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A CASE STUDY OF INDIVIDUALS' MUSIC PREFERENCES AND THEIR REPORTED  
INFLUENCES ON THESE PREFERENCES

BENJAMIN COSSITOR  
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Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Dr. Joanne Rutkowski  
Professor, Music Education  
Thesis Supervisor/Honors Advisor

Dr. Eric McKee  
Associate Professor, Music Theory  
Second Reader

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore reported influences on an individual's musical preference from a case study perspective. Three students from one university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States were selected from a pool of students enrolled in a general education music course that responded to a brief pre-screening survey. The data from the survey allowed the researcher to select individuals with varied music preferences for interviews, which led to three diverse case studies. After analyzing the transcriptions of these interviews, the researcher concluded that common themes did exist among the responses that corroborated previous research. Familiarity played one of the most important roles when deciding music preference; each subject illustrated how the music they heard as a child impacted their later music preference. In addition to these common themes, each subject had a unique story to share that fundamentally influenced the music he/she listened to. For example, one subject referred to a unique cultural experience in Nigeria that reportedly expanded his musical horizons, while another's experiences in school caused him to listen to primarily instrumental genres. In conclusion, common themes were identified, as in previous quantitative studies, but unique factors also emerged.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM**

### **Background**

As I sit perusing iTunes, many times I find I like a song simply because I heard it before. Often, I pass over every other one of a band's songs simply because I found one with a title I recognize. This makes me wonder whether I actually like music because of some intrinsic quality or because I have some familiarity with it. Furthermore, often I like a new song because I think it sounds like another piece I know very well. For example, I immediately loved the de Meij "Lord of the Rings" Symphony simply because it reminded me of the Holst "Folk Song Suites." By extension, this is probably also why I have such difficulty appreciating contemporary atonal music and the music of other cultures; I have little to no past experience with this music, so I find that I really do not "understand" it. Thus, I began to question, "Why do I like certain music and automatically dislike other music?" Is my preference based solely on familiarity or could there be other influences?

### **Establishment of Research Problem**

Previous research has already found various factors that influence music preference. One possible influence is a person's personality. Using the Little and Zuckerman's Music Preference Scale and the revised Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI), Rawlings (1997) found extraverts tend to prefer popular music while "open-minded" people enjoy a broader range of musical styles.

In addition, a person's culture is thought to have an influence on music selection. Morrison (1998) found that many people are influenced by music that they consider to be

a part of their culture. LeBlanc, Stamou, Jin, & McCrary (1999) actually found a significant interaction among gender, country, and age. However, they concluded that the effects of these influences cannot be generalized across all cultures because music serves very different roles in each culture, and different styles of music are perceived very differently. For example, Western people consider the Aeolian tonality to be “sad,” while in the Jewish tradition it is considered to be the main mode for folk songs.

Furthermore, the lifestyles of music consumers seem to influence their music preference. Hargreaves and North (2007) found that various aspects of a person’s lifestyle, including morality and interpersonal relationships, seem to link to certain musical styles. They divided these aspects of lifestyle into liberal and conservative; liberals preferring more “rebellious” music (i.e. pop and rock music) while conservatives preferred classical and other traditional forms of music.

Schubert (2007) found evidence that people tend to select music which causes them to become emotionally involved. As reported via a questionnaire, a sample of college students tended to favor music that caused them to have strong feelings. He also measured for familiarity and found that the students more often liked music that they had heard before than music that was new to them. However, it should be noted that the majority of his sample were students enrolled in a music course for undergraduate music majors. Therefore, his results may have been skewed by the use of trained musicians. Nonetheless, the findings seem to suggest that familiarity plays a role in music preference. Noted music psychologist Edwin Gordon in his Music Learning Theory also displays how important familiarity is in music comprehension. According to this theory, young children build a “vocabulary” of tonal and rhythm patterns that they can then hear

in other pieces of music. Thus, songs that incorporate this vocabulary will seem more familiar to them and easier to comprehend (Bluestine, 2000).

Most of this previous research has been quantitative, implying that results can be inferred to larger populations of people. While it appears that music preference is a personal choice, it may not be that those choices are based on common influences. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore reported influences on an individual's musical preference from a case study perspective. The guiding questions for this project were:

1. Why do persons report listening to the music they do?
2. Do any common themes emerge regarding reported reasons for preferences?

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

In this chapter, the reader will find a review of the pre-existing work in the field of music preference. For the purposes of this study, I used Boyle and Radocy's definition of "musical preference": "... an expressed choice of one musical work or style over other available works or styles. Some writers prefer the term musical taste" (Radocy & Boyle, 1979, p. 221). The majority of work in this area has been performed from a quantitative perspective. Thus, specific factors have been identified that are thought to universally affect the musical preferences of the human population. I have divided these factors into two categories, external and internal. The external category refers to all influences that come from the world outside of the individual and includes the effects of environment, culture, and social identity. In contrast, the internal category refers to the influences that come from within the individual and includes the effects of age, gender, lifestyle, personality, and familiarity/cognition. This review of literature provides a broad awareness of the many factors currently thought to be dominant in the shaping of a person's musical taste.

### External Influences

**Environment.** The environment in which a person is raised has been shown to have a profound impact on the types of music he/she listens to. Roulston's (2006) study, "Qualitative Investigation of Young Children's Music Preferences," is one example. As the title indicates, this also happens to be one of the few qualitative studies I was able to locate on which to model my own. In this study, Roulston examined students from five different classrooms, two from a local daycare and the remainder from a nearby

elementary school. Thus, the selected children were ages 3 to 8. Roulston took field notes while observing in the classroom settings on 15 different days, in addition to interviewing volunteer parents and elementary children who wanted to be a part of the study. After a complex system of transcribing and coding, Roulston found a few common themes. Children are listening to a much more diverse array of musical styles and cultures at an early age, and this is occurring through personal technological devices. Furthermore, the distinction between aural and visual media is also blurring now that media devices such as cell phones and iPods can playback video. These factors seem to have led to the subjects' increasingly varied and personalized music listening preferences, even at a very young age.

Christenson (1994) also investigated the environmental effects that parents and peers can have on children. Subjects (175 first- through sixth-graders) were interviewed to determine their music preferences, access to music, frequency of listening, and their social reasons for listening. Christensen found that the majority of children in each age group (every two grades being an age group for a total of three age groups) discussed music that was either "pop" or some type of "rock" music. This preference was seen much earlier than expected by Christensen, since pop and rock music was traditionally seen as a shift from a parent-centered environment to a peer-centered environment later in adolescence. However, the importance of music in terms of ownership and frequency of listening was higher in the older age group as expected. Christensen discussed how these results illustrate a trend of moving away from the music of parents to the music of peers at a surprisingly young age, especially since children at those ages were still spending the majority of their time with their parents at home.

Lamont and Webb (2009) conducted a study on favorite pieces of music over long and shorter time-spans. This study involved nine undergraduate students in the North West Midlands, England between the ages of 20 and 22. Three participants were male and six were female, and only one participant was an active musical performer. Each participant was required to complete a daily diary for two full weeks, with a separation of two weeks between each week of diary entries. Within each diary entry, participants were asked to write about their favorite pieces of music from that day, what reason they had for listening, what they did while they listened, how they felt while listening, etc. After reading these diary entries, two subjects were selected for a follow-up interview based on their reported contrasting music preferences. The results from this study displayed how quickly music preferences can change with the participants' reports of listening to a wide variety of songs and artists each day for different moods/purposes. The follow-up interviews revealed that one reason for this is to avoid "over-saturation." Furthermore, the investigators were able to separate the participants into two types of listeners; "magpies" store a limited collection of only their favorite music that they listen to in the short-term while "squirrels" build a large collection of music from which they can draw from in the long-term. Ultimately, the authors concluded that musical favorites are influenced by a combination of factors that include (but are not limited to) "positive emotional and personal circumstances as well as by repetition, choice, and positive effects on mood."

**Culture.** Leblanc, Jin, Stamou, & McCrary (1999) studied the music preference opinions of 2,042 students in Greece, South Korea, and the United States. Ages ranged from 8- to 18-years-old with 980 males and 1,062 females included. Subjects were from

Greece (n=483), the United States (n=551), and Korea (n=1008). The participants were given an 18 item pre-existing listening test with proven reliability, the “Turnpoint” music preference scale. This scale was evenly divided between rock music, traditional jazz, and art music examples. After studying the results, the researchers concluded that culture had a significant impact on the listening preferences of humans. In addition to culture, the researchers found that age and gender had a very complex interaction along with culture. In other words, variables (such as age and gender) do not have the same effect in each country. Thus, this study indicated that findings from research in one culture cannot simply be applied to another.

Morrison (1999) compared the preference responses of music majors and non-music majors in the United States, the People’s Republic of China, and Hong Kong. These college students were all working full-time as students towards their first degree. Music majors were in at least their second year, participating in the study as part of their music classes. The non-music majors participated at the start of a general education music course. The musical selections the subjects listened to included nine instrumental pieces that represented jazz, Western classical, and Chinese classical. The excerpts were between 1 minute and 1.5 minutes, and each category included one “slow,” “moderate,” and “fast” example. The participants indicated their responses using a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from “Don’t like it at all” to “Like it a lot.” In addition to this Likert scale, the subjects were given an open-ended comment section that asked them to give specific reasons for their rating. After analysis, the Chinese students and U.S. students were found to prefer the music from their respective cultures. In contrast, the Hong Kong students were more evenly distributed across all three styles. Furthermore, the music majors had

more positive ratings overall in comparison to non-music majors. Thus, culture was again shown to have a significant influence on music preference. By extension, this impact from culture might also be connected to familiarity; because individuals immersed in a particular culture hear the musical heritage of that culture ubiquitously, those individuals become very familiar with that style of music.

**Social Identity.** Brown & Volgsten addressed the influence of social identity on the musical preferences of individuals in their book, Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music. According to social identity theory, individuals seek to be the norm in their particular group or subculture. Thus, this socializing force could account for all of the above external influences. According to the authors, “. . . music, as a cultural entity, serves as an important symbol, in and of itself, of group identity, helping to create borders between ingroup and outgroup” (p. 4). The “groups” they mention could be as large as an entire culture or as small as just a circle of friends; a particular generation or gender could be a group in addition to the aforementioned geographical groups. The authors also discussed how identity formation is largely an “exclusionary process” that helps distinguish “us from them” (p. 4). As a result, individuals are affected by a series of concentric circles: their nation/culture, their community within that culture, and their small social groups within that community.

### **Internal Influences**

**Age/Gender.** As mentioned above, Leblanc, Jin, Stamou, & McCrary (1999) found that age, gender, and culture all have a complex interaction with one another when influencing an individual’s music preference. In addition, Leblanc, Sims, Siivola, & Obert (1996) conducted a study of the preference opinions of 2,262 participants whose

ages ranged from 6 to 91 years. The listening examples were art music, traditional jazz, and rock, and the researchers attempted to control for variables that had previously been demonstrated to have an influence on preference. Thus, they selected two “slow,” two “moderate,” and two “fast” examples for each category. The researchers stated, “We wanted to measure listener preference for three styles that might have comparable popularity across the wide range of listener ages samples in our study.” Their listening tape included 18 short examples (between 21 and 52 seconds) that were presented in a random order. The subjects recorded their answers using a scale modeled after the Likert scale; they marked a position along a five-step continuum that ranged from “I like” to “I dislike.” In the end, the researchers were surprised to find that the mean preferences for the three musical styles were never separated by more than 1 point on their 1 to 5 scale. This was true at each grade level. In addition, rock music was consistently highly regarded in each age-group, and art music was consistently competitive with the two other styles. Furthermore, after charting the preference levels for each age-group, the researchers found that listeners in Grade 1 had a high level of preference overall followed by a decline to Grade 6. Then, preference trended a rise to its peak at the college level followed by another decline into the adult years.

Flowers & Murphy (2001) interviewed 45 “older” adults from Virginia, West Virginia, and Ohio who volunteered to be part of the study. Eighteen subjects were between 80 and 90 years of age, 19 were between 70 and 79 years, and 4 were between 65 and 69 years (the remaining four were just listed as “above 70 years of age”). Thirty-two of the volunteers were women while only 13 volunteers were men. Participants were individually interviewed and were first asked the decade of their birth and their “type of

work.” The researchers found that the participants were economically diverse, ranging from low- through upper-middle class lifestyles. Following these questions, the researchers used a set of questions from a previous study that focused on music preferences, experiences, and skills. This included asking the adults about their “school experiences, music involvement at various times in their life, and current music activities” (p. 27). Finally, the participants were asked “What do you wish you had learned about music that would enhance the quality of your life at the present time?” and “What advice would you give to music teachers in developing public school music opportunities for children?” The results of this study showed that there were definite preference trends among these older adults. “Big band” music and other popular music from the participants’ early adult years was definitely the most prevalent preference among the subjects along with a general dislike of “loud and noisy” music; however, most had continued to develop their listening tastes since then, mentioning such diverse works as *Les Miserables* and even “In a Gadda da Vida.” Other findings in this study included the positive effect of previous experience in music education programs on the lives of the older adults (there was an increase in musical participation and understanding), the value of music-making skill among the participants, and the valuable insight that senior citizens have to offer on the function of music throughout life.

**Lifestyle.** Flowers & Murphy (2001), mentioned above, briefly discussed the wide variance of the socio-economic lifestyles of their participants. In the subjects’ responses, they found that those who did not have much experience at music-making listed financial hardships as the main reason. This limitation had a negative impact on the

rest of their lives, as most expressed a desire to learn a musical instrument (mainly the piano).

North & Hargreaves (2007) performed a three part study involving the relationship between music preference and various aspects of lifestyle. For the purposes of this paper, only the first part of the study is analyzed since that involved some of the most differential aspects of lifestyle; these aspects include interpersonal relationships, living arrangements, moral and political beliefs, and criminal behavior. Participants (n=2532) were selected from a variety of locations in a city in the United Kingdom; these locations were carefully selected in order to obtain a cross-section of the population. The subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire with 13 sections: “General information, Travel, Relationships, Living Arrangements, Money, Education, Employment, Health, Drinking and Smoking, Media, Beliefs, Crime, and Music” (p. 61). As already stated, the part of the study being discussed involved analysis of the General information, Relationships, Living Arrangements, Beliefs, and Crime sections. The music portion of the survey included a list of 35 musical styles followed by two example performers/composers of each; subjects were asked to pick one that best typified their current listening preference. The other sections used questions with a set of pre-defined responses, a specific number, or an 11-point Likert scale. After a very thorough statistical analysis, the researchers concluded that music and lifestyle were definitely related. They specifically mentioned the possibility of dividing music listeners along “a liberal-conservative dichotomy” (p. 86). Participants with a more liberal lifestyle (along with occasionally displaying some anti-social lifestyles and beliefs) were demonstrated to listen to more “problem” music; in contrast, participants with a more conservative, law-

abiding lifestyle appeared to listen to more classical and traditional styles of music.

However, the results of this study may be questionable due to the single generalization the researchers forced on the participants when selecting their music preference.

**Personality.** Rawlings (1997) used the music preference scale developed by Little and Zuckerman (1986) on a group of 150 university students in Melbourne, Australia. This 5-point scale asked participants to rate their enjoyment of ten “composite” categories that consisted of several items naming specific music types; each of these items included examples of performers, songs, and composers. An update of the examples to more contemporary artists was the only change made to this scale from Little and Zuckerman’s model. Subjects were also asked to state their previous musical experience and activity. In addition to this music preference scale, the subjects had to complete the revised version of the NEO Personality Inventory. This is a 240 item inventory that measures according to the Five-Factor Personality Model. The revision to this inventory involves the division of the five major domains into six subscales. The results of this study supported the researcher’s projection that extraversion and openness are two influential personality domains regarding music preference. Individuals displaying “openness” appear to prefer many diverse musical styles, although they tend to stay away from popular contemporary music. This suggests that they may tend to favor music that is not in the mainstream; this would make sense since “open” individuals characteristically seek “rich and novel experiences” (p. 130). Meanwhile, individuals showing “extraversion” show a strong association with popular music, especially rock music. Again, this seems logical since extraverts tend to seek “stimulating situations likely to increase cortical arousal” (p. 131). As the researcher stated, “Excitement-seekers

crave excitement and ‘like bright colors and noisy environments.’ Such stimulating environments are more likely to be associated with the loud, harsh sounds of much rock music rather than the more concordant sounds of the most frequently heard forms of classical music” (p. 131).

**Familiarity.** Schubert (2007) studied how emotion, familiarity, and preference interact with one another. The participants were recruited from two social clubs for the elderly, a music education summer school, and an upper-level undergraduate music course. Males (n=10) and females (n=55) took part, and their ages ranged from 19 to 91 years. Each subject was required to listen to five short excerpts from popular Romantic works that were perceived as evoking a particular emotion. The romantic style was selected because its use in modern-day films was thought to make it the most familiar. While listening, the subjects rated the music in terms of the valence (whether it was happy or sad), the arousal (whether it was exciting or peaceful), and the emotional strength. Twenty-eight of the participants listened to each piece twice, once to indicate the emotions the subject thought the piece was trying to convey and then once to indicate the emotions the subject actually felt. The remaining 37 volunteers completed both sets of questions at once after listening to each excerpt at a separate sitting. This was to prevent any skewing of results based on the study design. Lastly, the participants were asked to rate their familiarity with and liking of the excerpt. The researchers discovered that familiarity is an important predictor of enjoyment, which was consistent with their past research. Furthermore, the study revealed that felt emotion is much more influential on preference than expressed emotion. It did not matter whether the felt emotion was

positive or negative; subjects tended to prefer music that made them feel any emotion at all.

Furthermore, in Lerdahl's 1992 article, "Cognitive Constraints on Compositional Systems," he discussed the affect that cognition has on musical enjoyment. Cognition is very closely tied to familiarity, since music that a person hears repetitively from youth is the style of music that person will come to understand and regard as the norm. Lerdahl's theory involved the discussion of what he termed "musical grammar, a limited set of rules that can generate indefinitely large sets of musical events and/or their structural descriptions" (p. 99). He then divided this musical grammar into "compositional grammar" that generates the sequence of events in a piece and includes the tonality or organization (e.g. serialism) used by the composer, and "listening grammar, more or less unconsciously employed by auditors, that generates mental representations of the music" (p. 99). When the compositional grammar starts to use elements or "events" that are not included in the listening grammar, the listener is unable to comprehend the music or appreciate its value.

This idea aligns with Gordon's Music Learning Theory, where he describes how young children build a vocabulary of tonal and rhythm patterns that they can then hear in other pieces of music. If a piece incorporates this vocabulary, it is more comprehensible to people that hear it. In contrast, if a work fails to use this vocabulary, listeners will not understand the music and not be able to appreciate it (Bluestine, 2000).

### **Chapter Summary**

As can be seen above, much research has been conducted investigating what factors can affect music preference. The majority of the studies presented took an

empirical, quantitative stance on the issue and researched one particular factor. A limited number of qualitative studies were included, yet these also focused on a certain factor or used participants of a very young or old age. The factors that have been identified by previous research include all the external and internal facets titling each section above. These previous research studies point to a complex interaction of these factors when an individual decides his/her music preference. This study investigated these factors along with the effects of an individual's unique life experiences as reported by three case studies.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to explore reported influences on an individual's musical preference from a case study perspective. The guiding questions for this project were:

1. Why do persons report listening to the music they do?
2. Do any common themes emerge regarding reported reasons for preferences?

### **Design**

Most of the previous preference research has been quantitative in nature, inferring generalities across all populations. I hypothesize that music preference may be more personal, being influenced by each individual's unique life experiences. Thus, the design of this study followed a case study format. Individuals were interviewed one-on-one to acquire a much deeper understanding of their preferences and the reasons behind their choices than a quantitative methodology would afford.

Three persons were interviewed individually by the researcher, using a set of pre-formulated questions. They each had their own separate session one-on-one with the researcher. The focus of the interview was to determine what their music preference is, how they select their music, and how they were introduced to their music. Afterward, the researcher analyzed the responses, looking for possible influences on each individual's preference and common themes among the individuals.

### **Selection of Participants**

Participants were all selected from a general education course in music for non-music majors offered at a university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States; this

was to ensure that the students had varied backgrounds, were not music majors, and had a definite interest in music. The subjects selected included two males and one female with ages ranging from 21 to 23. The participants were initially contacted through the class website. All students enrolled in the class were sent a message that described the study and its processes and were given the option to participate. Because varied music preference was essential for this study, the potential subjects were asked to complete an on-line questionnaire to determine what music they liked. By responding to this initial contact, the subjects gave their implied consent. The researcher then chose the first three responders with preferences in contrasting musical genres to ensure random selection. Furthermore, only three participants were selected to give the researcher the opportunity to have a more in-depth analysis for each case study and to get varied results.

### **Data Collection Tools**

**Pre-Screening Questionnaire.** Data for phase one of this study were collected via an on-line survey (see Appendix A). The purpose of this survey was to identify three individuals who had contrasting musical preferences and to obtain these individuals' email addresses for future contact. In this survey, participants selected their top five preferences from a matrix of musical genres. The various musical genres were selected from the list that iTunes uses on its website. These are the musical styles with which the potential subjects would be most familiar and understand since iTunes is a leading provider of music in the United States. The first responder was automatically accepted for an interview. Two subsequent responders were then accepted based on whether their top three preferences differed from the subject(s) already accepted.

**Interviews.** Data for phase two of this study were collected via three separate one-on-one interviews. The questions focused on trying to learn more about each individual's background and past experiences, what their music preference is, and how they select their music (see Appendix B). These questions were based on Roulston (2006), in which she asked questions of both children and parents to determine the children's listening environments at home and at school. Thus, this seemed like an appropriate study after which to model my questions, given the study's qualitative nature and relevant subject matter. I have performed a few minor adjustments to this model for my subjects' older ages and circumstances. It was anticipated that these questions, and the ad lib discussion they triggered, would lead the individuals to reveal their music preference and the possible past influences that have affected this music preference.

### **Procedures**

After obtaining permission from the course instructor (see Appendix C), potential participants were initially contacted by posting a message to the website for a college general education music course (see Appendix D). In this message the students were informed about the study and were asked to complete a pre-screening questionnaire on surveymonkey.com in order to find three volunteers with contrasting music interests (see Appendix A). The survey also asked for contact information in order for the primary investigator to set up an interview with each selected subject. The researcher then contacted each selected subject to schedule an interview at which the subjects were given an implied consent form (see Appendix E). The interview consisting of a series of standard, pre-formulated questions in addition to some improvised questions based on his/her responses (see Appendix B). The individuals were interviewed separately at

different times. They were allowed to sit facing the researcher in a private room. After obtaining permission, the researcher audio-recorded the entire discussion that occurred to be transcribed later. Each question was asked, although the order was determined by the researcher according to the flow of conversation. In addition, the researcher always was sure to ask follow-up questions based on the person's responses before moving on to the next prepared question. Following the interview the participants were thanked by the researcher and allowed to leave.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. The transcriptions were analyzed for all possible influences and common themes among the answers.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In order to maintain anonymity, the three subjects selected for this study are labeled Subject A, B, and C. Subject A was a 21-year-old male who expressed rap/hip-hop and R&B as his top two music genres. Subject B was a 23-year-old female who described modern country and pop as her favorite two music genres, and Subject C was a 22-year-old male who expressed classic ('60s, '70s, and '80s) pop, jazz, and western classical as his favorite music genres. The rest of this chapter is organized by the themes that emerged from the subjects' responses: the influence of familiarity, the importance of the music's message, the importance of the music, the length of time to judge new music, the discovery of new music, the influence of parents' music, and the influence of peers' music. Additional unique experiences that also emerged as influences are presented last. All quotes are from the interview transcriptions.

### **Influence of Familiarity**

One area where the responses of all three subjects were comparable involved familiarity. Each subject admitted that there was some music that he/she simply could not understand because they had not been exposed to it. For example, Subject C mentioned that he did not enjoy listening to the "harsh" sounds of "free jazz" and serialism due to his limited listening of it. He also stated that he has changed his mind about liking a song simply because he heard it multiple times. Thus, this leads to the conclusion that familiarity with a song or style impacts a person's enjoyment of it. In addition, Subject B's continual exposure to country music due to sharing a room with her sister led to her eventual preference for that genre. Subject A expressed it clearly when he said,

"Yeah, well when you're familiar with something, it's always easy for you to just right off the bat, just listen to it, adapt to it and be like, "oh yeah." Like if I hear a rap song, I

know what rap sounds like. I'm open to listening to it because I've heard millions of rap songs before. But I don't like repetition of something that's already been done. So even though it's rap or even though it's soul or this or that, I like something to be different about it that makes it stick out from everybody else's because if not, then you're just like the next guy."

### **Importance of the Music's Message**

The first theme that quickly became apparent was the importance of the music's message (or lyrics). When asked, "How would you describe the music you like?" Subject A stressed the importance of the music having a message that he could relate to. When judging a piece of music, Subject A stated, "The two major things that I focus on is what they have to say and the production." In addition, when discussing the reasons for disliking the pop music genre in particular, he says,

"I don't really like pop too much because it's just...it's not...the majority of it is not meant for the public to relate to for personal use; it's just meant for people to party to when they get together to have fun, so I'm not really into music like that. Obviously, if I go out to a party, I'll dance to a party song because that's what it's meant for; it's meant to make you dance. But during my own personal time, I wouldn't be listening to stuff like that because I don't relate to it at that moment."

Lastly, Subject A mentioned how he would not play the music his parents listened to for his own enjoyment; (specifically mentioning Barry White) he describes, "I would never just go play Barry White, even though he sounds good and he's a good artist, it's just not something I relate to."

Likewise, when asked, "What exactly about country music draws you to it?" Subject B said, "I love how each country song kind of tells a story, and I can usually relate with a lot of them. And even when I can't, I still enjoy getting that message."

Furthermore, when describing music that she avoids, she mentioned “scream-o” music because she cannot understand what the artists are singing.

In contrast, Subject C placed much less importance on the message (or lyrics) of the music. His primary preferences were instrumental genres, so he declared, “I have a tendency to listen to the stuff outside of the . . . everything else other than the lyrics . . . at least on the first couple times through.”

### **Importance of the Music**

The next theme that emerged was the importance of the music itself; this involved all the sounds, timbres, and performance styles in a piece of music. Subject A went into great detail when describing the music that he currently likes. As was stated above, he mentioned the importance of the lyrics. He also mentioned an example where he liked an artist even though the lyrics weren’t very good. In his words, “They [the lyrics] don’t do the songs any justice, but his voice is just really good, and he’s the master of like how to really sing. And that just like overshadows any other flaw.” Subject A also discussed his experience singing in a studio and how that influenced his judgment of the music he hears. He states, “But when you start to record yourself, you know what sounds good and what doesn’t. You start to pay attention to pitches, pay attention to time signatures, pay attention to the artist singing in time or rapping in time, pay attention to resonance, pay attention to a lot of things.” The researcher did clarify that Subject A was not a music major during the interview; Subject A just happens to be an active performer.

Similarly, Subject B answered questions about how country music itself is attractive to her, not just the stories they tend to tell. She stated, “Well I also feel that it’s

how they get the message across; it's how they're singing it, too. I like that kind of hick-ish tone that they use.”

As previously mentioned, Subject C described how he listens to “everything other than the lyrics” when judging a new song. This makes sense since he favors primarily instrumental genres, where there are no lyrics or vocals utilized.

### **Length of Time to Judge New Music**

Each of the subjects was asked to estimate how many times they had to listen to a song in order to judge whether they liked it or not. Subject A responded with an immediate, “No, I know from the first listen.” Subject A had a lot of insight into the recording process, and used that knowledge to make his judgment and guess whether an artist would become popular. When giving an example of an artist who was talented but held back by his production, Subject A stated,

“His songs are good, but he has flaws. And the flaws are not him, it's his production. You can tell that he recorded his stuff with really low-fidelity audio equipment. At least I can tell maybe because I have the ear for that. So the recordings don't do the songs any justice. You know it's meant to sound better, but it just doesn't.”

Subject A mentioned this “production quality” repeatedly in his interview. He defined it as “the beat, the instrumentals, the guitars in there. How the instrumentals sound without any vocals.”

Subject B also responded that she could tell by the end of her first listening that she's going to love a particular song. She mentioned that the song would get “stuck in her head,” and she knew that was a sign that she loved that song.

While Subject C also indicated a pretty good sense of whether he liked a song after the first listening, his overall response was a bit different. “It depends. I listen to

different aspects of the song with each new listening. I think generally after the first time, I have a pretty good sense of whether I like it or not. But I won't be that mean and just make the decision right away." Thus, Subject C took a little more time when making a judgment on a new piece of music. This supports his earlier statements about listening to the music first and then the lyrics in subsequent listenings.

### **Discovery of New Music**

Each subject was then asked to describe his/her process for discovering new music. Subject A mentioned his use of specific internet blogs or forums and music critics. He specifically said that he does not use the radio for discovering new music. He also noted that his peers often come to him when looking to listen to new music because his interests are so broad.

Meanwhile, Subject B stated that the radio is her primary source for discovering new music from new artists. She also mentioned that she automatically buys CDs from her favorite artists and just "hopes she likes them."

Lastly, Subject C responded, "I'll ask somebody that I think has pretty good taste in music and say, 'Hey what's something interesting. What's something good?'" He also mentioned that he often listened to the radio and browsed websites like YouTube to discover new music and artists.

### **Influence of Parents' Music**

Another question the subjects answered involved the music they heard as children from their parents. While their backgrounds were all varied, each subject detailed the influence of music that surrounded them in their childhood.

Subject A cited some extremely diverse experiences thanks to his multi-cultural background. Subject A was born in Norton, NJ, moved to Nigeria and then moved back to Brooklyn, NY at age 16. As a result, his parents played music that included R&B singers such as Marvin Gaye, Luther Vandross, and Barry White along with traditional Nigerian gospel music. When asked if he would continue to listen to this music on his own, Subject A responded,

“No. That was just what he [my dad] liked. It was just different. It was just interesting for me to grow up around him and listen to that during that time. If not for him, I would never play that on my free time. But it was interesting just to, y’know, the only times I’ve ever listened to Barry White is if I saw him on TV randomly or when my dad played it in the house. I would never just go play Barry White, even though he sounds good and he’s a good artist, it’s just not something I relate to.”

Thus, Subject A could appreciate the music that his parents listened to, yet he couldn’t connect to the lyrics. Finally, Subject A made special mention of his father’s disapproval of his listening to rap music.

In contrast, Subject B came from a very “quiet,” suburban area. Her father listened to “mellow” music, such as John Mayer and Coldplay. Meanwhile, her mother also listened to country like Subject B. This parallel between Subject B’s preference and her mother’s preference might be explained by the modern-day artists they both listen to. Thus, the issue with relevance that Subject A mentioned would be non-existent.

Coming from an even smaller town, Subject C described his environment as being around “lots of farmers.” He mentioned that his parents both listened to the classic pop that he tended to enjoy. However, Subject C expressed that he especially enjoyed a lot of the same music as his mother. This may have been explained later when he detailed his

parents listening habits by saying, “If we were riding in the car with my mom, she would have it on every once in a while. My dad would not play it as much; he doesn’t really listen to music.” Thus, Subject C appears to have been exposed to more of the music that his mother was listening to. Furthermore, Subject C’s preference for music from past eras differs from the other subjects based on the dated lyrics and subject matter. A possible explanation for this is Subject C’s expressed tendency to listen to the actual music and not the lyrics.

### **Influence of Peers’ Music**

All three of the subjects basically expressed the same thought when questioned about their peers’ music preferences compared to their own. They all expressed that some of their tastes were similar to their friends, while other preferences were very different. Subject C articulated it best when he said, “It’s kind of like a Venn Diagram I guess; you know how they have a lot of differing tastes in music, but some things that are parallel to each other.” Subject A also stated,

“Everybody has their own preference. Even though there might be songs we all know and can sing along to, but when it comes down to it, when you’re by yourself, you know that artist that resonates with you, you know that song that you like so much that you want to listen to during your own time.”

### **Influence of Unique Experiences**

The three subjects also described unique, personal experiences that either fundamentally altered or broadened their musical preferences. For example, when reflecting on his African experiences Subject A discussed how that really broadened his musical perspective. He said,

“And the more I lived there, I started to find out about this guy that was a legend back there; his name’s Fela Kuti. There’s a Broadway show about him in New York two years ago. He’s a legend back there. His music is different than anything in the world actually, like even there there’s no...like he’s the only artist that’s done what he’s done. Y’know so his stuff is really different; it has a lot of instrumental focus and has vocals but it feels more like jazz, but it’s not really jazz, it’s just different. So like I’ve been used to listening to a lot of different stuff, so I judge music differently.”

Furthermore, Subject B was communicating the origin of her fondness for country music when she said,

“Well, whenever I was younger in elementary school, my sister would listen to country music every morning whenever we would get ready. And we shared a room, so I couldn’t really get away from it. And I didn’t like it at the time, and I think it just eventually grew on me, and that’s when I ended up flipping from pop music to country . . . at the end of my elementary years.”

Finally, Subject C discussed his schooling and teachers when he elaborated on his unique fondness for instrumental genres. He stated,

“It’s cool because you can spend an hour listening to one piece of music, and it’s beginning to end is like an hour long. Just that whole build-up to the end is very edifying I guess. It’s just neat to see how it progresses through the movements and the themes and stuff, and it’s just really cool. This is music that was written hundreds of years ago and it’s stood the test of time. It’s kind of like looking at fine art; that’s pretty neat.”

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Summary

After examining my own preferences concerning music, I began to question exactly what experiences in my life caused me to like certain genres of music and dislike others. This prompted me to review past studies that involved music preference; many factors such as age, culture, gender, environment, etc. have been identified as having a significant impact on music preference (Leblanc, Jin, Stamou, & McCrary, 1999; Christensen, 1994). However, little research has been conducted to explore an individual's unique experiences. Thus, a need for a qualitative analysis of music preference was perceived. The purpose of this study was to explore reported influences on an individual's musical preference from a case study perspective. The guiding questions for this project were:

1. Why do persons report listening to the music they do?
2. Do any common themes emerge regarding reported reasons for preferences?

I used a case study format with three individuals in order to obtain an in-depth analysis of three diverse experiences. These individuals were selected from a college-level general music education course for non-music majors who volunteered by completing a screening questionnaire. The purpose for this questionnaire was to identify three individuals who had contrasting musical preferences. The first responder to the questionnaire was automatically chosen; each subsequent selection was based on whether the reported favorite music genres contrasted with the previous subject's. Each selected volunteer was contacted to schedule a one-on-one interview. The participants were then asked a series

of guiding questions that were expanded with ad lib discussion. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for any common themes.

## **Results**

The first guiding question of this study was, “Why do persons report listening to the music they do?” Each subject reported unique life experiences that changed or broadened their musical perspective. These experiences included Subject A’s adolescence in Nigeria which allowed him to hear music of an entirely different culture and broadened his musical perspective. Also, Subject B’s unique experience involved her shared bedroom with her sister; as a result, she heard country music every morning, eventually leading her musical taste to shift from focusing on pop to country. Finally, Subject C reported the influence of his schooling and teachers when discussing his preference for instrumental music. These cases also reported factors identified in previous research (e.g. familiarity, lifestyle, culture, etc.) as influences in each subject’s musical taste.

The second guiding question of this study was, “Do any common themes emerge regarding reported reasons for preferences?” An analysis of the interviews revealed the following themes: the influence of familiarity, the importance of the music’s message, the importance of the music, the length of time to judge new music, the discovery of new music, the influence of parents’ music, the influence of peers’ music, and the influence of unique experiences. Each one of these themes had a significant impact on the reported music preferences of all three subjects.

## **Discussion**

All three subjects illustrated how important familiarity is when deciding music preference. This finding corroborates previous research from Schubert (2007) and the

theories of Gordon and Lerdaahl. Parents played an important role in their children's preferences. By playing music often at an early age, the subjects' parents (or sister, in Subject B's case) helped their children to develop a "listening vocabulary" in those specific genres. Subjects reported that these genres were the most understandable to them later in life. Conversely, each of the subjects mentioned music that they simply could not understand. This was always music that they had not reported being exposed to at any other point in their lives. Therefore, the subjects did not have a "listening vocabulary" for those genres and could not appreciate them.

The responses of Subjects A, B, and C also all illustrate the impact that their past experiences have had on their current music preferences. Each indicated a unique story behind their current preferences. For example, when discussing the impact that parents have had on their tastes, Subject A mentioned that he could not relate to the music of his parents because their music choices were so dated. However, it should be noted that Subject A mentioned still having an interest in modern-day soul and R&B, which are the same genres he listed his parents listening to. Furthermore, Subject B listened to a lot of the same music as her parents, which included a lot of contemporary country and pop. It was intriguing that Subject B reported listening to a lot of the same music as her parents, while Subject A reported that he could not identify with the lyrics in his parent's music. However, a possible explanation for this is the fact that Subject A's parents listened to music from past decades while Subject B's parents listened to music from contemporary artists.

In complete contrast to the previous two, Subject C intriguingly conversed about his preference for classic pop from the 60s, 70s, and 80s, along with a fondness for the

classical and jazz genres. This unique taste for instrumental genres did not appear to have originated with his parents; when asked about this, Subject C reported that experiences in school and with teachers caused him to listen to this instrumental music. Subject C's parents did reportedly listen to classic pop throughout Subject C's childhood, so that might explain how he discovered this music. However, why did Subject C take such a liking to this dated music when Subject A felt he could not relate to it? One possible explanation may be Subject C's tendencies when listening to music; it is apparent that while Subjects A and B focus on the lyrics of the music, Subject C focuses instead on the music itself. It would seem that this tendency has come from his unique experience in school and with teachers who encouraged him to listen to instrumental music.

All three subjects discussed unique stories that had an impact on their listening preference. For example, Subject A had a very unique cultural experience in Nigeria that taught him how music can affect people even when they do not understand the words. He talked at length about how his musical perspective was expanded by this experience. In addition, Subject B's living situation with her sister converted her to country music. She originally disliked this genre, yet repeatedly hearing her sister play it in the morning caused her to eventually change her mind. Subject C briefly conveyed his experience in school that contributed to his preference for instrumental music.

While conducting the interview, I was left with a few impressions about each subject. Subject A had the most detailed responses, and he seemed extremely excited to be a part of the project. I could tell that he had an interest in music and in the process for producing commercial music. Subjects B and C required a little more time to think of their answers, and their answers were very succinct. However, all three subjects were

unwavering in their answers once they reported them; they consistently mentioned the same experiences as influences throughout the discussion.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the subjects' responses, it would be extremely beneficial to further investigate parents' roles in their children's musical development. Much past research has been done to show that parents' listening selections affect their children's listening preferences (Christenson, 1994; Roulston, 2006). However, since the parental influences in this study were primarily vocal music, it would be interesting to investigate if parental influence extends to include instrumental "classical" music from throughout history. Children absorb music like a language at early ages, and develop a listening vocabulary. They then use this vocabulary later in life to judge the music that hear and decide their preferences (Bluestine 2000). Thus, music educators who desire to broaden their students' musical perspectives really need to begin while the children are young and involve the parents in the process.

In addition, this study was limited to three individuals of roughly the same age; another qualitative study involving a greater number of participants may shed even more light on how unique experiences can impact the preferences of an individual.

If I was given the opportunity to conduct this study again, I would definitely expand my subject selection to include more subjects from a wide range of ages. While the small number of subjects included allowed me to analyze their responses in-depth, a larger number of subjects would have given me a broader range of experiences. Furthermore, using a range of ages would make the influence of society and culture much more apparent (since these tend to change with each new generation). Lastly, I would

attempt to include the parents of each subject in a separate interview. Because much of the discussion focused on the subjects' childhoods, the parents would bring a new perspective to the subjects' reported past experiences.

### **Conclusions**

My intent with this study was to analyze what contributed to people liking certain types of music and disliking others. The results showed common influences found in previous research (such as familiarity and culture), along with influences from unique personal experiences. The interaction of these influences gave each of the subjects a very unique perspective and musical taste. From this study, it is my hope that music educators will take note of the various factors that influence their students' musical preferences and the potential importance teachers have in broadening their students' musical perspectives.

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**Appendix A:**  
**Pre-Screening Questionnaire**

## Music Preference Survey

Your participation in this research is confidential. This initial questionnaire will only be used for screening and will not be included in the research data. The follow-up interview will not ask for any information that would identify who the responses belong to. The follow-up interview will be audio recorded to facilitate later transcription by the researcher. The recordings will be safely stored and accessible only to the researcher and his adviser. The recordings will also be coded with a pseudonym to protect each subject's identity. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses.

Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Completion and return of this initial survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to take part in the research.

## Music Preference Survey

1. Out of the following music styles, please rank your top five favorites, with 1 being your first choice and 5 being your last.

	1	2	3	4	5
Alternative	<input type="radio"/>				
Christian/Gospel	<input type="radio"/>				
Country	<input type="radio"/>				
Electronic/Dance	<input type="radio"/>				
Jazz/Blues	<input type="radio"/>				
Latino	<input type="radio"/>				
Metal	<input type="radio"/>				
Pop	<input type="radio"/>				
Rap/Hip-Hop	<input type="radio"/>				
Reggae	<input type="radio"/>				
R&B/Soul	<input type="radio"/>				
Rock	<input type="radio"/>				
Soundtrack	<input type="radio"/>				
Western Classical	<input type="radio"/>				
World	<input type="radio"/>				

## Music Preference Survey

**\* 2. Please enter your email, so I may contact you if you have been chosen for an interview.**

**Appendix B:**  
**Interview Guiding Questions**

1. Could you please tell me your age and a brief description of the area in which you grew up?
2. How would you describe the music you like?
3. How do you select/discover new music?
4. What kinds of music do your parents enjoy? Do you find you like some of the same music or avoid it?
5. Is there any type of music you particularly avoid? What made you come to dislike it so?
6. Do you ever find yourself liking a song simply because you have heard it repeatedly (such as on the radio)?

## **Appendix C:**

### **Initial Contact with General Education Music Course Instructor**

Hi Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

You might not remember me, but I was in your MUS 262 class two years ago. Anyway I'm currently working on my honors thesis with Dr. Rutkowski, and I'm researching music preference in a case study format. I plan on selecting three subjects with known varied music interests to conduct one-on-one interviews. I was wondering if I could use your \_\_\_\_\_ class as a subject pool? I would send out an email to the entire class explaining the study and asking them a few brief questions about their music interests. Then I would accept the first three responses that had different music preferences listed. Please let me know if this is ok or if you want more information on my study!

Thanks,  
Ben Cossitor

Benjamin Cossitor  
Senior: Music Education  
Schreyer Honors College  
Penn State University  
[bwc5081@psu.edu](mailto:bwc5081@psu.edu)

**Appendix D:**  
**Initial Contact with Potential Subjects**

October 18, 2011

Dear students in Dr. \_\_\_\_\_'s \_\_\_\_\_ class,

I am conducting a study and am soliciting volunteers to answer questions about their music preferences and past experiences with music. The purpose of this research is to explore music preference through individuals' interviews on their unique past experiences. Thus, I would greatly appreciate any volunteers that would like to participate in this research as a possible interviewee.

By volunteering, you will be asked to complete a short screening survey (approx. 5 minutes) on [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com). Only the first three volunteers who indicate contrasting music preferences from each other on the survey will be selected. If selected, you will be contacted by the researcher and asked to set up an interview. At the scheduled interview, you will then be asked to answer a series of questions involving your musical preferences and past experiences with music. This interview would last no longer than 30 minutes and would be audio-recorded for the researcher's private use to transcribe under a coded name later.

Your participation in this research is **confidential**. The survey only asks for contact information in order for the researcher to contact you about an interview. None of the personally identifiable information from the survey will be included in the study's data. The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections, the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses.

Your decision to be in this research is **voluntary**. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise. In addition, your decision to participate, or not participate, will have no bearing on your grade in this course; the instructor will not know who does and does not elect to participate.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

The screening questionnaire can be found at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/958JW5G>. Completion and return of this initial survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to take part in the research. I appreciate your participation and assistance in my research.

Sincerely,

Ben Cossitor

Benjamin Cossitor  
Senior: Music Education  
Schreyer Honors College  
Penn State University

(814) 327-9076  
bwc5081@psu.edu

**Appendix E:**  
**Implied Consent Form**

**Implied Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research**  
The Pennsylvania State University

ORP OFFICE USE ONLY  
**DO NOT REMOVE OR MODIFY**  
**IRB#37754**  
The Pennsylvania State University  
Institutional Review Board  
Office for Research Protections  
Approval Date: 12/01/2011  
Expiration Date: 11/17/2016

**Title of Project:** A Case Study of Individuals' Music Preferences  
and their Reported Influences on these Preferences

**Principal Investigator:** Benjamin Cossitor  
212 Ridge Ave  
Altoona, PA 16602  
(814) 327-9076; [bwc5081@psu.edu](mailto:bwc5081@psu.edu)

**Advisor:** Dr. Joanne Rutkowski  
206 Music Building I  
University Park, PA 16802  
(814) 863-0419; [rvi@psu.edu](mailto:rvi@psu.edu)

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to explore music preference through individuals' interviews on their unique past experiences.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to complete a short screening survey on [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com). If selected, you will be contacted by the researcher and asked to set up an interview. At the scheduled interview, you will then be asked to answer a series of questions involving your musical preferences and past experiences with music. This interview would be audio-recorded for the researcher's private use to transcribe under a coded name later.
3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort.
4. **Benefits:** The benefits to you include a greater understanding of why you select certain musics, and it may help open your mind to other musical styles with which you are not as familiar.

The benefits to society include a new understanding by music educators about why students in a certain society gravitate towards certain music styles, and it will help these educators to open their students' minds to new, less familiar styles of music.

5. **Duration/Time:** The screening questionnaire will take around 5 minutes, and the follow-up interview will take approximately 30 minutes.
6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The survey only asks for contact information in order for the researcher to contact you about an interview. None of the personally identifiable information from the survey will be included in the study's data.. The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections, the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no

personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Benjamin Cossitor at (814) 327-9076 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Question about research procedures can be answered by the research team.
8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Completion and return of the survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to take part in the research.

Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

## Appendix F

### Academic Vita of Benjamin Cossitor

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212 Ridge Ave  
Altoona, PA 16602  
814-327-9076

[bwcossit@atlanticbb.net](mailto:bwcossit@atlanticbb.net)  
[bencossitor.weebly.com](http://bencossitor.weebly.com)

**Education:** Bachelor of Music Education;  
Honors in Music Education;  
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park  
Enrolled: August 2008. Graduation: May 2012.

**Thesis Title:** “A case study of individuals’ music preferences and their reported influences on these preferences.”

**Supervisor:** Dr. Joanne Rutkowski

#### Work Experience:

Student Teacher in Middle School Choral and General Unpaid Internship  
Central Dauphin Middle School, Hummelstown, PA March to May, 2012

- Led sixth and eighth grade general music classes, including lessons on history, keyboard, and guitar
- Conducted sixth, seventh, and eighth grade middle school choirs through warm-ups and several pieces
- Assisted in preparing an honors choir festival

Student Teacher in High School Band and General Unpaid Internship  
Milton Hershey School, Hershey, PA January to March, 2012

- Prepared lesson plans and taught a Survey of Music class units on the Grammys and Music History
- Prepared and conducted On a Hymnsong of Philip Bliss and Thunder for the High School Concert Band
- Tutored after-school, providing music lessons on a variety of instruments
- Assisted in planning, casting, directing, and rehearsing the musical Godspell

#### Awards/Honors:

- Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honors Society- March 2012 through Present
- Penn State Performer’s Recognition Award in Oboe Performance
- Phi Kappa Phi Collegiate Honors Society- February 2011 through Present
- Dean’s List- every semester 2008 through 2012
- Academic Excellence Scholarship- 2008 through 2012
- Class of 1908 Memorial Scholarship- 2008 through 2012

- Bryce and Jonelle Jordan Excellence Scholarship- 2008 through 2012
- Valedictorian of the Altoona Area High School Class of 2008 (Ranked 1/511)

**Professional Memberships:**

- Pennsylvania Collegiate Music Educators' Association
- Pennsylvania State Educators' Association
- International Double Reed Society

**Community Service:**

- St. Rose of Lima Church Choir, April 2004 to present
  - oboe soloist
  - singer
- Penn State School of Music, August 2008 to December 2011
  - volunteer oboist for several student recitals and productions
  - Audition Day helper

**Off-Campus Performing Experiences:**

- 2011- Performance with Penn State's Harmonie Ensemble at the International Double Reed Society Conference in Arizona. Collaborated with graduate students and Penn State faculty in the ensemble.
- 2011- Penn State President's Concert at the Strathmore Center in Bethesda, MD. Performed with Penn State's premiere band, the Symphonic Wind Ensemble.
- 2010- Penn State President's Concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City, NY. Performed with the Penn State Philharmonic Orchestra, playing many small solos from Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 3 and Respighi's Pines of Rome.
- 2009- Penn State President's Concert at the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, PA. Performed with the both the Penn State Philharmonic Orchestra and Symphonic Wind Ensemble