Noise Uprising

The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution

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Introduction

In the early twenty-first century, the world of music is in constant crisis and flux, but its overall lineaments are relatively clear and appear natural. The internet has emerged as a global jukebox of digital sound files that are uploaded, downloaded, streamed and shared, accumulated as collections, shuffled into playlists, and sampled as raw materials for new mixes. The vehicles of circulation may change—iTunes, Spotify, and YouTube loom large as I complete this book—but it seems self-evident that the wealth of music in a world where capitalist modes of production prevail appears as "an immense accumulation of commodities." These sound recordings exist in an intricate economy of genres, styles, and brands, linked to imagined communities of race and nation, and are adopted by consumers to manage their personal and collective soundscape—the ambience or atmosphere of daily life—whether through the privacy of earbuds and headphones or the publicity of DJs with sound systems.

At the same time, writing about music takes place on two radically different scales: grand generalizations about the meaning of music in the evolution of the species (its relation to language, to the order and disorders of the brain, to the sounds and songs of other species); and "rough guides" to the musical marketplace, micro-histories of specific genres and artists. The traditional sense that music is a fine art lives on in the residual culture of "classical music," which has lost much of its former glory and occupies a small market niche, while retaining some degree of cultural capital. And the older sense that music-making is a political act—which led Plato to assert that "any alteration in the

modes of music is always followed by alteration in the most fundamental laws of the state"[1]—has also receded to the fringes of the musical marketplace, where the germ of an alternative culture lies in songs of protest affiliated with social movements. It is not that the contemporary world of music lacks an audiopolitics, but rather that it is coded as the politics of the market: who owns and controls the sound files. The politics of intellectual property and piracy have eclipsed the politics of musical form or content.

This musical economy that incorporates arcane sounds and sublime frequencies from every corner of the planet seems new, the product of an era of globalization—the sound equivalent of the World Wide Web itself—but when it is given a history and a context, it usually appears to radiate out from the United States, from the post–World War II explosion of "American" musics from rock to rap. Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and Bob Dylan are the Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven of a second classical period, and the furious late twentieth-century battles over the hip-hop of Public Enemy and N.W.A. echo the late nineteenth-century furor over the operatic spectacles of Richard Wagner.

In this book, I want to offer an alternative account of the origins of our musical world: not in the rock and pop of the American century, but in a world musical revolution that took place almost a century ago. In a few short years between the introduction of electrical recording in 1925 and the onset of the worldwide depression in the 1930s, a noise uprising occurred in a series of relatively unnoticed recording sessions. In port cities from Havana to Honolulu, Cairo to Jakarta, New Orleans to Rio de Janeiro, commercial recording companies brought hundreds of unknown musicians into makeshift studios to record local musics. Thousands of inexpensive discs made from shellac (a resin secreted by the female lac bug, a colonial product harvested in the forests of South Asia) were released, disseminating musical idioms which have since reverberated around the globe under a riot of new names: son, rumba, samba, tango, jazz, calypso, beguine, fado, flamenco, tzigane, rebetika, ṭarab, marabi, kroncong, hula.

These recording sessions of vernacular musicians in the late 1920s stand out in the history of music like a range of volcanic peaks, the dormant but not extinct remains of a series of eruptions caused by the shifting of the tectonic plates of the world's musical continents. For five years, more or less, these eruptions took place as gramophone and phonograph companies fought with each other to capture the world's

vernacular musics through the new electrical microphones and to play them back through the new electrical loudspeakers.[2] It was one of those speculative manias that recur in capitalist booms, not unlike the tulip mania of the 1630s or the dot.com bubble of the 1990s. The recording boom took off around 1925, as the new technology of electrical recording enabled not only an extraordinary leap in audio fidelity but also a dramatic reduction in the cost of phonographs. It is hard to overestimate the sonic transformation; to this day, we listen with pleasure to reissues of the earliest electrical recordings, whereas the slightly older acoustic recordings are a dead language, a kind of sonic Middle English, the preserve of archivists whose ear training allows them to revisit the archaic soundscape of the Edison cylinders and the hill-and-dale discs.

In less than a decade, an unprecedented range of musical voices, instruments, and ensembles were placed in front of microphones. The producers and engineers knew little about the musics they were recording; they often regarded it as noise. Like the early radio broadcasters, they were simply trying to produce software—recorded sounds—that would encourage the purchase of the hardware, the phonograph. If new listeners could be lured by these noises—whether because they evoked novelty, nostalgia, or the neighborhood—then they would be recorded and marketed.

Like other technology booms, the recording boom burned itself out in a few years. By the early 1930s, the manufacturers of phonographs and phonograph records were sitting on masses of unsold inventory, as sales of hardware and software alike plummeted in the midst of a worldwide depression. Many small companies folded; the larger ones were taken over by amalgamated radio broadcasting and electrical equipment corporations, like RCA, EMI, and Telefunken. The vast majority of the musicians who had made their way to a recording studio in the late 1920s returned to the world of dance halls and shebeens, never to be recorded again.

But those five years changed the sound and the space of the world's music; they stand as the central musical revolution of the twentieth century, a musical "turnaround" with more profound consequences than that of the "modern" musics of the European avant-garde. The celebrated shock of the 1913 premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* has long stood as the emblem of modern music; it was a mere tremor compared to the reverberations of the still largely unrecognized recordings that created the vernacular idioms that

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continue to shape playlists: the Cuban son of the Trio Matamoros's "El Manisero" (The Peanut Vendor) and the New Orleans hot jazz of Louis Armstrong's "Heebie Jeebies," the gypsy jazz of Django Reinhardt's "Dinah" and the Brazilian samba of Ismael Silva's "Me faz carinhos," the Andalusian "deep song" of Pastora Pavón's "Había preguntado en una ocasión" and the Egyptian ṭarab of Umm Kulthūm's "In Kunt Asaamih" (If I Were to Forgive), the Hawaiian hula ku'i of the Kalama Quartette's "Nā Moku 'Ehā" (The Four Islands) and the Ghanaian highlife of the Kumasi Trio's "Yaa Amponsah," the Buenos Aires tango of Rosita Quiroga's "La Musa Mistonga" (The Muse of the Poor) and the Indonesian kroncong of Miss Riboet's "Krontjong Moeritskoe" (Moorish kroncong).

Noise Uprising is the story of the audiopolitics of this musical revolution. The struggle over these idioms was the central cultural struggle of what was called "modern times." Unlike modern novels, paintings, theater, or even film, which "represented" the modern "masses," these discs circulated the voices of those masses. And unlike our postmodern moment when high and low, experimental and pop, mix indiscriminately on the same playlist, modernism was a time of discrimination, when deference and defiance met. What musical languages and idioms were worthy of representing the nation and its people? The battle fought over jazz—the first great conflict over popular music—was a civil war between the ethos of the "philharmonic" (the love of harmony, an eighteenth-century coinage that captured both the symbolic centrality of the symphony orchestra and the tradition of accenting harmonic complexity over other musical dimensions), and the noise of outcast and oppressed peoples: gypsies, blacks, kanakas.

The reverberations of this musical revolution have been felt throughout the century that followed. After the apparent eclipse, even disappearance, of these musics during the worldwide depression and global war, they were rediscovered in the uncannily parallel "folk" revivals that punctuated the second half of the twentieth century. Revived as "roots" musics, part of the national heritage in a host of postcolonial societies, they became a fundamental stake in political struggles over nationalism and populism. These musics, remastered in digital form, are the forebears of twenty-first-century "world music," the raw material for postmodern remixes. These musicians were truly, as one journalist wrote as the new music dawned, "prophets of a noisy heaven and a syncopated earth."[3]

In the United States this moment is part of the history of popular

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music, particularly the explosion of jazz and blues on the "race records" marketed to African-American workers, and the emergence of modern country music in the "old-time" records made and distributed in the mill towns of the Appalachian Piedmont. It also included the recording of European-language "foreign" records in the Great Lakes industrial cities, which begat the hybrid music known as "polka," the border recordings of Mexican norteño sounds, and the recording of Cajun musics in Louisiana.

However, this US history is only one part of a worldwide musical explosion that included the recording of tango in Buenos Aires, son in Havana, and samba in Rio; of hula in Honolulu, huangse yinyue in Shanghai, and kroncong in Jakarta; of ṭarab in Cairo, palm-wine in Accra, and marabi in Johannesburg; of flamenco in Seville, tzigane in Belgrade, and rebetika in Athens. This book will juxtapose these musics whose histories have been told in militantly national terms—US jazz, Argentine tango, Brazilian samba—and see what happens if we map them on the globe, interweaving their histories, following the movements of the 78 rpm discs as Cuban son records echoed on the banks of the Congo and the sound of Hawaiian steel guitars was heard from Shanghai to Johannesburg, Calcutta to Buenos Aires.

In doing so, *Noise Uprising* recasts the histories and geographies of vernacular phonograph music. Rather than follow the long twentieth century of sound recording from wax cylinders to mp3s, it will focus on the sudden turnaround between 1925 and 1930; rather than concentrate on the global export of metropolitan popular music, it will chart the unexpected consequences of the recording industry's ambition to phonograph the vernacular, the global circulation of local musics across three arcs that connect port cities: the black Atlantic, the gypsy Mediterranean, and the Polynesian Pacific.

What were the audiopolitics of this musical revolution? Where did these musics come from? Why did the gramophone companies record them and what did the musical guild make of them? What was the shape of this new phonograph culture? What was its relation to what Fanon called the "coming combat" of decolonization? How did these vernacular phonograph records change the sound of modern music? These questions are the heart of this book. In answering them, I will make four central arguments: first, that these 78 rpm shellac discs emerged out of the polyphony of subaltern musical cultures in an archipelago of colonial ports; second, that they constituted a musical revolution, at once technological and cultural, that transformed the

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music industry as well as the musical guild; third, that they were fundamental to the extraordinary social, political, and cultural revolution that was decolonization; and finally, that they remade our musical ear.

These very different musics each had its own history and aesthetic; however, when they were recorded simultaneously in the late 1920s and early 1930s, they became part of a common historical soundscape, which I outline in Chapter 1, "Turnarounds." To many at the time, the worldwide craze for tango, jazz, rumba, and hula was merely the commercial packaging of exotic sounds for metropolitan audiences, "a resonance … that could be imported at will from Montevideo, Waikiki, and Shanghai."[4] Well-heeled audiences drank and romanced amid visual and aural "clubscapes," like the Hawaiian Room of New York's Lexington Hotel, the imperial fantasy of Paris's Bal Nègre, or the plantation stage set in Harlem's Cotton Club, or in tropical beach resorts like Havana and Honolulu. These musics were often heard as the global echo of American popular music, homogenizing and flattening local musicking.

The real story, however, lies neither in the metropolitan crazes for exotic musics, nor in the global spread of US popular music; rather, in Chapter 2, "The Polyphony of Colonial Ports," I argue that the vernacular music revolution emerged from the soundscape of working-class daily life in an archipelago of colonial ports. Over two decades and in the midst of urban riots and upheavals, these port cities had attracted millions of migrants, some from rural hinterlands, others from across oceans, most bringing songs, instruments, rhythms, and dances to play in the city's streets, taverns, and dance halls. The recording boom amplified this musical revolution: for the first time, the musics of these working-class neighborhoods were recorded and circulated by the commercial record industry. The gramophone became, as Theodor Adorno recognized in 1928, a "proletarian loudspeaker."[5]

Second, this musical revolution inaugurated the world musical space of the century to follow. A musical world that had been dominated by printed music—ranging from the notated compositions for the symphony orchestra to the sheet music of songs for the parlor piano—quickly gave way to a world musical industry dominated by sound recordings. The electrical reproduction of sound transformed the work of music by initiating a remarkable dialectic between musicking and recording, between the everyday practices of music culture and the schizophonic circulation of musical performances on shellac discs. As I argue in Chapter 3, "Phonographing the Vernacular," this was both a

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technical revolution—the remaking of music by sound recording—and a cultural revolution—the inscription on discs of everyday vernacular musics. These phonograph records were thus a technical uprising of noise because they carried in them the interference of the new means of reproduction. "When you place the needle upon the revolving phonograph record," Theodor Adorno observed, "first a noise appears. As soon as the music begins, this noise recedes to the background. But it constantly accompanies the musical event … The slight, continual noise is a sort of acoustic stripe."[6] But they were also a popular uprising of noise because the musics they disseminated were heard as noise by the established and cultivated elites of the time; they were unrespectable and unrespected. Both aspects of this musical revolution were registered in the debate over these recorded vernacular musics and their relation to classical and folk traditions, which engaged a generation of artists, social theorists, and cultural critics from the German philosopher Theodor Adorno to the Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, from the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges to the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, from the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók to the Hawaiian ethnographer Mary Kawena Pukui, from the South African music critic Mark Radebe to the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, from the African-American cultural critic Alain Locke to the pioneering ethnomusicologist Erich von Hornbostel.

I will call this the vernacular music revolution, because it is analogous to the tectonic shift from Latin to the European vernacular languages in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Just as Gutenberg's movable-type printing press made possible the flowering of vernacular language publishing, and eventually marginalized the learned *lingua franca* of medieval Latin (embodied ironically in Gutenberg's own Latin Bible), so the electrical gramophone quickly enfranchised the musical vernaculars of the world, and turned the notation-based European concert music of 1600 to 1900 into a new Latin, a henceforth "classical" music (embodied in sound recording's equivalent to the Gutenberg Bible, the Victor discs of the opera arias sung by Enrico Caruso).

This vernacularization of music—through which we are still living—is not the same as the commercialization of music; a commercial music industry of concert promoters, music publishers and instrument manufacturers dates back to the earliest moments of capitalism, and the recorded music industry simply amplified its forms. Nor should it be understood—as it often is—as the degeneration from serious to trivial music, from art to pop. There is serious and trivial music, art and pop,

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on both sides of the divide between classical and vernacular. Learned traditions developed in the vernacular musics, as they did in the vernacular languages; each of the musical vernaculars—samba, tango, jazz—spawned its own "grammars" and "dictionaries." Just as there were early modern writers who wrote in both Latin and the vernacular, so we have postmodern musicians who compose and improvise in both classical and vernacular traditions. Rather, if "classical music" has become a modern Latin, the international language of a musical clerisy, the vernacular musics have emerged as distinct but interrelated "national" idioms.

To speak of this musical revolution as the rise of vernacular musics also reminds us that, though these musics often share forms, histories, and inheritances, they are *not* the *same* musical language. It is a mistake to lump these musical idioms together as "modern popular music." Rather, just as English and Spanish emerged as distinct if related languages, so these musical vernaculars develop as voices in counterpoint, in similar, parallel, oblique, and contrary motion. Each of these vernaculars was a particular intonation and articulation of the musics of New Worlds and Old, Easts and Wests, neither the simple adoption of exotic sounds and rhythms (as in European philharmonic Orientalism) nor the unbroken continuation of the learned or folk traditions of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. And each of these new vernaculars counterpointed idioms of lyric song, often rooted in rural traditions of agrarian music-making, with the new "rhythm sections" of instrumental dance music.

The combination of these urban vernaculars and the new technologies of sound recording created a musical culture based increasingly on records, the subject of Chapter 4, "Phonograph Culture." To many, the records were just a mechanical music, repackaging the popular song of printed sheet music—with its traditional combination of lyric and music—and the conventional rhythms and steps of fashionable dances. The music industry's marketing of song and dance is so familiar that it may seem odd to try and defamiliarize it. Though song and dance seem to be transhistorical concepts, pertaining to every time and place, modern song and dance has, in fact, dramatically cut itself off from the social functions of music. If "autonomous" music was once a minor part of musical life, far outweighed by "functional" music, capitalist modernity has reversed that: the continued social functions of music—in dance halls and discos, at weddings and funerals, graduations and sporting events—are only a shadow of the omnipresence of

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"autonomous" recorded music, recorded music as the background, the soundtrack, the very medium of daily life. Indeed, I will suggest that the song and dance of the record evaded the terms of musicology's classic dichotomy of autonomous and functional music. The songs and dances of vernacular phonograph music, musics for distraction, were the first great medium that articulated and constituted "everyday life," the world of "consumption" beyond the workplace.

What is the connection between such apparently apolitical sonic innovations and the complex political struggles of decolonization of the subsequent half-century? In Chapter 5, "Decolonizing the Ear," I will argue that there was a political unconscious to the recorded vernacular musics. However, it was not simply one of "colonization," as Jacques Attali memorably argued, whereby "a music of revolt [was] transformed into a repetitive commodity."[7] Rather, this unexpected musical revolution, registered and amplified by the recording boom, emerged within the culture of empire and colonialism, and became the soundtrack to one of the central dramas of the twentieth century, the decolonization of the globe: the revolutionary overthrow of the European colonial empires that had dominated the world at the turn of the twentieth century, and the independence of more than 100 new nation-states in the generation after World War II.

Indeed, this noise uprising was prophetic: it not only preceded but prepared the way for the decolonization of legislatures and literatures. These vernacular phonograph musics reverberated across the colonial world, a cultural revolution in sound. Inheriting the harmonies and instruments of colonial musics, they embodied the contradictions of the anticolonial struggles: as "modern dance musics"—a common phrase of the time—they were scarred with the hierarchies of class and spectrums of color that shaped the dance halls and nightclubs, shebeens and streets, they inhabited. But if they prefigured what Fanon called "the trials and tribulations of national consciousness," they also, with their traveling if untranslatable names—son and samba, ṭarab and marabi, kroncong and jazz, rumba and hula—prefigured a new world, a "third" world, culturally as well as politically independent. Music did not simply sustain the soul in the struggle; the decolonization of the territory was made possible by the decolonization of the ear.

But what does it mean to decolonize the ear? If, as the young Marx famously suggested, "the *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world," then the reforming of the five senses is the fundamental labor of any cultural revolution. Marx's example of

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the history of the senses was music: "only music awakens in man the sense of music … the most beautiful music has *no* sense for the unmusical ear."[8] And new musics awaken new senses of music, remaking the musical ear. In Chapter 6, "A Noisy Heaven and a Syncopated Earth," I argue that the vernacular phonograph musics with their noisy timbres, syncopated rhythms, weird harmonies, and forms of improvised virtuosity, transformed the very sense and sound of music. It was a sonic revolution that remade the modern musical ear.

Thus, the audiopolitics of this noise uprising can be registered on three distinct scales, three different time frames. In the narrowest historical frame—a decade of economic acceleration and crash spanning the late 1920s and the early 1930s—this is the story of "syncopated" musics and 78 rpm shellac discs, a political economy of the electrical recording boom, the history of a brief economic and cultural renaissance that coincided with the emergence of anticolonial militancy in the years after the imperial crisis of World War I. In this frame, these musics represented the refusal of deference, the assertion of noise for noise's sake, the singing of the subaltern, "a premonition of an uprising as a noise in the transmission of some of the more familiar signals of deference."[9] In a somewhat wider frame—the generational cohort of "modern times" who lived roughly from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century—this is the story of the modern musics that were part of the cultural conflicts of modernism and decolonization, a struggle for musical justice—for a recognition of the dignity of the vernacular, the common, the everyday, a turning of the musical world upside down. In the widest frame—the *longue durée* of epochs and modes of production—this is the story of a cultural revolution enabled by a new mode of musical production—sound recording—that changed forever our relation to music-making, a revolution in the wake of which we continue to live.

Noise Uprising is not simply a history of music; rather, in the spirit of a tradition that extends from Theodor Adorno and Ernst Bloch to Jacques Attali and Paul Gilroy, it suggests that music and sound are fundamental to social and political analysis. For music is an inherently social and political art. Like the other performance arts (for example, theater and dance), music-making is a social activity, banding and bonding ensembles (to use Mark Slobin's terms). And like the other landscape arts (for example, architecture, urban planning, and landscape design), music organizes space and time. Music creates territorial markers, what Josh Kun has called "audiotopias," and

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temporal markers, keeping time through the rhythmic reordering of daily life.[10]

Thus the making of music—organized sound—is fundamental to the organization of social order, to creating social space and social solidarity. Sound constitutes subjects as social subjects, creating and sustaining social groups. The work of music is not only a performance of a social order; its very forms present an abstract model of the social order. It is not surprising that music is central to conserving and reproducing established social orders: the fundamental rites and spectacles of any social order are "accompanied" by music—from weddings and funerals to street festivals, military parades, and political rallies. Indeed, "accompanied" is too weak a word; it is more accurate to say that most of these rituals would seem hollow, empty, without their music, not unlike the rough cut of a film before the soundtrack has been added. For even the words spoken at these events—the ritualized speeches at rallies and prayers at weddings—take on the character of music: an organized sound that constitutes the social gathering in a specific time and place.

A recognition of music's role in establishing social order enabled the powerful critiques of the social forms of music under capitalism, of the ways a capitalist culture industry turned music—performed, printed, or recorded—into a commodity, an analysis associated first and foremost with the figure of Theodor Adorno. Adorno will be a constant presence in this book, not least because he was an ear-witness to this musical revolution. But I am less interested in attacking or defending Adorno than calling on three different Adornos to testify: first, the Adorno who analyzed the phonograph and the radio as forms of mechanized musical production, "music pouring out of the loudspeaker"; second, the Adorno who listened to the sounds of the modern dance musics, including "jazz" and "light music," and to the timbres of their guitars, saxophones, 'ukuleles, and accordions; and third, the Adorno who argued that music figures the contradictions of a society, that music is not a sign of community but of the desire for community: "the social alienation of music … cannot be corrected within music, but only within society: through the change of society."[11]

However, if music's role in binding social order together is well known—getting everyone to sing or play in harmony, to dance in time, to feel the groove—an alternative tradition has insisted that music is fundamental to social change, to the reordering, the revolution, of societies: it stretches from Ernst Bloch's account of the utopian

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nature of music to Jacques Attali's exploration of the prophetic nature of noise. For Bloch, music is a fundamental part of the principle of hope, the anticipatory consciousness that guides freedom movements: "music as a whole stands at the frontiers of mankind … the order in musical expression intends a house … from future freedom … a new earth."[12] For Attali, music not only makes social orders: disruptive music—noise—can break them. The history of music is, he suggested in a powerful philosophical history of European music, "a succession of orders … done violence by noises … that are prophetic because they create new orders, unstable and changing." If noise is unwanted sound, interference, sound out of place, it is also a powerful human weapon, a violent breaking of the sonic order. Noise challenges the established musical codes, which had themselves constituted the social order by domesticating and ritualizing the energy and violence of an earlier noise. Indeed, Attali argues that traditional musicology implicitly recognizes this dialectic of noise and music when it analyzes musical works as "the organization of controlled panic, the movement from anxiety to joy, from dissonance to harmony."[13]

The dialectic of noise and music is not, for Attali, simply the static, repetitive battle of carnival and lent. Rather, new noises—often associated with the disruptive sound of new instruments—herald social change and prophesy new social orders because "change is inscribed in noise faster than it transforms society."[14] Moreover, since music is a tool for creating community, and a great musical work is always "a model of amorous relations, a model of relations with the other," new noises—new musics—are a "rough sketch of the society under construction."[15] In their distinct idioms, Bloch and Attali insist on the anticipatory, prophetic, utopian capacity of music; it transports its participants to another place and another time, an elsewhere and a not-yet. To make another sound is to project another world. If each epoch dreams the next, as Walter Benjamin suggested, it does so in music.

Unfortunately, even this tradition often conceived of "music" in the abstract, reminding one of the comment the young Karl Marx—in the midst of the "polkamania" of the 1840s—made about a Hegelian critic who spoke "neither of the cancan nor of the polka, but of dancing in general, of the category Dancing, which is not performed anywhere except in his Critical cranium. Let him see a dance at the Chaumière in Paris, and his Christian-German soul would be outraged by the boldness, the frankness, the graceful petulance, and the music of that most sensual movement."[16] In contrast to Marx's vivid appreciation of

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the vernacular dances of his day—the Grande Chaumière lay on the working-class outskirts of Paris and the polka was often associated with sympathy for the defeated Polish uprising of 1831—too often those who insisted on the utopian elements of European philharmonic musics have been outraged by "the boldness, the frankness, the graceful petulance and the music of" rumba and kroncong, hula and samba, jazz and marabi. "Nothing coarser, nastier, more stupid has ever been seen than the jazz-dances since 1930," Ernst Bloch wrote. "Jitterbug, Boogie-Woogie, this is imbecility gone wild, with a corresponding howling which provides the so to speak musical accompaniment."[17] And Attali saw twentieth-century musics, both "theoretical music" and "mass music," under the sign of repetition: "it serves to silence, by mass-producing a deafening syncretic kind of music, and censoring all other human noises."[18]

For decades, the Marxist critical theory of music has been dominated by these powerful interpretative models of Adorno, Bloch, and Attali, which have accented the subjection of vernacular music to the commodity form. Without abandoning their insights, I take inspiration from the young Marx's homage to the polka and the cancan and hope to outline an alternative way of understanding vernacular music, one that draws on a somewhat unrecognized tradition in Marxist reflections on music stemming from figures whose work also emerged out the debates triggered by the vernacular phonograph records, among them Wilfrid Mellers, Alejo Carpentier, Charles Seeger, János Maróthy, and Amiri Baraka.

Noise Uprising hopes to suggest that this "howling" (Bloch), this mass-produced "deafening syncretic kind of music" (Attali), this noise, had a "boldness … frankness … [and] graceful petulance." It embodied a prophetic unconscious in its very form, not only disrupting the present order but figuring new orders, new rhythms, and new harmonies. The musics of this noise uprising became the fundamental and inescapable basis for the rich and contradictory developments in music around the world over the next century, as the circulation of recordings broke down the barriers between vernacular musicking, art musics, and the vast industry of commercial musics. Just as the early films of the generation from Sergei Eisenstein and Charlie Chaplin to Orson Welles and Satyajit Ray created the vocabulary of modern cinema, so these recordings created the musical idioms with which we continue to live. This turnaround began with a series of almost accidental recording sessions, the subject of the first chapter.

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