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"Is Your Baby Getting Enough Music?"
Musical Interventions into Gestational Labor

Women and Music

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Abstract

Music has often been figured as an ideal accompaniment to social reproduction. Arts institutions, advertisers, media companies, and streaming services have sought to emphasize music's reproductive utility: its purported capacity to help listeners to take care of themselves and others; enhance sociality and subjectification; and improve health and wellbeing. Music's reproductive utility has also been articulated in relation to pregnancy and childrearing. In this article, we distinguish between two types of musical interventions into pregnancy and gestational labor. On the one hand, music has been figured as a reproductive technology that can “improve” both future mother and future child. We take A Sound Beginning, a music-based family bonding subscription service, as exemplary of this tendency: through a personalized “Womb Song,” the program promises to help parents-to-be to “raise a calm, loving child.” On the other hand, music has been figured as a social service that can support disadvantaged future mothers and their children. Here, we critically examine Carnegie Hall’s Lullaby Project, which engages new mothers and mothers-to-be to co-compose lullabies for their babies. Noting the coherences and differences between A Sound Beginning and the Lullaby Project, we situate these interventions in relation to the post-Fordist organization of social reproduction; racial histories of pregnancy and maternity; and the cultural economy of music. In so doing, we hope to provide an alternative perspective on music and pregnancy’s imbrication with capitalist social relations.
Introduction

In a 2019 video titled “Is Your Baby Getting Enough Music?” for the children’s charity UNICEF, Dr. Ibrahim Baltagi offers a “mini parenting masterclass” on how “music affects your baby’s brain.”¹ Over the course of the five-minute video Baltagi, a lecturer in music at Lebanese International University, details the benefits of music for child development in early years. The viewer sees a multi-racial cast of infants, children, and parents happily making and listening to music. We are told that for babies and young children, “music ignites all areas of child development and skills for school readiness,” while “learning to play a musical instrument can improve mathematical learning.” However, in the video, Baltagi also extends these benefits to the period before birth, and to the fetus in utero. He suggests that listening to music during pregnancy has “a soothing and uplifting effect on the pregnant woman.” However, it also has a “positive influence on the unborn baby” insofar as “it is proven that music has a role in brain development before birth.” Consequently, Baltagi advises the viewer to “start music with your children as early as possible.”

This video is illustrative of common assertions made in media and discourse surrounding parenting about music’s capacity to stage valuable interventions into pregnancy. Various sound technologies, playlists, services, educational campaigns, and programs that posit music as a key resource in producing emotionally resilient and intelligent future-children, and generating appropriate familial bonds prior to birth, are now available.² Many of these interventions have focused on Anglo-American children in the (over)developed global North. However, as evidenced by the UNICEF video, some

² For other examples of music being offered as a key tool in producing intelligent and resilient children, see Marie Thompson, “Your womb, the perfect classroom: prenatal soundsystems and uterine audiophilia”, Feminist Review, 127, Issue 1 (2020), pp. 73-89.
organizations, companies, and institutions have addressed parents and (soon-to-be) infants outside of North America and Europe. These attempts to harness music's prenatal benefits are symptomatic of a wider cultural tendency to promote music as an ideal accompaniment to social reproduction. As we have argued elsewhere, arts institutions, advertisers, media companies, and streaming services have sought to emphasize music's reproductive utility, which is to say, its ability to help listeners to take care of themselves and others; enhance sociality and subjectification; and improve health and wellbeing.

In this article, we distinguish between two types of musical interventions into pregnancy and what we refer to herein as “gestational labor.” On the one hand, music has been sold as a reproductive technology that can improve both mother and future child. We take A Sound Beginning, a U.S.-based family bonding subscription service, as exemplary of this tendency: through a personalized “Womb Song,” the program promises to “attune” mother and baby, helping them raise a calm, loving, and attentive child. On the other hand, charities and cultural institutions have configured music as a social service that can support disadvantaged future mothers and their children. Here, we critically examine Carnegie Hall’s Lullaby Project, which engages new mothers and

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3 The extent to which musical interventions into gestational labor are “exported” from North America is debatable. The tendencies we discuss are particularly pronounced in the U.S., although transnational agencies like UNICEF help ensure that ideas about music’s social and reproductive utility traverse national boundaries. Furthermore, the relationship between North American notions of music’s reproductive utility in the context of pregnancy and childrearing and other geographic regions is bidirectional. The use of music in the ancient Hindu practice of Garbh Sanskar, for example, which focuses on the mental and physical development of the infant during pregnancy, has been spoken about in comparable terms. The Indian website Firstcry Parenting, for example, informs readers that: “References to Garbh Sanskar can be found in ancient Hindu Puranas and the Vedas. But you'll be surprised to know that the practice is not limited to India alone! Different cultures around the world encourage the nurturing of the bond between the mother and the growing baby, which is similar to the concept of ‘education in the womb.’ Mothers in Western countries often listen to classical music like that of maestros like Mozart to make their child smart.” Firstcry Parenting, “Garbh Sanskar Practices,” accessed October 18, 2017, https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/guide-garbh-sanskar-practices/.

mothers-to-be to co-compose a lullaby for their babies. Noting the coherences and
differences between A Sound Beginning and the Lullaby Project, we situate them in
relation to post-Fordist organizations of social reproduction, whereby responsibility for
looking after oneself and others is increasingly privatized; and racial histories of
pregnancy and maternity, through which “good” motherhood is racialized as white, and
the threat of “bad” motherhood is imbricated with anti-Blackness.

Central to the ideological work performed by both A Sound Beginning and the
Lullaby Project is this very emphasis on mothers, mothering, and motherhood—
whether “good” or “bad.” It is ideological not least of all because those who do
gestational labor are not necessarily mothers (motherhood does not follow from every
pregnancy), nor is mothering synonymous with womanhood (the practices we call
“mothering” can be performed by people of different genders both within and outside the nuclear family). Hence, if we recurrently use the term “mother” to refer to the
pregnant person who is the target of their respective musical interventions, our use of
this term herein reflects the gendered language that both adopt, and the (hetero)sexual
and gendered division of labor they assume. The Lullaby Project explicitly targets
“mothers and pregnant women” in their project, while the intended participant of A
Sound Beginning is less consistent in its terminology: the program’s website sometimes
does refer to “parents” as well as “mothers;” however the accompanying images of
women with infants suggests that the “you” that is repeatedly referred to is a
prospective mother. In both cases, “fathers;” “partners,” or “other caregivers” tend to be
mentioned in passing, if at all. We want to make clear, in adopting this language, that
these interventions serve to reproduce essentialist conceptions of motherly love, and, in
so doing, generate an intense maternal responsibility for the “success” of the future
child.
Also important for our comparison of these two musical interventions into gestational labor is the distinction between the concepts of commodity, gift, and asset. Specifically, A Sound Beginning and the Lullaby Project, despite their many parallels, channel music’s reproductive utility through two distinct economic forms. In the first instance, the lullaby assumes the guise of a commodity; as such, it exemplifies a broader shift towards the privatization of social reproduction under neoliberalism, particularly as this process has played out in the Anglo-American world, with austerity politics and a shrinking public sector obliging individuals and households to shoulder an increasing share of the costs and the labor of provisioning care. In the second instance, the lullaby assumes the form of a charitable gift, exemplifying another, related response to neoliberal retrenchment—namely the substitution of private philanthropy for public services. Tying these two economic forms together is a third instance: the child imagined as a special kind of asset. Yet, like all assets, the child’s value—symbolic as well as material—can either appreciate or depreciate. The child, in other words, can either end up as a site of accumulation or as waste, as Cindi Katz has observed in connection with the changing figurations of childhood under contemporary global capitalism. According to this bifurcated imaginary, how much and what kind of investments are made in the child determine its destiny qua asset, with music being framed by both A Sound Beginning and the Lullaby Project as a particularly powerful force for promoting its appreciation (or, barring that, forestalling its waste).

At first glance, recourse to lullabies as a means of fortifying the parent-child bond would seem uncontroversial. Underpinning the conventional wisdom that holds

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6 It is worth noting here how this perspective, by placing so much weight on the agency of parents and other individual subjects, blocks from view the role that structural, systemic determinants like race, class, and gender play in shaping the life chances of actually-existing children.
lullabies to have some positive benefit for the wellbeing and emotional development of children is the accumulated weight of tradition, stretching back millennia. In addition, such convictions increasingly enjoy the imprimatur of psychology and neuroscience, as a growing body of research purports to demonstrate the cognitive, psychic, and neurobiological benefits of addressing children—including children to come—through song. “The singing of the mother,” writes Ted Gioia, synthesizing folk wisdom and empirical research, “is the most therapeutic sound for the newborn child”; he cites one study that registered “measurable changes in the infant’s salivary cortisol” in response to singing by its caregiver. In addition, the importance ascribed to “attunement” in psychological theories of attachment would seem to confer upon music (and sound more generally) a special power that other media lack.

Whatever actual effect the singing of lullabies may have on children and fetuses, the practice would also appear to be invested with a supplementary symbolic value, being particularly well-equipped for the task of bringing future child and future mother

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into tune or accord with one another. This last point bears underlining, as a common thread that connects both A Sound Beginning and the Lullaby Project is their shared emphasis on personalization, which both unreflexively assume to be an unalloyed good. The personalized lullaby, in this understanding, creates a closed circuit between parent and child, presumably staving off the risks associated with separation or misattunement. Furthermore, the personalization of the lullaby is also the privatization of the lullaby. Where the lullaby might have once pertained to a type of musical commons—a body of songs that are shared within and across cultures and generations, owned by no-one but sung by many—the examples we consider envisage the lullaby as a type of private property. To be sure, even the most personalized lullaby will inevitably draw from the inherited norms, conventions, and meanings that have accrued to the lullaby, as both symbolic form and material practice. A personalized lullaby is still a lullaby, after all. Yet the uniqueness that ostensibly ensures its efficacy in promoting bonding between a singular parent and a singular fetus also invests the personalized with the kind of excludability that is a hallmark of privately-owned goods. In this way the enclosure that personalization and/or privatization erects around the lullaby may be seen as helping to fashion another enclosure, one that consolidates an idealized

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10 In both case studies examined below, what features define the lullaby are un- or under-specified. In the case of Womb Songs, the lullaby is defined more in affective than in musical terms, with much of the work of personalization stemming from the use of the caregiver’s voice. “In both natural and recorded form,” the website states, “the warmth and familiarity of your softly sung Womb Song is a tremendous source of comfort.” Womb Songs, “Musical Bonding with Womb Song,” accessed September 6, 2021, https://wombsongs.com/musical-bonding. In the case of the Lullaby Project, brochures put out by Carnegie Hall mainly focus on the lyrical content of the song. Although participants are asked to describe the broad characteristics they would like the song to exhibit (e.g., mood, genre, if there is an existing song they would like it to resemble, etc.), most concrete musical decisions are apparently left to the discretion of the musicians taking part. Nonetheless, recordings produced by the Lullaby Project suggest that participating musicians bring with them an implicit understanding of the lullaby as a genre: most songs feature a moderate tempo, conjunct melodic motion, and straightforward diatonic harmonies, with this basic formula modulated stylistically by the occasional use of a mambo rhythm, R&B-type harmonies, etc. See Carnegie Hall, “Musical Connections: Lullaby Project Celebration Winter 2018,” YouTube Playlist, last modified May 9, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6on-dql0232KHfGzynNp5Mhm5zt2EMbp.
family unit by making members’ connections with one another hinge on their disconnection from a collective musical common.

In this article, we begin with a consideration of A Sound Beginning, in particular its “Womb Songs” service, paying special attention to the way it mobilizes widely accepted and institutionally entrenched theories of attachment and attunement to legitimize its interventions. Within this framework, sound and music come to be valorized as a privileged means by which gestational labor may be managed, and “proper” or “good” attunement achieved. We then turn to The Lullaby Project, focusing on how the lullaby simultaneously mediates and is mediated by a wider network of social relations. These include the interpersonal relations that connect parent, future child, musician, and sponsoring institution, etc., as well as those that connect all of the above to broader sociodemographic groups and categories. In light of these two examples, we argue that musical interventions into gestational labor are significant insofar as they reveal a material and symbolic coherence between popular imaginations of musical affect and its value in terms of subjectification, cognitive ability, and wellbeing; neoliberal and post-Fordist formations of social reproduction, which are themselves productive of gendered, racial, and class-based distinctions; and the cultural-economic logics of the gift, commodity, and asset.

By addressing musical interventions into gestational labor, we hope to offer a useful addition to studies of music and capitalist culture. Where previous scholarship on music and capitalism has typically focused on music’s conditions of production or patterns of consumption, here we offer a distinctive approach, which centers on the imbrication of capitalist accumulation, racial formations, and the gendered division of
Furthermore, while capitalism is not a homogenous totality, a focus on social reproduction in general and gestational labor in particular enables us to address institutions (i.e. charities and cultural organizations) that ostensibly have relative autonomy from capitalist logics of production, highlighting how instances of musical philanthropy, as well as musical commodities, cohere with—and actively reproduce—capitalist notions of waste, investment, and appropriate subjectification. And this focus in turn highlights how the lullaby, as both gift and commercial good, contributes to the ongoing process whereby the production of human life is made to converge with the (re)production of capitalist life.

A Sound Beginning

A cluttered website full of low-resolution images of infants, heterosexual couples, cats, and dogs advertises a comprehensive parenting program for “baby’s optimal emotional development.” Starting at 28 weeks of pregnancy and for a US Dollar $89.95 membership fee, A Sound Beginning offers prospective parents the opportunity to develop “the skills and techniques required to be the best parent you can be.” The program stems from the PhD research of its founder, the Los Angeles psychologist Dr. Brian J. Satt, whose doctoral thesis examines the ability of unborn babies to learn. According to Satt, there is “direct and indirect evidence that the postnatal effects of intrauterine learning provided parents with a unique, effective communication link with

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their newborn,” not only “enabling them to calm their fussy baby” but also to do so in a way that “was pleasurable to the newborn.”

The signature “ingredient” of A Sound Beginning is Womb Songs: a musical bonding program that enables future parents to connect with their unborn child. The program website describes a Womb Song as “a piece of musical magic” that prospective parents can “create and teach your unborn during pregnancy.” Members are provided with instructions during the last six to eight weeks of pregnancy about how to create their own womb song using the program’s own web-based recording studio. According to the program website, this song will “communicate a unique expression of love and closeness” that will help the transition between pre-natal to post-natal experience; and “will calm both you and baby during times of discomfort and distress.” The communicative capacity of Womb Songs is (purportedly) illustrated by a “one-of-a-kind recording made by A Sound Beginning and the obstetricians at Women’s Hospital at the University of Southern California” of music being played in “the pregnant uterus [sic].” The recording aurally illustrates how music sounds outside and within a uterine environment: the listener hears a piano play a lullaby, which gradually becomes quieter, distorted, and muffled; and the sound of a heartbeat is introduced. Despite these audible differences, the Womb Songs website claims that “every note of the music is perfectly replicated in the womb.” Consequently, a personalized Womb Song can be “one of the most powerful tools that you can use after birth to promote Attunement and love with your baby.”

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
Our critical interest in A Sound Beginning by no means stems from the program’s commercial popularity. The company’s website is a testament to its obscurity: the site’s Online Community page has one post: an Admin message welcoming visitors to the Womb Song community.17 There has been little (if any) press about the program, and there are numerous other companies and services that use the same name (including a dog training program called A Sound Beginning; a WombSongs prenatal sound system and accompanying “Wombsongs Serenade” Mozart CD; and a musical doula company that offers to compose personalized womb songs as part of their services).18

Furthermore, while there is much that could be said about the assumptions that are made about fetal consciousness and auditory memory, our focus here is not on the efficacy (or lack thereof) of the program. Rather, we are interested in A Sound Beginning because it is symptomatic of a proliferation of commercial products that seek to use sound and music to communicate, educate, and connect with the fetus-in-utero and, in so doing, improve baby’s future prospects. Like A Sound Beginning, many of these products have modest commercial success. Nonetheless, they reflect and reproduce the popular notion that music is a beneficial medium, or tool, for gestational labor.

We use the term “gestational labor” to emphasize the connection between pregnancy in its various forms—both “assisted” and “unassisted,” unpaid and paid—and social reproduction. Recognizing gestational labor as such helps “denaturalize” pregnancy. Rather than considering pregnancy a fact of Nature and “biological sex,” or an ahistorical and universal process, we follow Sophie Lewis in recognizing pregnancy

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as a capitalist-mediated social labor, albeit one in which the body is often “working very, very hard at having the appearance of not working at all.” Pregnancy’s capitalist mediation manifests in various ways, ranging from the understanding of (current and future) children as the “property” of parents to the stratification of pregnancy’s “labor conditions,” whereby the risks and dangers associated with pregnancy are amplified or mitigated in accordance with race and class. Capitalism is also reliant on pregnancy since population and accumulation go hand in hand: despite various crises concerning declining productivity and wage stagnation, and the apparent promises of automation and AI, capitalism continues to be reliant on human workers, and those who maintain and sustain them.

Though products like A Sound Beginning may at first appear predicated on sentimental and essentialist conceptualizations of maternal love, they can also be understood as affirming pregnancy and childrearing as a labor-process that can be subject to optimization. Rather than presenting maternal-infant bonding as intuitive or inevitable, this relationship is posited as the product of guidance, instruction, and auditory intervention. This is not to suggest that the language of work is used to describe A Sound Beginning/Womb Songs. However, the provision of various “tools” and “rules” imply that a healthy, calm, and alert infant is something that is made by its mother. At the same time, such programs expand the remit of gestational labor to include musical composition and performance, as required to produce the personalized

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19 Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against the Family* (New York: Verso, 2019), 59. The term “biological sex” appears in quotation marks insofar as what constitutes this category remains questionable. Indeed, contrary to assertions associated with so-called “gender-critical” feminism, for example, both sex and sexuality are mutable and socially-mediated designations. In this regard, we consider pregnancy to pertain to a “biosocial” process. For more on the mutability of “biological sex,” see Katrina Karkazis, “The Misuses of ‘Biological Sex,’” *The Lancet* 394, no. 10212 (2019): 1898–1899.

lullaby. Furthermore, they tacitly reaffirm the capitalist mediation of both forms of labor, gestational and musical, by transforming the lullaby from a shared, common-pool resource into a form of Lockean private property, one that belongs to parents much as the child is seen to, by virtue of being the fruits of their labor.

The intense maternal responsibility that is created by products such as A Sound Beginning coheres with wider social shifts relating to the organization of social reproduction. As Nancy Fraser has highlighted, American and European Fordist economies of the mid-twentieth century assumed social reproduction to be arranged in accordance with the “family wage,” a racial and heteronormative formation which assumed white, unionized men were responsible for undertaking wage labor, and white women were responsible for undertaking unpaid, household labor. However, this arrangement has given way to the norm of the two-earner household, with more women expected to participate in the paid workforce. Meanwhile, state infrastructures of social reproduction, such as housing, education, and healthcare have been subject to disinvestment, privatization, and marketization. As a result, social reproduction has been externalized and commodified. The rescindment of state welfare provisions means that responsibility for social reproduction has been shifted onto families. For those who can afford it, social reproduction has become increasingly market-mediated, being sold and purchased as a service. For those who cannot, reproductive activities, such as childcare and elder care often become an additional

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21 Fordism here refers to an economic regime based around the mass production of standardized consumer goods. The post-war U.S. economy is often treated as the archetype of Fordism, though it was and remains an international phenomenon. It is associated with, amongst other characteristics, relatively high wages, the accumulation of power and capital by large companies, assembly line modes of production, national markets, domestic consumption, and an expanded welfare state.
demand on top of waged forms of work. These reproductive activities, furthermore, continue to be disproportionately undertaken by women.

It is in this context that various music-based pregnancy products have arisen. Indeed, A Sound Beginning/Womb Songs illustrates both the externalization and commodification of social reproduction. The lullaby and parental education service reflect the market-mediation of social reproduction, insofar as they offer a purchasable service intended to optimize the production of the future child; while the responsibility placed on the family unit in general—and the mother in particular—for producing emotional balance and appropriate subjectivity in infancy and adulthood reflects the increased externalization of social reproduction onto the private household.

A Sound Beginning’s emphasis on maternal responsibility is also symptomatic of its apparent rootedness in attachment theory, which originates in the work of British psychiatrist John Bowlby. As Marga Vicedo notes, “although this [attachment theory] was not the only theory that put maternal care and love as the cradle of the emotional self, it became the most enduring and successful one.” Following World War II and rising concerns about the effects of war on children, the World Health Organization commissioned Bowlby to write a report on maternal care and mental health, to help explore what children need to grow up emotionally and physically healthy so that they can become good citizens. Drawing upon cybernetics, ethology, developmental psychology, information processing, and psychoanalysis, Bowlby’s attachment theory concerned the infant’s apparent goal to secure maternal response through a set of

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22 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capitalism and Care,” 100.
24 Ibid.
evolutionary behaviors originating at birth, motivated by fear, affection, exploration, and caregiving. Bowlby concluded that what is essential for mental health is that the young child and infant should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or mother-substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment. Given this relationship, the emotions of anxiety and guilt, which characterize mental ill-health, will develop in a moderate and organized way.

Those children who were unable to have this kind of relationship were subject to “maternal deprivation”: a general term covering a number of different scenarios, including when a child is living at home and “his mother (or permanent mother-substitute) is unable to give him the loving care small children need,” if a child is removed from his mother’s care, or in cases where a child is placed in an institution, residential nursery, or hospital without a personal caregiver.

Bowlby’s theory of attachment arose at a time when questions about women’s mothering and women’s work roles were being widely debated, and it contributed to a growing discourse of maternal blame. Bowlby is clear that a “mother-substitute,” presumably of any gender, could undertake the maternal role vis-à-vis attachment. However, as Vicedo suggests, Bowlby’s naturalization of maternal love and care nonetheless offered a renewed justification for gendered parental roles. Indeed, Bowlby’s work articulates a particular gendered division of labor predicated on the family form: he offers comparatively little consideration on the paternal-child relationship, insofar as “his value as the economic and emotional support of the mother

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28 Ibid.
will be assumed.” Yet Bowlby’s report also emphasized the wider social and economic forces that enable optimal familial attachments: “just as children are absolutely dependent on their parents for sustenance, so in all but the most primitive communities [sic] are their parents, especially their mothers, dependent on a greater society for economic provision. If a community values its children it must cherish their parents.”

Roughly concurrent with Bowlby’s empirical work on human attachment, psychoanalytic theorists, including Therese Benedek, Helene Deutch, and Grete L. Bibring, began to explore prenatal attachment as part of their analyses of pregnancy experiences. From the 1960s, various formal constructs of prenatal attachment were developed. The work of nurse researcher Reva Rubin is typically understood to provide the groundwork for the theory of prenatal attachment: Rubin’s work examined the establishment of the maternal role and the mother-infant relationship prior to birth. Coinciding with the intensification of the mothering ideal and the increased medicalization of pregnancy, with which a heightened responsibility was placed on pregnant mothers-to-be to produce healthy babies, maternal-fetal attachment became a measurable and observable entity. As Jennifer Denbow argues, instruments like the maternal-fetal attachment scale and the maternal antenatal attachment scale, which were created in 1981 and 1993 respectively, make similar assumptions about optimal bonding. Despite differences in how attachment is defined in relation to them, these scales both assume that a high degree of preoccupation with the fetus, the visualization of the fetus as future-child, and the perception of the fetus as an individual are

29 Bolby, “Maternal Care and Mental Health,” 11.
30 Ibid., 84.
optimal.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, “optimal” maternal-fetal attachment is produced as a self-evident good, whereas ambivalent or negative feelings about pregnancy become evidence of “suboptimal” attachment. Indeed, for Denbow, these scales reflect the epistemological priority of the individual under liberal capitalism, and “the valorization of the intensive mothering ideal that many scholars have critiqued for reflecting white middle-class norms.”\textsuperscript{33} Put differently, these scales are predicated upon—and actively recreate—a particular, class-based and racialized formation of gestational labor.

As with Bowlby and other proponents of attachment theory, A Sound Beginning/Womb Songs places primacy on the maternal-infant relationship as a means of creating emotional stability in the future child. Indeed, the program draws no clear distinction between the maternal-fetal and maternal-infant relationship: the latter is envisaged as a continuation of the former. However, despite these similarities, A Sound Beginning/Womb Songs uses the term “attunement,” rather than attachment, to signify the optimal connection between pregnant person and unborn child. According to A Sound Beginning, this connection is often lacking: “Sadly, lack of Attunement leaves half of all newborns to live in various states of anxiety and mistrust, especially later in life.” This situation arises because many parents do not have the capacity nor resources to appropriately connect with their child:

Because of past traumatic emotional experiences as well as the pressures of the modern-day world, half of all parents don’t connect with their baby often enough to make them feel safe. And, even for those parents who are able, it is extremely

\textsuperscript{32} Jennifer Denbow, “Good Mothering Before Birth: Measuring Attachment and Ultrasound as an Affective Technology,” \textit{Engaging Science, Technology, and Society} 5 (2009): 1–10, 6. For Mecca Cranley, who drew upon Rubin’s work to create the maternal-fetal attachment scale, attachment concerns the extent to which mothers-to-be engage in behaviors that represent an affiliation and interaction with the unborn child. For John T. Condon, who created the maternal antenatal attachment scale, attachment is defined broadly as an emotional tie or psychological bond to a particular object. For more on the definition of attachment by Cranley and Condon see Denbow, “Good Mothering.”

\textsuperscript{33} Denbow “Good Mothering”, 7.
challenging to consistently set aside personal needs during those first two years of baby’s life—which are also the most critical years.\textsuperscript{34}

Often associated with developmental psychologist Daniel Stern, whose research draws influence from and has similarities to attachment theory, attunement has been used to refer to an affective alignment between mother-caregiver and infant. Attunement is significant for Stern’s theorization of the development of subjectification in infancy, which he posits as a series of four overlapping stages involving increasingly complex interpersonal relations. Attunement names a specific type of intersubjective affective resonance that is associated with the development of “subjective self.” In Stern’s general schema, attunement comes at approximately nine months of infancy, at which stage the mother increasingly recognizes the possibility of an intersubjective encounter with the infant. Stern distinguishes attunement from imitation: Social interactions based on imitation involve repeating overt behaviors, as is the case when a caregiver mirrors an infant’s facial gestures and expressions and does not necessarily require an understanding of the infant’s internal feeling state. Attunement differs from imitation in that it is a cross-modal form of matching (e.g., an infant’s vocalization may be matched with a mother’s nodding gesture), and what is being matched is “not the other person’s behavior \textit{per se}, but rather some aspect of the behavior that reflects a person’s feeling state.”\textsuperscript{35} During instances of attunement, the infant’s affective state is recast in the mother’s facial, vocal, and gestural responses.

A Sound Beginning does depart from Stern’s notion of attunement insofar as it does not use the term to refer to a specific, cross-modal, affective alignment between infant and mother, but rather a more general connection, bond, or synchronicity

\textsuperscript{34} Womb Songs, “Demo,” accessed September 6, 2021, \url{https://wombsongs.com/demo/}.

between mother and baby. However, A Sound Beginning does maintain the association of attunement with both affect and subjectification: for both, the constitution of the emotionally-balanced self is a natural outcome of an appropriate affective and communicative dyad. For A Sound Beginning, music, in the guise of a personalized lullaby, serves to positively mediate between the two elements of this dyad—between mother and fetus, and later, mother and infant. As we discuss further in relation to The Lullaby Project, this dyad is predicated on a fundamental separation of infant (or fetus) and mother, insofar as separation precedes the creation of a musical, affective, and communicative connection. Furthermore, in positing the successful or unsuccessful constitution of the emotional self on the maternal-dyad, both Stern and A Sound Beginning conceal their indebtedness to a particular, historically-specific constitution of subjectivity. As with the maternal-fetal attachment scale, Stern’s schema is predicated on the universalization and naturalization of a particular, liberal and bourgeois notion of the self. As Phillip Cushman argues: “by claiming to have found scientific proof that the human infant automatically emerges as the Western infant, Stern ... made a profoundly political statement ... he believes that socio-economic forms have no effect on the essential shape of this self, and therefore they can have no effect on changing it.”36 A Sound Beginning thus uses music as a reproductive technology in more than one sense. As well as being a tool for and mode of gestational labor through which the positive future of the infant can be secured, the personalized lullaby promises to produce and reproduce a particular formation of subjectivity. A Sound Beginning is not alone, however, in promising to (re)produce liberal subjectivity by means of the lullaby, or in deploying this particular form of musicking as a tool for gestational labor. A similar

dynamic is also at work in the object of our second case study, the Lullaby Project, despite the different institutions and economic forms through which the latter channels the lullaby's physical, psychic, and social effects.

The Lullaby Project

“There’s a sound you don’t expect to hear behind the prison walls of Riker’s Island: the soft sound of a baby's lullaby.” So begins a 2013 article in the *New York Daily News*, reporting on a program recently introduced at New York City’s notorious correctional facility. The program in question was the Lullaby Project, an initiative spearheaded by the Weill Music Institute, an affiliate of Carnegie Hall. Like A Sound Beginning, the Lullaby Project offers expecting and new parents—above all mothers—personal lullabies, addressed to their future child. Unlike A Sound Beginning, though, the program is conceived not as a commercial but as a public service, with the lullaby cast as the means by which a number of interlocking ends may be achieved. According to the program’s website, these aims include “supporting maternal health, aiding childhood development, and strengthening the bond between parent and child.” Or, to cite the more sentimental language of the *New York Daily News* article, the program encourages participants—“women who have made some bad choices,” as one Department of Corrections official puts it—to not only “be good parents,” but also to “strive for better futures,” both for themselves and for their offspring.

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39 Ibid.
In the years since the *New York Daily News* article was published, the Lullaby Project has expanded far beyond New York, having been adopted by a growing number of music organizations worldwide. It is not hard to see why. At a moment when traditional performing arts institutions have struggled to demonstrate the continuing relevance of their offerings, and when public and philanthropic support often hinges on evidence of music’s social impact, the Lullaby Project offers an ostensibly unproblematic application of music’s powers to promote the common good. For this reason, it is not surprising that a hoary institution like Carnegie Hall has so widely advertised the Lullaby Project and touted its purported successes, musical as well as social. It has uploaded videos of both the collaborative process and the finished product to YouTube, staged public performances, and even released a commercial recording, thus making the Lullaby Project one of the most visible—and audible—public outreach programs to be conducted by a performing arts institution in recent years.

The interventions that comprise the core of the Lullaby Project’s activities typically unfold over three sessions. An initial meeting between musician(s) and parent(s) centers on discussing and developing the themes the lullaby’s lyrics will explore, as well as trying out some potential musical settings. A workbook distributed to participants provides several prompts to facilitate the process: in addition to identifying the kind of overall style and affect they want the lullaby to express, participants are encouraged to list words to describe their baby, recount a special memory from their pregnancy, or address a letter to be read by their child later in life. Following this initial

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Examples include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Austin Guitar Society, the Oregon Symphony Orchestra, Hiland Mountain Correctional Facility (Arkansas), the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and LiveConnections (Philadelphia) in the United States; and Humanidad Compartida (Chile), New Zealand Opera, Kultur i Väst (Sweden), Korea Arts and Culture Education Service, and Grandes Oyentes (Spain) abroad. For a more complete worldwide list, see Carnegie Hall, “Carnegie Hall’s Lullaby Project Receives Grant from William Penn Foundation to Expand Program,” accessed 25 March 2022, https://www.carnegiehall.org/About/Press/Press-Releases/2020/01/23/Lullaby-Project-William-Penn-Foundation-Grant-1-23-2020.
session, the second focuses on assessing the lullaby and revising it as necessary, culminating in the production of a recording, usually with the mother singing and Lullaby Project musicians accompanying. Finally, a third session brings together various participants and their musician-collaborators to listen to one another’s lullabies, and to reflect on their experience as part of the program together.

A handful of discrete, temporally-bounded sessions are unable to contain the broader ambitions of the Lullaby Project. For the ultimate end toward which the collaboration between mother and musician is directed points less toward the lullaby per se, and more toward the longer-range benefits that the activities of making and singing it are supposed to engender. Principal among these is a heightened sense of connection among a number of different parties, including but not limited to mother and future child. “To write a lullaby is to connect,” explains a study conducted by WolfBrown, on behalf of Carnegie Hall. “In the process, musicians and mothers collaborate just like mothers and babies do—trading terms and building on what each other offers.”41 It is worth noting that despite the emphasis laid on reciprocity and equality of exchange in this description, there is an implicit asymmetry in the interaction it describes, with the mother positioned in relation to the musician in a manner that parallels how the baby is positioned in relation to the mother: as object to subject (this is a point we will return to below). Also worth noting is that the word “connection” seems here and elsewhere to function as a proxy for attachment, with the lullaby cast as a mechanism by which the bond between parent and infant can be strengthened or shored up.42

42 Among the sources cited in support of their reports in support of the Lullaby Project, WolfBrown refers to the work of Mary Ainsworth, who, after John Bowlby, is the figure most responsible
This tacit adherence to the precepts of attachment theory points to another end to which the lullaby is geared: the positive emotional, physical, and social development that such musicalized bonding is thought to advance. As is the case with A Sound Beginning, the lullaby is just the first element within a virtuous causal chain, one that extends far beyond music as such: by means of song, attachment is promoted, and by means of attachment, positive psychic, social, and physical wellbeing is secured. “Music,” another report by WolfBrown expounds, “can support […] intimate exchanges.” And children that have “caring and responsive caregivers” are more likely to “develop a sense of security” that will encourage them to “explore new activities, take risks, make mistakes, and recover.” Furthermore, the import attached to song stems from not only the positives it is seen to promote, but also the negatives it is seen to forestall. Here, too, there is a parallel with A Sound Beginning, inasmuch as a good deal of the rhetorical force of their shared appeal to music doesn’t simply derive from the aspirations they promise to actualize, but the anxieties they conjure—anxieties concerning the long-term negative consequences that will follow if children, having been deprived of music, are thereby deprived of secure attachment. According to the WolfBrown report, children who don’t benefit from musically-mediated forms of emotional and cognitive development are more likely to encounter “later struggles to thrive in school and in life,” which amounts to a “terrible and inequitable waste of human promise and talent.”

It is here that the Lullaby Project parts ways with A Sound Beginning in an important respect. In contrast to the latter, the anxieties the Lullaby Project at once

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43 Ibid., 7.
44 Ibid., 3.
evokes and promises to stave off are rooted not just in the individual or in the family unit, but are situated at a social, biopolitical level as well. As such, its use of music to encourage attachment and thus assist in the realization of human potential—or at least to prevent its waste—requires that its interventions be addressed to populations seen to be in need of such assistance, whose readiness or fitness for parenthood seems to be in question in some respect. Notable in this regard are two features of the Lullaby Project's targeted constituencies. The first is that many participants are recruited into the program from institutions charged with assisting (and/or controlling) populations that are marked as falling outside hegemonic notions of full personhood: homeless shelters, correctional facilities (like Riker's Island), hospitals, teen pregnancy centers, immigration detention centers, etc. The second concerns the sociodemographic composition of participants. Although data is spotty, a handful of surveys give some sense of the typical Lullaby Project participant. One multi-sited study, which examined the program’s implementation in both New York City and Virginia, indicated that roughly 80% of participants were first-time parents; 60% were unemployed or employed only part-time; and almost 80% earned less than the median household income (of which approximately a quarter fell under the official poverty line of USD $13,300 a year for individuals having no dependents). Another study, focusing exclusively on New York City, fills out this picture with data on the racial and ethnic composition of Lullaby Project participants. Significantly, of those who took part in the

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45 Our use of the term “biopolitics” here is broadly Foucauldian in inspiration (as opposed to, say, Agamben’s deployment of the concept). One major qualification, however, is that whereas Foucault and his intellectual inheritors mainly train their attention on the state, with biopower cast as a distinct mode of governmentality, we are just as interested in the ways in which efforts to manage populations are increasingly outsourced to private actors and institutions, including nonprofits like the Weill Music Institute. See Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, translated by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 243 ff.; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Project, 50% identified as Black, 33% identified as Hispanic or Latina, and 9% as mixed race (the remaining 8% either didn’t respond or fell into some other, unidentified ethnic category).

It goes without saying that these two characteristics of the Lullaby Project’s target constituencies aren’t contingent or disconnected, but are intimately intertwined. What they reflect is the way in which raced and classed practices of social control have resulted in a massive overrepresentation of working-class women of color in the prisons, detention centers, and other institutions from which Lullaby Project participants are drawn. But this linkage is also a function of the sort of raced and classed imaginaries that permeate discourses of “good” and “bad” mothering, with the figure of the white, middle-class mother having historically served as the unmarked norm against which others have long been judged—and, more often than not, judged as deficient or lacking. Dorothy Roberts, for one, has noted how the “popular mythology that portrays Black women as unfit to be mothers” is underpinned by their exclusion from “the American ideal of womanhood,” an ideal defined in and through the category of whiteness. The resulting stereotype of the “Bad Black Mother,” adds Patricia Hill Collins, is assembled out of a handful of stigmatized traits that stand in stark contrast to prevailing norms of white middle-class maternity. Such women, writes Collins, “are single mothers, they live in poverty, they are often young, and they rely on the state to support their children.”

It is here that we can see how a program like the Lullaby Project, despite its good intentions, runs headlong into the legacy of these racist and classist imaginaries, and in

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so doing may inadvertently assist in their ongoing reproduction. For in addressing its services to “at risk” populations that are overwhelmingly comprised of working-class minority women, the program may very well reinforce hegemonic discourses that hold such women to be always and forever at risk—which is tantamount to them being a risk, to their children and to the body politic by extension. For the more that working-class women of color (and Black women especially) are presumed to be preternaturally prone to bad mothering, the more their children are presumed to be destined for consignment to the category of waste. Unless, of course, the soft discipline of the lullaby can intervene and stave off such an eventuality, with music serving as a supplement that can fill in the lack that is imagined to characterize the at-risk mother’s relation to her future child.

From this fundamental point follows a handful of other corollaries. First, to the extent that a lack of sufficient or proper attachment is indeed seen to be a problem in need of redress, by proposing a cultural solution the Lullaby Project implies that the condition it sets out to remedy is likewise cultural, not something rooted in longstanding and systemic socioeconomic inequalities. As a result, its valorization of the lullaby as an instrument of social work skirts uncomfortably close to another popular mythology: the belief that the various forms of disadvantage that raced and classed subjects confront are rooted in some cultural or psychic pathology, for which they bear primary responsibility (a notable example being the Moynihan Report’s infamous claim that Black poverty was due primarily to the high incidence of families headed by single mothers within the African-American community). Viewed from this angle,

50 As Collins notes, the ideological construct of the “Bad Black Mother” maintains that they “allegedly pass on their bad values to their children who in turn are more likely to become criminals and unwed teenage mothers.” Ibid.
interventions like the Lullaby Project may be seen as addressing symptoms rather than underlying causes; or, more problematically still, as treating symptoms as if they were causes. That is, if one of the goals of the Project is to use music to help cultivate “positive emotions,” thereby quelling feelings of anxiety or doubt that participants may have about impending parenthood (feelings which are seen to jeopardize attachment), this aim brackets from consideration whether such doubts and anxieties have a real, material basis in the precarious conditions of participants’ everyday lives.

However, the interest in using music to improve attachment takes as given that attachment is an unalloyed and universal good. Yet, as noted above, the premises of attachment theory as well as the conclusions drawn from it are not just debatable, but ideological through and through. In addition to its responsibilization of the mother, its imposition of a particular form of gestational labor, and the emotional self-regulation (or self-censorship) it demands of its addressees, one of the most fundamental premises of attachment theory is that the fetus is a being distinct from the maternal subject (a position, incidentally, that opponents of abortion rights share). With respect to this final assumption, Denbow notes how attachment theory encourages expectant mothers, as well as a whole range of other actors, “to view the fetus as a unique person.”

Attachment theory, in other words, regards the future child as a bourgeois individual in the making, transposing an individuation that is projected into the postnatal future back onto a prenatal present. Within the Lullaby Project, this anticipatory individuation of the fetus is most clearly evinced in certain prompts meant to assist participants in brainstorming lyrics for their lullabies. In one particularly revealing instance, a workbook given to participants enjoins them to compose a letter addressed to their

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53 Ibid., 7.
future child imagined as a young adult, and to use this letter as the basis for the song’s words. Song thus functions not just as a means for creating a connection between mother and future child, but also for establishing a form of psychic separation, with words creating the very gap that sound and music are tasked with bridging. And it does this despite the fact that the boundary between the two is scarcely as crisp or cleanly delineated as the discrete signifiers “mother” and “fetus” might suggest, being characterized rather by a symbiotic and/or microchimeric relationality.54

Another repercussion of this insistence on viewing the fetus and mother as discrete liberal subjects, a perspective that the Lullaby Project inherits from attachment theory, is that such a conception ends up “devalu[ing] more relational or communal understandings of the self and the fetus.”55 Not coincidentally, understandings like these have a much stronger footing among groups placed beyond the pale of hegemonic white middle-class culture, as evinced, for instance, in the extended kin networks and othermothers that have long played a pivotal role in child-rearing within Afro diasporic communities.56 Yet a critique of attachment theory that is grounded not just in gender politics, but in racial and class politics as well, would necessarily situate its centering of attachment within a longer history of forcible detachment, to which minority and working-class families have been subject throughout US history (and which continues to this day). Perhaps the most brutal instrument of such violent separation was the auction block under chattel slavery, which served to break up innumerable African-American


56 Othermothering refers to the practice common in many African-American communities of not placing responsibility for the care of children solely on their biological mothers (bloodmothers), but distributing it more broadly, to other members of the community or extended kin network (othermothers). See Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 178-183.
families. But it does not lack for rivals: one might cite as well the boarding schools to which generations of Native American children were sent, as part of the policy of “kill[ing] the Indian” to “save the man [sic];” the prison system, whose very logic of confinement entails isolating the incarcerated from their family, including their children; or the US border, before, during, and after the implementation of the notorious Trump-era “family separation” policy. Attachment, in short, does not necessarily signify the same thing for different groups, across different sociohistorical conjunctures. This in turn suggests that lullabies, used as a technology for promoting attachment, will likely have different valences for different groups—a fact that universalizing appeals to both the power of music and the necessity of mother-child bonding serve to obscure.

Further complicating the status of the lullaby, along with the values, attitudes, and affects it is seen to promote, is the particular guise in which it appears to participants. As noted at the outset of this article, a key difference between the Lullaby


59 Granted, prison reform efforts have ameliorated this issue to a degree, by increasing the number of prison nurseries and residential alternatives for mothers of young children. Yet they are hardly panaceas; as Schenwar and Law observe, such programs are “still characterized by confinement and control, expanding such control into the community.” Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law, Prison by Any Other Name: The Harmful Consequences of Popular Reforms (New York: The New Press, 2020), 120.

Project and A Sound Beginning is that whereas the personalized lullabies offered by the latter assume the form of a commodity, those tendered by the former assume the form of a gift. From a certain vantage point, this difference in economic form would seem to elevate the Lullaby Project, investing it with a nobility of purpose that a commercial enterprise like A Sound Beginning can never quite attain. And there is a solid basis for this belief, given the evident goodwill of the musicians and administrators involved in various iterations of the program. Yet, as thinkers from Marcel Mauss onward have stressed, the giving of gifts isn’t a purely altruistic gesture, without being a purely selfish one either. For one thing, even the most magnanimous act of charity not only reflects but also helps to (re)produce an asymmetry in power relations, placing the recipient in a position of obligation or debt with respect to the giver. Furthermore, this unequal distribution of power is compounded by an unequal distribution of agency, a feature we have already touched on earlier, in the way the Lullaby Project frames the relation between musician and mother, with the latter cast in a more passive, dependent, and subordinate role. It is the musician who is invested with the skill, knowledge, and competency to transform the unstructured ideas of participants into something coherent and imbued with both aesthetic and social value. But perhaps most significantly, the ostensible selflessness of the gift is complicated by the fact that it typically requires a return or counter-gift, albeit one that may come in another form (e.g., prestige), from other parties, after an indeterminate lapse of time.

What form might this return on the gift of the lullaby assume? To answer this question we must ask another. Namely, how far does the gift of the lullaby actually go in achieving the Project’s stated aims? Clearly, this is difficult to answer. The program’s adoption by organizations across several countries guarantees a wide variation in both its application and outcomes. But even within individual settings, success as well as
failure can be defined in different ways. At a qualitative level, testimonials gathered from Lullaby Project participants would appear to confirm the program’s benefits, at both an individual and interpersonal level. “I thought it was a good way to connect with my kids,” remarks one participant in a UK-based iteration of the Project, while another reports that “it makes you feel like you can do more.” Other, similarly positive reports abound. Yet it is important to take such testimonials with a grain of salt. After all, the “vulnerable” or “at-risk” populations that are the principal addressees of the Lullaby Project’s interventions are equally vulnerable in relation to the Lullaby Project itself. As a result, one cannot discount the possibility that such sentiments are conditioned by what is a fundamentally unequal and perhaps even coercive set of power relations. Furthermore, accepting participant testimonials at face value risks underestimating the degree to which the Project subjectivates its participants, by means of the language of attachment and parental responsibility that it wields. Indeed, though the stated aim of the Project may be to improve parent-child bonding, the unstated means of doing so is by reshaping the attitudes and practices of participants, facilitating their (self-) transformation from risky to responsible subjects.

At a quantitative level, efforts to gauge the Lullaby Project’s impact run into other, no less intractable challenges. For one thing, it is far from clear how its impact could or should be measured. But even research that uses established metrics to evaluate the Lullaby Project’s success in encouraging mother-fetus bonding suggests that its effects are more muted than the program’s rhetoric might lead one to believe. For instance, one study employed the Maternal Fetal Attachment Scale (see above) to gauge whether feelings of attachment among participants in the program changed

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relative to a control group, and if so, by how much. Notably, the attachment scores for participants in the Lullaby Project did increase to an appreciable degree, going from a median score of 99 prior to intervention, to a median score of 107 afterwards. But just as notable is that the median scores for members of the control group rose by exactly the same amount, going from 91 at the beginning of the study to 99 at its end.63 In each case attachment rose, and in each it rose by eight points on the scale. Discussing the results, the authors of the study note that this across-the-board increase may simply reflect a pair of interconnected phenomena: that by the time the study had concluded, all of the mothers had given birth, and that there is a “progressive increase in the level of bonding from birth onward.”64

Yet if the significance of these results are at best unclear, there is another respect in which the Lullaby Project has been an unmitigated success. This is because the gift of music it bestows upon participants is part of a larger chain of gifts. As nonprofits, Carnegie Hall as well as other arts organizations that have adopted the Lullaby Project depend on both public subsidies and the charitable gifts they receive from foundations, other nonprofits, and private donors. Consider, for instance, the list of supporters that can be found on the Carnegie Hall Lullaby Project website: among those thanked for their patronage are the ELMA Music Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, Nicola and Beatrice Bulgari (of the eponymous luxury goods brand), Ameriprise Financial, MetLife, among others.65 If this list is anything to go by, the Lullaby Project has been very effective indeed. Giving the gift of lullabies—and, by extension, the gift of strengthened maternal-infant bonding—qualifies an institution like Carnegie Hall to

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63 Ibid., 547.
64 Ibid.
receive (funding, symbolic capital, etc.). But for Lullaby Project participants, receiving the gift of the lullaby obliges them to give in turn, both in the form of the surplus emotional and gestational labor they are obliged to perform as part of the Project, and in the form of themselves, as subjects whose putative riskiness makes them the ideal objects of this particular form of musical philanthropy.

**Conclusion: Commodities, Gifts, Assets, and Waste**

A Sound Beginning and the Lullaby Project elevate the lullaby from a song intended to induce sleep in infants to an individualized form of musical expression through which a mother can effectively connect, attune, and attach to their future child prior to birth and, in so doing, ensure their appropriate subjectification. Where A Sound Beginning tenders prospective parents the lullaby as a customizable commodity that is accessed by purchasing membership to a subscription service, the Lullaby Project offers music as a gift, albeit one which comes with various requirements attached. For both, the presenting of the lullaby as a commodity or gift is attached to the threat of waste: in the case of A Sound Beginning, the imperative to musically attune to one’s infant is counterposed by the threat of an emotionally insecure infant who will go on to struggle in adulthood. However, few prospective parents would have the social support and economic stability to be able to mitigate against this threat and, in the words of the program’s website, “consistently set aside personal needs.”\(^6^6\) Put differently, reproductive respectability would appear most readily available to those who do not need to juggle gestational labor with other worldly demands and caring responsibilities. What remains implicit in A Sound Beginning becomes explicit in A Lullaby Project,

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where the threat of the wasted individual infant is clearly attached to certain racialized and economically precarious populations. Indeed, given its proximity to racist and classist notions of unfit motherhood, A Lullaby Project risks partaking in a form of antireproductive politics, whereby the ambition is to prevent the future child from becoming like their parents.

The threat of waste articulated by both A Sound Beginning and The Lullaby Project is underpinned by another, economically-informed logic: the child as asset. Music, as either commodity or gift, becomes a means of investing in not just the child, but, specifically, in the child’s future. The earlier that this investment can take place, the better: hence both programs reproduce biologically selective and politically regressive conceptualizations of fetal personhood. As Cindi Katz makes clear, the notion of the child as an economic asset has a long history that precedes neoliberal and post-Fordist restructurings of social reproduction: prior to the industrialization of labor, for example, children were often recognized as a means of securing the economic future for their parents and the wider household.67 However, the establishment of A Sound Beginning and The Lullaby Project coheres with the increased centrality of assets to social inequality and economic prosperity within neoliberal economies. As Lisa Adkins, Melinda Cooper, and Martijn Konings have recently argued, “the key element shaping inequality is […] whether one is able to buy assets that appreciate at a faster rate than both inflation and wages.”68 Although the child as asset is not figured as something to be bought in any straightforward sense in the case studies we have examined, traceable similarities between the figure of the child and the logic of the asset remain. This

includes the promise of future gains and the aspiration of appreciation; the salience of intergenerational transfer, mediated by the family form (in the case of assets, parental assistance and inheritance are, for many, integral to securing assets); and the risk of depreciation, or waste.

Musical interventions into gestational labor, then, are significant insofar as they are symptomatic of a wider cultural and economic emphasis on music’s reproductive utility. They highlight a convergence between, on the one hand, longstanding and powerful ideas about music’s affective capacity and its value in terms of subjectification, cognitive ability, and psychological well-being, and on the other, neoliberal and post-Fordist formations of social reproduction, which are themselves productive of gendered, racial, and class-based distinctions. As our two case studies make clear, however, these interventions also evidence music’s (and more specifically the lullaby’s) material and symbolic intersection with a handful of distinctive cultural-economic logics: those of the gift, commodity, and asset. Nor are these features of both the Lullaby Project and A Sound Beginning independent of one another. On the contrary: the lullaby’s mediation by either gift or commodity exchange pivots on the particular use-value it is seen to afford for mother-child bonding, and the heightened importance that such bonding assumes within a conjuncture where the labor and costs of social reproduction have largely been privatized. It is the future return that it promises to generate—or the future waste it promises to avert—that makes the lullaby a gift worth giving or a commodity worth purchasing.