

IKOS report

Title for report

Classifying musical genre and the BCC: a report on progress

1.0. Introduction

Musical form, genre and types are a complex area of music classification. Work which started at the IKOS 2nd Domain Analysis clinic for music in November 2019, explores how the Basic Concepts Classification (BCC) could be extended for music. There is no need to approach this task by contemplating terms from scratch: instead, the music terms from the Library of Congress Genre/Forms Terms (LCGFT), an extensive vocabulary of musical forms, genres and types, can be utilized. However, for various reasons, it is not feasible to simply import the entire LCGFT hierarchy into the BCC. Therefore, since the workshop, the authors have commenced a project which explores musical forms, genres, and types, and how they fit into the structure of BCC. The purpose of this research is three-fold. First, the ultimate goal is to have a usable set of instructions and schedules in BCC that can accommodate works of music and works about music. Second, this endeavor will also analyze how BCC's focus on synthesis can be used to simplify and enable the classification of this complex area of music, and provides an interesting contribution to general research in the classification of music. Third, this exploration will additionally unpick the interdisciplinary aspects of music, potentially illuminating connections between disciplines in the process. A brief summary of the research so far is now provided.

2.0. Transforming LCGFT

The current version of LCGFT (as of May 6, 2020) has 25 narrower terms under the top term of music (Library of Congress 2020). Terms with asterisks indicate those terms which have no "children":

1. Accompaniments (Music)
2. Arrangements (Music)
3. Art music
4. Chants
5. Dramatic music
6. Filk music*
7. Folk music
8. Functional music
9. Glitch music*
10. Humorous music
11. Hymn tunes*
12. Improvisations (Music)*
13. Instrumental settings*
14. Medleys (Music)*
15. Muğams*
16. Musical settings*

17. Noise music*
18. Notated music
19. Popular music
20. Sacred music
21. Sampler albums (Sound recordings)*
22. Songs
23. Sound art
24. Teaching pieces (Music)
25. Unfinished music*

These terms are taken as the basis for the research concerning BCC and musical genres and types, alongside a selection of the sub-terms associated with these terms. Note that these 25 terms also give rise to over 1000 sub-terms, sub-sub-terms and more. The source used for the full vocabulary is Henry's (2019) edited list, extracted from LCGFT. This list has one small variation in structure, as it assumed that Noise music did not have music as a parent when Henry's (2019) list was created.

There are two, inter-related difficulties which need to be circumnavigated when repurposing LCGFT for BCC. First, the sub-terms of these 25 terms need consideration, but the desired treatment of the sub-terms within BCC may not always match other sub-terms in that class or their parent class. For example, some subclasses in a LCGFT class can be dealt with by synthesis, yet other subclasses within the same class might need a different sort of synthesis or might represent a concept that cannot be broken down further. Second, with over 1000 terms, the research does not aim to focus on every term; instead, the 25 classes and a small number of examples are studied instead. It is hoped that this will elicit some of the main ideas and issues, which could then be applied to the full vocabulary as and when needed for practical purposes.

3.0 Analysis of the 25 classes

The analysis of the 25 classes is divided into three actions: those LCGFT classes which are mostly constituted by synthesis; those LCGFT classes which are mostly not constituted by synthesis; those LCGFT classes which are not really genres or types at all. Overall, the mechanisms of BCC prove to be very adaptable to musical form, genre and type. For instance, types of functional music and much of folk can be usefully created using synthesis; similarly, complex genres such as aleatory music and noise music, can be precisely defined by synthesising classes using the phenomena and relators already in BCC. Another aspect to emerge from the analysis is how having a single facet for musical form, genre and type, alleviates some of the issues with differentiating and defining these often nebulous ideas. Furthermore, the single form/genre/type facet approach also potentially draws different traditions of music together.

However, this analysis also illuminates some of the challenges with the approach of utilizing LCGFT as a vocabulary. Due to how many different types of information are present in some of the LCGFT classes, it was difficult to divide a number of the 25 classes between those whose sub-classes could be dealt with by synthesis and those which could not. The analysis also highlighted how some non-music parts of BCC would need extending in order to accommodate musical forms, genres and types, such as dance, theater, religion, to name just a few.

4.0. Discussion

As well as detailed instructions and ideas leading to a usable set of BCC schedules for music, three threads emerge from the analysis of the 25 classes. First, a general structure of facets for dealing with form, genre and types emerges. Three specific facets emerge: a combined facet for form, genre and type; a format facet, to be dealt with as part of a more general format section outside of the specifically-music part of BCC's schedules; a techniques facet, which already exists within art but would need the addition of some specifically music and some general artistic methods. Second, the analysis of the 25 classes reveals how BCC's synthesis and the sophisticated collection of relators can be used to represent musical forms, genres, and types. This is shown to resolve some of the issues associated with music classification, such as the nebulous idea of function (Lee 2017), the issues with faceted structure in traditional music classification schemes (Lee 2017) and the large numbers of subgenres for genres such as opera (Lee, Robinson and Bawden 2020). The potential usefulness of BCC for the purposes of classifying music reflects BCC's general rethinking about how arts could be classified (Szostak 2014). Third, the analysis illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of music, by its potential combination with other art-forms, occasional synthesis with science subjects, and potential transfiguring of textual analysis methods for musical purposes.

The full version of this analysis and discussion is being prepared for separate publication.

References

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