Organizing the musical canon: the repertoires of major U.S. symphony orchestras, 1842 to 1969

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Abstract

Scholars have addressed the tendency of U.S. symphony orchestras to perform the works of relatively few composers. While many highlight this phenomenon, others note that the nature and extent of this conformity can shift over time, as reliance on the works of certain composers decreases and allows the works of newly heralded composers to be heard. Drawing on the work of DiMaggio and others, we derive hypotheses about field-level factors influencing both phenomena. We analyze more than 86,500 performances given by 27 major U.S. symphony orchestras between 1842 and 1969. Our findings indicate that three factors spur the introduction of new composers into orchestral repertoires: the increased performance capabilities of symphony orchestras, the expanded resources for new music, and the proliferation of music programs among U.S. colleges and universities. We also find that one of these factors reduces the conformity of orchestral repertoires: the increased performance capabilities of orchestras. Our exploratory analyses, then, offer lessons about the organization of the musical canon.

Holding vested interests in the programming selections made by symphony orchestras, composers have been outspoken critics of choices that overwhelmingly favor the works of relatively few composers (Cameron, 1985). In the words of Aaron Copland (1963: 42), “Musical art, as we hear it in our day, suffers if anything from an overdose of masterworks; an obsessive fixation on glories of the past. This narrows the range of our musical experience and tends to suffocate interest in the

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present.” Howard Hanson (1951: 26), director of the prestigious Eastman School of Music and a noted composer in his own right, witnessed the implications of this tendency. He reported that, “My conversations with young composers ... indicated that there was a real problem in the securing of that first performance. This was particularly true of the composer who was making the difficult transition from the student cocoon to the great outer world.” While echoing Hanson’s lament, composer Charles Wuorinen (1963: 56) placed part of the blame specifically on the “practical” concerns of symphony orchestras:

The difficulties young composers face in dealing with large ensembles (of “standard” orchestral size) are not technical, for there is now hardly a young composer who cannot, through lack of technique, handle the largest of ensembles. . . . The problem here is exclusively practical—the economics and ideology of orchestra management prevent the performance of unknown music. . . . [W]e must face the fact that for “practical” reasons, the orchestra as a medium relevant to living music is passing, or indeed may have already expired. It is unfortunate that in the United States, which boasts a thousand symphony orchestras, the opportunities for young composers to work in this medium are to all intents and purposes nonexistent. This of course means that within a generation or two there will be no orchestra music. And at that time, even the symphony orchestras... may find their nineteenth century repertoire dated.

The above comments resonate with social science research, which likewise notes that U.S. symphony orchestras tend to emphasize the familiar works of a few composers—the “classics.” Researchers often explain this tendency by highlighting the intertwining and mutually reinforcing organizational factors at work in symphony orchestras. Like Wuorinen, they note that a reliance on the classics can result from managerial responses to economic constraints. Such works are less likely to require exorbitant amounts of costly rehearsal than are works that orchestral musicians have yet to master (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Zolberg, 1980; Gilmore, 1987; see Smith, 1983). The classics are more likely to draw a paying audience than are works of unknown composers (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Felton, 1978; Gilmore, 1993; see Martorella, 1977). Some of the classics, particularly the oldest, do not require the payment of copyright fees (Felton, 1978; Zolberg, 1980; see Tawa, 1984). Like Wuorinen’s nod to the “ideology of orchestra management”, researchers also point to interests within symphony orchestras, but they consider those of both management and musicians. Reliance on the classics makes the operation of symphony orchestras predictable, thereby appealing to the interests of trustees and administrators. Reliance on the classics also appeals to the interests of conductors and musicians, as it shifts audience attention away from musical content per se to the interpretation and performance of this well known content (Arian, 1971; Gilmore, 1988, 1993; Glynn, 2000; this issue).

While organizational factors clearly influence the tendency of symphony orchestras to favor the classics, they are not the sole influences. As those cited above readily acknowledge, this tendency also draws on a classification of exalted music
(i.e., a canon) that transcends particular symphony orchestras.¹ This evolving canon is embedded in an historical context. In Europe, the exaltation of particular compositions and past composers was not common until the 1800s (Weber, 1984, 1992). Components of the emergent canon diffused from Europe to America via traveling elites and musicians, yet according to DiMaggio (1982b, 1991b), the U.S. initially had no organizations that primarily performed the classics and remained commercially viable (see also Levine, 1988; McConachie, 1988). DiMaggio maintains that the orchestral canon only took root in the U.S. when the classics were paired with an organizational form that is insulated from commercial concerns—the non-profit symphony orchestra. As non-profit orchestras proliferated across America, he argues, the emphasis on an exalted body of musical works increased and became commonplace by the early 1900s.

In the present study, we draw on the work of DiMaggio and others to inspect how supra-organizational factors shape the repertoires of major U.S. symphony orchestras. We do so by using data compiled by Mueller (1973), which track more than 86,500 performances offered by 27 symphony orchestras from 1842 to 1969. In particular, we focus on two outcomes—the annual number of composers who received their first-time performance (i.e., change) and the annual extent to which orchestras relied on the works of a few composers (i.e., conformity). While change and conformity provide ideal ways to assess orchestral repertoires, we also focus on these outcomes because of a pattern found in previous research on U.S. symphony orchestras (Mueller, 1951; Hart, 1973; Gilmore, 1993). Numerous performances of the classics in a given year (i.e., high conformity) are often accompanied by small amounts of change.² However, this research does not make clear whether change and conformity are shaped by similar factors. Our analyses should provide some clarity.

The present study represents the first installment in an ongoing project. Although our initial efforts are modest, we believe that this study makes several contributions. First, it complements those studies that rightly examine the impact of organizational factors on the repertoires of symphony orchestras, providing a much needed longitudinal analysis of supra-organizational factors. Second, it extends the seminal work of DiMaggio. He admirably details historical tendencies in orchestral repertoires but does not offer systematic analysis. We do so here. He also highlights a variety of supra-organizational factors that shape the repertoires of U.S. symphony orchestras. We examine the relative impact of such factors. Finally, we provide insight into the evolving orchestral canon by documenting one of its key components—the repertoires of performance organizations (Weber, 1992).

¹ We follow Weber’s (1992: 21) distinction. “[The] ‘classics’ will denote musical works that were revered for their greatness and performed on a continuing basis...’Canon’ will refer to the ideas that bound these works together as a set of masterpieces and thereby bestowed authority upon them. In modern musical life, canon has had three main components: repertory, critical judgement, and ideology.”

² This change is usually limited in impact, as it often involves the first and only performance for a given composer. Still, this change occasionally has a lasting impact, as when a new composer later moves into the ranks of the classics (Mueller, 1951; Hart, 1973; Gilmore, 1993).
The present study is informed by Paul DiMaggio’s project on high culture in the United States. He uses the term “high culture” to capture, in part, the classification of exalted works (i.e., canon) that arose in a variety of arts (DiMaggio, 1987b). Besides addressing orchestral music, his project also investigates the organizational form (i.e., non-profits) that likewise enabled the establishment of high culture in the visual arts, opera, dance, and theater (DiMaggio, 1982b, 1991a, 1992), the social implications of familiarity with high culture (i.e., cultural capital; DiMaggio, 1982a), and social changes contributing to the erosion of high culture (DiMaggio, 1991b). Before deriving hypotheses, we first explicate two concepts that lie at the core of his project: aesthetic classification and organizational field.

When considering high culture, DiMaggio (1987a, 1991b) emphasizes the social foundations of aesthetic classification. Rather than viewing classifications as simply emanating from the content of cultural objects, he focuses on the collective process by which actors (e.g., artists, audiences) ascribe significance to particular types (“genres”) of cultural objects. This process varies along four dimensions: the extent to which actors (1) distinguish among various genres (i.e., differentiation), (2) rank particular genres as superior (i.e., hierarchy), (3) agree on the ranking of genres (i.e., universality), and (4) object to the mixing of highly ranked genres with less esteemed genres (i.e., ritualized boundaries). The classification of high culture is but one particular outcome of this process. High culture is firmly established (i.e., institutionalized) when actors widely agree on the superiority of certain genres and when they cordon those genres off from more mundane genres (e.g., commercial entertainment). The institutionalization of high culture thus entails what he calls the “sacralization” of art (DiMaggio, 1982b). As DiMaggio (1992: 47 fn.1) explains, “sacredness in this sense has less to do with the content of art than with the kinds of barriers—both cognitive and organizational—that are built up around it.” The extent of sacralization, however, can vary. In fact, DiMaggio’s project grapples with how high culture first emerged in the U.S., how it later became institutionalized, and how it is now possibly eroding.

DiMaggio (1991a) also emphasizes the organizational field when considering high culture. In the abstract, a field is the context in which organizations pursuing a similar activity are embedded; this context includes the range of relevant actors (e.g., audiences) and the systems of meaning that inform their activity (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In the concrete, a field bears the imprint of both history and power. As a result, the evolution of the high culture field in the U.S. is not reducible to the isolated efforts of individual actors or organizations. Consider its roots: “In Europe, ‘high culture’ emerged out of court culture as aristocracies were overthrown by or made their peace with rising commercial classes...In the United States, institutions of high culture emerged as part of a larger process of upper-class formation by urban elites familiar with recent European precedents” (DiMaggio, 1991b: 135). History and power were both at play when certain elites established the non-profit organizations that anchored the high culture field. Moreover, DiMaggio argues that powerful actors, both within and beyond non-profit arts organizations, would shape
the historical development of the high culture field, spurring its vitality in the early to mid-1900s and bringing considerable challenges in the late 1900s (DiMaggio, 1987b, 1991b).

Mindful of DiMaggio’s project, we turn to the organizational field of U.S. symphony orchestras.3 We read the explication of his core concepts as suggesting the following trends among orchestral repertoires. When the high culture field emerged, conformity may have been at its highest and change at its lowest, as particular actors worked hard to sacralize orchestral music by touting the most revered of the classics. When the high culture field was firmly established, conformity may have declined and change increased, as actors within and beyond non-profit organizations explored the full range of the classics. When the high culture field faced its challenges in the late 1900s, conformity may have been at its lowest level and change at its highest, as actors throughout the field were less likely to sacralize the classics.

In the present paper, we see if trends of declining conformity and increasing change actually occurred among the repertoires of major U.S. symphony orchestras. Before turning to this empirical question, we consider various field-level factors that perhaps lie behind those trends. Following DiMaggio’s lead, we consider the “the systematic construction of national organizational fields, the incorporation by universities of the arts, and the role of commercial cultural industries” (DiMaggio, 1991b: 137). Such field-level factors, he argues, played fundamental roles in the institutionalization of high culture and later contributed to the subsequent erosion of high culture.

1.1. Construction of the field of U.S. symphony orchestras

A distinct and universal classification of “classical” music arguably did not exist in the United States before the late 1800s (see Seeger, 1977; Hamm, 1983; Levine, 1988; McConachie, 1988, 1990). While discourse regarding such music was evident prior to the Civil War, organizations that only dealt in classical music were few in number and limited in impact. Instead, concert life in the early U.S. would be dominated by commercial organizations that, seeking the largest possible audience, provided a mixture of “serious” and “light” music (DiMaggio, 1982b, 1987b). As Mueller (1951: 19) notes, “the concert programs of the pioneer period evince a heterogeneity in type and quality that seems shocking to the modern ear. Sentimental and even ribald ditties are found mated with serious Haydn symphonies.” These eclectic repertoires were antithetical to the creation of clear boundaries between music that was exalted and music that was merely entertainment (DiMaggio, 1987a).

Amidst the early concert life of the U.S., some struggled to create a separate arena for classical music. Certain elites desired performance settings that touted only the great European works, as did many European musicians who emigrated to the U.S.3

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3 DiMaggio’s writings suggest that the field of high culture (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 148) is comprised of inter-related fields of production with each containing its own particular canon (DiMaggio, 1992: 44). These inter-related fields include those of art museums and symphony orchestras (DiMaggio, 1991a, b).
(Hart, 1973; Seeger, 1977; Hamm, 1983). These individuals occasionally founded organizations to that end. While these early organizations took one of three forms, all of these forms proved to have limited capabilities (DiMaggio, 1982b). Commercial organizations that trucked in classical music were often short lived, as their repertoires did not result in booming ticket sales (Hart, 1973; Levine, 1988; McConachie, 1988). Worker cooperatives, such as the nascent New York Philharmonic, were less dependent on the box office and could survive for years (Mueller, 1951). However, they were constrained in the number of performances they could stage, as their musicians frequently had employment obligations outside the cooperatives (Hart, 1973; Levine, 1988). Voluntary associations, such as the Handel and Haydn Society, could also survive for years, but their exclusivity did not foster large audiences (DiMaggio, 1982b; Hamm, 1983; Craven, 1986).

Some of these early organizations were successful in offering performances of mostly, if not only, the classics. In its first 15 years, for example, the Handel and Haydn Society featured the music of its namesakes, as well as that of Mozart and Beethoven (Hamm, 1983). The early programming of the New York Philharmonic likewise featured the classics, initially emphasizing the music of Beethoven and Mendelssohn (Mueller, 1951). In fact, one contemporary complained about the Philharmonic, “Their repertoire consisted always of the same few Symphonies, works of the old composers in our Divine Science... The compositions of modern maestri have never been put in rehearsal” (quoted in Hamm, 1983: 209). Nevertheless, the infrequent performances and/or exclusive audiences of such organizations did not provide a foundation upon which to build a widely accepted classification of classical music (DiMaggio, 1987a).

DiMaggio (1982b, 1987b, 1991b) argues that classical music finally became a distinct and universal classification when urban elites turned to a fourth organizational form: the non-profit symphony orchestra. He points to Boston as the first instance. In the late 1800s, Boston’s old-money elite faced a number of developments (e.g., growing numbers of immigrants and nouveaux riches) that challenged their once formidable control over the city’s social and political life. They responded by founding a number of non-profit organizations (e.g., social clubs, private schools), thereby establishing institutions that they solely controlled. In 1881, Henry Lee Higginson founded the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)—a non-profit symphony orchestra staffed by full-time musicians. The non-profit form protected the BSO from the vagaries of the competitive market, as Higginson and others were committed to ensuring its financial support. In fact, Higginson would eventually pay some $900,000 to cover the BSO’s losses (Levine, 1988; see DiMaggio, 1992: 29).

Freed from the tyranny of the box office, the BSO embarked on a 40-year process whereby it sacralized certain musical works and developed an audience that could appreciate such exalted music in a respectful fashion. Given the cohesiveness and support of the Boston elite, and Higginson’s largess, this process met with success. As Higginson recounted in 1914, his role had been “...to pay the bills, to be satisfied with nothing short of perfection, and always to remember that we are seeking high art and not money” (quoted in Levine, 1988: 127). Boston now had an organization that featured classical music. Moreover, this organization had considerable
capabilities because, unlike other forms of symphony orchestras (e.g., worker cooperatives), it offered frequent and regular performances for the community and its elites.

The non-profit symphony orchestra likely originated in Boston because of the particular challenges that its unified elites faced (DiMaggio, 1991b; see Beisel, 1990). Once the capabilities of this new organizational form were demonstrated in Boston, it later diffused to other cities, including those that had less than unified elites. Competing factions of elites in New York City, for example, had divided their support between such organizations as the New York Philharmonic and the New York Symphony (Mueller, 1951; Hart, 1973). The ensuing competition worked against consensus regarding the classification of classical music (DiMaggio, 1987a). This ended when, in 1928, the two New York orchestras merged into a single non-profit organization. The development in New York typified a larger trend. By the 1930s, non-profit symphony orchestras were common in large cities across the United States (DiMaggio, 1992). In subsequent years, their numbers would explode as they spread across the nation (Hart, 1973; DiMaggio, 1987b). Like the BSO, these non-profit orchestras emphasized classical music, and they relied on trustees and others to cover the deficits that resulted from this programming emphasis. The entire nation now had an organizational base for the classification of high culture. That is, discourse regarding exalted music was now rooted in practice, as an orchestral field upheld the sacredness of this music. The distinction regarding classical music was now widely accepted (DiMaggio, 1987a).

We take from the above account the following lesson: the construction of the orchestral field in the U.S. entailed a dramatic expansion in performance capabilities. Symphony orchestras that were once hard pressed to offer frequent and regular performances were replaced by those that could increasingly do so. We expect that the collective expansion of these capabilities led to increasing change and declining conformity in orchestral repertoires. When those who sought to sacralize classical music could only offer a few performances, such as the early New York Philharmonic, they tended to perform a limited range of masterworks (Hamm, 1983). When symphony orchestras were able to offer numerous performances, they tended to explore both the full breadth of the canon (Mueller, 1951; Hart, 1973) and the works of new composers (Gilmore, 1993). If our expectation is correct, the following should hold:

**Hypothesis 1.** Expanding performance capabilities of symphony orchestras will result in (a) an increasing number of new composers in their repertoires and (b) a declining share for the few composers that dominate their repertoires.

When documenting the construction of the U.S. orchestral field, DiMaggio (1982b, 1987a, 1991b) emphasizes the distinct and universal classification of classical music that took root around the 1920s and the erosion of this classification that began around the 1960s. However, he says little about the contestation of this classification that occurred in the interim years. The musico-historical literature helps fill this gap. It shows that the construction of the U.S. orchestral field involved more than the proliferation of non-profit organizations and the expansion of their performance capabilities: this construction also involved ongoing debates over the
orchestral canon. While some upheld the canon by extolling such stalwarts as Beethoven and Mozart, others sought to expand the canon by touting composers and compositions that were either overlooked or undervalued. Especially notable were those instances when actors mobilized resources for performance of new music (Tawa, 1984; Oja, 1997).

The mobilization of resources sometimes occurred within non-profit symphony orchestras. Progressive conductors, for example, were important champions for new music (Tawa, 1984). During his tenure at the BSO, Serge Koussevitzky’s support for new music included performances of Scriabin, Sibelius, and Shostakovich, as well as a world premiere of Bartok’s *Concerto for Orchestra* (Mueller, 1951; Craven, 1986). He also premiered 66 works by American composers, bringing attention to the likes of Aaron Copland, Walter Piston, and William Schuman (Hanson, 1951; Copland and Perlis, 1984). In a career that spanned multiple decades and included stints at several symphony orchestras (e.g., Philadelphia Orchestra), Leopold Stokowski was responsible for the national and international premieres of some 2000 compositions (Arian, 1971; Smith, 1983). Though not particularly enamored with American composers (Tawa, 1984), he did offer exemplary performances of Charles Ives’ *Fourth Symphony* and Carl Ruggles’ *Sun Treader* (Smith, 1983; Craven, 1986).

Symphony orchestras with progressive missions were also important champions for new music. Beginning in 1947, for instance, the Louisville Orchestra embarked on a mission whereby it regularly commissioned and performed new compositions. Buoyed by financial support from the community and the Ford Foundation, it premiered over 100 compositions in the 1950s, including Copland’s *Orchestral Variations* (Hart, 1973; Copland and Perlis, 1984; Craven, 1986).

The mobilization of resources for new music also occurred in organizations other than non-profit symphony orchestras. We mention but two examples. In the 1920s, U.S. composers (both native and émigré) established such organizations as the International Composers Guild (e.g., Edgard Varese), the League of Composers (e.g., Aaron Copland), and the New Music Society (e.g., Henry Cowell). These organizations offered U.S. premieres of works by well-known composers (e.g., Bartok, Schoenberg, Stravinsky) and by unknown composers (which, at that time, included Charles Ives). They also established journals devoted to contemporary composition (e.g., *Modern Music*) and vehicles for the dissemination of previously unpublished musical scores (e.g., Cos Cob Press, *New Music*). In the wake of these organizational activities, the modern music scene erupted in the U.S., and in the process, influenced the repertoires of such symphony orchestras as the BSO (Salzman, 1964; Copland, 1968; Shackelford, 1978; Tawa, 1984; Copland and Perlis, 1984; Oja, 1997). In the late 1930s, as the nation grappled with economic difficulties, the Roosevelt administration launched federal programs that employed numerous composers and musicians. Federally funded performance organizations soon dotted the country, offering public concerts with no or minimal admission price. From 1935 to 1939, the Federal Music Project would present the works of more than 1600 U.S.

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4 As Oja (1997) demonstrates, much of this activity was made possible by the generous patronage of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Alma Morgenthau Wertheim, and Blanche Wetherill Walton.
composers, including those of Elliot Carter, Roy Harris, and Virgil Thomson. Amidst this boom associated with federal funding, the music of U.S. composers likewise enjoyed an increased presence among the repertoires of major symphony orchestras (Mueller, 1951; Hamm, 1983; Tawa, 1984).

The mobilization of resources for new music—both within and beyond symphony orchestras—has historically raised questions about the boundaries of the orchestral canon and occasionally altered those boundaries. DiMaggio (1987a: 451–453) apparently sees such contestation as a recent development that contributes to the erosion of the high culture classification. However, the musico-historical literature shows that this contestation has been ongoing. Furthermore, this literature indicates that the contestation in the 1960s and beyond represents a difference in degree rather than a fundamental shift. When this contestation is paired with resources, then, we expect increased change and decreased conformity in symphonic repertoires. If our expectation is correct, the following will hold:

**Hypothesis 2.** Expanding resources for the performance of new music by symphony orchestras will result in (a) an increasing number of new composers in their repertoires and (b) a declining share for the few composers that dominate their repertoires.

### 1.2. Universities, high culture, and classical music

Non-profit arts organizations proved to be key actors in the institutionalization of high culture, yet they were not the only actors—colleges and universities also played an important role (DiMaggio, 1987a, 1992). Given their growing centrality in the cultural and intellectual life of the U.S., institutions of higher learning provided legitimacy for canon formation and maintenance (see also Corse and Griffin, 1997; Baumann, 2001). This legitimation process unfolded over time. When high culture first emerged as a classification in Boston, most colleges and universities did not offer programs—let alone classes—in art and music (DiMaggio, 1991a,b). By the 1930s, when the high culture classification was nationally upheld by non-profit arts organizations, programs in art and music were becoming common. Indeed, three endowed schools of music were in operation—Curtis, Eastman, and Juilliard—and the National Association of Schools of Music was establishing curriculum standards and offering accreditation for collegiate music programs (Hanson, 1951; Wager and McGrath, 1962). These emergent programs and curricula not only endorsed the high culture classification, they also created an audience for high culture and trained the personnel who would staff non-profit arts organizations (DiMaggio, 1991b; Citron, 1993).

Although colleges and universities initially contributed to the institutionalization of high culture, DiMaggio (1991b) notes that they may have contributed to its erosion from the 1960s onward. The empirical work of DiMaggio and others suggests two avenues by which this could have occurred, with both avenues stressing the “products” (i.e., students) of higher education. First, individuals with college education have grown more eclectic in their tastes. For example, they now enjoy both classical and popular music, but do not necessarily rank classical music as more exalted than other types of music (Balfe, 1990; Peterson, 1990; DiMaggio, 1991b;
Bryson, 1996; Peterson and Kern, 1996). Second, college-trained administrators who now run certain non-profit arts organizations have come to emphasize audience building. As a result, they may encourage their organizations to move away from the canon—or at least away from challenging works in the canon—because such material has limited rather than broad appeal (DiMaggio, 1984; 1987b, 1991b; Peterson, 1986; see Glynn, 2000). Given such developments, the classification of high culture may be losing some of its “sacredness.”

DiMaggio’s (1987a: 448) theoretical work suggests another avenue for consideration. The high culture classification also erodes when the content of higher education becomes more differentiated and less hierarchical. In other words, the exaltation of a limited body of works is challenged when academics embrace a varied body of works and when they are reluctant to rank some works as superior to others. The musico-historical literature reveals that both tendencies occurred in the music programs of U.S. colleges and universities. This literature also shows that both tendencies percolated in the early 1900s, became obvious shortly after WWII, and grew especially pronounced from the 1960s onward (see Kerman, 1985; Randel, 1992; Citron, 1993; Nettl, 1995). We offer but two examples of such tendencies.

First, the rise of ethnomusicology—with its emphasis on music that lies beyond the orchestral canon—contributed to the variety found in music programs of U.S. colleges and universities, and its subsequent development would challenge the notion of a singular body of exalted music. The intellectual roots of ethnomusicology extend back to the turn of the century. In the late 1800s, a small number of U.S. academics documented the music of various groups—particularly that of African Americans and Native Americans (Levy, 1984; Meyers, 1992; Cruz, 1999). In the early to mid-1900s, a growing number of U.S. academics—such as comparative musicologists—turned their attention to the various musics located within and beyond the U.S., including those of Appalachia and non-Western societies (see Seeger, 1977). However, the approach of comparative musicologists sometimes favored the classical music of Europe, especially when using it as a reference point for study of other musics (Bohlman, 1992; Meyers, 1992).

In the mid-1950s, a group of academics launched an approach that would heed the musics of the world without privileging the Western canon; they adopted the label of ethnomusicology circa 1950 and founded the Society for Ethnomusicology in 1955 (Bohlman, 1992; Meyers, 1992). Their efforts led to an accumulation of a body of knowledge, facilitated by the founding of journals (e.g., Ethnomusicology) and centers (e.g., The Institute of Ethnomusicology at UCLA) and by a growing number of dissertations (Gillis and Merriam, 1966; Post, 1992). Although ethnomusicology arguably did not emerge as a rejection or a challenge to the canon of Western music, it has since grown more reflexive about the canon’s standing (Bohlman, 1992; Meyers, 1992). “Western art music is neither superior nor inferior

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5 Their emphasis partly results from the type of training administrators receive, which draws on management ideas from the for-profit realm. However, it is also reinforced, if not exacerbated, by the post-1960 proliferation of institutional funding (e.g., government grants) that encourages arts organizations to increase their audiences (DiMaggio, 1984, 1986, 1991b; Peterson, 1986).
to other musical traditions,” writes Judith Becker (1986: 359). “Musical systems are simply incommensurable.”

Second, the inclusion of contemporary composition—especially the avant-garde—in U.S. music programs likewise broadened the variety found in those programs, and it challenged assumptions that lay behind the orchestral canon. At the turn of the century, the few composers found in U.S. music programs leaned toward the musically traditional. As a result, composition students with modernist leanings often went to Europe for instruction (Wager and McGrath, 1962; Hamm, 1983; Tawa, 1984, 1992). However, the situation would soon change, especially in the wake of the turbulence that preceded and followed WWII. A number of composers fled Europe and secured teaching positions in U.S. music programs, including Paul Hindemith at Yale and Arnold Schoenberg at UCLA. Native-born composers also secured positions in U.S. programs, including Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt at Princeton and John Cage at UCLA. Many of these composers worked in musical styles that were decidedly non-canonical—such as atonal, chance, and electronic music (Hamm, 1983; Kerman, 1985; Tawa, 1987).

The diffusion of composers among U.S. institutions of higher learning led to talk of a new type of patronage (College Music Symposium, 1970; Cameron, 1989). “If the American landscape were dotted with tiny principalities and courts no doubt we would all be Kappelmeisters of a sort, like our 17th and 18th century European counterparts,” writes composer George Rochberg. “Instead America has colleges and universities. And in sufficient quantity and of a degree of enlightenment sufficient to have opened the doors, if not their hearts yet, to the hundreds, possibly thousands of composers alive today” (College Music Symposium, 1970: 90). Amidst this diffusion, contemporary composers gained voice in academia via journals (e.g., Perspectives of New Music), associations (e.g., American Society of University Composers), and a plethora of collegiate performance groups (Fromm, 1962; Burge, 1973; Kerman, 1985; Citron, 1993). The increased presence of contemporary composition in U.S. music programs, at the very least, raised questions about the temporal boundaries of the orchestral canon, wherein post-1920 music once was notably absent (Citron, 1993; Nettl, 1995). Such questions came to the fore when certain avant-garde composers forcefully challenged the superiority of a canon that, in their view, was fixated both on the past and on musical styles that were now intellectually exhausted (Cameron, 1985; Tawa, 1987).

The rise of ethnomusicology and the inclusion of contemporary composition did not topple the orchestral canon from the music programs of U.S. colleges and universities, yet in altering the curricula of such programs, both developments created space for an increasingly diverse body of musical works and both reduced the dominance of the canon (Kerman, 1985; Morgan, 1992; Nettl, 1995).6 While it is

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6 Other developments also led to increased differentiation and reduced hierarchy in the music programs of U.S. colleges and universities, including scholarship on early music, jazz, and popular music. These developments were particularly pronounced after the 1960s. Not surprisingly, some music scholars now speak of multiple canons rather than a single one (Morgan, 1992; Randel, 1992; Citron, 1993; Nettl, 1995). The varied content of music curricula likely plays a role in the eclectic tastes of college graduates.
difficult to specify the exact timing of such developments, we suspect that they were facilitated by the proliferation of music programs among U.S. colleges and universities: a growing number of programs provided increased opportunities for the expansion and diversification of musical scholarship. If our suspicion is correct, and if such developments have bearing on orchestral repertoires (see DiMaggio, 1987a; Morgan, 1992), then the following should hold:

**Hypothesis 3.** The proliferation of music programs among U.S. colleges and universities will result in (a) an increasing number of new composers in the repertoires of symphony orchestras and (b) a declining share for the few composers that dominate their repertoires.

### 1.3. Cultural industries, high culture, and classical music

The fields of high culture and popular culture are linked in several important ways (DiMaggio, 1982b, 1987a, 1991b, 1992). First, both fields emerged in the U.S. at roughly the same time. The emergence and institutionalization of high culture in the performance and visual arts overlapped with the burgeoning of popular culture in such commercial industries as vaudeville, sound recording, film, and radio. Second, the early interplay between these fields played a crucial role in the institutionalization of high culture. On the one hand, popular culture provided the foil against which high culture was defined, thereby enabling differentiation between “sacred” and “profane” cultural objects. On the other hand, the commercial industries of popular culture initially conceded the import of canonical works, and in the process, disseminated high culture. Managers in the early recording industry, for example, sought to legitimate their new medium by offering thousands of operatic and orchestral recordings; their successful efforts simultaneously upheld notions of exalted music and distributed such music to consumers throughout the U.S. (Dowd, 2001). Finally, the contemporary interplay between the fields of high and popular culture is likewise relevant, especially as the once sacrosanct boundaries between high and popular culture are frequently breached. DiMaggio points to these breaches, such as when symphony orchestras perform the music of Frank Zappa, as emblematic of the erosion of high culture.

When discussing the relationship between the field of orchestral music and commercial cultural industries, DiMaggio (1991b, 1992) points to the efforts of the radio and recording industries. However, he mostly addresses how both industries contributed to the nationalization of high culture via the production and distribution of the musical canon. He says less about how each may have contributed to the erosion of high culture. We draw on media history and suggest two ways in which both industries may have heightened change and reduced conformity in orchestral repertoires. In particular, we discuss the declining dominance of network radio and the recording industry’s release of music by U.S. composers.

The two networks that dominated the early U.S. radio industry emphasized the broadcasting of classical music (Dowd, 2001) and, in doing so, reinforced emergent notions regarding high culture. The following excerpt nicely captures the
programming emphasis of CBS and NBC, and it typifies the discourse of both networks in the early to mid-1900s.

In 1927 alone there were a total of fifty-six symphony programs broadcast by four outstanding orchestras...This was a remarkable beginning, but the remarkable strides become even more apparent when we look ahead nine years and find that in 1936 there were 420 symphony programs; 385 by twenty-four American orchestras...In this same period from 1927 to 1936, Grand Opera broadcasts increased from twenty-six to thirty-four a year (NBC, 1939: 54–55).

This emphasis on classical music helped both networks negotiate regulatory constraints found in the U.S. radio industry. Early broadcast regulation limited the number of radio stations that any firm could own, while encouraging stations to rely only on live rather than recorded music (Dowd, 2001, 2002). CBS and NBC each responded by establishing contractual relations with hundreds of local stations across the U.S. Each network attracted affiliates by providing them with live programs that would be difficult for local stations to produce on their own—including classical music performed by preeminent symphony orchestras and opera companies (e.g., CBS, 1933; NBC, 1945). Early broadcast regulation also held that radio should serve the public interest of local communities, with federal regulators eventually questioning the ability of expansive networks to do so (Dowd, 2001, 2002). CBS and NBC responded by arguing, among other things, that classical music programs edify and educate listeners, thereby serving the public interest and hence legitimating the enterprise of network radio (e.g., CBS, 1935; NBC, 1943).

The dominance of the radio networks dramatically waned from the 1950s onward, as did the broadcast of classical music programs. Ironically, CBS and NBC were responsible for their own reduced presence in the radio industry. Both had been involved in the development of television, and by the late 1940s, CBS and NBC had begun the transfer of their radio programming and resources to their respective television networks. Their efforts, in turn, left a tremendous void in radio broadcasting. Local radio stations soon filled that void by emphasizing the broadcast of musical recordings rather than live performances, with the vast majority of stations targeting listeners with recordings of popular music. Changing broadcast regulation encouraged the burgeoning of local radio stations: regulators licensed an unprecedented number of new stations and dropped their objections to the broadcast of recordings. Meanwhile, classical music was now relegated to a small number of specialist stations and would never again have the national prominence that it enjoyed on network radio of the early to mid 1900s (Dowd, 2001, 2002; see Dowd and Blyler, this issue). Thus, the dominance of network radio had once provided a forum for the nationalization of high culture, whereas its declining dominance eliminated that forum. If this development has any implication for the repertoires of symphony orchestras (see DiMaggio, 1991b, 1992), then the following should hold:
**Hypothesis 4.** The declining dominance of U.S. network radio will result in (a) an increasing number of new composers in the repertoires of symphony orchestras and (b) a declining share for the few composers that dominate their repertoires.

The involvement of the recording industry in the dissemination of the musical canon is well known (DiMaggio, 1991b, 1992; Dowd, 2001), yet less well known has been its dissemination of contemporary music that lies at the fringe of or well beyond this canon. Media history shows that, as the number of native and émigré composers in the U.S. expanded, so too did efforts to record the works of such composers (see Oja, 1982). These efforts were especially pronounced after the introduction of the long-playing album in 1948 (United States Congress, 1958; Murph, 1984; see Dowd, 2002). “More works of serious music are being written in the United States today than at any time in our history,” wrote composer Henry Cowell. “What is more important, more such works are being recorded and are being heard by the people” (United States Congress, 1958: 433). Although the number of recordings that featured U.S. composers had been relatively small, there were notable instances when they solidified the reputation of ascendant composers (e.g., Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Elliot Carter) and drew attention to once obscure composers (e.g., Charles Ives) (Davis, 1975; Smith, 1983; Kostelanetz, 1989).

Several types of actors have supported the recording of U.S. composers, and in the process, they may have expanded or undermined the musical canon. Large firms have offered a fair, if not surprising, number of these recordings (Oja, 1982). Their motivation for doing so sometimes sprung from a sense of musical responsibility rather than an expectation of profit, as when Columbia Records launched its Modern American Music series in 1949 (United States Congress, 1958; Davis, 1975). Small firms have also offered these recordings, purportedly dealing with those works and composers that their large counterparts have overlooked (United States Congress, 1958; Hamm, 1983; Smith, 1983; Murph, 1984). Foundations have likewise played an important role, as their funding has helped both large and small firms recoup the sizable expenses associated with the recording of contemporary music; they include the Ford Foundation, the Fromm Music Foundation, the Koussevitsky Musical Foundation, the Walter Naumberg Musical Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation (United States Congress, 1958; Hart, 1973; Smith, 1983). The combined efforts of these actors resulted in the ongoing accumulation of U.S. music on sound recordings, music that was clearly outside of the orchestral canon (see Oja, 1982; Nettl, 1995). While DiMaggio (1991b) suggests that recordings of canonical music initially helped legitimate the high culture classification, we would not be surprised if the expanding number of non-canonical recordings subsequently helped erode the high culture classification. If this is the case, the following should hold:

**Hypothesis 5.** The release of recordings featuring U.S. composers will result in (a) an increasing number of new composers in the repertoires of symphony orchestras and (b) a declining share for the few composers that dominate their repertoires.
2. Data and methods

2.1. Data

We test the above hypotheses by drawing on a wealth of information provided by Kate Hevner Mueller (1973). Her volume provides a comprehensive listing of the repertoires of 27 “major” U.S. symphony orchestras, defined in 1972 by the American Symphony Orchestra League as those with annual operating budgets greater than $500,000 (Mueller, 1973: ix). Concert programs, library archives, and organizational records kept by the orchestras themselves provided data that span more than a century. This ambitious volume contains information on all works performed by these orchestras during regular subscription series concerts—including each work’s title, composer, and year of performance. We manually entered this printed information into a newly created dataset, resulting in information on more than 86,500 performances.

Table 1 lists the major orchestras tracked in the Mueller (1973) volume. These 27 organizations include all but three of the major symphony orchestras classified by the American Symphony Orchestra League in 1972. Although our data do not represent a random sample of all U.S. symphony orchestras, they do reflect a nearly exhaustive analysis of major U.S. symphony orchestras. We are confident that our results will be relevant if not generalizable. Regarding relevancy, the breadth of information gleaned from these select orchestras is unparalleled. For example, its coverage encompasses those years that marked, according to DiMaggio (1982b, 1991b), the emergence, the establishment, and the initial erosion of high culture in the U.S. Regarding generalizability, the orchestras listed in Table 1 have historically enjoyed a high profile and likely provided role models for a burgeoning number of smaller orchestras.

2.2. Dependent variables

By drawing on Mueller’s (1973) volume, we know which composers had works performed in a given year. Our first dependent variable, then, is the annual number

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7 This volume is the culmination of John Mueller and Kate Hevner Mueller’s efforts. Their first effort tracked, among other things, the repertoires of eight major U.S. symphony orchestras (Mueller and Hevner, 1942), while John Mueller’s (1951) second effort tracked the repertoires of eleven major orchestras from 1842 to 1950.

8 Mueller used the American Symphony Orchestra League classifications from 1972, which broke orchestras into four groups based solely on annual operating budget: major, metropolitan, urban, and community. Fiscal year 1972–1973 marked a change in criteria for major symphonies that, in addition to an increased budget requirement, included considerations regarding the orchestra’s length of time in existence, employment of professional musicians, incorporation as a non-profit organization, and ability to perform the breadth of the repertoire (Pavlakis, 1974).

9 Mueller (1973) did not include the following orchestras due to data limitations: Honolulu (Hawaii), San Antonio (Texas), and the American Symphony (New York, NY).
of composers who enjoyed a first-time performance by a major U.S. symphony orchestra. Fig. 1 details the annual extent of change. It mostly follows the pattern that we expected. The annual number of new composers was relatively low in the early and mid-1800s, as actors emphasized the most revered of the classics while struggling to establish the high culture field. The annual number began rising in the mid-1800s, as the establishment of the high culture field brought an expanded range of classics. However, the annual number grew pronounced from the 1920s onward, well before the erosion of high culture that DiMaggio (1992) locates in the 1960s. Amidst this progression of 1934 new composers, 762 enjoyed only one performance during the time frame of our study (see Gilmore, 1993).10

By drawing on Mueller’s (1973) volume, we also know the frequency with which a given composer’s works were performed; this allows us to gauge the annual share of performances attributable to various composers and, in turn, to construct the

10 Meanwhile, 101 composers enjoyed more than 100 performances, 31 had more than 500 performances, only 19 had more than 1000, and just 2 had more than 5000 (Wagner with 6955 and Beethoven with 7290).
second dependent variable. We treat “conformity” as occurring among repertoires when the works of a small number of composers account for a large share of all annual performances. We measure conformity by employing the Herfindahl index. While many use this index to gauge the extent to which a few firms dominate a given market (Dobbin and Dowd, 1997), DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) use it to gauge the extent to which a few plays dominate the repertoires of resident theaters. We follow their example and use the Herfindahl to measure the extent to which the works of a few composers dominate the repertoires of major symphony orchestras. 11

In the present study, the Herfindahl index simultaneously measures the annual number of composers and their respective shares of annual performances. It ranges between 0 and 1000, where “0” indicates a complete lack of conformity (i.e., a different composer accounts for each performance) and “1000” indicates perfect conformity (i.e., one composer accounts for all performances). We construct the index by noting which composers received performances in a given year and the annual percentages represented by each (e.g., three composers with respective shares of 40%, 30%, and 30%). We take the square of each annual percentage (e.g., 402; 302; 302;)

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11 DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) also construct a “conformity” index to assess the extent to which the repertoire of an individual theater resembles the repertoires of other theaters; this index is based on a different formula than the Herfindahl index they use to assess “homogeneity” among all plays. Our usage of “conformity” thus departs from theirs, as our conformity measure applies across organizations rather than within a single one. We use “conformity” rather than “homogeneity” because the former captures an emphasis on the classics without evoking the negative connotations found in the latter term. In studies of popular music, for example, “homogeneity” is used to describe the banal music offered by monopolistic firms (Dowd, 2000).
30^2), sum the squared percentages (e.g., 1600 + 900 + 900), and then divide by 100 (e.g., 3400/10 = 340).

Fig. 2 documents the annual extent of conformity. It mostly follows the pattern that we expected. Conformity was at its highest levels in early years, as actors both celebrated a limited range of classics and struggled to devise a viable organizational form for the presentation of high culture. Indeed, this early conformity often reflected the repertoire of one orchestra—the New York Philharmonic (see Table 1)—and it occurred amidst limited performances (see below). Conformity began its decline with proliferation of the nonprofit form, as orchestras explored the breadth of the orchestral canon. However, conformity continued to decline from the 1920s onward, suggesting that the initial erosion of high culture may have occurred earlier than DiMaggio suggests. To make the pattern in Fig. 2 intuitive, we list in Table 2 the dominant composers found in time periods of equal length (i.e., 16 years). Note the declining share and changing composition of the top composers (see Mueller, 1951).

2.3. Independent variables

Given our focus on field-level factors, we are interested in the combined capabilities of symphony orchestras rather than the capabilities of an individual orchestra. We assess such capabilities by comparing the annual number of performances to the annual number of orchestras offering such performances. Fig. 3 details the annual ratio of performances to orchestras. Its low values in the early to mid-1800s show the limited capabilities that existed before the reliance on the nonprofit form. The rise in values for the ratio during the 1880s and 1890s coincides with the expanded capabilities brought by the emergence of the non-profit orchestra. The high values that occur from 1900 onward accompany the widespread reliance on the non-profit organizational form. The decline in values that emerges in the 1960s likely indicates the onset of the economic crisis that U.S. symphony orchestras continue to face (Hart, 1973; see Glynn, this issue). The annual ratio ranges from 8.00 to 83.83, with an average of 49.67.

Although the historical literature points to a variety of resources for new music, it offers no systematic data on the entire range of resources available across our time frame. As a result, we turn to the ecological literature for the construction of a proxy measure. Ecologists sometimes assess the level of resources in a field by examining the number of new actors in the previous time period (Dobbin and Dowd, 1997). An increasing number of new actors signals a hospitable environment with expanding resources; however, an extremely high number of new actors signals a crowded field with limited resources. Ecologists have modeled this inverted-U impact with a quadratic (\(x-C_0x^2\)). Following their example, we gauge the availability of resources for new music by examining the previous number of new composers, which is obtained by simply lagging the values depicted in Fig. 1. The positive significance of the first term (Previous Number of New Composers) would indicate the availability of resources, while the negative significance of the second term (–Previous Number of New Composers^2) would indicate the depletion of resources that occurs with a high number of actors. The previous number of new composers ranges from 1 to 41, with
Table 2
Top five composers accounting for the most performances in a given time period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Top five composers and their respective percentages of all performances</th>
<th>Combined percentage of top five composers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1842–1857</td>
<td>Mendelssohn (14.4); Beethoven (12.1); Weber (10.6); Mozart (8.6); Spohr (6.6)</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858–1873</td>
<td>Beethoven (17.0); Mendelssohn (10.9); Schumann (8.0); Liszt (7.3); Mozart (6.9)</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874–1889</td>
<td>Beethoven (15.0); Wagner (8.1); Liszt (7.4); Mendelssohn (7.1); Schumann (5.1)</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890–1905</td>
<td>Wagner (13.1); Beethoven (8.5); Liszt (6.4); Tchaikovsky (5.1); Mendelssohn (4.7)</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906–1921</td>
<td>Wagner (12.8); Beethoven (7.8); Liszt (5.2); Tchaikovsky (5.0); Brahms (4.3)</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922–1937</td>
<td>Wagner (10.2); Beethoven (7.3); Brahms (4.9); Mozart (4.1); Strauss, R. (4.0)</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938–1953</td>
<td>Beethoven (7.9); Wagner (6.7); Brahms (6.0); Mozart (5.6); Strauss, R. (4.5)</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954–1969</td>
<td>Beethoven (8.8); Mozart (7.2); Brahms (5.5); Wagner (4.2); Tchaikovsky (3.4)</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

an average value of 15.11. Fig. 1 suggests that the resources for new music were slight in the early years and grew in availability across the years.

We measure the proliferation of music programs by counting the annual number that receive first time accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music. We compiled the initial accreditation dates for each of the NASM member institutions by examining a directory (NASM, 1977). Admittedly, this directory may underestimate the number of music programs among U.S. colleges and universities, as NASM accreditation is not a requirement for existence; furthermore, this directory may lack information for music programs that were no longer in operation. Nevertheless, we expect that the information we compiled adequately taps the proliferation of music programs. New accreditations began in 1928 and totaled 323 by 1969. From 1928 onward, the annual number ranged from 0 to 24, with an average of 7.88.

We have two measures that gauge the impact of mass media. First, we measure the dominance of network radio by tracking the annual percentage of all U.S. radio stations that are affiliated with networks. We glean this information from Sterling (1984). The annual percentage was non-existent up to 1926, prior to the emergence of networks. The percentage of network radio quickly rose from 6.5% in 1927 and peaked at 89.8% in 1945. After this peak, network radio declined to less than 25% in the late 1960s. Second, we count the annual number of new recordings that

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12 Examining the impact of the previous number of new composers on the current number of new composers is a straightforward application of the ecological proxy for new resources (Dobbin and Dowd, 1997). Examining the impact of the previous number of new composers on the current level of conformity is less straightforward. Still, it makes conceptual sense, as the flurry of new composers (and attendant resources for new music that it represents) may lower the conformity of repertoires in subsequent years.
featured the works of U.S. composers (both native and émigré). We derive this information from the outstanding discography compiled by Carol J. Oja (1982). She identified nearly 7000 such recordings that fall into our time frame. However, her discography sometimes offers a period (e.g., pre-1948) rather than a specific year for the release of an individual recording. We compensated for this clumping of release-years by using a 5-year moving average. The resulting variable shows that the release of such recordings began in 1901. Annual numbers remained under 20 in the decades that followed, nearly disappearing during the Great Depression. The annual numbers hovered around 50 in the late 1930s and 1940s. From 1950 onward, annual numbers rose into the 100s and peaked at 338.

2.4. Methods

We use negative binomial regression to model our first dependent variable—a “count” of the annual number of new composers (Long, 1997). Although researchers commonly use Poisson regression to model event counts, Poisson regression depends on the assumption that the conditional variance and mean of the number of events are equal. Researchers sometimes find that the variance exceeds the mean (i.e., overdispersion), thereby rendering problematic the use of Poisson regression. One solution to this problem is the use of negative binomial regression—a solution that we likewise adopt given that our preliminary analyses revealed evidence of overdispersion. In count data, contagion across spells can result in autocorrelation, as when the number of new composers in one year stimulates the number of new composers in later years. One way of dealing with autocorrelation, when theoretically justified, is to use an independent variable that is a lag of the count variable (Barron, 1992: 216–217). We take this approach here given our use of the previous number of new composers as a proxy for resources. In the negative binomial results, we ascertain the impact of independent variables via the following formula: 100*[exp(coefficient)−1]. It describes how a one-unit change in a given variable shapes the expected count of the dependent variable (Long, 1997).

We use estimated generalized least squares (EGLS) regression to model our second dependent variable—a continuous measure detailing the annual extent of conformity (Gujarati, 1995). Although researchers often use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to model continuous outcomes, the assumptions of OLS regression can be compromised by traits found in time series data, including autocorrelation. Some researchers thus use EGLS regression when analyzing time series data, as we likewise do given that preliminary analyses revealed autocorrelation. EGLS regression offers an attractive solution because it compensates for autocorrelation while yielding output that is comparable to that of OLS regression.

3. Results

Table 3 contains the models by which we tested our hypotheses. In each model, we lag the independent variables, so that they predict the effect of variables in year \( t−1 \)
on the dependent variable in year \( t \). Given that the Mueller (1973) volume begins tracking performances in 1842, we lack information for what occurred in 1841. As a result, both models commence with 1843 and extend to 1969. The \( N \) for each model, then, refers to the 127 years for which we have values for each dependent variable.

The first column of Table 3 reveals several factors that account for the pattern wherein change in repertoires roughly increases over time. The combined performance capabilities of symphony orchestras play a notable role. Each one-unit increase in the ratio of performances to orchestra raises the expected number of new composers by 1.92\% (\( 100\times \exp(0.019) - 1 \)). While this may seem a slight effect, recall that this ratio ranges in value from 8 to 83.83. The significance of our proxy measure shows the positive impact of resources for new music. Each one-unit increase in the number of previous composers spurs the expected number of composers in the current year by 2.74\% (\( 100\times \exp(0.027) - 1 \)). In analyses not reported here, we found that the squared term was not significant. Thus, the resources available for new music have a linear rather than curvilinear effect on change in orchestral repertoires. The expansion of music programs among U.S. colleges and universities likewise prompts change in orchestral repertoires. Each one-unit increase in the annual number of newly accredited programs increases the expected number of new composers by 2.02\% (\( 100\times \exp(0.020) - 1 \)). This is a sizable impact given that the annual number of new accreditations ranges from 0 to 24. Meanwhile, neither network radio nor the release of U.S. recordings significantly shapes the number of new composers that annually enter the repertoires.

| Regression estimates for change and conformity in the repertoires of U.S. symphony orchestras, 1843–1969 |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Negative binomial regression for the annual number of new composers in orchestral repertoire | EGLS regression estimates for the annual extent to which a few composers dominate orchestral repertoires |
| Performance capabilities of symphony orchestra | 0.019** (0.002) |
| Resources for new music | 0.027** (0.007) |
| Proliferation of music programs among U.S. colleges and universities | 0.020* (0.011) |
| Dominance of network radio | 0.003 (0.003) |
| Release of recordings that feature U.S. composers | 0.002 (0.005) |
| Intercept | 0.984** (0.114) |
| Overdispersion parameter | 0.077** (0.026) |

Log-likelihood: \(-378.69\)

Adjusted R\(^2\): –

Durbin–Watson statistic: 1.84

Unstandardized coefficients; numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

*\( P < 0.05; ** P < 0.01 \) (one-tailed tests); \( n = 127 \).
The second column of Table 3 shows that only one factor accounts for the pattern wherein the conformity of repertoires roughly decreases over time. The expansion of performance capabilities among major symphony orchestras drives down the extent to which a few composers dominate the repertoires. Each one-unit increase in the ratio of performances to orchestras reduces the Herfindahl index by 1.044. A comparison of Figs. 2 and 3 reveals the appreciable impact of this relationship. Meanwhile, none of the other factors considered has a significant effect on the conformity of repertoires. Especially notable is the lack of a significant effect for the previous number of new composers. That is, expanding resources for new music in one year do not significantly reduce the conformity of repertoires in the following year. Thus, as Gilmore (1993) suggests, the performance of new composers by symphony orchestras entails but a marginal effort that pales in comparison to the performance of the classics.

4. Conclusions

The present study has built on Paul DiMaggio’s project on high culture in the United States. To be sure, this study has not exhausted all arguments found in his project; we did not consider, for example, the role that “fading urban upper classes” play in the erosion of the high culture classification (DiMaggio, 1991b: 143). Nevertheless, it did draw on several of his central arguments and, in the process, it has extended knowledge regarding aesthetic classification and organizational fields.

Consider first the lesson that this study offers regarding the evolution of aesthetic classification. When detailing the institutionalization of high culture, DiMaggio has often focused on two pivotal moments: the period wherein the high culture classification took root in a particular field (e.g., symphony orchestras from the 1880s to the 1920s; DiMaggio, 1982b) and the period wherein the high culture classification is eroding (i.e., from the 1960s onward; DiMaggio, 1991b). He has focused much less, however, on the years between such moments. Perhaps because of this tendency, DiMaggio (1991b) appears to speak of an epochal shift in aesthetic classification, whereby institutionalized classifications of high culture wither in the face of relatively recent developments (but see DiMaggio, 1992: 46). The longitudinal approach found in the present paper both confirms and qualifies DiMaggio’s argument. Regarding confirmation, symphony orchestras were indeed more likely to perform the classics of the canon in early rather than later years. Regarding qualification, the declining performance of the classics was ongoing across the years rather than a recent manifestation. Given this pattern in the orchestral field, it may be fruitful to examine whether other high culture fields are similarly marked by a declining reliance on canonical works.

Consider now the lessons that this study offers regarding the impact of field-level factors on evolving aesthetic classifications. First, we found much evidence of change among the repertoires of U.S. symphony orchestras: the number of composers receiving first-time performances increased dramatically across our time frame. We identified three factors that significantly spurred this trend—the growing
performance capabilities of orchestras, the expanding resources for new music, and the proliferation of music programs in higher education. Second, we found that this increasing change occurred mostly at the margins, as first-time performances of new composers were eclipsed by the performances of those composers who occupied a central place in the canon (e.g., Beethoven). In fact, the number of new composers performed in one year (i.e., change) had no bearing on the extent to which the classics were performed in the subsequent year (i.e., conformity). Not surprisingly, then, contemporary composers have complained about a lack of performance opportunities. Finally, we identified one factor that explained the declining conformity of orchestral repertoires: the collective performance capabilities of symphony orchestras. As these capabilities grew, orchestras were less likely to rely on a limited body of works. Ironically, the non-profit form that allowed such growth—and that enabled the institutionalization of high culture—would also contribute to the shift away from the classics. As DiMaggio (1991a: 287) notes, “institutionalization bears, if not the seeds of its own destruction, at least openings for substantial change.”

Note that the present paper represents the first installment in an ongoing project. In future installments, we will work to address the questions raised by this modest study. For example, we will offer analyses that combine organizational and field-level factors, thereby following the example of DiMaggio and Stenberg’s (1985) study of U.S. theaters. We will also employ more fine-tuned measures of repertoire than found here. Rather than examining change in general, for instance, we will focus on the ideological struggles regarding the inclusion of avant-garde composers in orchestral repertoires. Finally, we want to flesh out some of the links found in this quantitative study by using detailed qualitative analysis. Most notably, we will unpack the mechanisms by which organizational and field-level factors shape the repertoires of symphony orchestras. In doing so, we hope to illuminate further the organization of the musical canon.

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