Bytes and Backbeats

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Introduction to Part III

Part III explores the changes in the ways that composers, musicians, and consumers are participating in the musical process as a result of the expanded capabilities provided by digital audio. I began by undertaking a project built around a traditional African piece of musical folklore. The recording I have constructed consists of a re-creation of an African musical story called “Milee Yookoe.” I use only samples of previous recordings that are repurposed to create this version of “Milee Yookoe” (audio clip 12). I describe both the musical foundation and the technical procedures used to create this piece of audio, and I draw on this for a broader discussion of contemporary musical process. Key expressive elements from African music have become fundamental to popular music construction and supply the context for a better understanding of contemporary music culture. I explore the complex relationships between music, community, and technology within the context of both historical and hybridized music cultures that are continually adapted within contemporary music.

The studio study (chapter 8) reaches into these notions of participation and community within the technologized music culture of the West. I propose a paradigm shift in the dynamic between the composer, performer, and consumer of music. These relationships are changing as people interact with technology in ways that provide new expressions of social value through participation. I investigate the drive toward creativity that emanates from the pervasive consumer technology of the iPod through to the consumer-oriented compositional tools made available by the music construction software GarageBand. I argue that the new capac-
ities created by repurposing of audio elements feed new expressions of participation and community.

In the final chapter I look more closely at how creativity operates in the contemporary world, where music recordings are often made by constructing repurposed audio. Fundamental changes in the creative process are balanced against universal qualities of creation and participation. Repurposing is seen for its creative potential, notwithstanding its more obvious role in Overhauling our notion of where music comes from. In this way the distinctions between elements such as original and copy—including even the reciprocal relationship—begin to dissolve as musicians participate in the new paradigm of construction via repurposing. Finally, two prominent contemporary practices that emanate from the use of repurposed audio—file sharing and cultural appropriation—are briefly examined within this larger context of music participation. These discussions allow me to expand from the specifics of “Milee Yookoe” and the African folkloric tradition into a broader consideration of cross-cultural musical encounters.