

>> Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

>> Steve: Welcome to another in our series of music and the brain podcasts. I'm Steve Mencher, and I'm joined by Jacqueline Helfgott who's professor and Chair of the Criminal Justice Department at Seattle University, and Norman Middleton, a concert producer here at the Library of Congress, and I love the, at least the subtitle of the talk that you two are about to give or the presentation, "Halt or I'll Play Vivaldi." Now who came up with that? That was you, Norman. [Laughter]

>> Norman: Well, actually I... it was the title of a newspaper article about music and crime, and I thought it was so catchy, and I am a big Vivaldi fan, and so I thought I would just go ahead and use it for Jackie and my talk this evening.

>> Steve: Fabulous. So, Jackie, can I call you Jackie, or is that what people call you?

>> Jacqueline: Yes.

>> Steve: Good. I will then. Music and criminal behavior and crime prevention are what you're going to be talking about and you start out at least in the notes I read talking a little bit about routine activity theory, which sounded fascinating to me. What would that be?

>> Jacqueline: Routine activity theory is a dominant theory in criminology associated with Marcus Felson, and it basically states that in order to combat crime we need to decrease temptations and increase controls.

>> Steve: Okay, so decrease temptations. Say, I mean, it helped me to read a little bit about this because I start to understand myself a little better. If there is a \$10 bill lying on the table and I know it belongs to someone, I'm probably not going to take it, but there may be some circumstance where I need to borrow the money to go buy lunch, or something. I may have committed a crime, but the crime is not necessarily about the fact that I'm a bad person. It's as much about the fact that the \$10 bill is lying there on the table. Is that what you're saying?

>> Jacqueline: Right, and what the theory basically says is that anybody has the potential to commit crime. I mean, crime is a routine, everyday phenomenon, and, you know, people operate on the principle of limited rationality that there's aspects of the environment that you can change to alter people's decision making process and also known as the potato chip principle, that if you put a bag of potato chips in front of someone, then they're probably going to eat the whole bag of potato chips, but so people have to have some sort of controls and restraints to direct their behavior in any given environment. So that's the basic principle upon which routine activity theory operates.

>> Steve: Okay, so I think I'm sort of understanding. In other words, one's opportunity that you might have if you didn't want someone to eat the whole bag was to open the bag, let them take 2 or 3 and then take the bag away.

>> Jacqueline: Right, so, yeah, if you want to limit your potato chip eating, yeah. Put, you know, 5 chips in a Ziploc bag and put the rest in your cupboard and...

>> Steve: Good. We're going to get back to this theory and the ideas behind it, but I want to make sure that we start at the very beginning here bringing music in. Where's music going to come into this crime theory?

>> Jacqueline: Well, routine activity theory is about situational and environmental crime prevention, and all of that is incorporated in what's known as crime prevention through environmental design, otherwise called CPTED.

>> Steve: Crime prevention through environmental design, or you guys call it CPTED.

>> Jacqueline: CPTED, and many law enforcement agencies and public transit and schools employ CPTED strategies in order to reduce the likelihood of different types of criminal behavior. Where music comes in is that there's a whole range of techniques that can be used, and most law enforcement agencies have a holistic approach to CPTED where they'll employ a lot of different types of strategies. So anything from closing alleyways to reduce travel routes of individuals and to increase lighting, to trimming bushes, to elevating steps in order to create impression of territorial markers, and where music comes in is that it's been used as a territorial marker to move crime away from a particular location. So it would be one strategy like a spoke on the wheel. In fact I've had law enforcement officers tell me that music and other techniques are more like a spoke in a wheel of a more holistic approach to CPTED. So...

>> Steve: Okay, crime prevention through environmental design.

>> Jacqueline: Right.

>> Steve: All right, now, I know, Norman, you've been doing some research on this as well, and you had some case studies, especially you were trying to talk to some of the folks I know in West Palm Beach about how they were using music down there. Can you tell us a little bit about that case study?

>> Norman: Yes, the West Palm Beach situation was actually the first instance that I heard about where law enforcement was using music to deter crime, and I had written... a few years ago I read an article about this situation in West Palm Beach where they had used this technique, and so I called them. I actually called the police force down there and spoke to a detective who told me that they had used this and it worked, and then I found a subsequent article where another detective outlined the thing more specifically. She said that there was a bar, saloon, down there that was in the middle of this environment that was really drug dealer infested, and so they, first they closed the bar down, and then they went ahead and installed stereo speakers on the roof of this

abandoned bar, and they started piping in, I think it was Beethoven's string quartets into the speakers, and they started blasting these string quartets into the neighborhood late at night. After awhile they noticed that the drug dealers that were in this neighborhood had scattered. By 10 pm there was nobody there anymore. When the police asked the people in the neighborhood about this, they said that we just don't like that kind of music, and so it was really repugnant to them and so it worked.

>> Steve: Okay, now Jacqueline, you hinted at this before and we will talk about why using music in this way might sometimes be a little controversial. One of the obvious things that you hinted at was the fact that this doesn't solve crime. This doesn't change the criminals. It simply may push the criminal activity from point A to point B. Is this a concern about people using music in this sort of way?

>> Jacqueline: Well, I mean, people have written about the ethics of using music. The issue is about using the whole notion of if you increase the aesthetics of a particular environment, then you'll change the composition of that environment, and certain people will be deterred, and so in terms of, you know, there's a class issue and a ethics issue in terms of, you know, some people believe that perhaps it's a misuse of music, and associating particular types of music with particular types of groups and having people from high culture move into an area, and say, okay, classical music is associated with high culture and so if we play classical music, it's going to run the people who belong to low culture down the street. There are a lot of ethical and class based, you know, issues to think about and questions to ask about the use of music in that way.

>> Steve: Sure because in fact a lot of the intellectual debate in the last 10 or 20 or 30 years has been erasing these artificial boundaries. Some people go to the opera and they go to like rock music and they like punk music and there is no high culture and low culture anymore. In musicology for instance, we've decided that we're looking at rhythm. We're looking at melody. We're not looking at good music and bad music or high culture and low culture.

>> Jacqueline: Right, and I do want to say something about that because I talked to a colleague recently. I was just actually at a criminology conference talking to a colleague about this who was a warden of a prison who said that they played classical music in the prison and the prisoners loved it, and so it really isn't a matter of, you know, people who commit crimes don't like classical music, and, I mean, it's more reflexive relationship between the types of music and culture that criminalize and then the types of music that become associated with certain types of subcultural groups who engage in criminal behavior, and so what I mean by that is that certain types of music have been criminalized. So rap music, punk music, heavy metal music, and when I say criminalize I mean that they've become associated in pop culture and contemporary culture with certain types of groups who are more inclined to engage in... who tend to engage in antisocial behavior. So when music is criminalized, it feeds back into the subcultures and then youth, subcultured youth, you know, decide, okay, well if the cops don't like this kind of music then we're going to like this kind of music. So it's not necessarily a matter of,

you know, teenagers, gang members, people in prison don't like classical music or it doesn't have the same physiological response, you know, in them as it does on other types of people, but it's, you know, part of it is the type of music that has become criminalized in culture and then law enforcement agencies, you know, the crime prevention part of that comes from the fact that law enforcement agencies tap into the types of pop culture artifacts that people who engage in that type of behavior might be associated with, if that makes...

>> Steve: I think that sort of makes sense. Norman, maybe we can work on that a little bit because there were a lot of ideas all jumbled up together in that, and it was not bad. It was good, but let's go back a little bit. We've... because we've talked before, last time we talked, about the fact that there is something in the society where certain intervals or certain kind of music somehow got conflated with violence and that... in thinking about music, we don't want to necessarily think that an interval is bad or playing music loud is bad or people listening to a certain kind of music has a connotation, and yet we're dealing with those kind of connotations on the other hand where we're not saying, none of the three of us would say that classical music makes a good atmosphere necessarily, so therefore that's why people play it to deter crime, but that might be the first... the hit that people get from this. We'll play Vivaldi on the street corner. We'll chase away the undesirables because the kind of atmosphere that comes from Vivaldi is a good crime free atmosphere. Help me not make that case.

>> Jacqueline: No actually I think it's more of an issue because I don't... although I know that there is research on the physiological effects of music, that is not what's at play or that's not the dominant thing that's at play when we're talking about using music to repel crime. What's at play is this association between certain types of music and subcultural style and identity of certain types of groups and so what is repelling people is that they don't... it's not cool to hang out and listen to Vivaldi at, you know, street corners. You know, you're a teenager, you're a gang member, you know, you're whatever, you... it's not cool to hang out, and the reason is because what I was trying to explain before is the cultural association with certain types of music with certain types of subcultural groups, and there's a great book, it's actually a branch of criminology called "Cultural Criminology," and Jeff Ferrell's a criminologist associated with that, and he talks about how you cannot make sense of crime or crime prevention or criminal behavior, criminal justice without paying attention to pop culture, and there's a relationship between pop culture and crime and our responses to crime and society, and so that's what's at play when we're talking about using music as a crime deterrent, not that Bach, Vivaldi, Beethoven is going to soothe the savage beast. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the association between style, aesthetic, and subcultural identity and certain types of music.

>> Steve: Excellent. I think I'm starting to get that. Norman, tell me if I'm getting it right. So it's not, again, as you just said, it's not that those kinds of music create this sort of magical atmosphere that make everybody peaceful, but in fact, if they're playing Barry Manilow, and Barry Manilow is the least cool kind of music on the planet, then people

who might be into violence or crime or whatever, they're not going to want to hang out in this atmosphere with the Barry Manilow playing. They're just not going to want to be there.

>> Norman: Yes, I was thinking about this chicken and egg thing just to tag onto what Jackie was saying. The question is whether people are reacting to the music no matter what it sounds like or are they reacting negatively because [inaudible].

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>> Norman: So they don't only use classical music in these situations. They also use what we call easy listening-Mantovani, Lawrence Welk, Barry Manilow, Frank Sinatra. Anything that's not rock and roll or not rap or, as Jackie was saying, anything not associated with pop culture will be used in this manner.

>> Steve: Okay, so tell me, let's take it another step, and then let's see if this works or not. So the classical music might change the aesthetics of this corner that you're trying to change the aesthetics and chase people away, but if you played classical music at a garbage dump, that wouldn't necessarily change the aesthetics of the garbage dump. It's not that the music itself changes something or would it?

>> Jacqueline: Gee, classical music at a garbage dump might change the aesthetic. [Laughter] Like I said, it's part of a more holistic approach. I was involved in a... I've done public art with prisoners for many years in the prisons and part of what the prisoners did was paint bus stops, geometric bus stops. We do that in Seattle in order to reduce the likelihood of graffiti, and so, you know, doing murals on bus stops and increased lighting and changing colors and music together can change the aesthetic of the environment. So it's a combination, but it's also, you know, that there's another principle in routine activity theory is that you place safe activities in unsafe locations and you change the composition of the environment, and so it's not just about changing structures or buildings or paint or lighting. It's also about changing the activities and the people in that environment, and so there was another, you know, in Tacoma Sound Transit, they also, in Washington, they also used the classical music, and, you know, another thing that they did and there's a neighborhood in Tacoma that's associated with a lot of gang activities and senior citizens, and this was a grassroots activity that the residents came up with, but senior citizens decided to play pinochle on the street corner, and so that was another thing that was done. So it's not just changing the aesthetics, but also just changing the activities and the types of people in the environment.

>> Steve: Right, I was trying to think of examples of this because this seemed like sort of a tongue twister making unsafe activities in safe locations and safe activities in unsafe locations. So one of the things I thought about immediately as you just described was sort of a mural project, say, on a high crime block. So that's a sort of a safe activity they're doing, art, they're being creative. They're doing a cultural thing, and all of a sudden, the unsafe area starts to become safe, and

then maybe you can think of better examples than I did of an unsafe activity in a safe location. I was thinking of a skate park where that might be if you're skating down the steps of a metro or something, you know, that would be pretty unsafe in an unsafe location, but if you that unsafe activity in a safe location where they've built a skating park, then that's again a good thing for everybody.

>> Jacqueline: Well, I mean, I guess another example, and I think this actually the skating parks have been very good for communities, but there's always controversy about when strip clubs move into more residential areas and so bringing unsafe... Does that make sense?

>> Steve: I think so. Norman, did you sort of get what she was trying to say there, a validation of the activity? I mean if everything is bad in this neighborhood, there's a strip club and there's crime and there's drugs and people are ripping each other off, then everything about it is bad, but if you have a fairly safe neighborhood and you decide there's going to be strip clubs anyway, let's put that strip club in that neighborhood so we can see the people coming and going, the people who own their homes can see these other people coming and going in the neighborhood. They're not going to get in trouble. They're not going to feel like they can do the other unsafe things. They're simply going to the strip club, which we've decided we can't outlaw that. Am I getting that right?

>> Jacqueline: Right, I mean you have a strip club in a residential community with public schools and children walking down the street, it's not going... there's not going to be the same activity around that area as there would be in other areas that have a whole, you know, range of those types of behaviors and activities.

>> Steve: Sure, that makes sense to me. So let's end up talking a little bit more about some of these ethical dilemmas. When we talked about music and using it as a deterrent for crime, let's say, we also, I know, Norman, you were going to talk a little bit in your talk, and I don't know if it's still going to be in there, but talking about music as punishment in some way, like, you know, blasting General Noriega when they went down to Panama with bad rock and roll music to try to make them break or blasting the people in Guantanamo Bay with music day and night in a way to annoy them and to make them unhappy and uncomfortable. This seems like it's related in some ways to what you're saying, and yet it seems like a very morally suspect use of music as a... to create atmosphere.

>> Jacqueline: Yeah, and the idea of music as torture or music to repel people, I mean, there are negative uses of music and this is really a open matter of debate whether or not music, you know, it's a negative thing to be using it, but that whole ethical issue is simply the association of certain types of music with certain types of people, and it's been associated with, you know, the wealthier people moving into communities, and do they have a right to just blast their music and run, you know, other people out? We've got all kinds of communities, you know, where people have lived there their entire lives who may or may not be engaging in antisocial and criminal behavior, homeless, you know, drug

addict, people like on community supervision, offenders coming out of prison and transient populations but who live on the streets and consider those areas their home, and then you have people coming in and condos being built. Then they decide they're going to increase the aesthetic of this environment and play the classic music, and so there are ethical issues associated with doing that, and it all hinges on that association of music and high culture and aesthetics.

>> Norman: But when Stevie Wonder was here a few weeks ago, he mentioned when he was growing up in the inner city that there was one woman in the neighborhood who would play, every Saturday during the Met opera broadcast, she would play the Met operas, and she would blast these operas outside the window into the neighborhood, and people did complain. Stevie Wonder was teasing us about the fact that, you know, he was running around with his playmates and people in the neighborhood, and this woman was playing all this opera, and then people were going [singing], and they were going, "Will you shut that stuff off," and she had no intention of gentrifying the neighborhood. She just liked it, and for whatever reason she decided to blast it out the window, but people in that neighborhood did not like this music. Now was it because the music was ugly or was it because they didn't know the music, that genre? But whatever it was, they found it repugnant and so they asked her not to do that. I have not personally heard of people in up and coming neighborhoods, you know, sort of doing what the police do in drug neighborhoods, blasting classical music, you know, to get rid of the people who used to live there or the people who were there before. It's an interesting idea, but I don't think it would work.

>> Jacqueline: But the idea, the whole idea behind the use of classical music to move people to a different corner is this territoriality issue, you know, to mark the territories, and that's, you know, part of the whole, you know, situational crime prevention, and so people who are arguing that there's an ethical issue are suggesting that, you know, it's taking that assumption that music is going to increase the aesthetic of an environment and therefore draw territorial boundaries so only law-abiding citizens can go, you know, within those boundaries, that that's taking us away from a more important larger discussion that I was talking about before, the whole criminalization of pop culture and the whole association of certain aesthetic and style and subcultural identity with certain types of music. So the bottom line is that it's taking us away from the larger discussion of how does one group have a right to move another group out of a particular area, and that's a larger discussion than just focusing on, you know, how music can deter crime.

>> Steve: Fabulous. Let's leave it there. This was just a really great discussion, I think. I enjoyed it. I learned a lot, and I'm sure the people who come to your talk later tonight at the Library of Congress will enjoy it, too. I've been talking to Jacqueline Helfgott who's a professor and Chair of the Criminal Justice Department at Seattle University, and Norman Middleton, concert producer here at the Library of Congress. This has been one in our series of music and the brain podcasts. I'm Steve Mencher, and thanks for joining us.

>> Norman: Thank you.

>> Jacqueline: Thank you.

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