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Introduction

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[1] We are living in a time of radical paradigm shift in the way people think about disability. For a long time, and still in the present, the dominant model has been the medical model in which disability is defined as deficit—a pathology that resides within an individual body and that needs to be remediated or cured. In the new, social model, disability is understood as difference, not deficit. It is socially constructed, residing not within an individual body but in the network of relationships that bind us to each other and to our shared cultural and physical environment. This newer model shifts attention from the individual to the culture at large: instead of requiring individuals to be normalized or cured through medical intervention, or to be sequestered or eradicated, we require the surrounding culture to accept and accommodate a naturally occurring and desirable diversity of bodies and minds. Within this new, social model, the stigma traditionally associated with disability is stripped away, and people with disabilities are enabled to participate fully in the social, political, economic, and cultural lives of their communities.

[2] Within our own field, the past few years have seen a sharp rise of interest in disability as a topic of cultural analysis within our scholarship, as a significant factor in our teaching, and as a pervasive influence on our lives and the lives of our families, friends, and colleagues. Under the influence of the political movement for Disability Rights and the interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies, we have witnessed a burst of disability-related work in our journals and at our conferences. I am thinking especially of the essays collected in *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability and Music* (Lerner and Straus 2006) and two of my own essays (Straus 2006 and 2008). More generally, our colleagues with experiences of disability—personal, familial, or pedagogical—have begun to tell their stories and to talk openly about pressing issues that were, until very recently, considered too disturbing or too personal for public discussion.

[3] At the joint AMS/SMT conference in Nashville (November 2008), there were fourteen papers on disability-related topics. Ten of these (Attinello, Bassler, Deaville, Gillespie, Gimbel, Honisch, Jackson, Kochavi, Morris, and Scotto) were presented on an AMS Evening Panel called "Scholars with Disabilities," organized by the SMT Interest Group on Disability and Music. According to the abstract for this panel, "Disability confers a distinctive cultural vantage point from which our diverse panel of faculty and graduate students, in musicology and music theory, from North America and the UK, will assess the impact of disability on their own lives, careers, teaching, and scholarship. All of our panelists have profound personal or familial experiences of disability, and their public acts of 'coming out' and of self-identification with a stigmatized social group will affirm the inextricable relationship between personal position and engaged scholarship." These ten papers have a personal tone, although all engage larger issues of social and political action.

[4] Three of the papers (Jensen-Moulton, Pacun, and Saslaw) appeared on a session sponsored jointly by the SMT

Committee on Diversity and the SMT Interest Group on Pedagogy, and one of the papers (Johnson) was a freestanding paper on a regular SMT session. These four papers have a more practical orientation than the other ten, but draw heavily on the personal experiences of the authors. Many of the papers in this double volume have been expanded for their appearance in print in this special issue of *Music Theory Online*, but several of them appear here much as they were heard in Nashville.

[5] These papers vary somewhat in focus. Some are comparatively theoretical, grounded in Disability Studies, while others are more practical, dealing with career issues or the pragmatics of classroom teaching. The papers vary also in their emphasis on personal, familial, or pedagogical experiences. But they share a strong narrative element: in each of them, we can hear one of our colleagues telling his or her story of life with disability. These stories are not designed to elicit pity, an emotion that involves both distance and power disparity between the teller and the listener. Rather, the stories are offered in the spirit of social justice, to elicit an effective accommodation of disability and a newly invigorated effort to make our shared personal and physical environment fully accessible to all. The focus of these papers is not so much on what we can achieve in spite of disability (familiar narratives of disability overcome and inspirational tales of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity are generally avoided), but rather on what disability enables us to do—how our scholarship, our teaching, and our lives are lived through and with disability and also are enriched by disability.

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