

The consumption engineer is the big job of the immediate future. He will outrank the sales manager and give orders to the production manager. It is not his job to sell what the factory makes, but to teach the factory to make what the consumer will buy.

—Legendary adman Earnest Elmo Calkins, 1930

The magic of consumption offers an opportunity for utilizing our increased productive ability in the positive form of a better standing of living.

—Arno H. Johnson, J. Walter Thompson Company, 1955

INTRODUCTION

Capitalism, Consumption, Commerce, and Music

Music has power. Musicians know it, listeners know it. And so do advertisers.

This book tells the story of how the advertising industry through most of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first has employed music to sell goods, slowly imprinting into our collective DNA the sounds of songs that sell. The story is one of increasingly close relationships between the advertising industry and the other cultural industries; the increase in efficiency and specificity in marketing to particular segments of the population; the decrease—to negligibility—of the difference between “advertising music” and “music”; the almost unrestricted growth of the advertising industry; the almost unrelenting rise in consumption as a practice of everyday life; and the myriad clever

and complex ways that products have been insinuated into people's consciousness through lyrics and music.

In the cultural studies literature, much has been made of the resistant and even liberatory aspects of popular culture. If one examines particular cases, it is indeed possible to locate instances of people's resistance to what has been foisted upon them by the cultural industries. But if one examines the long haul of the production of the cultural industries, as this book does, it becomes clear that, while there may be cases here and there—even many instances—of resistance to and liberation through popular culture, it is nonetheless unarguable that the cultural industries have triumphed, and are continuing to triumph, over the nearly century-long history covered in this book. When this book begins, in the 1920s, the United States was primarily an industrial and agricultural economy. Today, it is a consumer economy. When this book begins, Americans fashioned selves by drawing on Victorian conceptions of character. Today, we fashion selves mainly through the products we purchase.

The question, of course, is, how did we get here from there? While I have long resisted what one might call music exceptionalism—the idea that music occupies a more important place in our culture than other forms of expression or cultural production—in this book, I argue that the various uses of music in advertising chronicled in what follows have played not just an important role, but a singular one, in shaping consumption patterns in the United States. More than that: music in advertising has helped make us into the consumers we are, for music's relationship to the body and its ability to address listeners emotionally have made it a powerful tool for advertisers at least since the rise of broadcasting in the 1920s.

This book begins in that tumultuous decade, examining the uses of music in advertising from the beginning of broadcasting to the present. Its main purpose is to narrate this almost entirely unknown history, but it will also examine the changing nature of various forms of American capitalism and the role that consumption has played, and continues to play, in American culture. It is now commonplace to hear contemporary American culture described as a consumer society, but only in the last couple of decades has consumption become an object of study, in part because of the long-standing focus on production. Scholars in the last couple of decades have sought to balance the productivist perspectives of Marxian and other studies, and there have been several histories of consumption in the United States that will inform what follows, such as those by Lizabeth Cohen, Gary Cross, and Charles F. McGovern.¹

I also hope to situate this book in historical studies of the music industry as an industry, particularly since, as I will show, the advertising and music industries are increasingly intertwined today. Histories of the music industry in the United States, by Karl Hagstrom Miller and David Suisman, provide an important complement to the history of the advertising industry to follow.²

This book also takes its place beside the small number of those to address the American advertising industry historically, books by David Ewen, Jackson Lears, and Roland Marchand, even though these and virtually all of the scholarly literature on advertising focus on print advertisements, not ads with sound and moving images.³ Advertisers' and advertising agencies' arguments over what kind of music to air are revealing, divulging a good deal about who they think their audience is, instructing us about how they think of themselves, as well as giving us a way to understand the workings of American capitalism over nearly a century.

In some ways, this book tells a simple story. A new music, or technology, or demographic, or medium, can result in effective advertising, advertising that those in advertising agencies can use as an example of the importance of their work. But once audiences become inured to these new modes of enticement, their effectiveness wanes. Until another one comes along.

Capitalism and the Production of Consumption

As useful as the writings on consumption are, capitalism is not always a salient part of their stories, which tend to be more concerned with analyzing consumption as a social practice that plays various important roles: in conceptions of citizenship, identity formation, the sign-values of commodities, and more. I, however, am interested in capitalism, and the role consumption plays in supporting it, driving it, and how individual subjects have slowly, over the course of the twentieth century, become increasingly, and primarily, defined as consumers. Examining how commercials were fashioned not only to sell goods and services but also to inculcate listeners and viewers into their roles as consumers forms an important part of this book. That is, I am mainly concerned with the production of consumption, rather than consumption as social practice, about which much has been written. And I am less interested in "reading" these commercials as entities in and of themselves (for which there is also an extensive literature, though mainly focusing on print).⁴ I am, rather,

concerned with commercials as expressions of an ideology designed to sell not only a particular commodity but consumption itself.

Several classic theorists have placed consumption at the center of their understanding of the workings of capitalism as a response to the productivist orientation of Karl Marx and much post-Marxian thought. Probably the most central of these is Werner Sombart, whose *Luxury and Capitalism*, first published in 1913, posited that the consumption practices in French courtly life led to increased consumption more generally in the early modern period.⁵ Following Sombart and others such as Arjun Appadurai, I seek to emphasize the role that consumption played, and continues to play, in both promoting and perpetuating American capitalism since the end of the nineteenth century in the United States.⁶ In this context, it is clear that the shift of the manufacture of goods for production—tools, railroads, and more—gave way to the increased production of consumer goods, which were sold through new venues such as department stores and lengthy catalogs such as those published by Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward.⁷ With the rise of the advertising industry in the late nineteenth century, advertising more than anything else began to propel consumption practices. Today it's clear, of course, that consumption plays a powerful role in driving capitalism; one hears routinely from news sources that the American economy is supported by consumer spending; and there are, of course, George W. Bush's and Rudolph Giuliani's exhortations to Americans after the September 11, 2001, attacks that their most important duty was not to sacrifice but to spend.

This book follows three waves of increased consumption and the increased inculcation of consumption in American life beginning, in the 1920s, with radio, a powerful new advertising medium; followed by television in the 1950s; and, finally, the explicit sacralization of consumption by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, a wave that was later buttressed by the rise of the Internet and in particular the World Wide Web in the 1990s.⁸

My approach to studying American consumer capitalism in the last ninety years or so is by now a familiar one among interpretive social scientists, employing a combination of Marxian criticism of capitalism as a system that is usually implicit, combined with a Weberian attention to concrete historical processes. That is, Marx, for all his insistence on the materialist conception of history, was rather long on materialism and rather short on history. Max Weber provides this, at least with respect to one of the origins of capitalism, and provides as well a model of how one can persuasively theorize out of a detailed

history, in this case, the history of music as a particularly compelling affective form that, when used in advertising, has played a potent role in making goods and consumption part of our habitus.

In this, I suppose, this book is not that different from the voluminous and influential writings of Theodor Adorno on the subject of music in capitalist cultures, though, indeed, there has been little writing on music and capitalism since Adorno that has been as sophisticated.⁹ (There haven't been many sustained treatments of music and capitalism at all, with a few exceptions, such as Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*).¹⁰ Yet, though I may agree with him occasionally, Adorno's work is replete with problems. It is short on empirical data, whether historical or ethnographic, the author preferring simply to "read" history and culture out of musical (or other) "texts." Sometimes this works spectacularly and convincingly; other times, less so. And Adorno was unreflexive about his own positionality, or, as Pierre Bourdieu would have it, he failed to objectify objectivity.¹¹ His privileged position as a middle-class academic permitted him to write about the degradations of "mass culture," as if everyone had previously listened to music attentively and in a kind of philosophically receptive mode in which he himself seemed to relate to western European classical music. Most seriously, the relative lack of empirical data led him to generalizations and conclusions that aren't always sustainable. Capitalism isn't as monolithic as it comes across in many of his writings, people aren't always duped by the cultural industries, music isn't always a commodity, and, if it is, isn't always a commodity in the same way. If we have learned one important thing from the Marxian study of culture after Adorno—from Raymond Williams—it is that the world is always in flux, that processes, even the most draconian effects of American capitalism, cannot be captured with snapshots of particular cultural moments, or examinations of a single work or two.¹²

Thus, detailed empirical data over the long term are required if we are truly going to attempt to understand how capitalism and cultural production work. This book offers such a study, covering nearly a century of advertising and music practices, showing how capitalism adapted to and created new modalities of consumption, and the role that music played in them. If, in the end, the book seems to arrive at a set of conclusions that might be recognized as Adornian, it is a result of long study of a very long historical moment, not a nostalgia for a past that never actually existed—except, perhaps, for a tiny social elite—or an almost pathological disdain for popular culture and its consumers.

The Chapters

The Sounds of Capitalism gathers together, for the first time, the myriad practices of advertising and music production and places them in a historical narrative (though admittedly multipronged) from the beginning of broadcasting in the 1920s to the present. This massive body of music has been remarkably neglected by scholars; there is almost no humanistic or social science writing on this subject apart from a handful of items, none of which are historical.¹³

In the early days of radio advertising, the subject of chapter 1, advertisers normally sponsored entire programs, a practice that made the choice of music crucial for attracting the audience the advertiser desired, and thus the history of the early period of broadcasting reveals the advertising industry desperate to discover what Americans wanted to hear, while at the same time offering them what advertisers thought was best suited to sell goods. Leery of direct selling in the home, the industry first settled on a “goodwill” strategy, trying to provide music that listeners would like, which, it was hoped, would generate goodwill for the advertiser’s product. In some cases, advertising agencies chose a genre or style that allowed them to attempt to impart a “personality” to a brand through music; for example, snappy, effervescent banjo music was thought to be the best way to sell Clicquot Club Ginger Ale in the 1920s. Advertising music was entirely functional in this era, designed to animate products and little else.

Chapter 2 explores the many paths pursued by advertisers and advertising agencies as they attempted to ascertain who was listening to their programs, and what kind of musical programs listeners preferred. Accustomed to print, advertising agencies were not prepared to broadcast their programs into a void. They thus encouraged listeners to write in for free photographs of the stars, postcards, and other items. In the early days of radio advertising, listener letters were scrutinized for quality of paper, penmanship, and style. Polling listener preferences also appeared in the 1920s, growing increasingly sophisticated.

The onset of the Depression meant that the goodwill model was exchanged for hard-sell tactics in an attempt to influence consumers directly, a move that is perhaps best registered by the late 1930s with the rise of the “singing commercial” or jingle, the happy, memorable tune with lyrics singing the praises of the product that dominated advertising music into the 1980s (chapter 3).

Since some successful jingles were recorded as songs in their own right, escaping the narrowly commercial world in which they originated, music produced for purely commercial purposes began to have an impact on the broader world of popular culture as popular music stars recorded song versions of jingles, such as the famous “Chiquita Banana” song from 1944. Chapter 5 continues the examination of the jingle, particularly how its sound came to be standardized in the postwar era in a sound that was derived from mainstream popular musics of the 1950s and 1960s and featured a chorus that became known as the Madison Avenue Choir. This chapter also chronicles the fall of the jingle as it became increasingly seen as uncool and unhip in the 1980s and after.

Chapter 4 interrupts the history of the jingle to examine the rise of television in the 1950s and the tensions that emerged between the hard-sell tactics of the Depression and the newer, and subtler, modes of selling that were often described as “psychological,” reflecting the penchant for Freudianism in the postwar era. Approaches to selling began to emphasize emotional appeals over rational ones, and some musicians were at the vanguard of this movement, articulating a discourse about affect, and a practice of evoking it, in advertising music. By the late 1970s, employing music to attempt to manipulate consumers’ emotions in complex ways was commonplace, having become the norm in the realm of all commercial music to the extent that extremely subtle gradations of mood are common in discussions of commercial music today.

The boundary between advertising music and other music continued to blur so that by the early 1970s advertising songs were becoming popular hits in their own right with increasing frequency, as in the 1971 Coca-Cola song “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing”; advertisers began to pull away from the jingle in favor of the original song that could become a hit. The real difference from the past, a difference that continues to inform the industry’s practices to this day, was to seek assiduously the youth market by employing popular music in commercials as part of what Thomas Frank has called the “conquest of cool,” a strategy of co-opting the cool and the hip in popular culture for use in advertising and marketing in order to appeal to youth.¹⁴ As a result, commercial music became even less segregated from other musics, increasingly infiltrating the listening lives of Americans, whether or not audibly marked as “advertising music.” The effects of baby boom youth were so powerful that a new form of capitalism has emerged that has been profoundly shaped by the counterculture’s critique of earlier forms of capitalism (chapter 6).

Chapter 7 examines the rise of market segmentation and the use of music to target specific groups of consumers, while at the same time, the advent of Music Television (MTV) in the early 1980s made the usage of music even more common, garnering for some musicians millions of dollars in fees as some advertisers continued to attempt to reach as broad a group as possible. This occurred in an era that witnessed a new wave of consumption, driven in part by Ronald Reagan's and others' promotion of consumption as a public good. A raft of mergers and consolidations in the advertising industry meant that there was ever greater attention to the bottom line and efficiency, which made advertising work for musicians less rewarding than it had been in the past.

In the mid-1980s, baby boomers' ascension to positions of power in the advertising and marketing industry meant that, instead of following popular music trends, advertising agency executives began to attempt to be trend-setters themselves by using existing popular music in commercials instead of commissioning jingles, and by seeking unknown music to feature in commercials in order to position advertising as the new arbiter of the hip and cool (chapter 8). The "conquest of cool," I argue, has become the conquest of culture itself. This conquest was aided in this period by MTV and new digital technologies, marking one of the most decisive changes in advertising music for decades, all signaling the beginning of the end of a clear boundary between "advertising music" and "popular music." Because of the dominance of these technologies, today's commercial musicians move fluidly between playing in bands; producing recordings; and making music for film, television, or advertising, taking their musical tastes and styles with them wherever they go. Sounds developed for advertising have found their way into mainstream popular musics, and vice versa, in what has become a constant interchange.

Thus, while advertising music for decades simply echoed contemporary popular music styles (and frequently lagging behind), by the 1950s, advertising music had begun to become closely intertwined with the production of popular music generally. The rise of the baby boomers and postboomers to power in the advertising industry and the increased flexibility of workers in the realm of commercial music has meant that there is no popular music that is not, to varying degrees, advertising music, whether or not listeners hear it as such. The long-standing distinction between art and commerce much debated by advertising industry workers and those who study them has become moot: the sounds of capitalism are everywhere.

The concluding theoretical chapter discusses the social group responsible

for promulgating the ideology of the hip and the cool, what Bourdieu has called the new petite bourgeoisie, and the new form of capitalism they are involved in promoting and perpetuating, a new capitalism that is more culturalized than earlier ones, drawing on the skills of people in this group to continue to promote consumption. A salient feature of this new capitalism in the field of cultural production of this new petite bourgeoisie is the main trope in the advertising industry—“creativity,” which operates as a kind of Weberian calling in today’s capitalism.

Finally, a note on sources. The empirical basis of this book is archival research, reading of the voluminous trade press, and interviews with workers in the advertising industry, past and present. Doubtless there are some historians who will quibble with my use of some or all of the above, for theirs is the task of separating truth from fabrication. But the goal I have set for myself in this book is only partially that of telling the “true” story of music used in advertising; I am just as interested in uncovering the ideologies, the discourses, that circulated in particular periods in American history when the music in question was produced. To that end, what people say in print or to me is all fair game: they are articulating the ideologies of their field of cultural production in their time, and these should be of no less interest to us than empirical history. I am thus making what is probably a commonplace distinction between historical approaches and ethnographic ones, and hope my attempts to combine them will be clear in what follows.

Last, I should note that, while this book covers a large amount of history, it is mainly focused on national advertising campaigns, which are well represented in the major archives, the trade press, and the national press. Local and regional campaigns are largely absent due to the impracticality of scouring small archives across the country, though a few scholars, particularly in the South, have offered some of this work.¹⁵

But that, I hope, does not diminish the book’s contribution. It is the first history of its kind, a history of music that many—even most—Americans know, but know nothing about.