

## **Music and Deaf Culture: Images from the Media and Their Interpretation by Deaf and Hearing Students**

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*The purpose of the study was threefold: (a) to examine how the visual media have portrayed the subject of music and the deaf, (b) to verify the validity of these portrayals with members of the deaf community, and (c) to compare and contrast deaf and hearing audiences' impressions of these portrayals. An additional purpose of the research was to examine the results in light of possible misconceptions that may be construed by music therapists and music educators based upon the media's representation of the relationship between music and deaf culture. Since music therapists and music educators are the primary persons responsible for the music instruction of students in school programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, it is particularly important that they receive accurate messages about the relationship of music to deaf culture. Fifty deaf (n = 25) and hearing (n = 25) undergraduate college students individually viewed motion picture and television excerpts related to music and the deaf. Subjects were instructed to take notes as needed regarding the content of each excerpt and their impressions. Students were then interviewed in their native language, English or American Sign Language, as to their interpretations and perceptions regarding these excerpts and their accuracy. Interviews of the deaf students were translated into English from American Sign Language by trained interpreters. Written transcriptions were then made of the interpreters' English translations of the interviews with deaf students and of the verbal interviews with hearing students. Interview transcripts from both groups were coded and analyzed for recurring themes and patterns using content analysis. Data analysis revealed*

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*cultural patterns for the two groups, impressions specific to individual subjects, and trends in communication style and content for the two groups. Implications for music therapists and music educators are given regarding the influence of the media, characteristics of deaf culture, and teaching music to deaf students.*

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Culture has been defined as a way of life that differentiates a specific group of people. Taken as a whole, the deaf community emerges as a distinctive societal entity, marked by the satisfaction deaf people usually find in the company of each other (Schein, 1978). Though deaf culture is a part of the larger society, it remains enigmatic to most of the hearing population. The common assumption that deaf culture is a culture without music has been a misjudgment made by many people in the hearing population. This erroneous conjecture has led to a subtle example of ethnocentrism—the tendency to judge other cultures by the standards of one's own. Because music is so highly valued in our society, many hearing people believe that a world without music, or music as we experience it, must be “less than” or certainly not as fulfilling or enriched. Though valued less and experienced differently, music does indeed exist within the deaf culture. Our often misguided view of the deaf world is understandable. Very few individuals can count among their close friends, or casual friends, one who is deaf. Our isolation from persons who are deaf has resulted in perceptions that are often stereotypical or are simply inaccurate. If not through association, how then are our perceptions regarding the deaf formed?

Historically, the media have played an important role in the way we perceive persons with a disability. Literature, television, and movies in particular, have not always been kind or accurate in their portrayal of deaf individuals. Deaf characters have been depicted as dimwitted and helpless (*Johnny Belinda*), animal-like (*The Miracle Worker*), or bitter and rebellious (*Children of a Lesser God*, *Bridge to Silence*). The fact that the message appears in print or on screen often gives it unjustifiable credibility. Deaf characters have also been portrayed as pitiable (*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*). The impetus for pity has often been another character's contemplation of life without music (*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *Voices*). Writers, like most

hearing individuals, seem to be intrigued by the notion of a world without music; hence, the topic frequently appears in films with deaf characters. The media have incredible power to influence our perception of others, particularly those with whom we have little contact. It would seem wise then to examine their interpretation of the role music plays in deaf culture.

Much has been written about the deaf community, particularly during the past 10 years. Padden and Humphries (1988) have described a community of Deaf (with a capital "D") people who share a language, American Sign Language, and a culture. They also describe the deaf (with a lower case "d") as individuals who lose their hearing adventitiously through illness, accidents, or old age. This group does not have access to the language, heritage, beliefs, and practices of Deaf people. In addition, a third group of individuals is connected to the deaf community. These people are the hearing children of Deaf parents; the culture bestows on them a similar status, but not necessarily an equal one. A movement has actively begun to recognize the deaf community, not in the usual terms of medical pathology, but as a distinct linguistic and cultural minority (Janesick, 1990).

The deaf population has grown, doubling its proportion of the total population in the last 40 years. The balance of adventitiously to congenitally deaf persons has shifted: a greater portion of the deaf population now is congenitally deaf. Changes in the nature of the deaf community are occurring along with external events such as the practice of mainstreaming which dramatically reduced enrollment in residential schools. In the past, state schools for the deaf were the cornerstones and centers of the local deaf communities (Schein, 1978). Other educational influences on the deaf community have been the practices of oral only programs and the implementation (by hearing educators) of English sign systems, which differ greatly from American Sign Language, the language of the deaf community (Padden, 1980). Hearing impaired children educated by these sign systems and those who have oral skills only, often find it difficult to communicate with other members of the deaf community. Because of these educational practices, hearing impaired children are often caught between the hearing society and the deaf community, resulting in a lack of personal identity with either group (Sacks, 1989).

In relation to the arts, the deaf community has produced many deaf sculptors, painters, photographers, illustrators, and actors (Gannon, 1981). There are a number of professional musicians with moderate to profound hearing losses (Merchant, 1989). Probably the most well known is Evelyn Glennie, a concert percussionist who has been the subject of documentaries for BBC in England and NBC here in the United States.

### *Music and Deaf Culture*

Hamm, Nettle, and Byrnside (1975) stated that, "There is no culture known to man, no single civilization of the past, that does not have its own body of music" (p. 71). The deaf culture is no exception. The idea of music and the deaf appears to be somewhat incongruous unless one considers the fact that very few individuals are entirely without hearing. Even individuals with profound hearing losses have some aural access to music. The earliest account of music and the deaf was written in the *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* (now called *American Annals of the Deaf*) in 1848 (Darrow & Heller, 1987). Numerous articles pertaining to music and the deaf continue to be published; however, a review of this literature revealed no entries written by deaf authors (Darrow, 1989, in press), underscoring the notion that 'the hearing are speaking on behalf of the deaf, perhaps erroneously, about the role of music in their lives.

In order to examine deaf individuals' opinions regarding music, Darrow (1993) surveyed a random sample of deaf Americans from across the country. The purpose of her study was to examine the role of music in the deaf culture and to accumulate data which would either substantiate or refute the writings of hearing authors regarding the value of music to the deaf. Based upon primary language and socialization practices, respondents were identified as members of the deaf culture, members of the hearing culture, or those that interact within both cultures. A summary of the results indicates that (a) cultural identification is a strong influential factor in deaf individuals' involvement with music, (b) deaf individuals that do involve themselves with music do so in ways similar to hearing individuals, (c) certain factors related to family involvement with music and musical training seem to be indicators of the role music will play in the lives of deaf individuals, and (d) deaf in-

dividuals do not participate to the degree that hearing individuals do in common ritual uses of music.

The purpose of Darrow and Merchant's (1993) study was to examine the status of deaf music students at the collegiate level by surveying and interviewing students at Gallaudet University. Gallaudet University, a university for the deaf in Washington, DC began offering a "special topics" course in music as an elective in the fall of 1985 and formed the University's music club, appropriately named the Beethoven Society in that same year. Results of the study indicate that deaf music students: (a) valued music considerably less than hearing music students, (b) preferred the kinesthetic and tactile experience of performing music rather than listening, (c) preferred the visual experience of watching a musical performance rather than listening to it, (d) owned some type of musical audio equipment, and (e) objected to the therapeutic use of music for deaf students. Some general comments made by students were: music is considered by some deaf students to be a 'hearing' value, deaf students who wish to study music are sometimes stereotyped as 'wanting to be like hearing people,' and deaf students are curious about the attraction of musical events. One student stated, "I feel rich as I learn, but never in my whole life have I felt richer than I do when I am learning music . . . I play for my pure pleasure and personal satisfaction."

Several studies have investigated the involvement of younger, school-aged hearing impaired students in music classes. A study by Gfeller, Darrow, and Hedden (1990) found that hearing impaired students were perceived by music educators to be one of the most difficult exceptional student populations to mainstream into the music classroom. Darrow and Gfeller (1991) examined the status of public school music instruction for hearing impaired students and the factors which contribute to the successful mainstreaming of hearing impaired students in the regular music classroom. Results of the study revealed the following: (a) more than half of all hearing impaired students attend regular music classes; (b) of those students mainstreamed, over half receive no music education in the self-contained classroom or otherwise; (c) many music educators are lacking in the educational preparation necessary for teaching hearing impaired students; (d) important instructional or administrative support is often not available; (e) several factors, such as lack of communication with other professionals, were iden-

tified as obstructions to the successful mainstreaming of hearing impaired students; and (f) only 35% of the respondents reported that they have the same objectives for hearing impaired students as for normal hearing students.

Several related studies examined the scope and sequence of music programs in residential and day school educational programs for hearing impaired students. These studies (Ford & Shroyer, 1987; Shroyer & Ford, 1986; Spitzer, 1984) investigated the extent to which day and residential programs for the hearing impaired offer music programs and the methods and objectives most commonly employed in these programs. Results of these studies revealed that only a little over half of these residential and day school programs offered music. The most commonly cited reason was lack of a qualified teacher. Other findings were: lack of participation by many students in schools where music was offered, program objectives were commonly concerned with speech improvement as well as the development of music concepts, music teachers often had degrees in academic areas other than music and often had additional teaching responsibilities other than music.

#### *Deafness and the Media*

The media in the United States represent an important source of public information about deafness and how deaf people relate to the hearing world. Most film and television viewers have never seen depictions of persons within the deaf community—communicating effortlessly and engaging freely in life's activities. As a result of our one-sided view of deaf persons, they are usually seen as less than fully functioning and dependent upon persons who hear. This biased view presented by the media is seldom challenged by direct contact with members of the deaf community. Few hearing people ever meet a person who is deaf; and when they do, language barriers usually obstruct any meaningful communication. Consumers of the media are left then with narrow, stereotypic and often negative depictions of deaf people.

John S. Schuchman, a professor of history at Gallaudet University, has identified 150 movies and network television programs that have included deaf characters (Schuchman, 1988). His study represents a historical description of deaf people and the film entertainment industry. "Film, both motion pictures and television, represents a necessary source of documentation for the study of deaf

people and deafness. Although historians need to consider all sources of information about the past, film constitutes a particularly unique piece of evidence for a cultural or social analysis of the deaf community . . ." (p. 5). Motion picture and television are documents that have wide distribution, and as a result, influence our perceptions and help to shape popular attitudes about deaf people. The motion picture industry has been reluctant, however, to utilize the expertise of deaf actors. Not until *Children of a Lesser God* in 1986 did a deaf actor play in a major film role. Since that time, with the exception of *Calendar Girl* in 1993, deaf characters have been portrayed by deaf actors.

Film analysis in relation to other minority groups such as women, Hispanics, Asians, and Afro-Americans has been carried out by social psychologists in order to better understand the milieu in which these groups interact with the majority culture. A number of studies have dealt with print and visual media's depiction of disabled persons in general (Biklen & Bogdan, 1977; Bogdan, Biklen, Shapiro, & Sepikoman, 1982; Gartner, 1982; Thurer, 1980; Trautman, 1978). One central, tragically wrong, prevailing image in early films was that disabled people are different from us more than they are like us, that their disabilities somehow set them apart from us (Bowe, 1978). Books and movies are powerful tools by which society perpetuates its values. Negative or stereotypic images portrayed by the media are difficult to overcome. Analysts have found that recent portrayals of persons with a disability have been more positive, though a tendency now exists to sensationalize the individual or to characterize them as heroic (Longmore 1985).

Since motion pictures and television are widely distributed messengers of social values and attitudes, it is important that we as educators and consumers understand the messages conveyed through the media and verify their validity. It is equally important, that we, as music therapists, music educators, and researchers, be aware of and responsive to the opinions of the deaf community, particularly in regard to issues related to deaf culture. The purpose of the present study, therefore, was threefold: (a) to examine how the visual media have portrayed the subject of music and the deaf, (b) to verify the validity of these portrayals with members of the deaf culture, and (c) to compare and contrast deaf and hearing audiences' impressions of these portrayals. An additional purpose of the research was to examine the results in light of possible mis-

conceptions that may be construed by music therapists and educators based upon the media's representation of the relationship between music and deaf culture. The message sent by the media about the deaf community and its relationship to music is one that is readily accepted by many therapists and educators as well as the general public. The accuracy of the message, however, needs to be evaluated.

## Method

### *Participants*

Fifty deaf ( $n = 25$ ) and hearing ( $n = 25$ ) undergraduate college students participated in the study. Participants were male ( $n = 20$ ) and female ( $n = 30$ ) nonmusic majors enrolled in elective music classes at Gallaudet University, a university for deaf students, in Washington, DC, and a large midwestern state university. Subjects were selected on a volunteer basis from music appreciation classes, a world music class, and basic musicianship skills classes.

### *Procedure*

The present study was designed to determine how deaf and hearing persons perceive and interpret excerpts from motion pictures and television programs that portray the relationship between music and deaf culture. The data collection technique used was in-depth interviewing (Mishler, 1986; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The data (the interview transcripts) were analyzed for emerging themes or patterns through the procedures of content analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Weber, 1990).

*Phase 1* of the study involved contacting potential subjects. Students at both universities were sent a letter in which the study was described and an invitation to participate extended. These letters were followed by a telephone call (using a phone or TDD, *Telecommunication Device for the Deaf*) during which questions were answered and the invitation to participate restated. Interviews were scheduled with the first 80 deaf students and hearing students who agreed to participate in the study. Attrition was due to students' inability to attend or complete the video viewing or scheduled interview sessions.

*Phase 2* of the study involved in-depth interviewing of the subjects regarding the video excerpts. In-depth interviewing is a data collection technique relied on quite extensively by descriptive and



qualitative researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Stainback & Stainback, 1988; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The nondirective, open-ended nature of in-depth interviewing enables the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people, without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories or rating scale items. Direct quotations obtained through nondirective interviews are the raw data that reveal people's thoughts and perceptions. This unstructured, open-ended approach allows the participants to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by pre-arranged questions (Mishler, 1986; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). Pilot interviews for the present study were carried out with members of the hearing community and the deaf community in a major metropolitan midwest city. Based upon these pilot interviews, procedures for subject interviews were revised and refined.

Individual subjects were first taken to a small video viewing room. They were instructed to: watch the six music related scenes from motion pictures and television programs with deaf characters, stop after each example and take notes as needed, then proceed to the next excerpt. Video examples are identified in Table 1. After viewing the final excerpt, subjects were taken to an interviewing room where, either verbally or through American Sign Language, they were interviewed by the researcher. The interview was nondirective. Subjects were asked only questions such as, "What was your impression of excerpt #1?", "Can you tell more?", "Is there anything you would like to add?", and "Could you expound on that idea?" All interviews were videotaped for later analysis.

*Phase 3* of the study consisted of compiling written transcripts of the interview material. Signed interviews with deaf subjects were first translated into English by students in their final year of the graduate degree program in interpreting at Gallaudet University. Translations were checked for reliability by a level-5 RID (*Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf*) certified interpreter. Reliability for ideas and concepts was found to be 100%. Written transcriptions were then made of the interpreters' English translations of the deaf subjects' interviews in American Sign Language and of the hearing subjects' verbal interviews.

*Phase 4* involved analysis of the written transcripts. Transcripts from both the deaf and hearing students' interviews were coded and analyzed for recurring themes and patterns using content

TABLE 1

*Film and Television Excerpts Used in the Study*

No.	Title	Medium	Production Company	Year
1	Heart is a Lonely Hunter	Motion Picture	Warner Brothers	1968
2a	Children of a Lesser God	Motion Picture	Paramount	1986
2b	Children of a Lesser God	Motion Picture	Paramount	1986
3	A Different World	Television	NBC	1991
4	Quantum Leap	Television	NBC	1991
5	Crazy Moon	Motion Picture	Allegro Films	1986

analysis, a procedure described by Weber (1990) and others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983). Content analysis classifies textual material, reducing it to more relevant manageable bits of data. Three common uses of content analysis are to reflect cultural patterns of groups, reveal the focus of an individual, and describe trends in communication content. All three uses were applied to the present study. The data process involved reducing words of the written transcripts into fewer content categories. The techniques or steps of content analysis such as text encoding, category counts, the development of key-word-in-context and word-frequency lists described by Weber (1990) were followed.

### Results

Analysis of the data, the interview transcripts, yielded eight major response patterns. These patterns were first identified by three readers who, independent of one another, characterized the nature of each statement in the written transcripts, then grouped them into categories. Of the final eight response patterns or categories, five were identified by all three readers. The readers, in consultation with each other, determined the remaining three categories by combining or reconfiguring categories. The final eight response categories were:

1. *Descriptive Statements*—Statements which did not express the subjects' thoughts, impressions, or interpretations; but rather, described the action or dialogue in the excerpt.
2. *Positive Statements*—Statements which indicated subjects' positive impression of the excerpt.
3. *Negative Statements*—Statements which indicated subjects' negative impression of the excerpt.

TABLE 2  
*Data Categories with Examples*

Category #	Category	Examples
1	Descriptive Statements	The man was just sitting there and the woman was trying to explain to him what the music sounded like.
2	Positive Impressions	Number three was really neat. I liked it because it showed that deaf people can interpret music in their own way.
3	Negative Impressions	I didn't like the first one because it made the deaf man look stupid.
4	Sympathy/Pity Concerns	A) He pitied her because she couldn't hear and appreciate the music B) I felt sorry for . . .
5	Incomprehensible Issues	I'm not sure I understand the point of that one.
6	Initial Thoughts	I never thought a deaf person could describe music.
7	Interpretive Statements	I think he was trying to change her into a hearing person.
8	Personalization Statements	Something like that happened to me once at a dance.
9	Statements about Music or Dancing	Music makes you feel certain things and makes you want to do certain things.
10	Statements about Deafness /Deaf Culture	Deaf people have their own music that doesn't depend on sound.

4. *Sympathy/Pity Issues*—Statements which indicated subjects' perception of sympathy or pity issues in the excerpt.
5. *Incomprehensible Issues*—Statements which expressed subjects' inability to understand some aspect of the excerpt.
6. *Initial Thoughts*—Statements which indicated a new or novel thought by subjects.
7. *Interpretive Statements*—Statements which expressed the subjects' interpretation of the character's thoughts or actions.
8. *Personalization Statements*—Statements which described subjects' own personal experiences.

Examples of category statements are given in Table 2. Some statements, such as, "That was what really interested me about that one"

TABLE 3

*Example of Coded Text: Deaf Subject*

Code	Subject Interview Text
2	[The next one, "Quantum Leap," I thought it was fine]. Again,
4a	it was [a situation where he felt pity]. In all of these, [they show pity towards the person who is deaf]. That's a cumulative thought.
10	[There's lots of things for deaf people who can't hear music].
1	[He's like, "I'm sorry. I wish you could hear music."]
7	[He felt guilty: "It's not fair." You know, "You should be able to hear. You feel left out, and I want you to hear the same thing I do."] I mean, that's the common attitude.
8	[But, I don't think hearing people need to feel guilty].
9	[There's just different ways to experience music].
7	[That was her, as a deaf person, in her way to express music, and that was the way she thought music was].
2	[So that was good].

*Note.* 1 = descriptive statements; 2 = positive impressions; 4a = sympathy/pity concerns, projected pity on character; 7 = interpretive statements; 8 = personalization statements; 9 = statements about music or dancing; 10 = statements about deafness/deaf culture.

had no real content and therefore were left uncategorized. An example of a coded transcript excerpt is shown in Table 3.

Analysis of the data revealed several trends in the communication style and interview content for the two groups. Both groups had some difficulty in expressing opinions, impressions, and perceptions. Most subjects tended to begin the interview by describing the content of excerpt, even though all subjects were told during the introduction to the interview session that descriptions of the excerpts were not necessary and that subjects only needed to express their thoughts regarding each excerpt.

There were a number of similarities between the responses of the two groups. The content category most represented for both groups was interpretive statements. Both groups were quick to interpret motives for characters in the excerpts, using statements such as, "I think he was trying to say that he [deaf character] was just like anyone else—that he could appreciate music in his own way," or "I think he was trying to change her into a hearing person." The next most represented category for both groups was positive statements. Both hearing and deaf subjects found the excerpts interesting and thought provoking, though subjects by group were

more positive about specific excerpts than others. Data related to specific excerpt differences will be presented later. An equal number of negative statements were made by both groups, though the nature or intensity of statements by hearing subjects was less negative or critical than by deaf subjects. In addition, subject groups tended to be negative about different excerpts. Both groups made statements about music and dance that were similar in both frequency and content.

There were several notable differences between the responses of the two groups. One distinct difference was in the amount of detail given in describing excerpts. Over twice as many descriptive statements were made by deaf subjects than were made by hearing subjects. Other differences related to deafness or deaf culture issues. Statements about deafness or deaf culture were made in a ratio of approximately 6:1 by deaf subjects. Similarly, deaf subjects were more likely to personalize events that occurred in the excerpts; that is, to make reference to similar events that had occurred in their own lives. Deaf subjects were also more sensitive to sympathy or pity projected on the deaf characters in the excerpts. Conversely, hearing subjects utilized this category almost entirely for expressing their own pity or sympathy for the deaf character.

Hearing subjects made more statements that reflected a lack of understanding about deaf culture. Though not related to specific excerpts, "I don't know" statements were used by hearing subjects throughout the interviews as a passing thought. Hearing subjects made more initial thought statements such as, "I never thought about those kinds of communication problems before," or "It never occurred to me that a deaf person would interpret music in a visual way. It never occurred to me that a deaf person would interpret music at all!" These data appear in Table 4.

#### *Data Related to Specific Excerpts*

**Excerpt 1: A deaf man is speech reading a young hearing girl as she attempts to describe the sound of the music playing on the phonograph. They both begin to conduct the music. The record stops and the man, not hearing the music, continues to conduct. The girl awkwardly informs the man that "the music is over now." Pertinent lines spoken by the young girl, "Oh, I wish I could make you hear!" and "I wish you had something like music."**

TABLE 4  
*Frequency of Comments by Category for Deaf and Hearing Subjects*

Category	Deaf Subjects (n = 25)	Hearing Subjects (n = 25)
1. Descriptive statements	168	81
2. Positive statements	198	205
3. Negative statements	83	83
4. Sympathy/pity concerns		
A) Projected pity on character	42	36
B) Subject felt pity	4	24
5. Incomprehensible issues	45	66
6. Initial thoughts	11	37
7. Interpretive statements	211	237
8. Personalization statements	104	77
9. Statements about music or dance	47	57
10. Statements about deafness/deaf culture	64	10

Perhaps because this excerpt was the first one, deaf subjects spent most of their earlier statements describing the situation represented in this excerpt. Both groups were quick to interpret motives for the characters in this excerpt, using statements such as, "I think she wanted him to be a hearing person." Deaf subjects were more likely to identify the pertinent lines as condescending or as expressing pity for deaf persons. Most deaf subjects reacted to the general nature of the excerpt and described it as "demeaning to deaf persons." Hearing subjects, perhaps identifying with the hearing character, often stated that they felt sorry for the young girl, knowing how much she wanted to share the music with the deaf man yet could not.

**Excerpt 2: The hearing man and deaf woman are obviously in a relationship. The man lies down to listen to Bach, then feels guilty because she can't also enjoy the music and turns it off. Later the woman asks him to "explain music to her." Pertinent line spoken by the man, "I can't enjoy it [the music] because you can't enjoy it." Pertinent line spoken by the woman, "Don't feel sorry for me [because I can't hear music]."**

Again, most deaf subjects interpreted this excerpt as "pitying deaf people." Deaf subjects often personalized this excerpt by stating, in general, that music does not mean as much to them as their hearing friends and that they realized that is often difficult for

hearing persons to understand. Hearing subjects, again identifying with the hearing character, interpreted his motives as trying to share something that was important to him and feeling frustrated at his lack of success in doing so.

**Excerpt 3: A young deaf man, in front of a cheering crowd of classmates, interprets a rap into sign as a hearing friend speaks the rap. Pertinent line spoken by a hearing classmate, “How do you live without music?” Pertinent line spoken by the deaf character, “What do you mean? I’m a rapper!”**

Subjects in both groups made the greatest number of positive statements about this excerpt. Many subjects stated that it was their “favorite.” Deaf subjects particularly liked it because they felt it sent a positive message about deaf people—that they can do music. Deaf subjects, however, tended to identify the pertinent line spoken by the hearing classmate as “condescending.” Many hearing subjects also stated that this excerpt was their favorite. Their reasons for liking it, however, were generally given in regard to the performance aspect. Most hearing subjects had never seen a deaf person perform a rap or dance.

**Excerpt 4: A young deaf woman is explaining to a hearing man how she interprets music, using analogies such as, “The wind is like my music.” Her references to music are related to nature. Pertinent line spoken by the man, “How do you live without music?”**

This excerpt prompted the most divergent statements. Deaf subjects either liked it a great deal or didn’t like it at all. Some deaf subjects liked the analogies to nature and felt that they were appropriate. Other deaf subjects thought these analogies were “stupid” or “silly.” Most hearing subjects, however, liked the excerpt, and found the analogies interesting. Several hearing subjects stated that they thought the deaf character might be trying to romanticize her deafness by using nature to explain her interpretation of music.

**Excerpt 5: A young deaf girl asks a young hearing man, “What is music like?” The young man then gives her a Walkman™ and they slow dance to the song, “Crazy Moon.”**

The greatest number of incomprehensible statements was made in response to this excerpt. Most subjects did not understand what

the excerpt was about, especially the Walkman™ as an explanation for music. This excerpt was also generally disliked by all subjects. Comments such as, "This one is stupid" were common among subjects in both groups. A few subjects, both hearing and deaf, thought that the Walkman™ might allow the girl to feel the vibrations of the music and, thus, perhaps better understand the music. A number of subjects stated that the dancing was perhaps a better explanation for the music, allowing the girl to feel the style and movement of the music. A number of deaf subjects reacted negatively to the hearing young man's correction of the girl's speech when she said "thank you" for the Walkman™. No hearing subject reacted to this exchange between the characters.

### Discussion

The purpose of the present study was threefold: (a) to examine how the visual media have portrayed the subject of music and the deaf, (b) to verify the validity of these portrayals with members of the deaf culture, and (c) to compare and contrast deaf and hearing audiences' impressions of these portrayals. An additional purpose of the research was to examine the results in light of possible misconceptions that may be construed by music therapists and music educators based upon the media's representation of the relationship between music and deaf culture. Because music therapists and music educators are the primary persons responsible for the music instruction of students in school programs, it is particularly important that they receive accurate messages about the relationship of music to deaf culture. How these professionals perceive their deaf students' ability to relate to music could conceivably be shaped by the images they see in the media, primarily the visual media, motion pictures and television. If the image sent by the media is in error, then it is conceivable that music therapists and music educators will have a distorted view of their deaf students' potential for success in the music classroom.

In summary, deaf subjects and hearing subjects were similar in the frequency of their positive and negative statements. Deaf subjects, however, were more likely to find examples that they identified as being condescending to deaf people, or as being representative of hearing peoples' cultural values and not representative of their own. If we accept the notion that deaf persons are the true subject matter experts when it comes to assessing the relationship



TABLE 5  
*Hearing Subjects' Categorical Comments by Excerpt*

Excerpt	Category										Excerpt Total	
	1	2	3	4a	4b	5	6	7	8	9		10
1	15	21	35	12	11	5	7	58	11	8	3	186
2	22	15	23	21	8	6	7	66	19	7	0	194
3	14	79	4	0	0	5	11	41	15	5	5	179
4	13	65	1	2	2	5	6	37	14	9	0	154
5	17	25	20	1	3	45	6	35	18	28	2	200
Categorical total	81	205	83	36	24	66	37	237	77	57	10	
Total # of Comments = 913												

TABLE 6  
*Deaf Subjects' Categorical Comments by Excerpt*

Excerpt	Category										Excerpt Total	
	1	2	3	4a	4b	5	6	7	8	9		10
1	42	12	24	19	1	6	1	71	18	7	10	211
2	48	28	14	20	3	10	0	68	25	8	15	239
3	22	92	1	0	0	2	4	18	14	9	14	176
4	27	44	6	3	0	4	5	14	22	13	9	147
5	29	22	38	0	0	23	1	40	25	10	16	204
Categorical total	168	198	83	42	4	45	11	211	104	47	64	

Total # of Comments = 977

between music and the deaf, these findings are somewhat disturbing. In two of the five excerpts, the deaf person was depicted as wanting a hearing person to describe music to them. Many deaf subjects said, in summary, that most deaf persons are not as interested in music as hearing persons might think, and therefore, these questions about music or the "deaf person's longing to know what music is like" were from a hearing person's perspective. Several deaf subjects stated that they heard music, or some of it, and that they were sufficiently satisfied with their musical experiences.

The fact that many deaf subjects stated that they were able to hear music in their personalization statements, highlights the implication in all of the excerpts that the deaf hear nothing, which is certainly a misrepresentation of the deaf community. Very few deaf persons hear nothing. Most deaf persons have some residual hearing and often utilize it to listen to music. For those deaf persons who hear very little, the lack of music does not appear to be an obvious loss in their lives. Perhaps this is because most other auditory events in the environment are also missing.

A number of the deaf students identified the question, "How do you live without music?," which was asked by a hearing person in two of the excerpts, as condescending. They felt it implied that "the deaf are missing out on something very important." One deaf student stated that the question was a way of "judging the deaf by hearing values." The student added, "What if I asked a hearing person, 'How do you live without sign language in your life? Boy, I feel sorry for you.'" This and similar statements seemed to indicate that deaf subjects may resent the notion that their interests should be like hearing persons' interests. Several subjects, both hearing and deaf, wondered why the characters in the *Children of a Lesser God* excerpt would both have to like Bach. One student stated, "A lot of hearing people don't like Bach!"

In regard to the first excerpt, many of the deaf students and a few of the hearing students remarked about the incident in which the record stops and the man continues to conduct until the girl has to tell him, with great discomfort, that the music is over. Their general interpretation was that this incident was intentionally meant to "make the viewer feel sorry for the deaf man." Several students noticed the early date of the movie and excused this manipulation as a "sign of the times."

Nearly half of the deaf subjects who liked the excerpt in which the deaf character signs a rap, stated their reason for liking it was because they could "see the rhythm of the words." These statements have direct implications for music therapists and music educators working with deaf students. Making rhythm visual greatly adds to the deaf students' perception of music. Some subjects also stated that his dance movements indicated the beat of the music, again indicating the advantage of visual representation. Nearly all of the deaf students also stated that they liked this excerpt because it represented deaf people in "a positive way" rather than as "poor, pathetic people who can't hear music."

The results of this study raise several concerns about the media's accuracy in portraying the attitudes of the deaf in regard to music. A solution would be for movie and television directors to use deaf consultants when utilizing deaf characters in their work. A more direct solution for music therapists and music educators would be for them to question, or at least, be cautious in accepting the images of the deaf and their relation to music portrayed by the media. It would also seem wise to place deaf students in situations where they can musically succeed and, hence, be seen in a positive manner. Most important, music therapists and educators should not rely on the messages sent by the media, but rather, openly discuss with their deaf students their musical perceptions and relationship to music.

This study allowed persons who are deaf to verify their image as portrayed by the media. It also provides a comparison of deaf and hearing persons' perceptions regarding music and the deaf. In doing so, this study adds a new dimension to the existing data on the topic of music and deaf culture. Future research might examine the accuracy of other images portrayed by the media, continue to define deaf persons' musical perceptions, or further assess hearing persons' judgments of the deaf.

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