some characteristics with jazz, but is not normally included in the jazz canon, Byron questioned and tested the limits of the jazz frame.

As we watch, the musicians file onto the stage. All are wearing black, the men in tuxedos with white shirts and bow ties and the women in black ankle- or floor-length dresses. [...] Their demeanor is restrained but casual and they talk together as they enter and move to their allotted seats. Their entry is understated, quiet; there is none of the razzmatazz, the explosion of flashpots and the flashing of colored lights, the expansive gestures, the display of outrageous clothing, that marks the arrival on stage of many popular artists. (1998:64)

There are several things to note here. The first is that the concert, as a social transaction between performers and audience, begins before a single note is sounded. (To the extent that both performers and audiences are familiar with the social and behavioral conventions contained within the classical music concert frame, the interaction could be said to begin well before the two groups even arrive at the concert hall, as each dresses for its part in the interaction, for instance.) The musicians' evening wear quite clearly conveys the message that the concert is a highly formal occasion, and that the audience is to conduct itself accordingly. The musicians present themselves in a low-key manner, suggesting seriousness rather than showmanship. They direct attention to what they do, not who they are, and expect the audience to follow suit. Finally, the musicians present themselves as a group; no player commands the spotlight as an individual (except the concert master, of course). Again, this conveys information to the audience about how to understand the interaction.

Small's own interpretation is "that the message of these musicians' onstage behavior is that of their professional exclusiveness, of their belonging to a world that the nonmusicians who sit beyond the edge of the stage cannot enter" (1998:64–65). It is clear that this message, as well as the others I just mentioned, serve the interests of the performers by letting the audience know what to expect from the interaction, what not to expect, and how to respond. The combination of a highly formal appearance with an exclusionary manner indicates, right off the bat, what the relationship between performers and audience is to be: there will be no direct communication; the musicians will not speak to the audience; and it would not be appropriate for audience members to call out to the musicians by name or to request certain pieces. Overly enthusiastic audience responses (e.g., singing along, whistling while applauding) would be at odds with the serious tone of the event, and so on. Further, the musicians' presentation of themselves as professionals suggests that they perform a specialized service for the audience, that the audience cannot perform for itself; this, combined with the elegance and formality of the musicians' appearance, makes the case that the price of admission was money well spent.

Because a symphony concert, like most formal musical performances, is a highly ritualized and convention-bound event, it might be tempting to argue that since symphony audiences know everything I have indicated before they reach the concert hall, there is no real need for the performers to convey this information at the scene. I would counter such an argument by suggesting that the conventional nature of musical events means primarily that audiences come to them with certain expectations; it remains for the performers to indicate whether or not they intend to fulfill those expectations. As Richard Bauman suggests, "conventions may provide precedents and guidelines for the range of alternatives possible, but the possibility of alternatives, the competencies and goals of the participants, and the emergent unfolding of the event make for variability" (1986:4). Just because a particular kind of performance is supposed to unfold in a particular way does not mean that it will in every instance. Convention provides a set of expectations but it does not in any way determine what will actually happen in a given performance; that reality unfolds through convention-bound but unscripted negotiation between performers and audience in each instance.

Though it may not seem so—because we have so many dependable models for different types of musical performance—the working consensus is inherently fragile. Small's example is intentionally normative: the performers give every sign of conforming to the audience's conventional expectations of a symphony concert, and offer no sign of advancing an extraordinary definition of the situation. But that need not be the case. Paula, a physician, classical music lover, and the proprietress of the personal weblog, *Paula's House of Toast*, recalls a concert at Boston's Jordan Hall in the early 1970s by the Dutch recorder virtuoso, Frans Bruggen:

During one of his pieces, likely some baroque sonata, an actor was stationed in an easy chair beside a floor lamp, and read the newspaper through the whole piece. As if to say: ho hum. Wallpaper music. Easy listening. Background music. I seemed to remember that the Boston Globe had even noted this little gesture of self-critique on its editorial page. Had Vietnam been the context of his small protest? (2004)

Brueggen clearly did not conform to his audience's expectations, but proposed a rekeying of the event as a sort of metaconcert—a reflexive concert-about-concerts intended to address the cultural status of classical music and the social significance of performing it. As Paula suggests, he may have been implying that the meaning of the event did not reside in itself, but in its relationship to events in the larger world.

Any attempt to define (or redefine) the situation depends entirely on the audience's cooperation. Such willingness is not always forthcoming, as the breakdown of consensus during a (c. 1968) concert by the rock group the Doors at the Los Angeles Forum shows. Although the group wanted to play new music that involved horns and strings, they reluctantly played their big hit, "Light My Fire," in response to audience demand:

The song over, and the kids shouting for the band to play it again, lead singer Jim Morrison [...] came to the edge of the stage.

"Hey, man," he said, his voice booming from the speakers on the ceiling. "Cut that shit." The crowd giggled.

"What are you all doing here?" he went on. No response.

"You want music?" A rousing Yeah.

"Well, man, we can play music all night, but that's not what you really want, you want something more, something greater than you've ever seen, right?"

"We want Mick Jagger!" someone shouted. "Light My Fire!" said someone else, to laughter.

It was a direct affront, and the Doors hadn't seen it coming. (Lydon 2003:73)

Arguably, this performance failed because there was no working consensus, no agreement as to what was supposed to happen and who was authorized to make crucial decisions. The Doors wanted to present new material; the audience wanted to hear only their earlier hits. The audience's recalcitrance led Morrison to break frame by negotiating directly with them, but his address to the audience, his attempt to impose his definition of the situation, generated only a mocking response.

Goffman calls the means a performer uses to foster an impression the "front," which consists of "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (1959:22). (It is worth emphasizing that performance, in Goffman's sense, may be undertaken either consciously or unconsciously. That a male symphony player simply dresses in his tux before the concert because that is what he has always done, and gives no thought to the impression he is creating, does not negate the fact that the tux functions as expressive equipment. The outfit contributes willy-nilly to the impression he makes on his audience.) Goffman divides front into two aspects: "setting" (the physical context of the performance) and "personal front," in which are included the performer's "'appearance' and 'manner'" (1959:22–24).

The "front" is a point at which performances intersect with larger social contexts. Settings contribute to the impressions created by musical performances by drawing upon existing cultural connotations. Classical music is most often performed today, at least in the United States, either in purpose-built concert halls or churches. As Small indicates, the monumental architecture of concert halls "convey[s] an impression of opulence, even sumptuousness. There is wealth here, and the power that wealth brings. But on the other hand, there is a careful avoidance of any suggestion of vulgarity. What is to happen here is serious and important" (1998:25). As settings for musical performances, churches also convey seriousness and importance, with additional connotations of sanctity and spirituality.

A setting designed for a different kind of music, the Rose Theater, part of the Frederick P. Rose Hall, is a new complex built to house the Jazz at Lincoln Center program in New York City. Opened in 2004, it is described in publicity materials on the program's website both as part of "the first facility ever created specifically for jazz" and as a "symphony in the round" (Jazz at Lincoln Center 2004). This suggests that the design of the theatre is intended to attach the cultural prestige of the symphony orchestra (and perhaps its access to wealth and power) to jazz, as is its Lincoln Center affiliation. The theatre itself, as a piece of expressive equipment, thus communicates to the audience that it is to understand and respond to jazz as "America's classical music," not as a form of popular music, an implicitly less "serious" and more "vulgar" category.<sup>14</sup> The performance space itself thus provides a definition of the musical and cultural situation.

Individual musicians can use the cultural associations of a particular venue or kind of venue to assert their personae. Cellist Matt Haimovitz, for example, supported his persona as a youthful, experimental, somewhat iconoclastic classical musician by doing on his 2002 tour "what no classical musician of his stature had done in living memory, navigating the country not by way of its acoustically precise concert halls but instead by its coffeehouses and clubrooms. Most radical was his performance at CBGB's, the legendary punk room in Manhattan" (Openheimer 2004).

There is a great deal more to be said about setting in musical performance, since the physical environment plays such a crucial role in defining the relationships and interactions among performers and audiences.<sup>15</sup> The topic is so broad, however, that I cannot attempt to do it justice within the confines of a more general discussion, so I will make just one last observation.

Compared with many other kinds of performers, musicians often have relatively little personal control over their settings. While they may enjoy considerable influence over the spaces and equipment they use directly (e.g., the stage, backstage areas, instruments or sound equipment provided), they usually have to settle for whatever atmosphere and relationship to audience a particular venue provides. Although musicians may exert a shaping influence on the setting—as when Jimmy Buffet sets up tiki bars at concert venues, or the Preservation Hall Jazz Band of New Orleans encourages its listeners to dance in the aisles of the symphony halls where it sometimes performs on tour—setting is largely an institutional, rather than individual, aspect of musical performance.

In his description of personal front, Goffman includes both "relatively fixed" signs like race and sex and "relatively mobile" signs "such as facial expression" (1959:24). Although I shall focus here primarily on the more mobile signs, fixed signs are clearly of critical importance, given the way so many musical genres are stratified in relation to social identities (e.g., the problematic status of white jazz musicians, black classical musicians, female conductors, women in rock and jazz, among others). Goffman proposes that routines tend to draw on an existing vocabulary of personal fronts with established social meanings; the rather quaint examples he provides are of chimney sweeps and perfume clerks who "wear white lab coats [...] to provide the client with an understanding that delicate tasks performed by these persons will be performed in what has become a standardized, clinical, confidential manner" (26). The white lab coat garnered such meanings in its primary scientific and medical uses, meanings that are then generalized to the other contexts in which it appears.

14. The phrase "America's classical music" is not used in the Jazz at Lincoln Center materials, but it is one way jazz is often described by its advocates. See, for example, the website of the American Jazz Museum in Kansas City (<<http://www.americanjazzmuseum.com>>). The Rose Theater institutionalizes both an analogy between jazz and classical music and the practice of staging jazz concerts at halls devoted to classical music that began in the 1930s with Benny Goodman's Carnegie Hall concerts (of course, Goodman also performed classical music on occasion) and continued in the 1940s with Norman Grantz's Jazz at the Philharmonic series. Since the 1960s, it has been fairly common for regional classical music venues in the United States to program at least some jazz artists, often those like Dave Brubeck whose music has affinities with classical or contemporary "serious" music.

15. See Small (1998:19–29) for a discussion of how symphony halls condition the social dimensions of concerts and Fonarow ([1995]1997) for an analysis of how the space of indie rock clubs is used by listeners to position themselves in relation to the music and its culture.

Symphony players' formal wear functions in precisely this way: a piece of expressive equipment with established connotations of formality, elegance, and class identification is used to bring those connotations into a particular context. In the 1950s, male jazz musicians (both black and white) frequently opted for Ivy League-style suits as their stage wear. This fashion, exemplified by Brooks Brothers, carried with it culturally encoded connotations of conservative sophistication as well as upward mobility (Gorman 2001:29). Jazz musicians thus presented themselves not as members of a disreputable subculture, as they often were thought to be, but as respectable, middle-class men (regardless of what their actual class status may have been).<sup>16</sup>

Some musical genres and performance contexts clearly permit more individual variation of personal front than others. While symphony players' costumes are pretty much fixed,<sup>17</sup> jazz or popular musicians are generally able to express a higher degree of idiosyncrasy in their dress. Psychedelic rock musicians of the 1960s, for instance, had a much broader range of possibilities available to them than symphony players. But their choices were governed nevertheless by a basic definition of the social situation. If symphony musicians strive to convey an impression of "professional exclusiveness, of their belonging to a world that the nonmusicians who sit beyond the edge of the stage cannot enter," as Small indicates, psychedelic rock musicians sought, for ideological reasons, to convey the opposite impression. By wearing clothing that partook of the same fashions as their audiences, and presenting themselves in a way that seemed to allow for dialogue between performers and audience (though not of the sort that occurred in the earlier example of the Doors' performance), they presented themselves as continuous with their audience and implied that, in principle (if not in fact), any member of the audience could become a musician.

The vocabulary Goffman uses to describe "manner" as an aspect of personal front might be taken to suggest that he has in mind something like personality: he contrasts "a haughty, aggressive manner" with a "meek, apologetic manner." But Goffman's formal definition indicates that manner is not an expression of the performer's personality but, rather, a set of "stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer expects to play in the oncoming situation" (1959:24). In other words, the performer's manner is specific to a particular, situated performance rather than an expression of an ongoing set of personality traits. For example, a symphony musician is likely to exhibit a very different manner when performing a solo recital or giving a master class than when playing with the orchestra. When the New York Philharmonic recently experimented in Avery Fisher Hall with giant video screens on which to project live images of the orchestra, some musicians objected because they did not want to be so visible. A violinist was quoted as saying, "We're not movie stars" (in Pogrebin 2004). That same violinist presumably would not object to being highly visible to his audience under other performance circumstances, but his performance of a rank and file symphonic musician's persona requires relative invisibility.

Musical persona varies with the performance situation, and may reflect the definition of that situation more than the musicians' individual personalities. The violinist I just quoted is not necessarily

16. It may or may not be coincidental that modern jazz musicians started dressing in this very respectable way just around the time that American sociologists began to characterize their professional milieu as a deviant subculture. See, for example, Howard Becker's classic ethnographic study, "The Professional Dance Musician and his Audience" (1951).

17. For an interesting and entertaining discussion of some of the social conventions of the classical music concert frame, see Wakin (2005). Here is Wakin's account of symphonic costuming conventions:

For main subscription concerts in the evening, men must wear formal black tails, formal black trousers, long-sleeved white shirts, white bow ties, white vests and black shoes. Black, floor-length, long-sleeved gowns or black skirts with long-sleeved black blouses are prescribed for women. No pants allowed. During matinees, men substitute black or midnight blue suits and long dark ties for the tails. Dresses for women can rise to midcalf; wide-leg "palazzo-style" pants are permitted. The formality diminishes for summer concerts. The code is white jacket and white short-sleeved shirt for men, black bow tie and black pants. When it is too hot for jackets, white long-sleeved shirts are allowed. Women must stay with the floor-length black skirt and long-sleeved white blouse. Still no pants. The dress code is the same for the men for the parks concerts, although women may wear short-sleeved white blouses, midcalf black skirts—and, finally, pants if they want.

possessed of a retiring personality: those who know him may characterize him as generally outgoing, gregarious, even aggressive. But in his persona as symphony musician, he wishes to blend into the crowd. Goffman himself provides another example which shows that musical persona is not necessarily a function of personality:

Singers [of popular songs] routinely trot out the most alarmingly emotional expression without the lengthy buildup that a stage play provides. Thirty seconds and there it is— instant affect. As a singer, an individual wears his heart in his throat: as an everyday interactant he is less likely to expose himself. As one can say that it is only qua singer that he emotes on call, so one can say that it is only qua conversationalist that he doesn't. (1974:572)

A highly emotive singer onstage could be guarded and reluctant to express emotion offstage. His onstage emotionalism, then, would not be an expression of his personality in general but a manner he employs to enhance the impression he wishes to create in his pop singer routine. The performer's persona as a pop singer has an emotional hair trigger: the singer as a human being most likely does not.

In some cases, highly idiosyncratic personae function as something like frames—figures like Canadian classical musician Glenn Gould and British singer Joe Cocker come to mind in this connection. Gould's humming along with his playing, or Cocker's weird bodily contortions while singing, cannot be fully accounted for by reference to the general frames surrounding their performances. To take Cocker as an example, it is clear that his performances take place within the rock music genre frame, which certainly includes the possibility of eccentric bodily display. Meaning no disrespect to Cocker, I assert that the peculiar, spasmodic style of movement for which he is famous is nevertheless not simply conventional, even within the permissive rock frame. To put the case a bit differently, there is no information contained in the rock frame itself that would enable an uninformed spectator to understand that she is witnessing a normal performance by Cocker, as opposed to a performer undergoing an unfortunate neurological episode onstage. (In Goffman's terms, this would be an instance of frame ambiguity with respect to the primary frame: it would be unclear to the spectator whether the event should be understood within a social frame [musical performance] or a natural frame [neurological episode].) It is only when one becomes aware of Cocker's own idiosyncratic performance conventions that it is possible fully to understand what is going on. At that point, his gestures become conventional *for him* and one might be disappointed were he not to perform them on a given occasion. Cocker's gestures (which are often highly stylized keyings of the gestures made by guitarists and keyboard players) are so identifiable that John Belushi's keying of them as parody on *Saturday Night Live* was readily perceivable as a lamination over what might be called the Cocker frame.

This is a good place to emphasize that musical personae are not necessarily emotionally or personally expressive in the manner of a Gould or a Cocker. There is, for example, the persona of the "cool" jazz musician that requires the maintenance of a certain emotional distance from the music and one's own performance of it. The workaday world of professional musicians includes a great many cases in which musical performance does not entail emotional expression. The musicians in an invisible Broadway pit orchestra may enjoy what they do, and may express their pleasure in the way they perform, but that is an aspect of their performances that remains out of frame and to which their audience has no access and is, therefore, nonessential to the performance of that musical persona. A singer may be highly emotive when performing as a soloist, yet perform a relatively unemotional persona when singing in a chorus or serving as a backup singer.

In cases where the performance of a musical persona does entail emotional expression, musicians may be said to engage in what Goffman calls "dramatization." This has to do with making visible work which goes into a particular routine that the audience would not otherwise see, so that the performer can get credit for it; and also with presenting an idealized image to the audience (in this context, idealized means conforming to the audience's existing expectations of a certain kind of person). Goffman includes violinists alongside "prizefighters, surgeons [...] and policemen" as a category of performers whose act is "wonderfully adapted [...] as means of vividly conveying the qualities and

attributes claimed by the performer” (1959:31). In relation to musical performance, an idealized image of the musician as emotionally expressive is conveyed through dramatizations of the process of music-making that purport to expose the musician’s internal state while performing.<sup>18</sup>

There is no better example of musical dramatization than the phenomenon known as “guitar face.” This phrase refers to the distorted expressions that appear on the faces of rock guitarists, particularly when playing a solo. These expressions are nonessential to the actual production of musical sound but serve as coded displays that provide the audience with external evidence of the musician’s ostensible internal state while playing. The conventional nature of these expressions and their relationship to a guitarist’s persona are indicated by one journalist’s taxonomy, which includes suffering, satanic possession, surprise at the guitarist’s own virtuosity, swagger, sex god status, spirituality, and stoicism among the emotions and attitudes frequently portrayed by rock guitarists and bass guitarists (Guzman 2004). The fact that such a list can be constructed suggests that idealization is at work here: audiences and musicians alike are aware of a set of emotions and attitudes (and corresponding facial expressions) deemed appropriate within the genre frame of rock music, and musicians generally draw on that vocabulary in their performances.

Although guitar face is specifically associated with rock, the basic idea behind it (that facial expression, as an aspect of a performer’s manner, is specific to particular musical genres and performance situations) can be generalized to other musical forms. Without using the term, Godlovitch describes the classical guitarist Julian Bream’s guitar face (1998:141) and it is no stretch to say that Pavarotti, for instance, exemplifies in his performances what might be called “tenor face.”

The presentation of a front is not an end in itself, of course: it is the first step in the execution of a routine, a step that constitutes an implicit claim to be taken seriously in a particular social role. Goffman: “when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon [his audience], obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect” (1959:13). Following the performer’s staking of this claim, the actual performance of the routine either bolsters the audience’s willingness to accept the performer’s claim to a certain identity, or provides the audience with reasons to reject it. (It may have been that the Doors’ audience felt that the new, string- and horn-laden music they proposed to play was not consistent with the expectations the group had otherwise created.)

In relation to musical performance, this means that performers use their fronts to claim musical identities that are ultimately either secured or problematized by the relationship of their actual playing of music to the initial definition of the situation they projected. This relationship is enacted along several vectors. One of the most basic is that of musical genre. Suppose a concert of mine is advertised as a classical piano recital and booked into the Carnegie Recital Hall. When I appear before the audience, I am dressed appropriately in a black tail coat and white shirt with bow tie and exhibit a manner appropriate to a classical soloist. I sit down at an impressive Steinway grand piano and proceed to pick out “Mary Had a Little Lamb” awkwardly with one finger. Clearly, my execution of the routine (the actual work of making music) would discredit (to use Goffman’s term) the claim I advanced through the framing of the event and my presentation of a front; it would throw my claim to a classical musician’s identity seriously into question. Indeed, such a performance would probably lead my audience to impute to me the persona of a prankster rather than that of a serious musician, and prevent them from treating me in the manner they would an accomplished classical pianist.

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18. I use the word “purport” here (and “ostensible” in the next paragraph) advisedly. What is important, after all, is that the performer *appear* to be feeling and expressing certain emotions, not that she really feel them at the time of performance. Although sincerity and authenticity are ideologically important in many musical genres, the audience can only assess the presence or absence of such qualities in a given performance by attending to the signs the performer displays. As Simon Frith puts it, “‘Sincerity’ [...] cannot be measured by searching for what lies *behind* the performance; if we are moved by a performer we are moved by what we *immediately* hear and see” (1996:215; emphasis in original).

The foregoing hypothetical is intentionally silly, but the question of whether and how a performer justifies the claims made through the presentation of a front is a serious one that impinges on matters of repertoire, style, and persona. If all of these aspects of a musician's performance are not perceived as consistent in one way or another with the claims the musician has advanced by presenting a front, the performer risks being discredited. If I claim an identity as a virtuoso in any field of musical performance, for instance, the repertoire I select, the technical skill I display in playing it, the sophistication of my interpretation, and my own manner all must be in keeping with that identity, or it will be thrown into question. Another case in point is that of Phil Ochs who, in the 1960s, developed a following as a politically and socially engaged "folk troubadour" (Unterberger 1997:669). In 1970, however, following a period of stylistic change and political disenchantment, Ochs tried something different during a concert at Carnegie Hall, described here in a review:

Instead of presenting only his customary protest songs, he offered also rock songs of the 1950s associated with Elvis Presley, Conway Twitty and Buddy Holly. Mr. Ochs appeared in a glittering golden suit, patterned on one worn by Mr. Presley. His audience's reaction to this was a rising barrage of boos and hisses. (Wilson 1970:44)

In terms of repertoire and personal front, Ochs's musical performance did not match his established persona, and his audience was not amenable to his attempt to redefine the situation.

Despite my insistence on the situational, emergent character of musical personae, I will not go so far as to claim that each performance entails the creation of a fresh persona. As the examples of the Doors and Ochs show, audiences expect performers whose work they experience more than once to maintain relatively consistent personae. As Goffman puts it, "when an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to arise" (1959:16). In order for that relationship to be maintained, both parties (performer and audience) need to be able to count on a high degree of continuity from occasion to occasion.

I do not mean to suggest that musical personae are necessarily rigid and static, though they certainly can be. Performers in any genre of music may find that audiences expect them to continue to do some version of what they seemingly have always done. But some musical performers find ways of letting their personae change over time. Compare the Beatles in 1963, when they were essentially a very talented boy band, with the Beatles in 1968, when they were recognized as countercultural avatars. A parallel development in another musical realm might be the career of John Coltrane, who emerged as a highly respected post-bop tenor saxophonist in the 1950s, but later transformed himself into a spiritual seeker exploring the psyche and the cosmos through demanding, dissonant music. In both cases, the changes of personae were dramatic, yet there was an audience prepared to accept the performers in each guise. The Beach Boys, by contrast, attempted the same transformation—from teen heartthrobs to countercultural eminences—as the Beatles, but were unable to achieve credibility within the counterculture.

Clearly, there is no simple answer as to why some musicians are able to pull off transformations of persona while others are not—one would have to look very closely at all the personal, industrial, and cultural factors involved. But I hypothesize that such transformations can only occur in relation to genre framing. Goffman notes that frames are not static: what is possible and permissible within any given social frame may change over time (1974:50–52). Musical genres change and evolve as well. There are therefore at least three distinguishable kinds of alterations of persona: lateral moves, so to speak, in which a performer shifts between two identity positions available within a given frame at a given moment (John Mellencamp's evolution out of Johnny Cougar is an example of an artist who changed personae while maintaining general stylistic continuity); movements from one frame to another (as when a rock artist becomes a country artist); and changes over time within a single frame (the cases of the Beatles and Coltrane fall into this category). As socially defined genre frames change, what counts as rock or jazz (or any other kind of music) changes, and fresh opportunities for artists to (re)define their personae in relation to the music open up.

There are also many performers whose personae allow their audiences to accept performances that might be perceived as anomalous when executed by other artists operating in the same genre

frame. Haimovitz is one example: performing Bach at a recital hall is just as consistent with his persona as a maverick classical cellist as performing his arrangement of Jimi Hendrix's version of "The Star Spangled Banner" at CBGB's. In fact, I will go a step further and say that Haimovitz's implicit claim to be a *maverick* classical musician actually *requires* him both to demonstrate his mastery of the classical repertoire and to do things conventional classical musicians do not, like play rock or perform at a punk club. Another example is that of the late Frank Zappa, whose persona of a learned, technically accomplished, outspoken musical curmudgeon permitted him to work, simultaneously and sequentially, as a rock musician, a jazz musician, and a symphonic composer. In such cases, the performer's flexible persona serves as a bridge among institutionally and culturally distinct musical genres, audiences, and repertoires—and that very flexibility is part of the performer's appeal to an audience.

There is a continuum from types of musical performance in which the musicians' personae are strongly mandated because they are built into the framing conventions of a particular genre (symphony players or member of marching bands would be examples), to types in which musicians have a great deal of freedom to construct personae. In no case, however, is the musician in a position to construct a persona autonomously—personae are always negotiated between musicians and their audiences within the constraints of genre framing. For Goffman, all human identities, all selves, are produced by such negotiations and do not exist apart from them:

A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then [...] is a dramatic effect arising from a scene that is presented [...]. (1959:252–53; emphasis in original)

This suggests that the audience, not the performer, plays the most decisive role in the process of identity formation, since it is the audience that produces the final construction of an identity from the impressions created by the performer. In some cases, this audience role can go well beyond the acceptance or rejection of the performer's claim to a particular musical identity: an audience can actually impose an identity on the performer. The identity of virtuoso to which I alluded earlier is such a case: one generally does not nominate oneself as a virtuoso. Other people—initially one's teachers, perhaps, then audiences, critics, and peers—assign that title to those deserving of it, according to the canons of virtuosity for any particular musical genre (technical and interpretive skills in classical music, technical and improvisational skills in jazz, etc.). Once a musician is designated as a virtuoso, all of his or her subsequent performances will be understood and assessed in light of that aspect of persona.



1. Brian Setzer performing with the Stray Cats on 17 July 2004. Brixton Academy, London, U.K. (Photo courtesy of Tommy Maguire)



2. Brian Setzer performing on New Year's Eve with the Brian Setzer Orchestra during their 2004 U.S. tour. Caesar's Hotel and Casino, Atlantic City, New Jersey. (Photo courtesy of Tommy Maguire)

Bob Dylan represents a different instance in which the audience imposed a persona on a performer that went well beyond the definition of the situation as he perceived it—and beyond what he intended. Largely because of the social and political engagement he expressed in the songs he wrote in the early 1960s, and his embrace of a rock style after working in a folk vein, Dylan was designated “The Voice of His Generation.” Many of his subsequent performances, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, could be seen as efforts to undermine that persona by taking unexpected personal and ideological turns, producing erratic performances in which he would mumble or distort the lyrics to his famous songs, and so on.

Dylan is a complex case because the feisty, retiring, obscurantist

persona he developed to counter the prophetic one his audience sought to impose on him in some ways only made the prophetic persona all the more auratic and credible.

Examples of audiences imposing personae on performers, or refusing to accept a performer's definition (or redefinition) of the situation, should not be taken to mean merely that audiences are fickle and capricious, and that music is locked into a cycle of commercialism in which artists are repeatedly called upon simply to produce fresh versions of their last saleable commodity. Rather, they point toward two very important things. The first, which I have already discussed, is the fact that the performer's persona is precipitated by interaction with an audience and is, in that sense, a social construct, not simply an individual one. The other is the way these episodes indicate the *investment* audiences have in the performance personae they help to create. This investment is not purely economic; it is also cultural, emotional, ritual, sometimes political or even spiritual. Audiences try to make performers into who they need them to be, to fulfill a social function. A successful working consensus means that such a relationship has been achieved. If one thinks of audiences not just as consumers, but also as the cocreators of the musicians' personae, and as having a substantial investment in those personae and the functions they serve, it is easy to understand why audiences often respond very conservatively (in the literal sense) to musicians' desire to retool their personae.<sup>19</sup>

Having examined issues surrounding the possibility of change and evolution of musical personae, I turn now to the special case of musicians who enact multiple personae because they perform in multiple musical genres. One case in point is David Amram, who is a composer and conductor of symphonic music and also a jazz musician. Another is Perry Farrell, known by that name as the leader of hard rock groups Jane's Addiction and Porno for Pyros, and as DJ Peretz when he performs as a

19. Although I have restricted the scope of my discussion to the contemporary, secular, Western musical forms I feel competent to discuss, I would guess that the audience's investment in the musician's persona is even deeper in cases where musical performance serves ritual functions.

turntablist specializing in electronica.<sup>20</sup> Still another is Brian Setzer, a guitarist and singer who performs with multiple groups (including the Stray Cats, the Brian Setzer Orchestra, and Brian Setzer and the Nashvillians).

As is to be expected, these musicians present different fronts and personae in different genre frames. Images of Amram conducting show him in white bow tie and tails, while in pictures in which he is playing jazz (his instrument is the French horn), he appears in a black turtleneck. In his hard rock incarnation, Perry Farrell often wore flamboyant, spangled outfits and played aggressively to the audience; DJ Peretz, by contrast, dresses down in relatively modest T-shirts and casual slacks, and focuses his attention primarily on his equipment. When playing with the Stray Cats, a rockabilly revival group that originated in the early 1980s, Setzer wears black jeans and sleeveless black T-shirts that show off his tattooed arms. He carries on in the time-honored fashion of a rockabilly wild man, leaping through the air or crouching down on the floor, all while playing. With the Brian Setzer Orchestra, a group that plays big band swing, Setzer typically wears colorful, overstated retro suits that simultaneously evoke the zoot suit era and Las Vegas style. If I see any of these artists in any one of their personae, I might reasonably suppose that they had experienced that artist's sole presentation of self. But if I gain the knowledge that these are all musicians who assume different personae in different genre-inflected circumstances, my perception of them changes.

Although I hold that Amram's personae as symphonic composer/conductor and as jazz musician are largely separate entities that emerge in different kinds of performance situations—as are Farrell's personae as rock singer and turntablist and Setzer's personae as swing guitarist and rockabilly—it is clear that the informed audience's sense of who each of these men is as a musician (and a human being) derives in part from the knowledge that they assume multiple personae. At that level, their disparate personae are not completely separate: our understanding of what kind of classical musician Amram is cannot be separated from our knowledge that he is also a jazz musician, and vice versa. Musicians like Amram, Farrell, and Setzer possess what I shall call meta-personae, which constitute the umbrella over the individual personae that emerge under different performative circumstances.

These meta-personae are primarily virtual entities, by which I mean that it is hard to imagine them being performed directly, for several reasons. For one thing, each persona exists in relation to a different musical genre, culture, and audience. The audience for one persona may not share values and interests with the audience for another. A jazz fan might have no interest in Amram's classical music career, for instance. It is also the case that audiences emerging from different music cultures do not necessarily mix well. Farrell considers this issue as he reflects on his own desire to bring together the audiences for rock and electronica: "I do assume that straight rock people are going to see what this is about. 'What the heck is going on here? You know they're not going to mosh. I don't think I dress like them. I hope they don't think I am a loser.' Then they start to get uptight" (in Chartattack 2001).<sup>21</sup>

The anonymous author of the article in which Farrell is quoted notes, "When he shows up to clubs to drop wax, he's often swarmed by hordes of Jane's Addiction fans hoping to catch a glimpse of their teenage hero. The electronica freaks aren't familiar with his past and are only there to dance" (Chartattack 2001). Whereas it is clear that Farrell can maintain different personae for different audiences, it would seem impossible for him to inhabit simultaneously the two different personae being called up by these different audiences. This is a general problem: How exactly would Amram perform simultaneously as a classical musician and a jazz musician? Although Farrell's or

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20. Both of these personae are detached from the "real" person who embodies them, whose birth name is Perry Bernstein.

21. A possible scenario is one in which a musician participates in two different musical cultures that are so antithetical to one another that the knowledge that she works in one context would be discrediting in the other. As a purely hypothetical example, consider the plight of a musician who plays Jewish music at weddings and bar mitzvahs on the weekends and neo-Nazi hardcore at clubs during the week. In such a case, the musician would be obligated to maintain strict audience segregation (Goffman 1959:49) and make sure that neither audience ever became aware of the persona intended for the other one.

Amram's meta-persona may exist conceptually for audiences who appreciate the diversity of their interests, and whose perception of their performances is informed by an awareness of the meta-persona, the meta-persona itself cannot actually be presented in performance. In fact, the informed audience has to suppress aspects of its knowledge of the performer in order to achieve a successful working consensus. Even though Amram is both a classical musician and a jazz musician, and my understanding of him as a musician is enhanced by my knowledge of both aspects of his work, it would not be appropriate for me to attend one of his performances as a symphony conductor and applaud after a brilliantly conducted movement, as one would after a virtuosic jazz riff.

One finds that even musicians such as Farrell and Amram, who express serious interest in bringing together disparate musical forms and their corresponding audiences, actually engage in forms of bracketing designed to keep their personae discrete. One form of bracketing is achieved through setting: whereas Farrell and Jane's Addiction play at rock venues, DJ Peretz spins records at electronica and house music clubs. Information design can also serve as bracketing. There is a section on Setzer's website (<http://briansetzer.com>) devoted to performance photographs. These are organized by group: the images of the Stray Cats are on one page, those of the Brian Setzer Orchestra on another, and so on. Because the careers of almost all of the groups with which Setzer has been associated overlap, one would see him moving among personae if the pictures had been organized chronologically. Organization by group identity, however, brackets off each persona from the others and allows it to exist in isolation.

In 1971, Amram issued a recording entitled *No More Walls*, a two-disc LP set. The first disc features his symphonic compositions, which he conducted. The second disc contains pieces he wrote in jazz, Brazilian, folk, and what would now be called world music idioms, on which he performs as an instrumentalist. The stated intention of the recording was to allow Amram a virtual space in which to perform his meta-persona as a restless spirit whose diverse musical tastes and eagerness to experiment have led him to master a number of very different musical idioms, a space he would be unlikely to encounter in his usual live performance contexts. The album is a compelling portrait of a performer with multiple musical personae, but it is noteworthy that the orchestral pieces and the other material were segregated onto separate discs rather than intermingled, physically marking the main line of division between Amram's personae. When the album was rereleased on CD, only the material from the second (nonsymphonic) disc was included, thus further materializing the bracketing of musical personae implicit in the organization of the original LP. (The CD reissue is on Flying Fish Records, a Chicago label devoted primarily to blues, for which an album of symphonic music would be an anomaly—this constitutes yet another form of bracketing.)

In sum, musical personae are so closely associated with particular frames and audiences that even musicians who perform multiple personae with an eye toward challenging cultural distinctions are constrained to keep their personae separate.

I have argued here that to think of music as performance is to foreground performers and their concrete relationships to audiences, rather than the question of the relationship between musical works and performance. Unlike actors, opera singers, or even ballet dancers, musicians normally do not portray overtly fictional characters in their performances. It therefore seems reasonable to analyze musical performance as a species of performance of identity. Although musicians usually initiate musical identities by presenting specific fronts, these identities are not simply created by musicians and consumed by audiences. Rather, such identities are social in a number of crucial ways. Although a musician's persona is expected to be more or less continuous from performance to performance, it is also produced at any given performance through the negotiation of a working consensus with the audience. The audience is thus the cocreator of the persona and has an investment in it that extends beyond mere consumption.

The production of musical identities takes place within social frames that provide musicians and audiences alike with sets of conventions and expectations that govern, but do not determine, their definitions of the situation and corresponding behavior. I have suggested that each musical genre

constitutes a social frame that carries its own particular set of conventions. Both musicians and audiences draw on these conventions in their presentations of fronts, interactions, and so on. Seen this way, the object of musical performance is the successful presentation of an identity, a musical persona, in a defined social context, rather than the execution of a text. Musical works, then, are part of the expressive equipment musicians employ in the production of personae. As much as setting, appearance, and manner, the music performed and the style of performance must cohere with the identity claim the musician stakes.

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