

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

**MOBILE MUSIC
STUDIES**

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CHAPTER 5

DING, DING!: THE COMMODITY AESTHETIC OF ICE CREAM TRUCK MUSIC

DANIEL T. NEELY

Well now, ice cream man, upon my street
I heard your truck outside, it's really neat.
Ice cream man, upon my block Your little chimes, they reel and they rock.

—Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers, “Ice Cream Man”

Hey, ice cream boy...you wanna turn that goddamn noise off? Don't
nobody wanna hear that shit this time of morning.

—Richard Pryor, *That Nigger's Crazy*

FOR many, the heralding sounds of ice cream trucks play to “the sweet melody of simple hearts.”¹ They attract attention and business, and they have helped ice cream truck music become a symbol of that which is to be consumed—ice cream, frozen novelties, and other assorted sweets. Some say that this music is Pavlovian, that it is a conditioned stimulus that elicits a reflex response in people to want ice cream. However, the desire for ice cream is not conditional on hearing chime music, nor does the music’s sound necessarily increase one’s interest in having it. What I suggest is that the music is intended to play on anamnesis, more specifically a kind of anamnesis that is conditioned on the recognizability of a specific product through sound. On the road, vendors hope their music’s tune and timbre will link perception to memory and lead to nostalgia—for childhood, for sweetness, or for the Main Street of the American imaginary.² But because anamnestic effect is determined by how a listener apprehends sound, ice cream truck music’s tune and timbre may work against a vendor’s best intentions and provoke negative reactions that sometimes lead to complaints or abatement efforts.

In this chapter, I examine ice cream truck music from several perspectives to explore what the system of automobility’s role was in its use, why technology developed around

timbre, and the responses and interpretations of those it has touched. My intention is to provide new insight into a music and its sound that although ubiquitous and easily recognizable have been historically neglected and intellectually untried.

AUTOMOBILITY

The end of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the modern era of the ice cream trade. As economic turmoil stabilized, industrial changes allowed new businesses to develop and hasten economic growth. This led to a new discourse about what constituted the good life and helped redefine the visual and aural expectations of popular culture. Access to new technologies—devices for making, storing, and serving ice cream, for example—became more universal and increasingly automated as a tendency toward ease of use permeated most industries. With this, America began to turn away from a “producer ethic” to a “mythology of consumerism”—especially in novelties and entertainments associated with the ice cream trade—that favored “effortless recreation, leisure, and immediate gratification” (Théberge 1997:29). If the new era’s promise became apparent to American entrepreneurs at the 1893 Chicago World’s Exhibition, its promise was fully realized at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, where the ice cream cone became a national sensation (Rydell 1984:155). The business of selling ice cream was poised for dramatic growth.

The automobile would become an important part of this growth. Automobiles increased access to goods and services, and reduced the scale of long distances because they helped extend the radius of metropolitanism, or “the geographic configuration of a consumer society” in which car travel was a necessity (Interrante 1983:90–91).³ They also satisfied the need for transportation brought on by new social and spatial cultural patterns at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a *system*, however, automobility reoriented and decentralized urban areas and reorganized and centralized rural space because it drew these often disparate territorialities into a closer and more interdependent relationship. In general, this helped businesses grow.

An upward trend in motor car use in the twentieth century ensured the mobile ice cream industry’s growth. Automobility allowed for the more efficient shipment of wholesale product, and the reorganized rural and urban environment it provided meant that mobile retail sale was possible on a much larger geographic scale. Expanding metropolitanism and road-dependency aided this by organizing social networks around roads, which centralized cultural meaning on an ideological level and decentralized economic opportunity. An automobile also conferred an elevated status on drivers because they were seen as modernizing an old-fashioned model.⁴ By the middle of the twentieth century, automobile-based point-of-sale vending became a dominant force in the industry, and began to subordinate other methods of retail sale including foot and pedal driven carts and probably also brick-and-mortar establishments.

Automobility also offered vendors important temporal advantages. Vendors who adapted to this new system had an edge on other street sellers because they could now travel farther before their product melted. Further, drivers could come or go in an instant, *lingering* where business was strong and disappearing from where it was not. This sort of temporal and spatial flexibility allowed automobile-based vendors to establish their brand with a wider network of consumers and to take greater advantage of the social and economic networks automobility's "peculiar combination of flexibility and coercion" locked in (Urry 2004:27). However, because street vending was—at best—a minimally scheduled activity from a consumer's perspective, the perception of automobility's influence on the form was minimal and the form retained a sense of old-fashionedness.⁵

Temporal and spatial freedom were important allowances for a product as acutely ephemeral as ice cream. While these freedoms were keys to mobile vending's growth, automobility had other implications. In this modernized form, mobile street vending became an element in a complex of social interlinkages with other industries that not only included the dairy and ice cream trades but others as well: drivers needed proper delivery vehicles (see Whitby and Earnshaw 1999; Earnshaw 2005), parts for these vehicles, gasoline, good roads and in time, refrigeration and, eventually, sound to maintain their business investment and guarantee solvency.

Within this system, sounds played from an ice cream truck helped reinforce this new spatiality and affirmed the social and economic changes automobility introduced. Sound's role in mobile vending has always been important. If there is one unifying theme in ice cream vending's history, it is the documented use of sound in attracting business. Virtually every nineteenth-century account includes some aspect of aurality, be it how vendors used sound to peddle their wares or how people reacted to them. For example, an 1828 issue of the *National Advertiser*, listed "I Scream, Ice Cream" as one of New York City's common street cries (Dickson 1972:25). Another slightly later nineteenth-century description comes from Philadelphia:

The country man . . . sells an excellent article. . . . The loudest criers . . . are the coloured gentlemen who carry the tin cans containing [ice cream], about the streets on their shoulders. They sing a most laughable, but scarcely intelligible song in praise of their lemon ice cream and vanilla too. (Quoted in Funderburg 1995:72–73)⁶

Within automobility, the use of sound helped extend mobile vending's already increased influence. It allowed a vendor to surround and penetrate the ears of potential customers from a distance. Because the right sound could draw people to the roadside, the beaconing sound of an ice cream truck became a herald for the new automobile-based consumerism (Figure 5.1). Vendors knew this sound would have to be cheap, project well and yet somehow evoke the product it was being used to sell. At first, bells were the answer. Later on, however, the sound most adopted was technologically and timbrally similar to bells *and* musical amusements, in particular the music boxes of nineteenth-century ice cream parlors and soda fountains.



FIGURE 5.1 Patrons at an ice cream truck in New York City during the Northeast Blackout of 2003. Photo © 2003, John Osborne.

TRADITION AND TECHNOLOGY

Emerging in 1874, the ice cream soda was an immediate hit with consumers. In the following decades, a zealous economy developed around the manufacture of ice cream soda fountains, and sound soon joined visibility as an important component in ice cream sales. According to one 1877 industry publication, “to please the palate, you must appeal to the eye” Another, in 1892, quoted a fountain owner as having said “it is the grossest error imaginable to suppose that there is any economy in having a small and unpretentious [fountain] apparatus.”⁷

By 1893, soda fountains thrived as the ice cream soda became so popular that some hailed it as America’s “national beverage” (Dickson 1972:62; cf. Funderburg 1995:100–7). While late 19th century accounts juxtaposed visibility with the palate, in-store aurality had become an equally important part of the soda fountain experience.⁸ Drawn by the popularity of the ice cream soda (and, most likely, by ice cream in various other guises, like the milkshake and the sundae), customers grew used to seeing and hearing automata of various sorts in the stores that served ice cream. One of the most important of these automata were music boxes. In the nineteenth century, these devices were unique in that they were common, could play familiar (or even not-so-familiar) pieces and were often musically, mechanically and decoratively ambitious (Chapius 1980:287; Tallis 1971:37, 41; cf. Hoover 1971).

In 1896, the Wurlitzer company became the first business to outfit music boxes (manufactured mainly by the American *Regina* company) with a device to make them

coin-operated. Most of these boxes were used in saloons, soda fountains, and ice cream parlors and played adaptations of contemporary popular songs and light classical pieces (Roehl 1968:20). Shortly thereafter, *Regina* marketed an automatic changing device into its larger boxes that allowed listeners to select from a number of different tunes, each on a separate disc (28–29). These innovations made music boxes cheaper and more profitable. As such, they were visual and sonic draws and represented an important revenue stream for business owners (DeWaard 1967:107–8; Thompson 1995:13).

At the turn of the twentieth century, the phonograph devastated the music box industry, passing through it “like a virulent blight” (Ord-Hume 1973:287). However, an association between the sound of music boxes, the visuality of soda fountains and the taste of ice cream had already been forged in ice cream parlors and soda fountains. The emergence of more convenient forms to package and store ice cream, allowed companies to increasingly use motorcars for wholesale delivery, and eventually as retail outlets. When this happened, they would take their visual and aural cues from nineteenth-century retail ice cream establishments and become the basis for how ice cream trucks would look—and more importantly, sound—for years to come.

In 1920 a man named Harry Burt in Youngstown, Ohio found inspiration in the success of the “I-Scream,” the chocolate-covered ice cream bar Christian Nelson invented in 1919 that was renamed the “Eskimo Pie” in 1921. A confectioner and ice cream parlor operator by trade, Burt wanted to replicate Nelson’s success and went to work on his own frozen novelty. The result was an ice cream bar on a stick. Because he believed that “the humors of the mind were regulated by those of the palate” (Dickson 1972:77), he named his product the “Good Humor” bar, evoking the nineteenth-century synesthetic visuality of soda fountain manufacturing, and began selling them from a truck.

Building upon this sense of synesthesia, Burt brought a clean visual sensibility to his business. Good Humor trucks were white with an illustration of a Good Humor bar on their sides; their drivers, who adhered to a rather strict code of courtesy and behavior, always wore white uniforms consistent with the truck’s appearance (Jakle and Sculle 1999:182–83). To match this visual imagery in sound, Burt fitted his trucks with small bells. The first rack he used was taken directly from his family’s bobsled. He doubtlessly saw these bells as a pleasing and cost effective way of announcing his truck’s presence in a neighborhood, and a way of affecting a certain naïveté resonant with that evoked in nineteenth-century soda fountains.

Although long used by pushcart vendors, the choice of bells as ice cream truck vending’s new sonic herald was significant because it tapped into and adapted bell ringing’s larger history. Others have noted how larger bells once impelled a sense of regular daily rhythm by calling laborers to mealtime, signaling the beginning or end of a work day or marking the scheduled departure of a train (Corbin 1998:x–xi; Smith 2001:34, 57–58). In street vending contexts, bell ringing had always also called people to specific (albeit irregular) action, but Burt’s choice of small bobsled bells for his ice cream trucks was significant because it both recalled the familiar timbre of coin operated soda fountain automata and signified a *wintry* sound that conveyed ice cream’s relieving coldness in hot weather. In addition, the delicate sound of small bells and

their frequent association with juvenescence tapped into a rapidly changing consumer culture of the time, especially as it was directed toward children.⁹ In her work on the modern consumer ethic and childhood, Susan Matt shows how attitudes toward envy as a moral and behavioral concern in children changed in the period 1890–1930. Discouraging material deprivation as a way of controlling envy not only supported the expansion of the consumer economy, but fostered in children “an emotional style which encouraged consumer activity” (Matt 2002:284). A positive response in both parent and child to a vendor’s bells, then, could be justified as an object lesson in social meaning.

In this sense, Good Humor trucks had a kind of coercive power. As sonic pastiche, the synesthetic experience of Burt’s small, twinkling bells appealed to people’s sense of innocence and nostalgia, and its relationship to food (and specifically, a comfort food like ice cream) gave it an important role in the construction of social memory (Sutton 2001:73–102).¹⁰ Because they were easily apprehended and (regardless of volume) quickly recognized, however, they *imposed* this mood and character onto the communities in which Good Humor’s trucks operated. Using this pleasing sound to summon people to the roadside for a frozen treat helped turn Good Humor’s trucks into a spectacle to be heard, then seen and patronized. It also extended the acceptance of some kinds of public sound. Bell ringing from an automobile could now be viewed positively and even advocated as a bit of nostalgia, even though bells added a layer of itinerant noise to an increasingly crowded soundscape. More importantly, the pealing bells helped centralize consumer ideology around the system of automobility further as a proxy for modern consumerism (Truax 2001:125, 210; Attali 1996:31).

Once sound became an identifiable part of the Good Humor company’s brand, several years passed before it was elaborated, automated, and amplified to reach acoustic spaces beyond a bell’s reach. When Burt died in 1926, a group of businessmen from Cleveland bought the rights to the Good Humor name, established the *Good Humor Corporation of America* and sold franchises for a down payment of \$100 to entrepreneurs in Detroit, Chicago, Miami, Pittsburgh, and New York (Jakle and Sculle 1999:182–83). The company diversified further in 1929 after stock speculator Michael Meehan invested in the Cleveland group. With this, the company licensed Good Humor manufacturers in Los Angeles, Tulsa, Miami, and Dallas (*Time Magazine* 1935). Drivers in all of these markets learned quickly how automobility allowed them to target and move between popular roaming grounds to maximize sales.

During the Great Depression the mobile ice cream trade thrived. One of the most successful businesses was Good Humor of California, established in 1929 by a Los Angeles-based businessman named Paul Hawkins. Although a savvy businessman, Hawkins’s success was in part due to his replacing the bells on his trucks with amplified mechanical music.¹¹ The device he used was manufactured by the small, California-based West Coast Organ Company and played a Polish folk tune called “Stodola Pumpa.”¹² Housed in a small, rectangular plywood box, its musical works consisted of “a tiny 10-key carillon, operated by a rotating wood cylinder with steel pins to lift the mallets. Each mallet [was] powered by a piano-wire spring. Behind every

steel chime bar [was] a magnetic pickup coil much like that for an electric guitar” (Rhodes 2006).

Although these units were mechanically complicated and prone to breaking, they were amplified (most likely through inexpensive coil-driven trumpet-horn loudspeakers mounted under the hood), which enabled a much larger potential market than non-amplified methods.¹³ The choice of a single, simple melody was effective because it anchored an easily remembered sonic brand in the ears of consumers. While certainly not a perfectly phonogenic reproduction, this technological mediation preserved a level of timbral intimacy that allowed the chimey, bell-like timbre of West Coast Organ boxes to *sound* like music boxes should over a long distance. Most important, their sound evoked the auralty of nineteenth-century soda ~~fountain~~ more effectively than a rack of bells ever could, and helped reinforce the sense of pastiche that Good Humor had earlier established. In addition, the mood ice cream trucks now imposed on communities was better defined musically. It had an even more concrete, positively viewed cultural association that did a better job of negating arguments against its use. This gave Good Humor of California an important competitive edge during the depression; **they** continued manufacturing chime music boxes into the late 1950s and probably stopped shortly after Bacigalupi died in 1959.

Hawkins’s approach to sound *and* automobility helped extend his influence in other ways. He made sure that his trucks were parked outside movie studios and radio stations. In those locations, music helped attract actors and performers who gave him free publicity by talking about his “Good Humor” products on the air. He even sent trucks to on-location shoots up to 75 miles away as a way of keeping his company’s name in good standing with members of the film industry (Harris 1949:96). Hawkins’s success with sound on the road and, in turn, over the airwaves inspired others in the trade, especially after World War II (96).¹⁴

In late 1940s, for example, John Ralston was a driver for the Los Angeles-based Swelltime Ice Cream Company, one of Good Humor’s competitors. Ralston had once worked for Hawkins at Good Humor and was aware of the commercial advantages music offered. In 1947, Swelltime’s trucks had no music so Ralston decided to experiment and built a sounding apparatus using a toy cylinder-based music box works and an army surplus carbon microphone. He taped the mic to the works, taped the works to his steering column, attached a Distler toy car motor to drive the works, and played his new apparatus through a tube amplifier powered off the truck’s battery. As Ralston told me, “It worked.”¹⁵

Then, in early 1948, Ralston brought his idea to the Nelson Company for development. With the help of Bob Nelson, several changes were introduced that led to the commercial production of chime boxes for ice cream trucks. The first of these replaced the Distler motor Ralston used with a **Dynamotor**, a small motor-generator that produced 240 volts off the truck’s 6-volt battery and let the apparatus run more efficiently. The second replaced the Ralston’s toy works with a Thorens AD-30, a comb-based movement that played six-inch interchangeable metal discs in a way that resembled a record player. With this, drivers could choose from hundreds of well-known popular, religious,

and kiddie tunes.¹⁶ By late 1949, ice cream truck bells were beginning to be replaced by music boxes that played tunes like *Strawberry Blonde*, *Little Brown Jug*, and *Sidewalks of New York* (Harris 1949:96). Amplified music had become a symbol of organizational strength, progress, and prosperity (Bijsterveld 2008:36–37).

Nelson, who later merged his outfit with the Stromberg-Carlson company, was the first to mass-produce chime music for ice cream trucks, but others followed. Huffein and Koditek were electronic technicians based out of California who manufactured disc-type boxes for a short period of time in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Another was Schulmerich Electronics, a company that developed its own comb-based chime music box in the early 1950s, originally intended to be a surrogate for church bells (they later manufactured boxes for Mister Softee). However successful these companies were in diversifying the kinds of sounds drivers had available to them, their products did little more than provide a range of options for choosing a melodic brand. None seemed to address the major problem facing drivers, that being how to balance the advantages amplification permitted with the technical limitations a gasoline-powered truck fitted with a refrigerator presented.

The most significant change in the use and manufacture of ice cream truck music happened in 1957. While refinements such as the dynamotor improved the effectiveness of chime music apparatuses, the amplifiers necessary for its use put a significant stress on a truck's battery and limited the amount of time music could be played. So, in 1957, John Ralston (who had continued to experiment with different chime music devices throughout the 1950s) approached Bob Nichols, an electrical engineer from Minneapolis, Minnesota, for help. Nichols had experience with emergent transistor-based technologies and responded first by improving the transduction method used in music boxes being used and then by building that into a transistorized amplification system.¹⁷ These changes put a significantly lighter stress on the truck's battery (by 1956, most auto manufacturers had switched to a 12-volt system that made electrical components run more reliably) and gave drivers the option of playing music all the time. In doing so they could, in theory, attract more business on the road.

Nichols went into business under the name Nichols Electronics. In the early days, his units primarily used the Thorens AD-30 movement, but by 1962, he had switched over to a Thorens-manufactured cylinder works that was cheaper to work with and maintain. When Thorens halted production of these works in 1975, these movements came from the Japanese Sankyo company. While Nichols continued to service the AD-30-based boxes well into the 1970s and the cylinder-based works for much longer, in 1985 he began to manufacture boxes that mimicked chime music through chip-based waveform synthesis. Early versions of these electronic boxes featured one song; later models, including the still-popular industry standard *Digital II*, played eight, and one of Nichols's more recent models, the *Omni*, includes a selection of 32 tunes to choose from. As a special option, Nichols will also program boxes with custom renditions of popular public domain melodies from an in-house list. (Nichols's custom tune list is far, far smaller than that of the AD-30, but they are clearly related.) Distributing his product to mobile vendors throughout the Americas, Europe, and Asia, Nichols Electronics is

rightly considered the largest and most important manufacturer of chime music in the world.¹⁸

Despite several innovations, the changes Nichols has made to his product line over the years have been remarkably conservative, emphasizing timbre over other considerations. In developing his electronic, computer chip-based system, Nichols's priority was to maintain a chime sound timbrally consistent with earlier analog movements. In this he was largely successful—the timbre of the new boxes was different from that of the old ones, but not unrecognizably so. He took the small number of early complaints he received from vendors about the new boxes not sounding “the same” with some sympathy, but there was nothing to suggest that the differences vendors noticed meant anything to the consumers they served, because the new boxes were as effective at drawing attention and, for many of an older generation, at provoking nostalgic discourse as the older models. Because the new technology was also more electrically efficient, the new boxes could be played loud with even less battery usage than earlier models. Further, because the new models contained no moving or user-serviceable parts, they proved more durable than their predecessors and represented a superior value.

While Nichols's knowledge of mobile vending's technological needs are reflected in the changes he—and others—introduced over the years, ultimately little about the sounds associated with ice cream has changed since the nineteenth century. The timbre vendors favored, and that manufacturers worked around, played on a mechanical technology whose ease of use mapped well onto the new consumerism at the end of the nineteenth century. Made mobile, it urged and in fact propagated a cultural formation, based on sound, between the taste of ice cream and the places that sold it.

TUNE AND TIMBRE

Tune and timbre have been critical to individual success throughout ice cream vending's history. Tune, because many identify individual vendors or vending companies by the tune they play; timbre because it is a powerful agent in evoking memory through anamnesis. In combination, these two elements elicit a visceral nostalgia for an idealized past that attracts attention and promotes business.

The tunes vendors typically favor are almost always bright, upbeat, and melodically simple; rarely are they in a minor key. Many include basic contrapuntal parts for harmonic effect and some today even include an end-of-loop vocalization (“Hello!”) to help attract attention. In the industry, these tunes are referred to as “kiddie tunes.” Because they are a factor in product recognition, vendors typically pick one tune and stick with it for a long time.

Today's best-known ice cream truck tune is probably Mister Softee's. Founded on St. Patrick's Day in 1956 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by two brothers, William and James Conway, Mister Softee has since grown substantially and as of 2010 had 350 franchise

dealers operating 600 trucks in 15 states. Its proprietary jingle is extremely well known throughout the United States and is a common reference in popular culture.¹⁹

“Mister Softee (Jingle and Chimes)” was written by Philadelphia-based jingle composer Les Waas and is an excellent example of how important tune and timbre are in marketing ice cream truck music. In 1958, shortly after the Conways moved Mister Softee’s business operation from Philadelphia to Runnemede, New Jersey, they hired the small Philadelphia agency where Waas worked to compose a radio jingle.²⁰ In a move reminiscent of Paul Hawkins’s marketing technique, company representatives asked that the sound of the bell they used on their trucks be incorporated somewhere in their advertisement to evoke the in-neighborhood aural presence of their trucks. Waas remembered that the bell Mister Softee provided him was heavy, about 12 inches tall, and had a built-in clapper. He carried it to New York City, where the jingle was recorded, and used it at the advertisement’s beginning, to attract the attention of a group of children: “(Ding! Ding!) Here comes Mister Softee, the soft ice cream man!” (Figure 5.2):

(Kids voices):

The creamiest, dreamiest soft ice cream
You get from Mister Softee.
For a refreshing delight supreme,
Look for Mister Softee.

(Deep, pleasant male voice):

My milkshakes and my sundaes and my cones are such a treat,
Listen for my store on wheels, ding-a-ling down the street.

(Kids again):

The creamiest, dreamiest soft ice cream,
You get from Mister Softee.
For a refreshing delight supreme,
Look for Mister Softee.
S-o-f-t double “E,” Mister Softee!

The jingle was successful in several local markets. But the bell ringing helped make it effective, I suggest, because it not only drew the in-ad children’s attention to the Mister Softee truck, it also attracted the ear of radio listeners (most of whom likely already identified a ringing bell with mobile ice cream vending) to the ad itself. Mister Softee could (and later, did) build on the increased publicity this ad generated by adding chime music to its trucks in imitation of Waas’s recorded jingle.²¹ In the context of mobile vending, the timbre of the redone “Mister Softee (Jingle and Chimes)” granted the company’s new on-the-road sonic herald a sense of historical authenticity. This legitimacy helped make the Mister Softee tune—for better or for worse—known to millions of people and a cultural icon throughout the United States.

Although tune is important, timbre is the crucial factor in how ice cream truck music accrues meaning. In cinema, for instance, ice cream truck music’s timbre can be the basis of comedic parody, as in Sacha Baron Cohen’s 2006 film *Borat*, where the music attracts hopeful kids to an ice cream truck’s window where they are surprised to find



FIGURE 5.2 “(Ding! Ding!) Here comes Mister Softee, the soft ice cream man!”

an adult brown bear instead of a traditional vendor. Or it can be naiveté’s foil. The horror genre has satirized ice cream truck music’s innocence in such films as *Maximum Overdrive* (1986), *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* (1988), and *Ice Cream Man* (1995), and in the “We All Scream for Ice Cream” episode of the *Masters of Horror* TV series (2007), by playing on the incongruity between its timbre and that of screams of bloody murder.

Timbre’s role in ice cream truck music’s historical identity makes it the overwhelming basis upon which contemporary artists and musicians creatively re-imagine the music. For example, 8bitpeoples is a bitpop/chiptune artists collective founded in 1999. Its members make new music based on 8-bit digital technology, the same technology found in the music boxes Nichols Electronics began to manufacture in 1985.²² In July 2007, 8bitpeoples member Richard Alexander Caraballo (aka “minusbaby”) launched *WHY ICE CREAM, OR: WHY SCREAM?*, a project that invited other members to write “imaginary ice cream truck music in a chip music style.”²³ In addition to sharing thirty-four tracks by thirty-three artists on the project’s webpage, Caraballo posted a loop of New York City street sounds that could be played concurrently with the recordings to help give them life. Although most were effective, the project’s most convincing submissions (including Bubblyfish’s “Strawberry Flavor Green Frog,” Bud Melvin’s “Sherbertful Penis Lilt,” Dotdummy’s “Mr. Ding-a-Ling,” Naruto’s “Fantastic Sweetness Trucks,” m_036’s “Mario’s Ice Cream,” Peter Swimm’s “Mi Heladero, Mi Salvador,” and

Tugboat's "Frozen Ice Cream Pops in the Shape of a Tugboat") utilized (and in some cases, manipulated through signal processing) ice cream truck music's familiar 8-bit chime timbre to work both within and against the themes of innocence and nostalgia commonly associated with the genre.²⁴

Another who explored ice cream truck music's timbre is sound artist and member of the Brooklyn, New York-based art collective *e-Xplo*, Erin McGonigle. In 2003, McGonigle received a Brooklyn Arts Council grant to re-imagine the ice cream truck's musical repertoire by composing alternatives. Her goal was to underscore the role form and timbre have in creating context, location, and social identity through sound in public space.

She travelled with two drivers from Brooklyn's Kool Man Ice Cream Company along their daily route to better understand how music articulated with the community (McGonigle 2004). After several ride-alongs, she had gathered ideas about what effective alternatives might sound like and eventually produced eleven pieces that explored how timbre and repetition might be manipulated to reflect a driver's relationship to the community. Some of these were electroacoustic transformations of traditional ice cream truck music. One such piece removed the rhythmic pulse and melodic character of a toy music box by sampling and rearranging its melody into a non-melodic sequence and processing the result through echo; it became an exercise in pure timbre. Another placed a high frequency hiss over a backward sample of a calliope. Other pieces explored timbres with legitimate but not-so-obvious childhood associations. One interspersed the sound of white noise into the sound of marbles swirling in a metal bowl; another made church bells and fireworks the basis for a repeating ambient Carnavalesque texture. Some of McGonigle's more challenging pieces examined cultural and socio-economic differences by exploring ideas of spatiality. One such piece evoked an inner city housing project by juxtaposing the sound of a crackling fire, hard-heeled steps in a reverberant hallway, a surveillance helicopter, and gun fire into a repeating sonic collage; others played on neighborhood cultural boundaries by repeating and deconstructing samples of Cuban and Brazilian music.

Later that year, I saw McGonigle play her pieces on compact disc from a Kool Man ice cream truck in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. As the truck drove through the neighborhood, her pieces had varying degrees of immediate effectiveness. Of them all, the one that seemed to have the best response was a fairly straightforward field recording she made of Brooklyn's Hungry March Band rehearsing "Turkey in the Straw." Although the lively (if somewhat sloppy) brass band rendition veered far astray from chime music in sound, the sense of old-time nostalgia it struck helped underscore the efficiency and value of a chimey timbre. Chime boxes rely on a cheap, mass produced technology to convey in timbre what this recording achieved by other means, but only through sophisticated technological intervention.

As compact disc and, now, electronic media players become more common, such technological intervention represents a better value and creates space for musical innovations that work within ice cream truck music's traditional timbral boundaries. For example, after noticing the lack of musical variety on ice cream trucks in 2006, Brooklyn-based composer, multi-instrumentalist, writer, and producer Michael Hearst

began to compose musically sophisticated alternatives that could *in theory* be played from a truck. Following several months of work, he released *Songs for Ice Cream Trucks* on his own Urban Geek Records label in early 2007.

A founding member of the eclectic indie “lit rock” band One Ring Zero, Hearst’s goal with the project was to write familiar-sounding music that would “make sense” as ice cream truck music. To achieve this he began with simple, monophonic tunes:

I wanted to write melodies that could stand on their own without chords and counterpoint, and then add to them, layer them with some other sounds. I wanted it to be an album that you would actually want to listen to, which was more of a challenge. Nothing but chime melodies by themselves is not something I would want to listen to over and over again. I wanted to somehow take what we know of already as ice cream truck music and the sound of these chimey simple melodies, and make it into something that fits in with our generation, maybe even has a slight hip quality to it.²⁵

Timbre had a formative conceptual role in this. In many cases, Hearst first imagined these melodies through the sound of glockenspiel; in these early stages, he composed “in terms of high register”; “percussive, quick, short, sharp notes” were key. As he arranged, he chose instruments that would complement this sound. Instruments including clavichord, a cheap chord organ, a small Casiotone keyboard, melodica, glockenspiel, and a small, high-pitched percussion instrument called “Space Crickets,” lent themselves to the form well and were consistent with the stylistic direction in which he was headed. Eventually, Hearst found additional inspiration in a number of related musical styles (e.g., carnival/circus music, Muzak, calliopes, the works of composer Danny Elfman), each of which has its own nostalgic sensibilities that resonate well with a generational cohort that grew up in the 1970s and 1980s.

A few months after its initial release, the Brooklyn-based BAR/NONE record label re-released the album, which greatly increased its distribution both as a compact disc and as an MP3 download. (It is currently available through every major downloading site.) Reaction to *Songs for Ice Cream Trucks* was overwhelmingly positive.²⁶ Critics praised the album’s musicality as well as how it maintained a traditional ice cream music aesthetic. Writer and literary critic John Hodgman, for example, wrote that Hearst “transformed one of the most overlooked, yet most insidiously infectious forms of American popular song into a rumination on summertime, innocence, and the music that lurks almost inaudibly in the margins of our lives.”²⁷

Although encouraged by its commercial success, Hearst’s music’s practical success revealed itself once he heard his music played from a truck. This happened shortly after the album’s release, when Matt Allen, aka *The Ice Cream Man*, visited Brooklyn and asked Hearst to help with installing a new loudspeaker on his truck.²⁸ As they drove around playing *Songs for Ice Cream Trucks* later that afternoon, Hearst observed how the timbres he chose helped his music propagate correctly and attract attention. “Oh my God, it works,” he remembered thinking. “It *sounds* like ice cream truck music when you hear it a block away.” Through an ice cream truck’s speaker, Hearst’s music had a stylistic accuracy and an authority he had not anticipated.

This authority, however, was not lost on ice cream vendors. In May 2007, Hearst knew of eight using it; by spring 2009 there were at least 50, including individual trucks in North Carolina, Wisconsin, Georgia, and California, as well as an entire fleet of trucks in Portland, Oregon. One driver in North Carolina even commissioned a custom track for his own truck. Many vendors are thankful for an alternative that actually *sounds* like traditional ice cream truck music. The ease of plugging a compact disc or MP3 player loaded with *Songs for Ice Cream Trucks* into a loudspeaker has meant that vendors are more likely to use it.

NOISE

Thus far I have focused on the mostly positive and nostalgic elements that motivated ice cream truck music's technology and sound aesthetic, but I have said little about the negative aspects of its use. While many hear this music nostalgically and reflect on it as a cherished part of childhood, others revile its sound as cloying and its use annoying. Many see it as a public health concern. For this latter group (and sometimes *even* for the former), ice cream truck music is nothing more than vaguely defined "noise," its banal repetitiveness an intrusion that epitomizes the redundancy of compelled consumption. Calls for its regulation and abatement are common and figure prominently into the music's political history, often dictating how and when it can be used. Further, mobility plays a major role in how people experience an ice cream truck's music. Although its timbre, form and delivery are determined by tradition and past use, the details of music's propagation are less predictable.²⁹

In discussing ice cream truck music and abatement, then, one is faced with a fundamental question: what makes it noise? Barry Truax provided one interpretation, arguing that it is any manner of aural disturbance "that loosens the contact the listener has with the environment... works against effective communication [and] allows more noise to proliferate unprotected and unnoticed" (2001:94–95). In this view, ice cream truck music is a cognitive disruption that promotes less attentive listening. Because it focuses on how a sound articulates with an environment and not solely on its loudness or intensity, noise's consequences go beyond subjective concerns.

For example, an apprehension about ice cream truck music's deleterious effects on aesthetics was among soundscape researcher R. Murray Schafer's objections to it. He lamented that "almost all" the synthesized tunes played from ice cream trucks "contain at least one melodic inaccuracy, due... to the tin ear of the engineer who programmed them. In this way the 'fake' transmogrifications of well-known melodies are rendered 'real' for countless millions of people the world over so that the real tune, if ever heard again, will sound *wrong*; and engineers with no musical ability whatsoever become musical arrangers of incredible influence" (1993:121–22). From this perspective, ice cream truck music weakens what in Schafer's mind are objective musical values.³⁰

Others, however, see more grave—and coercive—cultural implications. Jacques Attali argued that background sounds like ice cream truck music channel people toward consumption and are a powerful factor in leveling class differences, driving consumer integration, and abetting cultural homogenization (cf. Radano 1989; Sterne 1997). This happens largely through repetition, an element in music’s commodification that Attali suggested dilutes its meaning. Although he was talking about music as a commodity-object, ice cream truck music draws out his point because it is *literally* repetitive in its commodification of sweets: in neighborhood after neighborhood, kiddie tunes play repetitively and (some might argue) *oppressively* from a truck that returns on a daily, weekly, seasonal, or annual basis. A stalwart—and basically welcome—neighborhood presence, the music ultimately “slips into the growing spaces of activity void of meaning and relations, into the organization of our everyday life . . . it signifies a power that needs no flag or symbol: musical repetition confirms the presence of repetitive consumption, of the flow of noises as ersatz sociality” (1996:111; cf. Fink 2005).

If coercion is one of this music’s effects, silencing is another. While ice cream truck music’s mere presence—regardless of intensity level—is enough to attract and polarize attention, even in a crowded soundscape, the music’s repetitiveness obstructs communication and silences organized dissent about its use.³¹ One reason for this, Truax suggested, is that the music is amplified and therefore carries a particular kind of power:

Amplified messages, whether political, commercial or public service, when broadcast from vehicles moving through the streets, have the ability to command more attention than most other forms—with little scope for response. Some ice cream vendors even advertise their wares by repeatedly broadcasting an amplified electronic version of the traditional bell from their trucks, thereby driving the neighborhood to distraction for many blocks! This practice has been banned in some communities. Amplification automatically confers an aura of authenticity on any message, and puts the recipient at an immediate disadvantage. (2001:209)

Although timbre is perhaps ice cream truck music’s most recognizable trait, it was amplification that enhanced the music’s commercial potency at different points in its development. It was also one of the main reasons efforts are so commonly made to limit or ban its use.

In all these analyses, ice cream truck music is a disruption aggravated by automobility. “A symbol of individualized power” (Attali 1996:123), the automobile helped consolidate ice cream truck music’s effects along the networks of roads, but also allowed it to be a presence that worked against abatement efforts. Since the twentieth century, efforts to attenuate traffic noise have included “traffic regulation, alternative pavements, new transportation constructions, and city planning,” which have helped canalize traffic and create “new forms of order, integration, and enhanced predictability—a new smooth and controlled rhythm, so to speak—in city life” (Bijsterveld 2008:92–93). These visual and spatial considerations, however, seem to have focused discourse about traffic noise in ways that either fail to take more objective analyses into account or to justify it in particular ways.

Indeed, the most common arguments against ice cream truck music are ideologically driven and based on subjective or emotional criteria that lead to rationalizations ignorant of how sound works. Such “deaf spot” (Truax 2001:98–103) arguments hold, for example, that sound is not noise when one can grow accustomed or desensitized to it (habituation); that a sound is not noise if it is no louder than the sounds around it; that sound is not noise—and therefore acceptable—when it is not loud; and that noise may be excused when it is part of industry or economic progress. Ice cream music brings other, similar, arguments to bear. Many suggest that limiting the music will somehow disappoint children, or that doing so infringes upon one’s right to free speech. Because these deaf spot arguments generally articulate definitions of noise poorly, they help perpetuate a logical inconsistency about what noise is by positioning abatement concerns against ideas about sentimentality, cultural meaning, and nostalgic effect.

Three hundred ninety noise complaints about ice cream truck music were lodged in New York City ~~between~~ July and August ~~in~~ 2003; in the same period in 2004 there were 572 (243 in the month of May alone) and 410 in 2005 (*New York Times* 2005; Ramirez 2004). For many cities throughout the United States, ice cream truck music is a serious concern; legislative efforts to limit or ban its use are common annual events. Ever since bells and mechanical devices were first used on trucks to sell ice cream, mobility has made the enforcement of noise legislation difficult. A 1932 *New York Times* article, for example, not only pointed out that early noise laws were difficult to know because they were distributed haphazardly through the Code of Ordinances, but that most of the codes used in that era were passed “before the inception of the most important noise makers—the truck, the horn, the riveter, and the loudspeaker” (cf. Attali 1996:123).

New York City’s current noise code literature explicitly acknowledges the difficulties mobility presents in enforcement.³² Less obvious is how ice cream truck music’s status as “noise” has exacerbated the enforcement challenges automobility presents. This began in the 1930s, when notions of what constituted traffic noise began to change. Karin Bijsterveld has shown how abatement efforts in cities like New York streamlined the system of automobility by introducing new kinds of order, integration and, predictability, and pioneered new ways of measuring sound, which led to alternative ideas about how loudness and “traffic noise” were defined. The “*chaos* of unwelcome sounds produced by badly behaving *individuals*” had become a blended hum that created “*levels* of unwanted sound” from a *collective* source (2008:93). Although the noise legislation that accompanied these advances addressed the problem of ice cream truck vehicular noise, it did so in a way that laid a heavy, and for many, unwarranted, hand on the music and its use. As modern abatement efforts threatened to silence this cherished old-fashioned form, a discourse about sound emerged that de-emphasized objectivity and anticipated new forms of legislation.

Today, typical noise legislation imposes temporal and spatial limitations on ice cream truck music’s use to address loudness. In 1965, for example, New York City prohibited the use of ice cream truck music after 9 p.m. and provided that it could be no louder than four decibels at ten feet; further, operation was prohibited on certain restricted streets and “within 25 feet of a street corner” (*New York Times* 1965); in the 1970s, vendors could

only play music “10 seconds at a time, and only once every 10 minutes when parked” (*New York Times* 1972). Sometimes, these restrictions can even more specific. For example, the noise ordinance passed in Chicago in 1962 stipulated that “a peddler using a vehicle . . . can travel any specific block only twice a day; stop not to exceed 30 minutes in any one block; operate only from 10 a.m. To 11 p.m.; must not park within 200 feet of any licensed shop selling the same merchandise; can sell only from the curbside; and, can use musical or noise making devices no louder than 6 decibels [audible about half a block] and play them only 30 seconds at a time and only from 10 a.m. To 9 p.m.” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1962c).

However, legislation is only as effective as far as ice cream truck music is considered noise. For example, it is not known what effect—if any—New York’s early 1930s efforts to ban “the operation of any musical instrument, radio, phonograph or other mechanical or electrical sound-making device on motor vehicle, airplane or dirigible the noise of which shall disturb the peace and quiet” (*New York Times* 1932) had on ice cream truck music’s use in the City, but it would not appear that noise codes were always worthy of enforcement. In 1935, for example, the Mayor of Pelham, New York lifted a ban on ice cream truck chimes in Pelham’s business district because they “were more soothing than the noise of hundreds of auto horns” (*New York Times* 1935). The Los Angeles City Council made a similar argument in 1960. It refused to ban the music outright after limiting music box operation to the hours between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. because “the normal sound of music boxes on ice cream trucks is not loud enough to be a public nuisance” (*Los Angeles Times* 1960).

Legislation to restrict ice cream truck music often draws resistance that links child welfare with common sense nostalgia.³³ In Los Angeles in 1933, for example, a noise ordinance was introduced to restrict the use of “advertising loud-skeapers [sic] and ballyhoo wagons” (*Los Angeles Times* 1933b). Although the measure eventually passed (*Los Angeles Times* 1933c), a contemporary *Los Angeles Times* report played on an emotional connection to the sounds of street vending by threatening that the measure’s passage would *eliminate* “the tinkling bell of the ice cream vendor that made dad dig, many evenings, for his spare nickels” (*Los Angeles Times* 1933a). This argument was echoed in 1953 in Trenton, New Jersey, where a member of the City Council came out against a local Magistrate who had ordered a vendor to remove his bells: “it cannot possibly be urged that the tinkling of the ice cream bell to notify little Mary or Johnny that they should commence to annoy and harass mother for a coin has become a crime. You must let the bells ring” (*New York Times* 1953). Here, abatement’s intent is to “take a smile off a child’s face” (Corbett 2007) in an effort to “traumatize” kids (Hu 2005). Such arguments, however, do little more than prejudice rational discussion about noise.

Popular resistance to abatement often leads to legislation based on compromise, which strikes a delicate balance between anti-noise concerns and the needs of small businesses. For example, in response to a 1947 investigation into the use of bells and amplified music on ice cream trucks called by the Los Angeles City Council’s Public Health and Welfare Committee, one of its members convened a group of ice cream company owners to work out a set of provisions for its use that all parties could find mutually acceptable. The agreement they reached required vendors to “cease street selling at

9 p.m. and turn off their sound equipment. Tone volume generally is to be reduced and the call of the ice cream cone entirely muted around schools, churches, and hospitals” (*Los Angeles Times* 1947a; 1947b).³⁴ A similar deal was struck in 2004 when New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed a strict new noise code that would require ice cream vendors to replace their music with bells (Steinhauer 2004). Mister Softee President Jams Conway argued that vendors “need the jingle,” that it is “a New York institution” (Ramirez 2004), and ultimately hired a lobbyist to work with the city on a compromise (Barry 2004). The result was the 2007 noise code that prohibited vendors from using music unless their truck was in motion (New York City Department of Environmental Protection).

Very often, however, resolution is reached only after legal action. When the city of Chicago began to enforce an ordinance that banned “noise making” street vendors like ice cream trucks in 1962, for instance, Mr. Softee of Illinois, Tastee-Freez, and Freezefresh Inc. filed suit, alleging that the ordinance’s enforcement discriminated against vendors because it had not been prosecuted in thirty-five years. After the vendors won a court injunction to prevent the ordinance’s enforcement, the City Council’s Committees on Health and Licensing responded by implementing the stringent noise ordinance I mentioned earlier (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1962a, 1962b, 1962c). A more recent example involved Jeffrey Cabaniss, an ice cream truck driver based in Stafford Township, New Jersey known for playing “Turkey in the Straw.” When the Township voted to ban ice cream truck music 1998, Cabaniss filed a lawsuit in federal court, which held that a ban on commercial speech would violate his First Amendment rights. He ultimately lowered the volume of his music (of his own volition), but only after a court injunction prompted the Township council to rescind the ban (Nieves 1998; see also Gordon 2002 and Zielbauer 2002).

There are many different ideas about what makes ice cream truck music noise. They are all, in essence, correct. But legislation to control this music has taken many forms and often tends to downplay how noise functions as sound in balancing abatement efforts with commercial interests. Local anti-noise efforts typically limit when, where, and how loud this music may be played and are often framed as a public health concerns. In instances when legislation becomes too ambitious, abatement is sometimes seen as a cultural threat; in these situations, ice cream truck music becomes more important because of the perceived (if, perhaps, imagined) dire consequence of a world without it. Ice cream truck music is tricky. Outside of an outright ban, it retains the chance ability to slip into the blank spaces of the acoustic community and be noticed. Regardless of abatement efforts, it remains an extremely effective way to sell ice cream.

CONCLUSION

Most writing about ice cream truck music either plays on its nostalgic quality or its saccharine invasiveness (Neely 2005). These common approaches, however, miss

the point that the music is effective largely because of how its sound works. Ice cream truck music's influence is indeed based on its representational power. When Harry Burt used bells on his trucks to sell ice cream, he wanted to evoke the taste of this popular Victorian-era comfort food by playing off an expectation about what such comforts should sound like. Music box-based devices built on this association—while a chimey timbre still represented the product, melody enabled consumers to distinguish one business's truck from another. In cooperation, tune, timbre, and technology recalled the sound of nineteenth-century soda fountains and ice cream parlors, and are the basis for the nostalgia many ascribe to the music.

But the *experience* of nostalgia (or noise) in ice cream truck music is achieved anamnesically. Each of the technical innovations outlined in this chapter was intended to improve the music's propagation in various ways. Some of these changes improved timbral reproduction, others more reliable amplification; but timbre remained a constant because it compels people's attention and draws them to the roadside so well. While few would find interest in listening to chime music on its own, from a moving truck this stilted, old-fashioned mechanical music becomes fluid and dynamic as its sound filters through different spatial configurations. The context of its reception influences how people determine the music's value and meaning, and becomes the basis for how nostalgia and noise are experienced.

It seems simple—perhaps even unworthy of inquiry—but ice cream truck music is a highly specialized and refined form, and its discourse should no longer be restricted to debates about nostalgia or noise. Made mobile, its sound organizes social networks of consumers while its timbre accrues ideological meaning through collective memory. Although some have experimented with these issues creatively, my hope is that this chapter will inspire new inquiry into how this and other heralding musics work. While many will doubtlessly still hear it as noise, there is much to contemplate in the “ding ding” of the ice cream truck.

NOTES

1. Here I am paraphrasing what Swiss writer Cecile Lauber once wrote about music boxes (quoted in DeWaard 1967:9). Although he was not talking about ice cream trucks in specific, the quote suggests a historical continuity in technology and in timbre that I follow throughout this chapter.
2. Following Augoyard and Torgue, anamnesis is “an effect of reminiscence in which a past situation or atmosphere is brought back to the listener's consciousness, provoked by a particular signal or sonic context. Anamnesis, a semiotic effect, is the often involuntary revival of memory caused by listening and the evocative power of sounds” (2006:21). My ideas about music's role in evoking the “friendly sites of junction, assembly, and encounter” of Main Street USA are inspired by Gage Averill's work on nostalgia in barbershop singing (Averill 2003).
3. Interrante borrows this word from a 1933 Hoover Commission report that in essence defined metropolitanism as a “reorganization of the physical and social urban and rural environments which changed people's need for transformation.”

4. Funderburg (1995:72, 74–75) has suggested that in the nineteenth century street vendors tended to be individuals who were then considered socially marginal or otherwise unemployable, including ugly women, the handicapped, the elderly, and midgets. As mobile vending changed and became a more profitable endeavor with twentieth century automobility, the image of the mobile vendor improved substantially, especially with the success of companies like Good Humor.
5. Oral history and written records show that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ice cream vending—usually from push or goat-drawn carts—had been accompanied by shouting, bell ringing, harmonica playing and even barrel organ music. Between this earlier period and point-of-sale automotive vending, there was a moment where the wholesale delivery of ice cream took place from horse-drawn carts and early trucks. Although a related practice, because this delivery was wholesale and usually did not involve sound, it lies outside this chapter’s purview.
6. Similar accounts came from the Caribbean as well. Nicholas Slonimsky, for example, remarked that “the symphony of pushcart tenors is particularly rich and varied. The **florituras** that a Havana knife-sharpener performed on his mouth harmonica reminded me of the neo-Grecian modes of Debussy’s **Flûte de Pan** from **Chansons de Bilitis**” (1945:40). In Cuba, the songs of street vendors are called *pregón* and are the basis of popular song. Similarly, Granville Campbell, a classically trained Jamaican singer, arranged a **Jamaica Potpourri** entitled **Piano Fantasia on 5 (Some) Kingston Street Cries** in the 1930s; it was based on melodies collected by Jamaican musicologist Astley Clerk.
7. Quoted in Funderburg (2002:40), quoting from an October 1877 article entitled “Soda Water Apparatus,” in **Carbonated Drinks**: 10; the second again comes from Funderburg (1995:95), quoting from June 15, 1892 article entitled “Soda Water in Chicago,” in **Pharmaceutical Era** 7:409–14.
8. Mark Smith (2001:261–64) has done an excellent job articulating the relationship between aurality and visuality to show the tendency for historical accounts to favor the latter over the former. His work, along with that of Jonathan Sterne (2003:14–16), emphasizes the importance of aurality as a counterpoint to visuality in histories of the senses.
9. The most explicit and likely best-known authority on timbral association was Berlioz, who codified many in his **Treatise on Instrumentation**. He noted, for example, that the glockenspiel’s sound is “soft, mysterious, and of extreme delicacy” while that of the high bells is “more serene in character; it has something rustic and naïve about it” ([1855]1991:338, 385, respectively).

Although Berlioz’s commentary was likely the synthesis of a variety of creative sources and opinions of his day, there may also be a physical reason that ties this kind of timbre to a particular psychology. In **The Audible Past**, Jonathan Sterne cites Helmholtz, who suggested that “sounds [can] best be distinguished from one another by their upper partials, that is through their higher frequencies” (Sterne 2003:64–65). Whether a culturally determined association between these frequencies and childhood was ever assumed is not known, but the physical phenomenon he describes seems open to this sort of analysis and deserves further inquiry.

10. My use of pastiche here follows Frederic Jameson’s use as “the imitation of a peculiar or unique style— a neutral practice of— mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something **normal** compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor” (1983:114).

11. It is unclear when this happened. Old time Los Angeles-based driver John Ralston told me he thought it was circa 1929. Chime box manufacturer Bob Nichols believes it was probably the early to mid-1930s.
12. Yaras (2005) suggests that West Coast Organ was probably owned by Louis Bacigalupi, an organ builder specializing in barrel organs, who was also a professional wrestler, actor, and amateur herpetologist. For more on the use of barrel organs in nineteenth and early twentieth century America, see Zucchi (1992).

“Stodola Pumpa” was proprietary to Good Humor of California until 1962, when the company’s assets were brought under new ownership and the music changed to “Danny’s Dream,” written by the company’s new owner, Dan Tropp. However, “Stodola Pumpa” had already become an iconic part of southern Californian culture. For example, it was the basis for “Come and Get It,” a 1963 single recorded by a Beach Boys side project called the “Tri-Five”; later that year, it was used again for “The Rocking Surfer,” an instrumental included on the Beach Boys’ *Surfer Girl* album.
13. The speakers were likely located under the hood to protect them from the elements. Anecdotal photographic evidence suggests that externally mounted loudspeakers did not emerge until the 1960s/1970s.
14. During the War, ice cream’s availability was limited by the scarcity of ingredients and by truck tire rationing. Afterward, however, there was a drastic increase in street vending and sales. 1946 was an especially good year for ice cream. In 1948, sales reached a plateau that remained more or less constant for at least three decades.
15. John Ralston, telephone interview with author, 1999.
16. Kevin Johnson, who runs a website about the AD-30, has identified nearly 1,700 on-disc titles made for this music box model since its introduction in the 1920s. For this list, as well as detailed information about the different styles of AD-30, see <http://www.thorensad30.com/>.
17. Bob Nichols, telephone interview with author, 1999.
18. For more about the Nichols Electronics company, see <http://www.nicholselectronicsco.com/>.
19. For example, Eddie Murphy sings the melody in his 1983 stand-up comedy special *Delirious*; thrash metal band Nuclear Assault plays it on their 1986 album *Game Over*; it is the melodic basis for the acoustic duo Drink Me’s 1995 recording “Song of the Ice Cream Truck”; it is the basis for Jed Distler’s String Quartet #1, the “Mister Softee Variations, which premiered in 1999; it is played from the ice cream truck Bernie Mac’s character is operating at the end his 2004 film *Mister 3000*; and, a toy piano-electro version appears on Twink’s 2007 CD *Ice Cream Trucking*. When I talked about ice cream truck music with others, it is mentioned far more often than any other tune.
20. Les Waas, telephone interview with author, May 1, 2009.
21. Waas composed over 900 jingles and is not sure when this happened, although it occurred long before he found out about it. It seems to have been sometime in the 1960s or early 1970s (Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia). According to Bob Nichols of Nichols Electronics, which began manufacturing Mister Softee boxes in 1975, they were first manufactured by Schulmerich Electronics.
22. 8-bit sound is a synthesized digital technology that produces music via simple waveforms using a very low sample rate. It has a peculiar (and characteristic) lo-fi electronic sound. This format rose to prominence in the period 1970–1990 and found many commercial applications, especially the video game industry, where music was simple and very often

repetitive (as on ice cream trucks). This technology was capable of recreating frequencies that roughly mimicked the chimey sounds traditionally used by ice cream vendors on their trucks.

23. Project website can be found at: <http://icecream.8bitpeoples.com> (accessed April 20, 2009).
24. Jeffrey Lopez and Lauren Rosati, members of the Brooklyn-based artist collective suite405, initiated a similar project in 2007 called “Ice Cream Headache” (Smith, “We All Scream for New Ice Cream Song”). It invited sound artists to remix and reinterpret ice cream truck music to come up with a better alternative. The winner would have its music played from a rented ice cream truck over Memorial Day Weekend. Although they received more than 40 submissions, the organizers were not able to secure an ice cream truck and ultimately cancelled the event.
25. Michael Hearst, interview with author, February 12, 2009.
26. For example, Hearst appeared on the Today Show, on National Public Radio’s “Fresh Air” program, and was interviewed for several influential pop culture blogs, including **Boing**, **Gothamist**, and **Wired**.
27. For more on this project, see the MySpace page for “Songs for Ice Cream Trucks” at <http://www.myspace.com/songsforicecreamtrucks>; see also Heart’s site at <http://www.songsforicecreamtrucks.com/>. Quote available at: <http://www.bar-none.com/michael-hearst.html> (accessed March 1, 2012).
28. Originally from Long Beach, California, Matt Allen drives around the country handing out free ice cream as **The Ice Cream Man**. Allen became an ice cream vendor in 2004 in Ashland, Oregon. Toward the end of the summer, he began to give his inventory away at pre-planned ice cream socials. Well-attended and widely publicized, these events inspired Allen to tour the country in his 1969 Chevy step-van, giving away free ice creams; his goal is to give away half a million. He funds this enterprise through advertising, sponsorship, promotional tie-ins, and merchandising. Hearst says the track of his that Allen plays most often is “Where do ice cream trucks go in the winter?”
29. A case can be made here for “aleatoric hearing,” as opposed to conventional musical aleatory which involves compositional procedure (which this music typically does not). Here, chime music’s propagation and how a listener hears it are contingent on many chance variables, including but not limited to the physical details of a vendor-in-motion’s environment, where the vendor and the subject are positioned in relation to one another, and the subject’s general state of mind at the moment of recognition.

To better illustrate this point, a comparison can be made with John Cage’s “empty” piece, **4’ 33”**. Using silence, Cage controverted the idea of the work of art by forcing the ear of the listener to hear music in the world of natural sound, often prompting the question “is it music?” (Campbell 1992). While ice cream truck music’s prosaic commerciality lays aside any notion of it being a work of art, it similarly forces one to hear music in the world of natural sound in a literal sense albeit prompting the question “is it noise?” The qualitative difference between these two examples is that the former is bracketed by the pretense of a concert space while the latter is not.

If one accepts the notion that Cage’s critical success lay in his failure to undermine the musical work-concept by maintaining institutional control in the performance of **4’ 33”** (see Goehr 2005:264; cf. Campbell 1992), one might argue that chime music presents a far more successful challenge to the notion of art because its commercial success is so heavily dependent on circumstance and chance. The polarizing and often contradictory attitudes

that result become compelling evidence to suggest that aleatory is a basic strategy behind ice cream truck music's success.

30. Although Schafer's point is well taken, mechanical boxes still greatly outnumbered boxes capable of playing "synthesized" tunes at the time this quote was published. The kinds of "inaccuracies" Schafer refers to are likely due to old or poorly maintained music boxes. As mechanical boxes get older, cylinder teeth and comb tynes break, thus eliminating notes and producing melodic gaps in the music. Further, as the metal of the comb tynes becomes fatigued, the pitch of certain notes will change slightly, leading to the effect Schafer describes.
31. This point generally speaks to silencing discourse about consumption, but it has other (sometimes amusing) implications as well. In 2010, for example, ice cream truck music was used to silence and disperse a group of rioting teenagers in Belfast, Northern Ireland (Kelly 2010; Henry 2010). Although chime music was an effective deterrent, however, the officer who used it came under scrutiny because its use was considered humorous and therefore not "appropriate" in this situation.
32. In New York City's **Noise Code Guide**, the section "Food Vending Vehicles and their Jingles" reads as follows:

"Ice cream is a refreshing summer treat and ice cream trucks traveling on city streets are important summer traditions, but their repetitious jingles create a community nuisance and disrupt the lives of nearby residents.

"To alleviate this problem, the new noise code prohibits the playing of jingles while any type of food vending vehicle is stationary. Jingles may only be played when vehicles are in motion, traveling through neighborhoods."

Enforcement

"Because ice cream trucks travel from neighborhood to neighborhood, enforcement can be difficult. To decrease the need for enforcement, DEP works closely with the Department of Consumer Affairs, the City licensing agency for the vendors, to produce informational materials reminding drivers of their responsibilities under the new noise code." (New York City Department of Environmental Protection 2007:7)
33. In one notable instance, support for ice cream truck music focused not on an emotional link with children, but with veterans: "Don't forget that the drivers of the ice cream vehicles were heroes on the beach heads. God bless them one and all" (**Los Angeles Times** 1948b). Such examples, however, are unusual.
34. In this case, the compromise was not without controversy. Because the Councilman acted **independent** of the full City Council—and perhaps in the full interest of business owners—the provisions were not adopted.

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