

CREATIVITY WITH A LARGE ‘C’ – CREATIVITY WITH A SMALL ‘C’

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Background

The central distinction between art music and popular music is frequently seen in the quality of composition. While art music composition is expected to be the work of a ‘genius’, popular music is often not even considered composed music, but rather a re-arrangement of pre-shaped musical clichés either at random (amateur section) or according to a formula (professional section). Psychologically, this distinction may be reduced to the idea of “creativity with a small ‘c’ – creativity with a large ‘C’” – that is, creativity as an everyday activity available to everyone or creativity as the rare work of a genius.

Aims

The aim of this paper is to suggest a revised concept of creativity and composition in music psychology which extends to the field of popular music.

Main Contribution

One of the reasons why music psychologists largely neglect the field of popular music may be because they do not consider the “creativity with a small ‘c’” associated with this field worth the effort: While the ‘inexplicable’ work of ‘genius’ is a challenge for psychology, everyday creativity

may not hold the same fascination. However, the idea that “creativity with a large ‘C’” is inherently different from “creativity with a small ‘c’” recently has been questioned by both psychologists and musicologists such as Robert Weisberg (1989) and Nicholas Cook (1990, 1998).

A closer look at processes of inspiration and elaboration suggests that the ‘exceptionality’ of western art music composition is an idea closely connected to the ‘genius myth,’ the Romantic concept of creativity. Due to large structural similarities between composition in both contexts, music psychology’s disregard of popular music seems largely undeserved.

Implications

See aims.