High and low in music

Canons versus charts

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Over the past few decades, particularly since the 1980s and 90s, it has become increasingly common to portray the boundary between high and low culture as undergoing decomposition, erosion, or even breakdown. While a discernable boundary still exists, most scholars in aesthetics, arts, music, and cultural studies concur that there are few, if any, remaining obstacles to transgressing it, by, for example, fusing high and low genres of music or literature (see, e.g., Jameson, 1991; Goodall, 1995; Seabrook, 2001; Storey, 2003; Svenska Akademien, 2006; Horowitz, 2012; Haak, 2014; Bjurström, 2016; Marx, 2022). Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that art in general has fully transitioned into a post-high-low culture. Furthermore, the distinction between high and low culture does not consistently adhere to the same logic or pattern across all artistic domains. Even if significant aesthetic shifts, like the transition from classicism to modernism, have had an overall impact on the arts, the differentiation between high and low within them still depends on distinct features, practices, and criteria specific to each of them. Hence, the boundary between high and low culture relies on both shared and distinct characteristics inherent in various forms of art.

Here, I will argue that the large-scale introduction of music charts in the early 1940s intensified the distinction between high and low culture in music, making it more unequivocal and unambiguous. This distinction rests on musical as well as extramusical dimensions and properties and can therefore be discerned in music as well as its social, cultural, and economic infrastructure or context. What is considered high and low works as antipodes in the constitution and upholding of the boundary between them. Hence, there cannot be a high pole without a low one, and vice versa. But to discern and differentiate between them, one must look beyond their shared traits and focus on what sets them apart. Here, I depart from the assumption that the more intense and antagonistic the relationship between the high and low poles appears, the more distinct and unambiguous the boundary between them becomes. Consequently, the boundary will appear more unequivocal if the contradictory tension becomes stronger, and more ambiguous if it becomes weaker. Given the abstract nature of this boundary, the widespread adoption of music charts in the 1940s heightened the tension between the musical high and low, thereby facilitating their differentiation. By becoming an integral part of popular music's infrastructure and juxtaposed against the established canon of Western classical music, charts not only accentuated the division between high and low music, but also propelled the denunciation of the latter as an inferior manifestation of mass culture.

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In the subsequent analysis, I explore the modern canon formation in music and the emergence of a multicanonic state, against the backdrop of the introduction of music charts and their gradual diversification within musical life. My primary focus is to explore the relationship between musical canons and charts and its implications for the division between high and low culture. This division also contextualizes the hierarchical differentiation of musical canons, which is explored in terms of major and minor canons. In this part of the analysis, I also delve into the interconnections among musical genres, repertories, traditions, and canons, before scrutinizing the opposition between canons and charts in an ideal-typical manner. After highlighting this opposition and how it, so to speak, has rubbed off on various kinds and genres of music in terms of high and low, I wrap up the article with some commentary on how the transition from analogue to digital media technology might reshape the distinction between high and low culture.

The large-scale introduction of charts ushered in a more precise method for assessing and quantifying the popularity and economic significance of popular music, in contrast to the canonical assessments that attributed aesthetic and cultural value to classical, serious, or art music. This accompanied an ongoing shift in the meaning of 'popular', from being *of* or *for* the people to being popular *with* it (cf. Scott, 2009, p. 5). The contrast between charts and the classical music canon, which at the time of the widespread introduction of the former was the sole more consciously recognized musical canon, remained, however, implicit rather than explicitly delineated. The classical music canon was – and still is – the most crucial building block in the composition of, although not identical with, high culture in terms of music. The demarcation between high and low in music preceded the implied contrast between the classical music canon and the popular music charts, but the latter contrariness made the former distinction more clear-cut and pronounced. The implied contrast between the classical canon and popular charts became deeply ingrained in the social, cultural, and economic infrastructure of music, in a way that reinforced the broader separation between the musical high and low. When scrutinized, this implied contrast comes forth as a composite, compressed, and multidimensional image of traits attributed to the high and low poles of music, as well as the broader distinction between high and low culture.

However, the implied contrast between the classical canon and popular charts has gradually weakened, in alignment with the widely held notion that the distinction between high and low culture has lost its prior relevance. This is not least reflected in the disintegration of the critique of mass culture, which can be discerned already in the 1960s but became a more obvious turning point in the perception of popular culture in the subsequent decades. In the wake of what can be characterized as the mass culture critique era, particularly since the 1980s and 90s, the status of both the classical music canon and the popular charts has likely diminished, which also ought to have affected the contrast between them.

Presently, both the classical canon and the popular charts seem to be on a trajectory of decline, with loss of status and impact. The classical canon has not only faced questioning and defiance but has been challenged by alternative canon proposals and the emergence of alleged canons within other musical genres (see, e.g., Bohlman, 1988;

Bergeron and Bohlman, 1992; Kärjä, 2006; Jones, 2008; Kurkela and Väkevä, 2009; Prouty, 2012; Shreffler, 2013; Weber, 2020). Likewise, charts have lost much of their prior standing due to the digitalization of music distribution and consumption, or what has been described as the shift from analogue to digital music or the advent of the digital music commodity (Morris, 2015; Krukowski, 2017; Johansson et al., 2018).

High culture and the canonization of music

The emergence and formation of a classical music canon has quite consensually been located to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Weber, 1992, 1999, 2008; Goehr, 1992/2007, 2008). What became known as classical music not only marked a turning point in the progress of music but liberated it from its tight connections to the human voice, the word, ceremonial, social, and other extramusical functions, primarily dictated by the church and the court. The music dubbed classical established a new hierarchical order of canons. The canon of religious music, mainly based on the declamatory style of hymns and psalms, anthems and madrigals, was subordinated to the emergent canon of classical music, which in turn, but as a late newcomer, was integrated into an overall secular canon of fine art, displayed as a coherent paradigm of high culture (Weber, 1992, 2008; Goehr 1992/2007).

However, music did not neatly align with this paradigm, which in compliance with Matthew Arnold's (1867/2006, p. 5) renowned dictum, 'the best which has been thought and said in the world', emphasized *logos*, words, and thought. Yet, this dictum could serve as a conceivable definition of both high culture and a canon, highlighting their conceptual proximity and potential for conflation.

The transformation of music into high art was complex and multifaceted, but as Lydia Goehr (1992/2007, 2008) has shown, based on notions of *les beaux arts* and new conceptualizations of aesthetics, culminating with romantic aestheticism and the *l'art pour l'art* movement. This made music not only compatible with other forms of fine art, but a paragon of Kant's precept that proper aesthetic judgments should be based on purposeless and disinterested contemplation. Renowned philosophers like Schiller, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, even regarded music as the supreme fine art and an ideal for the less purely representational arts (Goehr, 2008; Englund, 2020).

The formation of a new canonical order was likely more pronounced in music than in other arts, as it was based on new conceptualizations of music as well as new musical practices and twists in the meaning of musical concepts. The work-concept, materialized in the score, was regarded as the essence or prime entity of music, which trumped its performance, tone, or acoustic qualities (Goehr, 1992/2007, pp. 89–90). But a continuity between the musical past and present was at the same time established through the inclusion of older compositions in the new secular canon, like Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*, which was updated and literally brought from the church to the concert hall by Mendelssohn in 1829. Hence, the newly established classical music canon, heavily dependent on the recent hero status of composers such as Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, was given a dubious heritage that subtly obscured its origin.

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Like in other arts, the canonization of classical music was part of drawing a line between art and non-art during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Artworks were separated from craft-products and the concept of art became closely associated with aesthetics in contrast to functionality. Concurrently, the growing cultural market contributed to music's emancipation from patronage, allowing the classical canon to be embraced by the cultivated classes in the expanding bourgeois European societies. On the other hand, the fashion and fads in the market of cultural goods stood in opposition to the timeless pretension of canonical works, which prompted the influential English critic and taste reformer John Ruskin (1887, p. 17) to describe the canon of classical music as a 'mistress of Learning and the Arts; – faithful guardian of great memories in the midst of irreverent and ephemeral visions; – faithful servant of time-tried principles'. Like other contemporary taste reformers, Ruskin (ibid., p. 6) attacked the commercialization of culture, viewing it as a menace to people's 'accurate attention to work of a higher order'. From the mid-nineteenth century, the classical music canon was, along with the canons of literature and art, uplifted to this higher order by numerous taste reformers who excluded the emergent mass culture from the realm of true aesthetics (see, e.g., Gay, 1998; Bjurström, 2008, 2016). According to Arnold (1867/2006, p. 52) culture encompassed '*real* thought and *real* beauty, *real* sweetness and *real* light' in contrast to the spread of trumpery, while Ruskin (1887, p. 6) asserted that it was 'only by moral changes, not by art criticism' that the taste for cheap and unworthy consumer goods could be altered.

Through such notions, taste reformers of the nineteenth century paved the way for the subsequent century's moral critique of mass culture and made the modern canons of art a matter of pure and spiritualized aesthetics. Furthermore, they underscored the importance of fortifying the position of high culture and the canons of art. Arnold (1867/2006, pp. 6, 82) lamented 'the absence of any centre of taste and authority' and 'a high standard to choose our guides by' in the English society, and Ruskin (1887, p. 11) stressed the need of 'eager demands of accurate science, and of disciplined passion' in lay aesthetic judgments. But despite all rejections of commercialism, music was dependent on the market for its emancipation as an independent secular art. Prominent composers such as Beethoven, who played a pivotal role in shaping the classical canon, depended on income generated by the expanding commercial music infrastructure. Similarly, sheet music served as a conduit for establishing the classical canon, particularly on German-speaking soil where the *Hausmusik* tradition prevailed and most of the canonized composers belonged, even though the sale of such music was swiftly overtaken by popular songs and tunes, culminating in the emergence of the first large-scale popular music industry, Tin Pan Alley, by the end of the nineteenth century.

While the classical music canon was firmly established by the turn of the twentieth century, and soon encountered new challenges with the rise of modernist atonal music, popular music took on a new identity, reflected in neologisms like the German *Schlager* and the English 'hit', both of which refer to the more or less immediate impact that songs or tunes have on audiences.

Yet, before the advent of sound recording and radio, literature and art dominated over music in the market of popular cultural goods in terms of sales. Popularity rankings based on sales were first introduced in the market of literature and referred to as bestsellers during the late nineteenth century, and inexpensive art was coined 'kitsch', which like *Schlager* music soon evolved into a popular genre of its own (see, e.g., Sutherland, 2007, pp. 44–45). Meanwhile, the classical canon reigned supreme in the cultural hierarchy of the musical world.

The growing practice of evaluating popular culture based on sales intensified the tendency to label it as commercial, ephemeral, or trivial in contrast to the grandeur values ascribed to high culture and the canon of classical music in the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time, the Western art canons encountered internal challenges due to the emergence of modernist and avant-garde movements. However, aesthetic modernism did not dismantle the canons; instead, it was gradually adopted by them. Despite modernist music's departure from tonality, a fundamental characteristic of classical music, it was gradually integrated into its canon. In music and other arts, the canonical endorsement of modernism even deepened the opposition between high culture and popular culture. The modernist music audience was a select and exclusive minority, in sharp contrast to the mass audience of popular music – an opposition that readily lends itself to a quality-versus-quantity conceptualization.

Restructured by modernism, the classical music canon took a further step toward autonomy, formalism, and purification through the embracing of atonality and other deviations from the previously established classical standards of music. Tradition-challenging, experimentation, innovation, and novelty emerged as defining character-istics that set high culture apart from popular culture, when the music of modernists such as Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg was incorporated into the classical canon during the twentieth century; features which Adorno (1941/1998, 1953/2003) contrasted with the formulaic and standardized character of popular music, in which he included the 'so-called improvisations' of jazz, by regarding them as 'domesticated' and 'normalized'. A position he clung to, albeit slightly modified, even after bebop, cool, and free jazz nudged jazz toward modernist aesthetics and gave it an air of popular avant-garde style during the 1950s and 60s (Adorno, 1962/1975).

The contrast between high culture and low culture evolved into an opposition between modernism and mass culture already during the 1930s and 40s, when modernism gained international prominence within the art world and 'mass' became the paramount term for labelling popular culture (see, e.g., Rosenberg, 1948/1973; Huyssen, 1986; Horowitz, 2012). The modernization of high culture rendered it more exclusive and hostile toward popular arts and even to what had been labelled middle-brow around the turn of the twentieth century (see Rubin, 1992; Hammill, 2023). By that time, sound recording and radio had revolutionized music listening and trans-formed the commodity form of music. Records had supplanted sheet music as the primary music commodity, while radio and gramophones had integrated music listening into everyday domestic life on an unprecedented scale. By the same token, sound recording and radio enabled performer- and ear-based music to compete with and

surpass composer- and score-based music. While performances of the classical canon, with assimilated modernist idioms, adhered to the principal concert hall setting and were firmly embedded in high culture's established infrastructure and institutions, popular music swiftly embraced the novel technologies of sound recording, reproduction, and distribution. Even when recorded, classical music employed strategies to preserve its canonic status and aura of uniqueness, in the age when the work of art, according to Walter Benjamin, was threatened by mechanical reproduction. As Benjamin (1936/1999, p. 217) astutely observed, the uniqueness of a work of art is *inter alia* confirmed through ritualistic means. Serious demeanor and contemplative attention during concerts have traditionally served as such means since the formation of the classical canon but were supplemented with high-cultural insignia when recorded, in the shape of strictly standardized sleeve notes, offering detailed information about composers, compositions, conductors, orchestras, recording sites, dates, and other performance specifics. Paying homage and demonstrating fidelity to the musical work or respect for the integral work of art, *Werktreue* was – and still is – a defining feature of canonized serious music when recorded (see Goehr, 1992/2007).

Contrary to Benjamin's (1936/1999, p. 215) assertion that 'the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition', recording did not endanger musical traditions. Rather, it served as a catalyst, propelling the breakthrough and popularity of performer- and ear-based traditions, particularly within Afro- and European-American idiomatic styles. Concurrently, sound recording contributed to the canonization of opera throughout the twentieth century. Notably, it granted canonical status to recordings by celebrated and internationally acclaimed opera singers and performances (Henson, 2020). However, the impact of sound recording on classical and popular music took divergent paths with the advent and widespread adoption of music charts in the early 1940s. Charts, albeit implicitly or indirectly, emerged as popular music's opposite to the canonical establishment processes within classical music – and, more broadly, to canonical mechanisms and processes in general. Moreover, this subtly underscored the divide between high and low in music, as well as culture more broadly.

Canons and charts

The first publicly displayed music charts, based on airplay or record sales, emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s in the United States. Over time, these top lists of best-selling records were augmented by genre-specific rankings within the realm of popular music. Initially, top charts – typically limited to the ten or twenty best-selling records – appeared in trade magazines such as the American *Billboard*. After publishing the Network Song Census in 1934 and a subsequent Hit Parade two years later, *Billboard* compiled the first chart based on record sales in the summer of 1940. This chart paved the way for the regular display of music charts in daily newspapers and magazines covering entertainment and popular music.

Based on sales, charts gave fuel to the sustained critique of commercialism and mass culture during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, as echoed in Dwight MacDonald's (1957, p. 59)

denouncing view that mass culture was 'solely and directly an article for mass consumption, like chewing gum', entirely governed by commercial interests and devoid of any genuine aesthetic qualities. While charts can be described as popular music's antipode to the classical music canon, such a characterization can be a bit misleading. Neither in the past nor the present have they, to my knowledge, been explicitly regarded as antitypes. One plausible explanation for this is that a comparison between them, especially during the early days of charts, might have been perceived as disrespectful to the classical music canon. Another related reason could be that charts have so convincingly delineated the realms of high and low music, that the contrast has inadvertently been overlooked. Nevertheless, the enduring canonization of classical music and the subsequent chartification of popular music exhibit characteristics that could be perceived as inherent qualities of the music itself. Likely, the contrast between canonic processes and the compilation of charts has imprinted the perception and evaluation of the hierarchic distinction between classical or serious music and popular music, as well as the broader distinction between high and low culture. This should have been especially apparent during the 1940s and 50s, when the classical canon enjoyed nearly universal recognition and held a supreme status as The Canon, while music charts progressively emerged as the primary platform for showcasing popular music.

Despite the initial and lingering latent enmity between top charts and canonic processes, their paths have slightly converged over time. In recent times, specific charts for classical music have emerged, and classical pieces have occasionally made their way into official charts dominated by popular music. This can be seen as reflecting a current fluidity in transcending the boundary between high and low musical genres, suggesting that the distinction between high and low culture has become blurred. Furthermore, it seems quite evident that both the classical music canon and music charts have gradually lost significance, which ought to have reduced the implied contrast between them as well.

However, the evolution of the intricate contrast between the classical canon and music charts represents only one aspect of the broader gap between high and low culture. Thus, it is intertwined with other phenomena, conditions, and forces that collectively shape and define this cultural divide. Among these phenomena are the social practices, conventions, and rituals that, in terms of listening, distinguish classical music genres from those of popular music; for example, the disciplined and cultivated listening during a chamber music concert versus the expressive and participatory behaviour of heavy metal or EDM (Electronic Dance Music) audiences. Such differences highlight the prevailing contrast between classical or serious and popular music, but also offer insights into the social and historical context of the classical canon. Contemporary efforts to preserve or revive cultural canons, along with the critiques directed at them, reveal their nature as social, cultural, and historical constructs, which, in turn, suggests that they can be deconstructed or replaced by new orders (see, e.g., Guillory, 1993; Bloom, 1994; Carey, 2005; Bjurström, 2012). Yet, this perspective must be complemented by the recognition that canons possess an imaginary and implicit nature, and are tacitly naturalized rather than explicitly defined, which in the case of

music gives them the semblance of what Goehr (1992/2007, p. 8; cf. Guillory, 1993, p. 30) aptly terms an 'imaginary museum of musical works'.

The imaginary nature of canons, juxtaposed with the tangible quality of charts, underscores a fundamental difference between them. This difference makes it problematic to grapple with the comparison of canons and charts as lists or techniques of listings, as has been done from the viewpoint of media materialism (Young, 2017). Due to their imaginary essence, it is doubtful if canons should be understood as lists; but if so, in an implied, rather than explicit sense. In contrast, charts boldly present themselves as tangible and palpable lists. This difference is rooted in the fact that charts rely on a single criterion – typically sales, airplay, or streams – for inclusion, while canons are based on multiple and more elusive criteria. Selection and inclusion are fundamental to both but operate differently: having a more explicit character in the case of charts compared to canons. Attempts to explicate canons as lists mostly ignite controversies and, intriguingly, may be perceived as a harbinger of their crisis or decay.

Another closely related difference lies in the fact that the selection of canons is founded upon ideals, whereas charts emerge from sheer numerical competition. Canons, of course, also harbour an element of competition, but less explicit than in the case of charts. Canons substantiate ideal aesthetic standards. In the context of music, paraphrasing Arnold's renowned dictum, they can be stated as 'the best which has been composed, performed, or recorded'. As such, canons possess a normative and disciplinary character, which charts lack. In addition, the normative claim of canons is intricately tied to their aspiration to transcend time and space, imbuing their selections with a sense of timelessness. A timelessness which is chiefly validated by their capacity to withstand the test of time, but becomes problematic when aesthetic standards evolve, as they did during the emergence of modernism and postmodernism in the twentieth century. In contrast, popular music has long been perceived as lacking enduring value, which has been underscored by the ever-changing composition of music charts.

While charts serve as dynamic indicators of popularity, canons, in contrast, lay claim to stability and exhibit a more static order. This is closely related to the fact that charts rely on laypersons' preferences or purchasing decisions, whereas canons primarily stem from judgments by experts, scholars, connoisseurs, and cultural institutions. Unlike charts, which quantify aggregated individual preferences in time, canonical verdicts exhibit continuity over time primarily shaped by a lineage of experts, scholars, and cultural institutions. Chart measurements operate in the field of cultural consumption, while canonical judgments are firmly rooted in the field of cultural production (cf. Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1993).

Closely tied to the aforementioned differences are considerations regarding the type of judgment upon which canons and charts are constructed. One might, for example, invoke the Kantian aesthetic and argue that charts are based on what people momentarily like or find pleasurable, whereas a canon rests on a more refined and cultivated faculty of judgment (Kant, 1790/1995, pp. 232–234). By their temporary fluctuations and adherence to straightforward criteria such as sales or streams, charts can

be criticized from a Kantian perspective on aesthetics, which can be said to be in accordance with the prevailing canonical view on aesthetic judgment.

From such a canonical viewpoint, popular culture has often faced rejection as a legitimate subject of aesthetic judgment, particularly by cultural conservatives, like Allan Bloom (1987, p. 73) who in the 1980s decried rock music for having 'one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire – not love, not eros, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored'. While harsh attacks of that kind might now be counterproductive in safe-guarding the classical music canon, they serve as a poignant reminder of the entrenched tendency to separate popularity, as reflected in musical charts, from proper aesthetic assessments.

Still, the blurring of the classical canon and music charts poses a challenge to the former. Classical music charts, such as the one compiled by the monthly magazine *Gramophone*, threaten the classical canon, since they measure the transient popularity of works belonging to it, thereby inadvertently challenging its long-term stability and presumed timelessness.

However, comparing musical canons and charts is akin to contrasting apples and oranges. The classical music canon operates within a normative framework, adhering to aesthetic standards and ideals, whereas music charts merely gauge popularity based on sales, streams, or votes. Moreover, the classical canon is deeply entrenched in the infrastructure and institutions of high culture, while charts serve as distinct features of popular culture, functioning both as commercial metrics and attention-grabbing tools for cultural industry products. Specifically, the classic music canon, akin to other fine art canons, prescribes what people *ought to appreciate*, whereas music charts merely claim to display what they *actually* or *in fact like*.

While there may be a normative discrepancy between theory and practice in the case of canons, a corresponding discrepancy exists regarding the validity and reliability of charts: whether they accurately measure popularity, sales, or streams. Charts rely on a quantitative methodology, whereas canons delve into matters of quality and incorporate their constituents through processes of consecration.

The latter is supported by the etymology of the word 'canon'. By the sixteenth century, 'canon' had acquired a general meaning of 'standard of judging', distinct from its prior meaning within the Roman Catholic Church, where it referred to the official version of the Bible and list of saints, and the term 'canonize' remained synonymous with 'sanctify'. Historically, the Roman Catholic Church can be seen as the last single authority vested with the power to precisely define a canon as a list of approved works. When secular aesthetic canons emerged, the term 'canon' lost much of its prior meaning as 'approved list', which had been transferred from early Christianity to medieval times, along with its more ancient meanings of 'rule' or 'measuring rod' (Guillory, 1990, p. 253; Thomassen, 2010, p. 9). Yet, the conceptual heritage from Christianity illuminates the authority and universal claim of high art canons, which are considered exclusive and enduring, transcending both temporal and spatial boundaries.

Given that a general acknowledgement of a canon is essential for its authority and claims, it seems somewhat unwarranted to discuss competitive or divergent canons. In

contrast, competition is not a threat to charts; instead, it fuels their vitality and enhances their appeal. However, the loss of general recognition, coherence, or consensus poses a challenge to the existence of a canon, as well as its implementation. Notably, the recognition, cohesiveness, and consensus that a canon requires primarily emanate from established cultural institutions. In essence, canons rely on institutional power and are shaped by institutionalized aesthetic judgments, i.e., judgments approved of, maintained, or enforced by various institutions (Bjurström, 2021, pp. 148–149).

Major and minor canons

It is undeniable that a multitude of canonicity claims exists within the more comprising world of contemporary music. Likewise, it seems undisputable that such claims or what might be depicted as incipient canons, exhibit a hierarchical order. As such, they possess varying degrees of cultural status and prestige, enabling one to differentiate between major and minor canons.

As previously mentioned, the once-preeminent canon of sacred music, still preserved by the Church, transformed into a minor canon as it was overshadowed by the emergence of the classical music canon. This transformation not only integrated 'religious' composers, like Bach, into the secular classical canon but enabled those not co-opted, like, for example, the French composer Nicolas Roze, to persist within the sacred canon, deeply rooted in religious practices. However, as clarified by William Weber (1999, 2008), secular canonical formations predated the canonization of classical music, although they held less authority and were less integrated into the world of high art, to which the classical canon arrived as a late newcomer. Subsequently, canonical processes have given rise to genre-based canon claims of folk and popular music; processes which commenced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the collection and transcription of orally transmitted songs and ballads (see, e.g., Bohlman, 1988, pp. 6–7; Shiach, 1989, pp. 112–115). Similarly, genres within popular music – such as jazz, rhythm & blues, rock, reggae, and, more recently, rap – have given rise to what can be considered incipient or minor canons; primarily consisting of artists, recordings, or albums that have withstood the test of time and thereby affirmed that the popular can possess enduring qualities (cf. Jones, 2008; Prouty, 2012). These, partially evolved or inchoate canons also serve as evidence of the pivotal role that media technologies, such as recording, have played in canonic processes.

As canonic processes within popular music genres have become more apparent, the canon-concept has migrated from its lofty position in classical or art music to the lower spheres of the popular. Advocates for serious music, or high culture more broadly, can no longer assert exclusive ownership of the concept. By the same token, the concept has undergone dilution, no longer carrying the firm connotations of supremacy and universality it once did. The canonization of popular music has even brought the canon-concept closer to the music charts since present-day hits may eventually find their place in a minor popular canon of the future. Compilations featuring all-time greatest jazz or rock albums, whether curated by critics or laypersons, appear as hybrids of canons and charts – or as transformations of the latter into the former, bridging the gap between

them. Similarly, when older successful songs, tunes, or albums re-enter the charts, they provide compelling evidence of their canonical status and affirm that recurring popularity is a way of withstanding the test of time.

In certain cases, informal popular music canons have supplanted minor canons of a more official or semi-official nature. This is quite evident in Sweden, where the tradition of teaching *stamsånger* (songs of national heritage) by heart in primary schools was discontinued in 1969. Subsequently, the previously sanctioned minor canon of Swedish pedigree-songs, listed in the songbook *Sjung svenska folk!* (Sing, Swedish people!), has yielded to *Allsångshäftet* (The sing-along booklet) associated with the popular TV show *Allsång på Skansen* (Sing-along at Skansen), which has established an unofficial sing-along canon. Hence, the once-hegemonic Swedish minor song canon has transformed, relinquished its official status and transitioned from educational settings to the realm of entertainment.

In the canon of classical or art music, akin to other modern canons of art, the distinction between creator and work blurs. This inadvertency in considering canonicity primarily stems from the romantic notion of the artist as genius. Nonetheless, the intimate connection between creator and work remains a steadfast belief among custodians of esteemed canons. Harold Bloom (1994, pp. 37, 39) boldly asserts that the death of the author, as proposed by Roland Barthes (1977), merely perpetuates 'another anticanonical myth' and dismisses the notion of a literature devoid of a canon: 'Without the canon, we cease to think'. By the same token, he (ibid., p. 57) underscores that a canon, inherently dynamic and never fully sealed, defies pursuit as an anti-elitist endeavour, which makes the celebration of 'currently fashionable counter-canons' as 'opening up the canon' become 'a strictly redundant operation'. While an anti-elitist canon appears contradictory, it is true that a canon is never entirely closed or stable. Yet, canons persistently strive for closeness and stability, at least in the sense that a work's admission to a canon unfolds as a slow and ponderous process, and any tangible instability poses a threat to its credibility and authority. The credibility and authority of a canon hinge, in part, on its age, established status, and, notably, its unwavering acceptance. This is reflected in the hierarchical ordering of canons, where a distinction can be made between major and minor ones, which, in turn, mirrors their respective positions within the broader separation between high and low culture.

Hence, the two distinctions, between major and minor musical canons on the one hand, and between high and low culture on the other, can be seen as mutually reliant. This also sheds light on why the existence of popular music canons has been neglected or questioned for a long time. Given that popular music has been perceived as a subordinate counterpart to classical or serious music, especially in terms of its canon, it has been controversial to extend the canon concept across the divide between high and low culture. Yet it is hardly possible to deny that musical genres other than art music undergo canon processes, and, despite its inherent elitist bias, the canon concept has *de facto* been employed to understand and analyze such processes (Bohlman, 1988; Bergeron and Bohlman, 1992; Gabbard, 1995; Kärjä, 2006; Jones, 2008; Kurkela and Väkevä, 2009; Prouty, 2012). The role of the canon within musicology has faced

scrutiny from a similar perspective, with proponents advocating for broadening its scope and replacing it with 'a collection of multiple canons' (Morgan, 1992, p. 61). Such a perspective invites consideration of an almost endless existence of music canons beyond the established canon of art music; these include genre-specific canons, such as jazz, folk, and popular music, often with their own sub-canons. Additionally, an operatic canon, a musicals canon, an operetta canon, a film music canon, and various sing-along canons can be discerned. Furthermore, religious canons encompass church music, motets, hymns, and psalms, while secular choral music also forms a distinct canon. Canons have emerged for social and ceremonial occasions such as Christmas and weddings. Scholarly and pedagogical canons coexist alongside national, regional, and local musical canons, and so on, *ad infinitum* in principle.

Such a multiplicity or plurality of the canon-concept affirms the ubiquity of canonical processes, mechanisms, values, and criteria within musical life and practices. However, the acknowledgment of a multitude of canons requires a consideration of their imaginary and elusive nature, and comprehending canonization as a multifaceted, highly intricate, and contingent process. Canonic inclusions play a crucial role in the hierarchical ordering within musical genres, and the canons of these genres exhibit, in turn, a hierarchical order.

While the distinction between major and minor canons is hierarchical, it relies on a complex set of determinants, such as their authority, status, recognition, durability, permanence, extension, degree of institutionalization, and embeddedness within a supportive social, cultural, economic, and material infrastructure. In this respect, the hegemonic position and status of the classical canon as The Major Canon seems almost axiomatic, with its extensive history, global reach, firm entrenchment in high cultural institutions and robust infrastructural support, by for instance criticism and prestigious venues of performances of its canonized pieces. By the same token, it seems reasonable – though more controversial than before – to consider it as the primary or even sole major canon, to which other musical canons, referred to as minors, are subordinated. The hierarchical order among these minor canons, or canons in general, hinges on their progress in canon-building or, conversely, whether they are treading the path toward de-canonization. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that musical canons are built on various entities or phenomena: the classical canon is built on the score and its performance, conceived as an integral work of art; the jazz and rock canons primarily rely on recorded albums, songs, tunes, and renowned performances; sacred music canons are intricately tied to religious practices; while sing-along or chorus canons persist through practices that sustain repertories of songs.

From this perspective, canonization reveals itself as an intrinsic and more or less inevitable process within music, as well as other artistic and scholarly domains, which enables one to discern both commonalities and distinctions among contemporary musical canons. Additionally, this underscores the existence of various pathways to canon formation. The plurality of these pathways becomes evident when comparing explorations of the formation of the classical canon with that of other canons, within

opera (Henson, 2020; Weber, 2020), folk (Bohlman, 1988, 1992), jazz (Prouty, 2012), rock, or pop music (Kärjä, 2006; Jones, 2008).

The process of canon formation reveals intriguing variations both within and between different musical genres. At the same time, canons often defy narrower genre boundaries, like the canon of classical or, more aptly, serious or art music has successively amalgamated genres such as chamber music, symphony, sonata, suite, twelve-tone or serial music, and evolved into an umbrella term that encompasses a rich tapestry of musical styles. Correspondingly, what can be envisioned as canons of popular music, rock, and jazz encompasses a variety of genres, sub-genres, and styles. Hence, canonization can be conceived as a process that both relies on genre boundaries and tends to exceed them.

One encounters a similar complexity or duality when examining the interconnections among the concepts of canon, tradition, and repertory. The establishment of musical traditions and repertories serves as foundational building blocks in the formation of canons. Recognition of a canon is, in turn, partly affirmed by a canonic repertory and, more significantly, by an institutionalized belief in its greatness, which elevates certain elements of a musical tradition and repertory to the status of a canon (cf. Berger, 2013, pp. 50–51).

The existence of multiple pathways to canon formation, coupled with significant variation, implies that comprehending all the conditions and factors contributing to it is a challenging endeavour. This complexity is further intertwined with the imaginary or elusive nature of a canon and the difficulties in precisely defining its scope. In turn, this derives primarily from the dynamic nature of processes of canonization, which can vary in strength. Musical canons, like any other canon, exhibit a central kernel surrounded by a periphery. The core of the classical canon comprises the most strongly canonized works and composers, while it becomes increasingly challenging to determine what belongs to it the farther out one moves into the periphery, where the weakest canonized pieces reside. Thus, it is easier to identify the kernel of a canon than defining its boundaries.

The varying strength of canonization implies that musical canons are hierarchized internally as well as externally. The internal hierarchy of a canon, however, is typically implied and unspoken, demanding pondering and critical reflection for suggested assessment. To some degree, this mirrors the imaginary and elusive nature of the canon *per se*.

Drawing from the preceding discussion, one can infer an intricate interplay among the canonization of musical works or pieces, canon formation, and the apprehension of a canon. The formation and subsequent recognition of the classical music canon in the nineteenth century were, for example, heavily dependent on the canonization of Beethoven's music and the cult surrounding him as a composer. When the classical canon was well-established, Beethoven's role evolved from one of its original architects or builders to an exemplar or measuring rod against which subsequent composers could be judged and, if measuring up, canonized. This example conveys how canonization can

partly change character during the process from the construction phase of a canon until it is well-established.

From the same viewpoint, one can shift focus to the conditions for enduring canonizations and the preservation and maintenance of canons, and, conversely, processes of de-canonization. Beethoven, still positioned as a central figure in the kernel of the classical canon, is of course a prime example of an enduring canonization. Similarly, the classical or art music canon itself has been preserved for a long time, although it has faced increased challenges and criticism lately.

Canonization and its counterpart, de-canonization, are, however, concepts that apply to both individual works or pieces and the construction of canons per se, a duality which gives them a subtle ambiguity. As such they refer to the inclusion or exclusion of pieces within canons, as well as the formation or disintegration of the canons themselves. In the former sense, canonization and de-canonization are integral to the regular workings and play a pivotal role in maintaining a canon. Conversely, processes of the latter kind involve the emergence and establishment of canons, as well as their loss of authority and eventual disintegration. As Anne Shreffler (2013, p. 611) emphasizes, the ongoing interplay between canonization and de-canonization infuses canons with dynamism, preventing them from becoming rigid or stagnant, ensuring their vitality and adaptability to new circumstances, and, ultimately, sustaining their relevance.

In this sense, the canonization and de-canonization of musical works and composers have played a role in maintaining the major classical canon, encompassing the inclusion of new works and composers, as well as the rediscovery of forgotten older ones and the demotion and eventual exclusion of others. Moreover, this dynamic trade contributes to the fluidity of the canon's boundaries, which remain open to constant negotiation.

In addition, the maintenance and implementation of a canon can be divided into a set of interconnected part- or sub-canons, as William Weber (1999) does when he distinguishes among three major kinds of musical canon: a scholarly, a pedagogical, and a performing one. As Weber asserts, such canons predated the formation and establishment of the classical canon, which, however, elevated the performance of canonized works to a prominent position among them, and they can now be perceived as distinct yet inextricable parts of the canon as a whole. In compliance with other distinctions among different types of canons – such as Bohlman's (1988) between three types of folk music canons, small group, mediated, and imagined, or Kärjä's (2006) between an alternative, a mainstream, and a prescribed canon of popular music – Weber's is horizontal albeit diverging from the others by basically being genre-neutral. In contrast to these approaches, the distinction between major and minor canons proposed here is vertical and primarily genre-based, although acknowledging the genre-exceeding potential inherent in canonic processes, set against the backdrop of the hierarchical order of high and low culture. To distinguish various types of canons within the same genre, as Bohlman and Kärjä, following his approach, do, risks conflating different processes and pathways of canon formation with the canon *per se*. Similarly, any approach that differentiates between canons faces the risk of conflating partially

overlapping formations and processes related to traditions, genres, repertories, and canons.

The pursuit of maintaining and implementing a canon not seldom signals its crisis or even implies concern that is has dissipated or no longer exists. Moreover, such instances often prompt calls for listing the inclusions of the canon. Such listings, however, diminish the elusive and enigmatic character of canons, inadvertently fuelling controversies about inclusions and exclusions, leading to quite unsolvable differences of opinion. In this manner, and of course notably diverging from charts, canons display a susceptibility to listings. Listing a canon can even be perceived as a violation of its elusiveness and principles, oversimplifying its complexity, improperly diminishing its ambiguity, sparking controversies regarding rankings, inclusions, and exclusions.

Politically orchestrated efforts to construct or restore national or other canons face significant challenges, by rendering them overtly explicit, tangible, or palpable, in ways that even contradict the taste of canon-restorers like Harold Bloom (1994, pp. 13–19), who put the literary canon above politics and emphasize its independence. The establishment or restoration of a canon through political means makes it controversial in terms of power and instrumentalization, besides obscuring its aesthetic character (Bjurström, 2012).

Canons and charts as oppositional entities

To endure or be relevant, canons must open themselves to new times and circumstances, and foremost adapt to changing aesthetic standards and tastes. Change is, however, something a canon must be able to both withstand and adapt to. On the one hand, its pieces must be able to withstand the test of time, and on the other it must recognize and respond to evolving aesthetic standards and changing criteria of judgment. An aesthetic canon that resists the passage of time and rigidly clings to the past easily becomes irrelevant, decays, and eventually withers away (cf. Bohlman, 1988, p. 110; Shreffler, 2013). The classical music canon, which descends from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has demonstrated its adaptability to quite radical musical transformations, even though its universal assertions and dismissive attitude toward popular and non-Western music have diminished considerably in strength. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that it is changing appearance from being the dominant musical canon to one among many, gradually diminishing its once superior cultural prominence. Simultaneously, the opposition between canons and charts seems to diminish, especially when viewed as an indicator of the divide between high and low culture. However, significant obstacles to the decomposition of this opposition remain, which can be revealed through a systematic comparison of its constituents.

Yet, such a comparison can only be conducted in a ideal-typical manner, given the elusive, imaginary, and normative nature of canons versus the palpable, tangible, and pragmatic nature of charts. These differences open canons to alternative proposals and negotiations regarding their components, a possibility that is ruled out in the case of charts. Additionally, charts are explicitly competitive, which can give rise to moments of thrill or excitement, generally lacking in canons. In these as well as other respects,

canons and charts embody what has been recognized as fundamental and distinctive differences between high and popular culture. Systematizing and explicating these differences points to some of the most contentious and antagonistic tendencies within modern culture (Table 1):

Table 1. Differences between canons and charts

Canons	Charts
Imaginary (implicit), elusive, ideal	Palpable (explicit), alluring, pragmatic
Qualitative selection based on aesthetic judgments, and many criteria, expert and minority decisions	Quantitative selection based on sales, streams or votes, and one criterion, lay persons' majority decisions
Implicit list (vulnerable to listing), negotiable	Explicit list, nonnegotiable
Aesthetically partial	Aesthetically impartial
Venerable and grand	Competitively exciting or thrilling
Relatively closed to incorporation	Open to new entries
Relatively stable and fixed	Unstable and fluctuating
Lasting or putatively timeless or eternal (for the ages)	Temporary (for the age)
Non-competitive	Competitive
Normative	Non-normative
Based on complex processes of consecrations, judgments, and institutionalizations	Based on simple counts of sales, streams, votes, or frequencies of listening
Lay claim on implementation and cultivation	Work as measures of popularity and marketing devices
Non-commercial (anchored in the field of cultural production)	Commercial (anchored in the field of cultural consumption)
Outcome of a historical process of canonization over time	Result of a measurement in time
Culturally conservative	Culturally opportunistic
Aesthetically elitist	Aesthetically democratic (or ignorant)
In need of maintenance and implementation (cultivation)	No need of maintenance or implementation

As illustrated in Table 1, an ideal-typical analysis of the contrasts between canons and charts provides a clear view of the challenges related to their merging, hybridization, or replacement.

Although the contrast between canons and charts may not be as sharply defined or straightforward as when displayed ideal-typically, it remains unlikely that they will blend, converge, hybridize, or in any way replace one another. In the realm of music, they continue to function as indicators – or, perhaps more aptly described, as oppositional microcosms – mirroring the gap between high and low culture. Canons and charts are grounded in oppositional values, principles, mechanisms, practices, and procedures. Chartifying classical or serious music, by measuring its popularity in terms of sales, streams, or downloads, tends to break the spell of the aesthetic tradition it rests on.

However, pieces of popular music are dechartified over time, by being canonized and accumulating aesthetic value, in the shape of, for example, so-called evergreens, classic rock, or golden oldies. Contrary to what has been the case in classical music and partly in jazz, listing has played a crucial role in the canonization of popular music; primarily evident in the constant production of lists featuring the Best Rock Albums of All Time (see Jones, 2008, pp. 93–96; Prouty, 2012). While such lists undoubtedly have been influenced by rock music's close affiliation with charts, they can also be seen as evolved iterations of them, claiming canonicity based on qualitative instead of quantitative criteria.

Canons presuppose canonizers, preferably with cultural power or capital, whose judgments, values, and actions can facilitate the canonization of musical works or pieces within different institutional settings (see Bohlman, 1988, p. 106, and 1992, p. 206; Jones, 2008, p. 14). However, canonization is a multifaceted process in which the institutionalization of aesthetic judgments, values, and practices plays a crucial role. The institutionalization of a canon is essential not only for its initial formation but also for its reproduction and long-term survival. As noted by Jones (2008, p. 10), the relationship between canons and institutions exhibits a 'mutually reliant symbiotic' character: canons rely on institutions for their survival, endurance, and status, while institutions depend on canons for their authority, prestige, and selections. Furthermore, institutions consolidate the conservative nature of canons. Canons meticulously incorporate new works or pieces through time-consuming processes guided by aesthetic standards, in contrast to charts, which are culturally opportunistic by embracing whatever is popular regardless of aesthetic standards. Canons encapsulate age and historical precedence, while charts continually replace older entries with new ones.

A fading contrast?

The more or less implied contrast between the classical music canon and the popular charts evolved with the widespread introduction of the latter in the early 1940s. This opposition was most pronounced during the peak of the moral critique of mass culture in the post-World War II era, persisting until the transition from the 1960s to the 70s. During this period, the pinnacle of music, epitomized by the classical canon, was consistently juxtaposed with the popular preferences of the masses, as reflected in the charts, in a way that rarely stirred controversies. Indirectly, this also strengthened the demarcation between high and low culture, rendering it less ambiguous, not only within music but in a broader sense. Unlike in other cultural or aesthetic domains, charts were given a prominent position within music, and could serve as an indicator of the broader preferences held by the masses and, as such, represent the cultural lower echelon.

But as ever, the demarcation between high and low culture remained nuanced. In the 1960s, it was for instance challenged and blurred by pop art, a more affirmative criticism of popular culture, and a more creative and artistic appearance of popular music, embodied by artists such as Bob Dylan, The Beatles, Frank Zappa, and Jimi Hendrix. However, the softening of the high/low boundary was as ambiguous as the preceding sharpening of it. It was not until the advent of postmodernism in the 1980s that the

high/low divide began to be more commonly perceived as evaporating or losing its previous significance. This backdrop also fuelled efforts to save the so-called Western canon and portray the disintegration of cultural hierarchies as a threat to its preservation. Literature has consistently been at the heart of the canon debate, ignited by these efforts, and reading the Great Books of Ages the predominant recipe for restoring the canon (see e.g. Guillory, 1992; Bloom, 1994; Olsson, 2011; Bjurström, 2012). However, that recipe was easily extended to music, as done by Allan Bloom (1987, p. 69), when he blamed rock music for relegating classical music to a mere 'special taste' among others.

Since the late twentieth century, the perceived threat to, or dissolution of, the boundary between high and low culture has become a widely accepted starting point for both discussions on preserving or restoring canons and declaring their demise or death. A similar conjectural understanding of the status of the high/low divide has become something of a standard view in contemporary cultural research and debates. Even though there is still a critique of popular culture, with warnings about its insipidness or banality, the loss of status or authority of high culture is hardly called into question (see, e.g., McGuigan, 1992; Turner, 2012; Horowitz, 2012; Bjurström, 2016; Marx, 2022).

However, the impact of the transition from analogue to digital media technology on musical canons and charts, as well as the cultural high/low divide, remains an open question. Undoubtedly, music charts have evolved in response to the internet age by, for instance, incorporating streams and downloads alongside traditional record sales measurements. Likewise, the standing of both canons and charts, as well as the contrast between them, seems less pronounced since the advent of digitalization. But while the impact of digitalization and the internet on recorded music, music consumption, and use has been scrutinized from different viewpoints, there has been limited exploration of its effects from the perspective of canons or the distinction between high and low culture (see, e.g., Krukowski, 2017; Johansson et. al., 2018; Anastasiadis, 2019). Yet, the influential prognostications made nearly twenty years ago by Henry Jenkins (2006) and Chris Anderson (2006), regarding convergence culture and the long tail, seem to validate the inevitable decline of both musical canons and charts, and hence of their implied ability to contribute to the separation of high and low culture. Both Jenkins and Anderson, albeit from different perspectives, posited that digital media would significantly influence the reception and meaning of popular culture, aligning somewhat with Benjamin's analysis of how mechanical reproduction transformed art. But unlike Benjamin, neither Jenkins nor Anderson focused on art or high culture. Instead, their analyses are strictly confined to popular culture. According to Jenkins (2006, p. 140), the emergence of convergence culture evolved from earlier forms of popular culture, as folk culture gave way to mass culture, leading to the 'reemergence of grassroots creativity as everyday people take advantage of new technologies that enable them to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content'. He further asserts that convergence culture is more democratic, more participatory, knowledge-sharing, community-based, and individually empowering, but more polarized in terms of taste compared to pre-internet popular culture. Yet, convergence culture is also marked by bewilderment, since '[n]one of us really knows how to live in this era of media

convergence, collective intelligence, and participatory culture' (ibid., p. 76). By and large, this uncertainty is, however, seen as creative by Jenkins. Convergence culture is also a 'vernacular culture' according to Jenkins (ibid., pp. 322, 334), shaped by amateurs and their joint production of 'collective knowledge' and 'vernacular theories'. Anderson attributes the same spirit of DIY culture to the niche cultures that, according to him, have replaced the mainstream hit culture of the pre-internet era. The use of digital media is viewed by Anderson (2006, pp. 106–107) as 'manifestations of the wisdom of the crowd', transforming 'regular people' into 'the new tastemakers', who no longer are 'a super-elite of people cooler than us; they *are* us'.

Both Jenkins and Anderson predicted that the internet era, with its media convergence, online participation, search engines, customization, and new forms of community, would democratize people's access to culture and empower them as customers, DIY-producers, 'produsers' or 'prosumers'. For Anderson (ibid., p. 37), this has wiped out the hit culture of the twentieth century: 'Culture has shifted from following the crowd up to the top of the charts to finding your own style and exploring far out beyond the broadcast mainstream, into both relative obscurity and back through time to the classics'. Hit culture is losing prominence primarily because the digital technology enables real-time measurement of consumption patterns, inclinations, and tastes. In the music and book markets, top charts and bestseller lists are no longer necessary for determining and capitalizing popularity. Instead, niches and specialization have taken the forefront. Forecasted by Anderson, rankings across genres would gradually diminish in importance, but persist within specific genres and sub-genres. People will discover what they want and explore their preferences through collaborative filters, recommendations, and by sharing individual playlists. According to Anderson (ibid., pp. 183, 184), the new era succeeding the hit-driven mainstream era is marked by increasing cultural heterogeneity and fragmentation; characterized by the coexistence of 'millions of microcultures' and 'a shift from mass culture to *massively parallel culture*'. Hence, he (ibid., pp. 33, 38) concluded that 'this looks like the end of the blockbuster era' and 'a hit-driven culture'.

However, the reasoning of both Anderson and Jenkins requires more extensive elaboration, primarily because it is restricted to popular culture and treats taste and aesthetic judgment as mere subjective faculties. While Anderson (ibid., p. 118) dismisses distinctions between high and low quality as 'entirely subjective' and 'in the eye of the beholder', Jenkins' (2006, p. 200) conceptualization of convergence culture lacks a focus on taste, although he suggests that 'our taste in popular culture will become more polarized'.

A change addressed neither by Jenkins nor Anderson is that digitalization has transformed recorded music into an infinite jukebox – an impalpable yet instantly accessible archive – where quantity, once and for all, seems to triumph over quality. Listeners' individual tastes direct their choices from this archive, unencumbered by hierarchical distinctions among musical categories, styles, or genres. In this context, and as suggested by Anderson, taste and aesthetic judgment can indeed be regarded as purely subjective, and the selections made by other users, prominently displayed

through popular streams, as the main filter guiding individuals as they explore music on Spotify or other digital media platforms.

Digital music archives are neither structured as canons nor as charts, but basically organized by artists, songs or tunes, albums, genres, stations, and playlists. They operate without gate-filters, allowing all types of music to be included, regardless of popularity, musical quality, artistic merit, or esteem. Overall, they renounce categorizations of music in terms of high and low culture, mainstream, avant-garde, subculture, underground, and even to some extent popularity, leaving all such distinctions to their users.

Unlike canons and charts, digital music archives operate non-discriminatorily and non-selectively, giving their users nearly total control over discrimination and selection. Selecting from those archives has a nobrow-character – in accordance with Seabrook's (2001) notion of nobrow as something which cannot be classified as neither high nor low – and seems akin to a zero-sum game: empowering listeners, while potentially challenging or undermining established musical standards and hierarchies. Thus far, subjective taste reigns in the digital music archives, alongside a rich tapestry of community-based tastes on the internet. This might be taken as a sign of the empowerment of people as consumers, yet disempowering them in other respects, as for example their knowledgeability about music or ability to master musical matters. Likewise, it is doubtful if and how digital music archives have affected musical canon formations and popularity rankings. While the shift from analogue to digital media has indeed transformed the material culture of recorded music, comprehending its broader impact on music remains elusive. Nonetheless, this change in material culture has influenced musical practices. Music listening has likely become more private and less public with the transition from physical records to streaming services. In all likelihood, this transition has also fostered casual listening and browsing across a vast and almost endless musical soundscape. Moreover, the immediate access to nearly the entire history of recorded music has profoundly altered the conditions for finding, ordering, and collecting music. The past coexists seamlessly with the present, and nothing really goes out of time anymore. In the digital music archives, plain time-filters are conspicuously absent. Unlike canons and charts, which signify accumulated aesthetic values and current popularity, these archives lack straightforward time-based mechanisms. However, current popularity, measured in various ways, serves as both an ordering principle and a guide-option for users navigating the archives.

Notwithstanding these and other factors and changes, the digitalization of music appears to have minimal impact on canons and charts. The digital archives of recorded music neither strongly support nor oppose canonicity, whether it pertains to major or minor canons. Processes of canonization and de-canonization primarily rely on venues beyond those offered by digital music archives: foremost an infrastructure that encompasses practices, institutions, education, and criticism. Digital music archives serve canonicity by preserving the memory of different kinds of music, but the repertories of prominent concert halls, education curricula, criticism, and historiography hold greater significance in this regard. Oblivion poses a threat to items with claims to canonicity, and since the archives function as a memory bank for recorded music they

play a role in preserving its longevity and can thereby counteract processes of de-canonization. Likewise, they perpetuate the memory of hit music after its popularity has peaked and support its recycling, which appears to be a requirement for its canonization. In this manner they also contribute to the canonization of popular music, as it has unfolded by, for instance, its integration into academic discourse, rigorous criticism, and recent musealization of rock and pop music, with the establishment of museums such as The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, the British Music Experience in London, and The Abba Museum in Stockholm.

In the ways mentioned, digital music archives strengthen the longevity and endurance of popular music, allowing it to better withstand the test of time and additionally giving popularity a less time-bound and more recurrent quality. Digital music devices personalize and diversify music selections and rankings through, for example, the making and sharing of individual playlists. Furthermore, the digital era has spawned numerous competing channels for assessing hits. YouTube hits, iTunes hits, MP3 hits, streaming and download hits, online radio hits, and other top lists now vie with charts based on sales of records in the more traditional formats of singles and albums.

In the realm of classical and contemporary art music, recording have increasingly gained importance, elevating certain performances to canonical status. Minor canons, or what might be termed classical sub-canons, of recorded performances by conductors, orchestras, instrumentalists, or singers have branched off from the work- and composer-based canon of classical music, in ways that resemble the canonization of jazz and rock music, which is primarily based on recordings.

Digital audio technologies, however, function both as agents of change and preservers of the past. Likewise, they cultivate technofuturism as well as technonostalgia (Bijsterveld and Dijck, 2009, pp. 19–20). Jenkins' and Anderson's views on the impact of the digital era belong to the former, while, for example, audiophiles who cherish the analogue sound of vinyl records belong to the latter. And as advocates for the digital age as a pathway toward dismantling hierarchical culture and taste, Jenkins and Anderson remain at the forefront among the technofuturists.

At first glance, a diminishing opposition between canons and charts may seem to bolster Jenkins' and Anderson's views on the de-hierarchization of culture and taste, especially since the digital age has provided people with new platforms for evaluating music and assessing its quality. Laypersons now have the capacity to function as music critics, equipped with collaborative tools for organizing and categorizing music, in competition with established classifications and hierarchies. The expertise of laypersons can certainly, as suggested by Jenkins, function as collective knowledge and generate metadata on internet, in the shape of 'folksonomies' – a term formed by blending 'folk' and 'taxonomy' – with the capacity to reorder, reclassify, and circulate media content with potential to challenge established cultural and musical standards and norms.

Yet, contemporary nobrow-notions of the erosion or breakdown of the high/low dichotomy rarely reckon with the intricate interplay of ascending and descending movements between its opposite poles. For example, the gaining of prominence for pieces or genres of popular music and the loss of esteem for works of classical music is

often interpreted as evidence of such an erosion or breakdown, rather than being seen as mere upward and downward movements. In that context, it is also noteworthy that the presumed canonization of popular music reflects traditional high culture aesthetics and canonical criteria, such as genius, originality, authenticity, creativity, seriousness, and innovation, albeit supplemented by genre-specific values, like rebellion or distinctive sonic qualities, which are particularly evident in rock music (see Jones, 2008, pp. 138–139).

The canonization of popular music affirms that popularity does not necessarily impede canonicity. But, akin to most instances of canonization, the elevation of popular music to canonical status necessitates the endorsement of a cultivated taste. Most likely, omnivorous taste plays a crucial role in that respect, for example by applying high aesthetic standards to judgments on popular culture. However, there seem to be no entirely fitting concepts to fully grasp the upward mobility of popular culture and the downward mobility of high culture, or so-called *gesunkenes Kulturgut.* Regardless, elevating the status of popular culture or diminishing the status of high culture does not *per se* obliterate the boundary between high and low culture, although it may relocate it.

The hierarchization of culture in terms of high and low relies primarily on oppositions. It can be assumed, as I have done here, that the more clear-cut or commonly accepted these oppositions are, the less ambiguous will the boundary between high and popular culture appear. The diminished contrast between canons and charts, albeit in many ways marginal, has made the high/low divide more ambiguous and blurred. But the contribution to this from digital media technologies seems far from the impact that Jenkins and Anderson predicted media convergence and the long tail of media commerce would have. Still, the implied contrast between canons and charts seems weaker today than a few decades ago. When popular music was chartified in the 1940s and infused with properties and qualities of chart mechanisms, it altered the social, cultural, and economic infrastructure of music. These properties and qualities could be contrasted with the canon of classical or serious music, thereby reinforcing the comprehension of this music as possessing superior qualities, such as universality, timelessness, intriguing complexity, authenticity, and autonomy, compared to the perception of popular music as inferior, ephemeral, derivative, simple, trifling, and strictly commercial. Indirectly, this contrast between chart music and canonized music likely contributed to the strong and more general moral critique of mass culture up until the late 1960s and early 70s, especially since music was more profoundly chartified than other areas of popular culture or artistic domains, such as literature or film. However, the apparent diversification of both charts and canons since the late twentieth century, with claims on canonicity from popular music genres, has weakened the contrast between them. This can be regarded as one of several factors contributing to the blurring of the boundary between high and low in music, as well as within culture more broadly.

While the digital age appears to steer media consumers toward a musical nobrow culture, this alone may not significantly contribute to the erosion of the boundary

between high and low culture. Digital media is just one player, and hardly the most crucial, in the transformation of musical practices, hierarchies, institutions, and tastes.

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Abstract

The article explores the contrast between canonization processes and the compilation of popularity charts within music, set against the backdrop of the high/low culture distinction. By becoming a crucial building block in the infrastructure of popular music in the 1940s, charts laid the groundwork for a more clear-cut distinction between high and low culture, fuelled by an implicit tension between canonicity and the prominence of charts. Although this tension has weakened, it persists in contemporary music, framed by multiple claims to canonicity and an expanded diversification of charts, primarily propelled by the shift to digital media technology. This development is considered in terms of the distinction between major and minor musical canons, which reflects their hierarchical positions in the high/low culture divide. After delineating the contrast between canons and charts in an ideal-typical manner, the article ends with a discussion of how the transition from analogue to digital media has altered the implied interplay between canonicity and charts, as well as the distinction between high and low in music and in culture more broadly.

Keywords: Canon of classical music, canons, major and minor canons, music charts, high and low culture, digitalization, digital media.

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