

Editorial

We are delighted to bring you this special issue of *twentieth-century music* on the social liminality of musicians. The idea for the issue arose from a chance discussion in spring 2005 at a time when the *tcm* Editorial Board was considering the question of themed issues. Such a possibility had been mooted quite early on, but it was regarded as important to maintain the journal's broad thematic scope in order to signal our engagement with plurality, both stylistic and methodological. With this first themed issue, therefore, we mark a symbolic 'coming of age'.

As a journal, *tcm* is ideally positioned to explore common themes that cut across different musical traditions, opening up exciting possibilities in terms of comparative study. And what better place to start than with the music-makers themselves? With a few notable exceptions, the question of the social location of performing musicians has been largely neglected within 'traditional' musicology, with its preoccupation with composers and their (notated) works. Even among popular and ethno-musicologists, where one might have expected a greater interest in this topic, surprisingly few have taken a broad view or attempted to extend the seminal work of Alan Merriam, first published over forty years ago.¹ The articles in this special issue offer interdisciplinary perspectives on the social position of (primarily professional) performing musicians drawn from North India, Hungarian Romani musicians, British orchestral musicians, and buskers on the streets of Bath and on the London underground.

A commitment to diversity and pluralism brings with it responsibilities, and raises ethical and political questions that David Clarke set out very clearly in his Editorial to an earlier issue of *tcm*.² Among other things, it requires us to think about the ways in which we understand, theorize, and construct 'difference' – 'among the twentieth century's most volatile legacies to the twenty-first' (155), according to Clarke – and, by extension, 'similarity'. As far as cultural difference is concerned, writers such as Kofi Agawu and Michael Tenzer have critiqued the tendency among ethnomusicologists to focus on, and thereby privilege, difference, a tendency not without political implications.³ Whilst a focus on diversity can run the risk of detracting from what we share as human beings, *tcm* also offers the opportunity to explore commonalities. The present collection of writings, through its focus on the relevance of a single concept – liminality – to the relationship between culture and social location, highlights the perhaps unexpected parallels in the experience of being a musician in quite different sociocultural settings. At the very least, we hope that the issue will open up the debate on an important topic that is ripe for further research.

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1 Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

2 See David Clarke, 'Editorial: Twentieth-Century Music – Plural', *twentieth-century music* 1/2 (2004), 155–9.

3 Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Michael Tenzer, *Gamelan Gong Kebyar: the Art of Twentieth-Century Balinese Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).