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# **THE CLASSIFICATION OF MUSIC: A SURVEY STUDY**

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## **1. Purpose**

The terminology used in any discipline should serve as a means of expressing concepts and theories in a clear, coherent fashion. However, when the set of connotations and ambiguities surrounding a particular term is allowed to settle unnoticed into the background, unintentional confusion almost inevitably arises. For musical terminology, two tendencies may be identified. On the one hand, the use of a particular term passively reflects prevailing attitudes and values. On the other hand, a term may be used in such a way that it functions actively in an adverse manner, by perpetuating outdated concepts and restricting the range and kind of ideas expressed. This second tendency is particularly important because it is rarely perceived on a conscious level.

These concerns grew out of discussion in a seminar on musical terminology at the University of Toronto in the academic year 1976-77. In the course of our investigation of the common classification system of music with "classical" and "popular" at opposite poles, we discovered that our historical investigations were hampered by the lack of any clear understanding of how these terms are currently used and understood. This study resulted from our attempt to discover how this informal system of classification functions among undergraduate students studying music.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. The Questionnaire**

To this end, we devised a questionnaire which, it was hoped, would reflect the various background connotations and

ambiguities surrounding the terms chosen for study. In order to limit the scope of the investigation, four terms were chosen for the questionnaire: classical, popular, folk, and modern. For each term, six kinds of questions were asked: (1) respondents were asked to pick words from a list which seemed to them opposite in meaning to the terms studied, and (2) words applicable to the concept; (3) names of composers, performers, and compositions were offered for choice as examples of one classification or another, and (4) brief characterizations were likewise offered for choice. In order to allow for, and, indeed, encourage, the widest possible range of interpretation, respondents were invited to check as many of the items offered for choice as they felt were appropriate.<sup>2</sup> (5) Two questions attempted to determine the respondent's self-assessed level of knowledge of classical music, and to compare this with the knowledge of the "average person," and (6) two final questions asked respondents to rank the four kinds of music in order of their importance for "contemporary cultural life" and "to you personally." Responses to these questions help to put the data obtained into perspective by indirectly indicating individual biases, and by identifying the self-assessed place of the respondents in the socio-cultural hierarchy. The questionnaire is reproduced below:

Please do not identify yourself on this questionnaire. This is not a test of your knowledge, but an investigation of the current understanding of a few terms as applied to music.

1. Which of the following words are opposite in meaning to the word "classical"? (Check as many as apply)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> modern	<input type="checkbox"/> eccentric
<input type="checkbox"/> innovative	<input type="checkbox"/> entertaining
<input type="checkbox"/> romantic	<input type="checkbox"/> baroque
  
2. Which of the following adjectives are applicable to the concept of classical music? (Check as many as apply)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> intellectual	<input type="checkbox"/> enduring
<input type="checkbox"/> accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertaining
<input type="checkbox"/> inaccessible	<input type="checkbox"/> elite
  
3. Which of the following are "classical"? (Check as many as apply)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Machaut	<input type="checkbox"/> Healey Willan
<input type="checkbox"/> Palestrina	<input type="checkbox"/> Chaikovsky
<input type="checkbox"/> Boston Pops	<input type="checkbox"/> Chopin



10. Which of the following describe the meaning of the word "popular"? (Check as many as apply)
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A musical style   | <input type="checkbox"/> A contemporary phenomenon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A social standing | <input type="checkbox"/> A value judgement         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An ideal standard |  |
11. Which of the following words are opposite in meaning to the word "folk"? (Check as many as apply)
- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> serious       | <input type="checkbox"/> conservative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> vulgar        | <input type="checkbox"/> popular      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sophisticated | <input type="checkbox"/> elite        |
12. Which of the following words are applicable to the concept of folk music? (Check as many as apply)
- |                                       |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ethnic       | <input type="checkbox"/> conservative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accessible   | <input type="checkbox"/> cheap        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inaccessible | <input type="checkbox"/> traditional  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> relevant     | <input type="checkbox"/> familiar     |
13. Which of the following would you classify as "folk"? (Check as many as apply)
- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gordon Lightfoot | <input type="checkbox"/> The Beatles  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bob Dylan        | <input type="checkbox"/> Joan Baez    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Porgy and Bess" | <input type="checkbox"/> blues        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bartók           | <input type="checkbox"/> Ravi Shankar |
14. Which of the following describe the meaning of the word "folk" in music? (Check as many as apply)
- |  |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A musical style           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An ethnic classification  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An established norm       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A contemporary phenomenon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A value judgement         |
15. Which of the following words are opposite in meaning to the word "modern"? (Check as many as apply)
- |                                    |                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ancient   | <input type="checkbox"/> conservative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> classical | <input type="checkbox"/> contemporary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> romantic  | <input type="checkbox"/> radical      |

16. Which of the following adjectives are applicable to the concept of modern music? (Check as many as apply)
- |                                       |                                    |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> progressive  | <input type="checkbox"/> classical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accessible   | <input type="checkbox"/> popular   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inaccessible | <input type="checkbox"/> radical   |
17. Which of the following would you classify as "modern"? (Check as many as apply)
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stockhausen               | <input type="checkbox"/> Healy Willan   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bob Dylan                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Wagner         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Jesus Christ, Superstar" | <input type="checkbox"/> Gershwin       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bartók                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Oscar Peterson |
18. Which of the following describe the meaning of the word "modern" in music? (Check as many as apply)
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A musical style           | <input type="checkbox"/> An aesthetic attitude     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An historical time period | <input type="checkbox"/> A contemporary phenomenon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An ideal standard         | <input type="checkbox"/> A value judgement         |
19. Rank the four kinds of music in order of their importance for contemporary cultural life. (1 = most important)
- |                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> classical | <input type="checkbox"/> modern  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> folk      | <input type="checkbox"/> popular |
20. Rank the four kinds of music in order of their value to you personally. (1 = most valuable)
- |                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> classical | <input type="checkbox"/> modern  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> folk      | <input type="checkbox"/> popular |

Figure I

The first two question types ("opposite," nos. 1, 7, 11, 15; "applicable," nos. 2, 8, 12, 16) would appear to be redundant, as they draw on a common pool of adjectives, and elicit basically the same kind of information. However, by placing the "opposite" questions first, respondents were perhaps induced to select answers more spontaneously than if more direct ("applicable") questions were given precedence. Furthermore, inconsistencies which can occur provide grounds for considering particular responses invalid, especially in cases where the same word appears under each question type for a given term. For

example, “entertaining” appears in questions 1 & 2, “serious” in 7 & 8, and “conservative” in 11 & 12.

### 3. Composition of the Sample Group

The group of respondents to our questionnaire (the “sample”) consisted of 261 undergraduate students at the University of Toronto. These students ranged in age and musical experience from first year general Arts students with no previous musical training to fourth year students preparing to enter graduate study in musicology.<sup>3</sup> In the statistical tables which follow, they are divided into three large groups as follows:

- I. Arts and Science Students
  - A. MUS 100 (50 questionnaires). This is an introductory course in Western music history and literature for non-music students.
  - B. MUS 200 (17 questionnaires). Parallel to the above, but covering non-Western music.
- II. Faculty of Music, First and Second years
  - A. HMU 120 (82 questionnaires). Introduction to music history for music majors, covering all historical periods. Compulsory for Faculty of Music students.
  - B. HMU 220 (53 questionnaires). Continuation of the above; a more detailed survey from Haydn to the present.
- III. Faculty of Music, Third and Fourth years
  - A. HMU 454 — “Beethoven” (29 questionnaires). An elective course for upper level undergraduates, predominantly History and Literature majors.
  - B. HMU 354 — “Concepts of Popular Music” (13 questionnaires). As above, covering popular music of all periods.
  - C. HMU 357 — “Impressionism and Expressionism” (17 questionnaires). As above, covering early twentieth-century music in Germany and France.

The character of the various sub-groups has been set out in some detail because, contrary to expectations, the subject matter of the course in which the students were engaged did

have some influence on their responses. Except for students in HMU 120 and 220, all were in "elective" courses, so it is unclear whether their experience in the course influenced their answers, or whether their previous experience influenced them to take the course.

#### **4. Overall Quantitative Results**

The complete results of the surveys are set out below. Figures given represent the percentage of respondents choosing each individual item on the questionnaire, and sub-totals are shown for all Arts students (column 3), all first and second year Faculty of Music students (column 6), all third and fourth year Faculty of Music students (column 10), all Faculty of Music students (column 11), and all respondents (column 12). Additional data concerning the combination of rankings in questions 19 and 20 taken together within each questionnaire is particularly important. In the interests of simplicity we have avoided presenting all 576 ( $24 \times 24$ ) such possible combinations. Instead, the results for the pairs of terms ranked first in both questions are provided in Table 1a.

#### **5. Biases of the Sample Group (especially questions 4-5; 19-20)**

Some of the extreme deviations in Table I reveal differences among the groups based upon background, experience, and subject matter. Without examining the statistics in detail, several such instances may be noted: (1) In question 3, Ravi Shankar was chosen as an example of "classical" by 35% of MUS 200 students, and 31% of HMU 364 students, against an overall average of 12%. Awareness of Shankar and of his status as a classical musician was evidently more highly developed in those students taking subjects outside the main stream of Western "classical" music. (2) The same explanation may be offered for HMU 364's markedly different reaction to the adjective "serious" in relation to "popular." Only 15% chose it as opposite to "popular" (overall 41%), and 31% chose it as applicable (overall 15%). (3) In question 9, HMU 364 again proved to be the most clearly deviant group. Both "West-Side Story" and "Louis Armstrong" were chosen by 85% as representative of "popular" (42% and 43% respectively overall), and 69% chose "The Mikado" (overall 23%). Again, the different perspective of these students had evidently altered and broadened their

concept of “popular.” (4) HMU 364 picked “blues” as representative of “folk” in question 13 46% of the time, against an average overall of 23%. (5) In question 17, Karlheinz Stockhausen was identified as “modern” by 100% of HMU 357, 92% of HMU 364, and 89% of HMU 220. This compares to an overall response of 65%, and a 40% response among Arts and Science students. This suggests not so much a difference of opinion as a difference in knowledge and experience. The groups which chose Stockhausen less frequently may have done so because he was unknown to them. This is suggested most strongly by the varied response of HMU 120 and 220, as students in 220 had just finished studying twentieth-century music when they completed the questionnaire, whereas the HMU 120 group had not yet “covered” that repertory.

These differences between and among groups focus largely on their varied responses to “classical” and “non-classical” categories. Questions 4-5, 19-20 were aimed at discovering the group’s own estimate of their biases toward the four categories studied, and their assessment of the “average person’s” knowledge. The statistical tables tell only part of this story, as only percentages for individual categories are shown. The combinations chosen in questions 4-5 and in 19 and 20 are needed to complete the picture.

Combining the responses to questions 4 and 5, one finds that no individual considered that he or she was familiar with less “classical music” than the average person. Only 22% of the respondents considered their knowledge of “classical music” on a par with that of the average person. The largest group — 67% — ranked their knowledge one degree higher than that of the “average person.” That is, they chose one of the following combinations: 4. Almost none & 5. A little; or 4. A little & 5. A lot. The remaining 10% chose the most contrasting combination of “almost none” in question 4, and “a lot” in question 5.

	MUS 100	MUS 200	Total A & S	HMU 120	HMU 220	Total FM, 1-2	HMU 454	HMU 364	HMU 357	Total FM, 3-4	Total FM	Total
Question 1												
modern	70	47	43	59	63	60	52	38	47	47	56	58
innovative	20	6	16	26	30	27	3	8	12	7	21	20
romantic	30	35	31	34	53	41	55	31	41	46	43	40
eccentric	30	12	25	30	34	32	21	23	12	19	28	26
entertaining	6	12	7	5	13	8	7	8	6	7	8	8
baroque	24	53	31	32	43	36	48	38	18	37	37	35
Question 2												
intellectual	72	71	66	71	66	69	69	54	59	63	67	68
accessible	38	47	40	45	40	43	45	46	47	46	44	43
inaccessible	8	0	6	5	4	4	0	15	0	3	4	5
enduring	50	47	49	56	58	57	52	54	82	61	71	66
entertaining	40	35	39	39	49	43	55	38	47	49	45	43
elite	30	53	36	40	28	36	24	46	35	32	35	35
Question 3												
Machaut	23	18	18	21	9	16	10	23	35	20	18	18
Palestrina	14	41	21	24	13	20	14	23	47	25	22	21
Boston Pops	6	6	6	11	2	7	0	15	12	10	7	7
Bartók	22	41	27	26	8	18	14	31	35	24	20	22
Willan	4	12	6	23	6	16	3	31	18	14	15	13
Chaikovsky	38	59	43	39	21	32	17	31	24	22	24	29
Chopin	36	59	42	35	15	27	21	31	29	25	27	31
Shankar	6	35	13	10	8	9	7	31	29	19	12	12
Mozart	94	94	94	100	100	100	93	100	100	97	99	98
Question 4												
Almost none	34	47	37	39	28	35	24	15	24	22	36	36
A little	66	53	63	59	64	61	76	85	76	78	66	65
A lot	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
Question 5												
Almost none	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.4
A little	62	59	61	45	24	37	41	15	23	30	35	42
A lot	38	35	37	55	76	63	59	85	76	69	65	58
Question 6												
musical style	76	76	76	89	92	90	86	92	76	85	89	85
time period	70	53	66	77	81	79	76	77	65	73	77	74
aesthetic	40	47	42	43	49	45	59	62	65	61	50	47
standard	20	12	18	21	17	19	10	31	12	15	18	18
norm	10	12	10	21	17	19	10	23	18	15	18	16
value	4	29	10	15	8	12	7	31	47	24	15	14

	MUS 100	MUS 200	Total	A & S	HMU 120	HMU 220	Total	HMU 454	HMU 364	HMU 357	Total	Total	Total
							FM, 1-2				FM, 3-4	FM	
Question 7													
serious	50	29	45		39	60	47	24	15	29	24	40	41
accessible	14	0	10		5	9	7	10	15	12	12	8	9
inaccessible	40	65	46		49	42	46	41	54	59	49	47	47
elite	42	65	48		57	39	50	52	46	76	58	53	51
conservative	34	24	31		30	28	30	17	8	0	9	23	26
expensive	6	18	9		12	11	12	3	8	8	5	10	10
Question 8													
serious	12	18	13		18	9	15	21	31	6	19	16	15
common	80	59	75		72	62	68	69	62	71	68	68	70
relevant	28	53	34		44	36	41	24	77	35	39	40	39
cheap	34	12	28		24	28	26	14	15	6	12	24	25
entertaining	88	88	88		61	87	71	79	85	82	81	74	78
traditional	10	12	10		16	17	16	7	38	6	14	15	14
Question 9													
Petula Clark	74	76	75		68	72	70	83	85	88	85	74	74
Louis Armstrong	42	65	48		44	28	38	27	85	53	47	41	43
Boston Pops	54	65	57		70	43	59	52	77	65	61	60	59
West Side Story	46	65	51		49	34	43	31	85	65	53	46	47
B.T.O.	58	65	60		83	58	73	52	69	76	63	70	67
Joan Baez	54	76	60		62	55	59	59	77	59	63	60	60
"Mikado"	10	12	10		22	24	23	17	69	53	39	28	23
Mozart	2	6	3		13	9	12	14	38	24	22	15	12
Question 10													
musical style	52	41	49		44	45	44	48	46	29	42	44	45
social standing	26	47	31		40	38	39	17	31	24	22	34	33
ideal standard	2	6	3		10	2	7	3	0	6	3	6	5
contemporary	72	71	72		62	57	60	62	38	41	51	57	61
value	30	47	34		43	30	38	21	54	47	36	37	36
Question 11													
serious	14	23	16		26	15	21	14	15	6	12	19	18
vulgar	8	18	10		24	19	22	10	8	6	8	18	16
sophisticated	58	53	57		58	55	57	62	54	53	58	57	57
conservative	18	29	21		26	9	19	17	8	0	10	16	18
popular	16	6	13		7	4	6	7	8	0	5	6	8
elite	46	65	51		55	51	53	62	46	71	61	55	54
Question 12													
ethnic	80	88	82		79	87	82	29	77	100	81	82	82
accessible	50	82	58		61	51	57	62	69	71	66	60	59
inaccessible	0	0	0		2	2	2	3	0	0	2	2	2
relevant	46	47	46		34	42	37	45	54	47	47	40	42
conservative	12	6	10		11	19	14	10	23	18	15	14	13
cheap	4	12	6		7	8	7	7	8	0	5	7	6
traditional	94	53	84		78	79	78	59	92	88	75	77	79
familiar	72	47	66		65	70	67	76	54	71	69	67	67

	MUS 100	MUS 200	Total A & S	HMU 120	HMU 220	Total FM, 1-2	HMU 454	HMU 364	HMU 357	Total FM, 3-4	Total FM	Total
Question 13												
Lightfoot	64	71	66	88	81	85	83	46	53	66	79	76
Dylan	60	71	63	84	72	79	76	69	65	71	77	73
"Porgy & Bess"	18	12	16	8	11	10	21	31	41	28	15	16
Bartók	14	6	12	12	30	19	21	54	41	34	24	20
Beatles	12	6	10	6	4	5	0	8	0	2	4	6
Joan Baez	70	76	72	79	72	76	83	69	65	75	76	75
blues	28	35	30	13	13	13	31	46	35	36	20	23
Shankar	14	18	15	13	13	13	14	15	12	14	13	14
Question 14												
musical style	76	53	70	78	68	74	76	54	41	61	70	70
ethnic	62	71	64	57	68	61	65	77	76	71	64	64
established norm	10	35	16	18	19	18	17	8	18	15	17	17
contemporary	8	6	7	16	9	13	34	15	6	22	16	14
value	20	29	22	19	9	16	17	31	29	24	18	19
Question 15												
ancient	80	88	82	85	83	84	86	77	94	86	85	84
classical	72	53	67	59	51	56	69	31	35	59	57	59
romantic	40	24	37	43	45	44	59	23	12	37	42	40
conservative	36	24	33	33	42	36	24	15	12	19	31	31
contemporary	2	0	1	4	4	4	0	0	6	2	3	3
radical	8	0	6	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	.5	2
Question 16												
progressive	70	65	69	80	75	78	69	77	65	69	76	74
accessible	26	53	33	34	19	28	28	31	6	22	26	28
inaccessible	22	6	18	16	30	21	10	0	24	12	19	15
classical	5	12	4	21	8	15	0	23	18	10	14	11
popular	36	35	36	26	11	20	21	31	12	20	20	24
radical	56	29	49	56	74	63	52	54	24	44	57	55
Question 17												
Stockhausen	38	47	40	59	89	70	69	92	100	83	74	65
Dylan	32	41	49	34	25	30	24	62	59	42	34	38
J.C., Superstar	58	59	58	43	32	38	38	62	53	47	41	46
Bartók	32	35	33	55	43	50	45	46	41	44	48	48
Willan	32	24	30	40	28	35	24	46	24	29	33	33
Wagner	2	0	1	12	13	13	3	15	18	10	12	9
Gershwin	40	35	39	43	23	35	34	69	29	41	37	37
Peterson	38	47	40	44	21	35	38	54	47	41	37	37
Question 18												
musical style	64	35	57	55	64	58	52	38	29	42	53	54
period	52	47	51	50	55	52	59	54	41	53	48	49
ideal	6	0	4	9	8	8	10	8	6	8	8	7
aesthetic	30	29	30	44	43	44	31	31	47	36	41	38
contemporary	34	53	39	50	49	50	45	46	35	42	47	45
value	18	18	18	24	19	22	10	23	41	22	22	21

		MUS 100	MUS 200	Total A & S	HMU 120	HMU 220	Total FM, 1-2	HMU 454	HMU 364	HMU 357	Total FM, 3-4	Total FM	Total	
Question 19	classical	1	22	0	16	22	23	22	31	15	24	25	23	21
		2	12	29	16	24	17	21	24	15	24	22	22	20
		3	24	18	22	37	32	35	31	38	29	32	34	31
		4	22	35	25	13	15	14	10	15	0	9	12	16
	folk	1	10	12	10	7	17	11	10	23	6	12	11	11
		2	26	12	22	39	41	40	38	23	29	32	38	34
		3	36	53	40	32	19	27	41	23	29	34	29	32
		4	8	6	7	20	9	16	7	15	12	10	14	12
	modern	1	16	12	15	16	11	14	10	8	6	8	12	13
		2	24	35	27	21	9	16	14	31	24	20	18	20
		3	14	6	12	17	19	18	10	8	6	8	15	14
		4	26	29	27	43	47	44	62	38	41	51	46	41
	popular	1	32	59	39	48	40	44	41	38	41	41	43	42
		2	18	6	15	13	19	16	21	15	0	14	15	15
		3	6	6	6	11	11	11	17	15	12	15	12	11
		4	24	12	21	21	17	19	17	15	24	19	19	20
Question 20	classical	1	48	35	45	67	72	69	83	38	65	68	69	62
		2	22	35	25	22	9	17	10	15	0	8	14	17
		3	14	12	13	5	6	5	3	8	6	5	5	7
		4	4	6	4	1	0	1	0	8	0	2	1	2
	folk	1	14	18	15	1	2	1	7	8	0	5	3	6
		2	28	29	28	17	34	24	52	25	29	37	28	28
		3	26	35	28	41	41	41	17	23	29	22	36	34
		4	20	6	16	34	9	24	21	23	12	19	23	21
	modern	1	18	24	19	15	8	12	0	0	6	2	9	11
		2	14	12	13	35	28	33	17	15	24	19	28	25
		3	26	24	25	20	17	18	28	15	24	24	20	21
		4	30	29	30	20	34	25	52	38	18	39	29	29
	popular	1	10	18	12	12	6	10	10	23	0	10	10	10
		2	24	6	19	16	15	16	14	23	18	17	16	17
		3	20	24	21	22	23	22	48	23	12	32	25	24
		4	34	41	36	39	43	41	24	0	41	24	36	36

Table I

*Statistical Table for all Questions  
(given in percentages)*

The overall contrast between the survey group and the "average person" is probably even greater than these percentages show, because of the tendency in surveys to select a middle answer from a list of graduated possibilities, regardless of the question.<sup>4</sup>

First choice in Question 19

		First choice in Question 20			
		classical	folk	modern	popular
First choice in Question 19	classical	20	2	0	2
	folk	8	2	2	1
	modern	7	1	6	.4
	popular	35	1	4	9

Table Ia

Combination within each questionnaire of first choices in Questions 19 and 20 given in percentages (100% = 230 questionnaires)

		Question 5		
		Almost none	A little	A lot
Question 4	Almost none	.4	22	10
	A little	0	21	45
	A lot	0	0	1

Table II

Combination of responses to Questions 4 & 5 given in percentages (100% = 258 questionnaires; total = 99% because of rounding-off procedures)

A group bias toward "classical music," regardless of the particular meanings selected earlier by the individual respondent, is revealed by the combination answers to questions 19 and 20. Only 6% of the respondents ranked "classical music" lower in value to them personally (question 20) than to "contemporary cultural life" (question 19); 33% ranked it as equal in both questions; the majority — 62% — ranked it higher in question 20.

		Ranking in Question 20			
		1	2	3	4
Ranking in Question 19	1	20	3	.4	0
	2	14	8	1	.4
	3	27	5	4	1
	4	9	4	3	1

Table III

Combinations of ranking of "classical music" in Questions 19 & 20 given in percentages (100% = 227 questionnaires; total = 101% because of rounding-off procedures)

The contrast between the survey group and the generality may also be shown by examining the ranking in question 20 of the first choice in question 19. The most significant statistic would seem to be that 32% ranked “popular music” first in question 19, but third or fourth in question 20. The other larger group is made up of the 20% who ranked “classical music” first in both questions.<sup>5</sup>

Ranked first Question 19		1	2	3	4
	classical	20	3	4	0
	folk	2	5	4	1
	modern	6	5	3	1
	popular	9	9	16	16

Table IV

*Ranking in Question 20 of first choice in Question 19 given in percentages (100% = 225 questionnaires)*

The ranking of “classical music” in question 20 is likewise related to the individual’s assessment of his/her knowledge of “classical music” in questions 4-5. This is shown by comparing the composition of the sub-group which ranked “classical music” first in question 20, with the sub-group ranking it second to fourth. The percentage of respondents who considered their familiarity as only roughly equal to that of the “average person” is significantly higher in the latter sub-group.

		Questions 4-5		
Ranking in Question 20		more	equal	equal in sub-group 1
		1	58	12
2		12	7	equal in sub-group 2
3		6	3	$33 (= \frac{10.4}{30.4} \times 100)$
4		2	.4	

Table V

*Ranking of “classical” in Question 20 and self-assessed knowledge in Questions 4-5 given in percentages (100% = 237 questionnaires)*

Although the foregoing argues for a strong commitment by the whole group surveyed toward "classical music," differences appear again if we regard the sample as made up of two or three separate groups. As shown in Table VI, there appears to be a direct relationship between the amount of training in music and the commitment to "classical music."

Group	Percentage
MUS 100	42
MUS 200	53
Sub-total	47.5
HMU 120	29
HMU 220	28
Sub-total	29
HMU 454	14
HMU 364	30
HMU 357	12
Sub-total	19

Table VI

*Percentage of respondents ranking "classical music" 2nd, 3rd & 4th in Question 20  
(100% = 261 questionnaires)*

## 6. Analysis of the Results

The questionnaire was formulated in such a way that distinctions between historical-stylistic, evaluative, and socio-economic interpretations of the four main terms under consideration could be analyzed. Each of the nine descriptive phrases offered in question-type 6 (nos. 6, 10, 14, 18) can be classified into one of these three categories, and many of the twenty-four adjectives given in question-type 1 (nos. 1, 7, 11, 15) and question-type 2 (nos. 2, 8, 12, 16) either duplicate these phrases or offer near-synonyms. Because many of these adjectives are open to a variety of interpretations, they are not easily confined to one category. While the classification shown in Figure 2 is not a rigid one, it will be useful in understanding the loose framework under which the study was carried out, and for evaluating the statistical results.

## I. Historical-Stylistic

"a contemporary  
phenomenon"  
"a historical time  
period"  
"a musical style"

## One category only

ancient  
baroque  
romantic

## More than one category

conservative  
innovative  
radical  
traditional

## II. Evaluative

"an aesthetic  
attitude"  
"an established  
norm"  
"an ideal standard"  
"a value judgement"

accessible  
eccentric  
enduring  
entertaining  
inaccessible  
intellectual  
progressive  
serious

cheap  
conservative  
common  
elite  
expensive  
innovative  
radical  
relevant  
sophisticated  
traditional  
vulgar

## III. Socio-Economic

"an ethnic  
classification"  
"a social standing"

ethnic  
familiar

cheap  
common  
elite  
expensive  
radical  
relevant  
sophisticated  
vulgar

Figure 2

*Descriptive phrases and adjectives used in the Questionnaire<sup>6</sup>*

To encourage spontaneous replies, no attempt was made to be particularly systematic in the choice of these words and phrases. Naturally the alternatives offered reflect the biases and expectations of the investigators, but at the same time allow the respondents a wide variety of possible interpretations.

Before proceeding to a consideration of the four terms separately, it is important to emphasize the multiplicity of meanings elicited for each by the survey. In most cases respondents selected more than one answer for each question. Particularly noteworthy is the small number of single responses to question-type 6.

Question 6 — "Classical"	Single responses (%)	
musical style	8	
time period	5	
aesthetic	2	
standard	1	
established norm	0	
value judgement	.4	Subtotal 16
Question 10 — "Popular"		
musical style	8	
social standing	5	
ideal standard	.4	
contemporary	17	
value judgement	8	Subtotal 38
Question 14 — "Folk"		
musical style	20	
ethnic classification	15	
established norm	2	
contemporary	.4	
value judgement	1	Subtotal 38
Question 18 — "Modern"		
musical style	2	
time period	6	
ideal standard	.4	
aesthetic	3	
contemporary	8	
value judgement	2	Subtotal 21

Table VII

Single responses to Questions 6, 10, 14, and 18 given in percentages  
(100% = 261 questionnaires)

**“CLASSICAL”** (*Questions 1-3; 6*)

Most responses selected for the term “classical” may be organized into two large groups. “Historical-stylistic” (category I) characterizations are chosen most frequently. Thus the majority described “classical” as a “musical style” (85%; single responses 8%) and/or “a historical time period” (74%; single responses 5%), and considered it opposite in meaning to “romantic” (40%) and “baroque” (35%). The second major group of responses chosen was “evaluative” (category II). This is most clearly represented in responses to question 2, where “intellectual” (68%), “enduring” (66%), “accessible” (43%), and “entertaining” (43%) were most often selected as “applicable” adjectives. Furthermore, although it ranked third in question 6, “an aesthetic attitude” was nevertheless chosen by a significant proportion of the sample group (47%, but only 2% single responses).

These results support the hypothesis that two different meanings of “classical” are at work:

- (a) a narrow historical style period (category I);
- (b) a broad classification of “serious art-music” based primarily on aesthetic (evaluative) criteria (category II).

The first meaning corresponds to the textbook definition of “classical music” as a term for the music of Western Europe composed between *ca.*1760 to *ca.*1820, and exemplified by the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Given the general bias of the sample group, one would expect this meaning to dominate the results. That this in fact occurs is demonstrated by the responses to question 3, where “Mozart” was not only chosen by almost all respondents (98%), but was also unrivalled by any of the alternatives offered.

The second meaning emerges as a less well-defined concept. Despite the undeniable emphasis on evaluative criteria shown by the replies to question 2, there was a noticeable reluctance to admit “an aesthetic attitude” as an appropriate description in question 6.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the significant but disparate choices of composers other than “Mozart” in question 3 discloses a general lack of agreement about the extents and limits of this wider meaning.

The main terminological problem which arises here is the existence of what may suitably be called a “continually oscillating term.” In other words, the connotation of one of the above meanings would seem to impinge on the other, regardless of the user’s conscious intention.

Thus, on the one hand, the wider meaning of the term "classical music" is limited by the historical-stylistic criteria of the narrower meaning. Responses to question 3 clearly reveal this influence. Interestingly, the ranking of composers after "Mozart" (i.e., Chopin, Chaikovsky, Bartók, Palestrina, Machaut, Willan, Shankar) is a sequence showing progressively greater distance from Mozart, both chronologically and stylistically. On the other hand, attempts by specialists notwithstanding, the use of the term in its narrower meaning continues to carry with it the connotation of "high aesthetic worth." This demonstrates that the best-formulated "textbook" definitions do not always succeed in driving out unwanted connotations.

**"POPULAR"** (Questions 7-10)

The majority of the responses chosen were "evaluative" (category II) or "socio-economic" (category III) descriptions. "Popular music" was felt to be "entertaining" (78%), "common" (70%) and "relevant" (39%), and was considered opposite in meaning to "elite" (51%), "inaccessible" (47%) and "serious" (41%). The characterizations "a value judgement" (36%; single responses 8%) and "a social standing" (33%; single responses 5%) were chosen frequently in question 10, although they ranked third and fourth respectively. The two most frequently chosen responses to question 10 were "a contemporary phenomenon" (61%; single responses a remarkable 17%) and "a musical style" (45%; single responses 8%), both of which are "historical-stylistic" characterizations (category I).

The interpretation of "popular music" which emerges from this is: "a contemporary style of music with mass entertainment as its primary function (categories I, II, and III)." This neatly combines elements from all of our main categories, but problems emerge when the results are examined more carefully. Especially troublesome is the fact that although "a musical style" was frequently chosen as an apt description in question 10, apparently divergent styles are represented by the preferred choices in question 9 (Clark, 74%; B.T.O., 67%; Baez, 60%; Boston Pops, 59%; West-Side Story, 47%; Armstrong, 43%). This anomaly can be resolved by making one of the following assumptions:<sup>8</sup>

- (a) "musical style" is not a well formulated or generally understood concept;
- (b) respondents found more stylistic similarity among the items singled out in question 9 than disparity;

(c) musical style *per se* was not an important criterion for responses chosen.

The third assumption suggests that, in addition to the more particular interpretation of "popular music" given above, two more general meanings were apparently influential:

- (1) any music whose chief function is entertainment (categories II and III);
- (2) any music "of the people" (category III).

Neither of these very general meanings is limited to a particular musical style, and thus their application could account for the range of responses to question 9. If, on the other hand, either of assumptions (a) or (b) is true, it would seem that style and other criteria are so inextricably bound up together that they cannot be separated. While "classical music" oscillates between the more closely related categories I and II, "popular music" partakes of all three without belonging clearly to any.

#### **"FOLK"** (Questions 11-14)

Among the responses most frequently selected, one can distinguish between "stylistic" (category I) descriptions as opposed to "socio-economic" (category III) and "evaluative" (category II) ones. On the one hand, most respondents chose "a musical style" (70%; single responses, a high 20%) as the most suitable characterization, and furthermore considered it to be "traditional" (79%).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, it was frequently described as "an ethnic classification" (64%; single responses, a significant 15%). It was considered to be "ethnic" (82%), "familiar" (67%), "accessible" (59%) and "relevant" (42%), and was judged to be opposite in meaning to "sophisticated" (57%) and "elite" (54%).

These results suggest that two quite different meanings of "folk music" are used by the respondents:

- (1) any "ethnic" music (category III);
- (2) a particular commercial stylization of one kind of traditional Anglo-American music (categories I and II).

In a literal sense, the second meaning is a particular subset of the first. However, since one is unlikely to view one's own culture as "ethnic," the two meanings can be considered mutually exclusive in the context of this study. Furthermore, the "musical style" identified in (2) becomes in a sense divorced from the ethnic group which originated it, and therefore ceases to be "folk music" in the sense of (1).

An analysis of the responses indicates that, although most of the survey group accorded considerable weight to the first interpretation of "folk music," this was often little more than an acknowledgement of the existence of this general meaning. The dominance of the second, more specific meaning is clearly shown in question 13, where it was obviously used as the determining factor in selecting exemplary performers, composers, and music. "Lightfoot" (76%), "Baez" (75%), and Dylan (73%) were chosen far more often than the other alternatives. By contrast, examples of ethnic music in the general sense ("Bartók," "Shankar"), including diverse manifestations of the Afro-American tradition ("blues," "Porgy and Bess") were relatively ignored.

Again, a terminological problem arises from the simultaneous use of two distinct meanings for a single term. Although most respondents were able to restrict themselves to one meaning in question 13, the two meanings were confused in all of the other questions. It is interesting that, in a subtle way, stylistic elements of the second meaning can become associated with the general socio-economic element of the first meaning. This may be the origin of the common misconception that "ethnic music" in general is never "sophisticated" or highly artistic ("elite").

#### **"MODERN"** (*Questions 15-18*)

Almost all of the favored responses in this section of the survey were "historical-stylistic" ones (category I). "Modern music" was most often described as "a musical style" (54%; single responses 2%), "a historical time period" (45%; single responses 8%). In addition, it was considered to be opposite in meaning to "ancient" (84%) and "romantic" (40%). The main evaluative choices (category II) were the adjectives "progressive" (74%) and "radical" (55%).

Again, the overall results support the hypothesis that respondents were using two quite different and, in this case, mutually exclusive meanings of the term "modern music":

- (1) a contemporary "art music" style (category I);
- (2) the style of a more "popular" commercial kind of contemporary music (category II).

This hypothesis would allow us to explain some apparent anomalies in the responses. The first meaning would explain the frequent selection of "Stockhausen" (65%) and "Bartók"

(48%) in question 17; the second would account for the high ranking of “Jesus Christ, Superstar” (46%) in the same question. The existence of these disparate meanings would also explain the contradictory answers in question 16, where “modern” was seen as both “accessible” (28%) and “inaccessible” (15%).<sup>10</sup> In one questionnaire, an explicit example of the second meaning was given by a respondent from HMU 120 who bracketed “modern” and “popular” in question 20 with the added remark “interchangeable.”

The equation of the term “modern music” with some kind of popular, commercial type may be evidence of the alienation felt by many respondents toward contemporary “art-music.” In addition, we note that “classical” is chosen as an appropriate opposite for “modern” by 59%, just as “modern” was chosen by 58% as the opposite of “classical” in question 1. Although this is most obviously a comparison of historical periods, the “evaluative” meaning of “classical” is probably influential, whether intentionally or not. The small percentage of those who chose “classical” as applicable on question 16 (11%) suggests that the two are incompatible regardless of which meanings are intended.

The results of this survey highlight the problematic nature of our terminology for classifying music. It is not simply the fact that some terms have several different meanings. The property of polysemy is characteristic of many words, and is not in itself sufficient to render the use of a given term troublesome, provided the context makes the intention clear. Nor is the difficulty limited to the fact that the boundaries (“terminals”) of a particular meaning may be unclear. On the contrary, one may reasonably concede that this property is shared by most concepts in everyday language.<sup>11</sup>

Instead, this study has demonstrated how several types of terminological problems produce adverse effects in the specialized field of music. Each of the four terms studied is frequently overburdened with the task of representing, explicitly or implicitly, different kinds of classifications based on elements of historical origin, musical style, evaluative judgment, aesthetic value, function, and social standing. The resulting terminological problems cause and reinforce many widely held misconceptions about various kinds of music. The authors can offer no remedy, but these pages should serve to alert both

professional and amateur users of this classification system of its many pitfalls.

This study has made a case for one kind of interpretation of the data presented in the tables. It must be emphasized in closing that other kinds of interpretations could be derived from the same data. A different set of categories (see Figure 2, I-III), for instance, might produce a different result (e.g., positive vs. negative adjectives and descriptive phrases; extrinsic vs. intrinsic qualities, etc.). Also, the various sub-groups which made up the sample could have been compared in more detail. What could be learned, for instance, from a detailed comparison of the most advanced group of students (HMU 454, HMU 354, HMU 357) with the least advanced (MUS 100)? How deep do the differences between first year (HMU 120) and second year students (HMU 220) go? What about the group studying non-Western, or popular music (MUS 200, HMU 354), compared to the larger group? It has not been possible to pursue all of these subjects in this brief report, but it is hoped that the main objectives of the survey have been fairly and fully set forth.

## NOTES

1. We wish to emphasize that this informal scheme is only the most recent manifestation of the West's preoccupation with the classification of music, from the classic Boethian system through the various divisions proposed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers based on stylistic, functional, and "class" criteria.

2. In spite of this, one respondent found the questionnaire "extremely poorly thought out . . . ; these terms can mean many things to many people . . . I know I certainly use the terms in many various ways — not only one way as our answers [ sic ] to this survey would suggest."

3. One of the latter group studied our questionnaire with great care for perhaps ten minutes before declaring himself unable to answer it. The higher degree of sophistication which he brought to the task made him unable to respond with the desired spontaneity.

4. This is known as the "ordinal or position bias." See Warwick and Lininger 1975:147.

5. The tendency of all such surveys to yield a high degree of similarity between the respondent and his/her conception of social norms may be at work in this case. This kind of response is called "acquiescence" or "social desirability" in Warwick and Lininger, 1975:145-46.

6. The adjectives "classical," "popular," and "modern" have been omitted.

7. Analysis of the "aesthetic" aspect is further complicated by the fact that meaning (1) is a subset of meaning (2).

8. The possibility that the respondents simply disagreed among themselves is ruled out by the high percentage of responses in all questionnaires to six of the alternatives offered in question 9.

9. "Traditional" was the only adjective from category I offered for choice in questions 11 and 12. The same is true in the parallel questions under "popular."

10. While these figures do not seem close enough, or high enough, to be significant, the comparable figures for this pairing under "classical" (question 2) were 43% - 5%; "popular" (question 7) 9% - 47%; and "folk" (question 12) 59% - 2%. The question of accessibility versus inaccessibility was resolved much more easily and decisively in the case of the first three terms studied.

11. See Lakoff 1975:221-71.

"Logicians have . . . engaged in the convenient fiction that sentences of natural languages . . . are either true or false . . . or have a third value often interpreted as 'nonsense'. . . Yet students of language . . . have long been attuned to the fact that natural language concepts have vague boundaries . . . and that, consequently, natural language sentences will very often be neither true, nor false, nor nonsensical, but rather true to a certain extent and false to a certain extent . . ."  
(221)

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