



What Is Good and Bad Children's Music? Exploring Quality and Value in Music for Children

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Abstract: This article outlines and discusses various aspects of quality and value in children's music. Quality is defined as something performative—that is, characteristics within the aesthetic object that gain significance and value through interaction with listening subjects. The article argues that the judgment of quality in music is always relative, depending on the listener and the criteria in play, and when it comes to children's music, a variety of participating subjects and possible criteria could be involved. This pluralistic, relativistic concept of quality allows the author to theoretically examine quality perceptions of children's music by employing different sets of criteria significant to the aesthetic object and its various functions and, philosophically, through the viewpoints of different agents in the field of children's music. Through this analytical exercise, the article contributes to the categorization and understanding of various logics underpinning normative judgments of children's music.

Keywords: Children's music, quality assessment, value judgement, evaluation criteria, music education

Introduction

What is good and bad music? This is a pivotal question in music education and among music lovers, and it constitutes the very cornerstone of the field of musical criticism. The question may well be as old as music itself and continues to function as a facilitator for academic and personal discussion and dispute (e.g., Frith, 1996, 2004). The question “What is good and bad children's music?” narrows the scope. Children's music, or music produced and marketed to a child audience (Ruud, 1983), is seldom the subject of criticism in musical press or media, and the topic is strongly underrepresented in the literature of music education and musicology. The aim of this article is to contribute to the understanding of children's music as a subject for qualitative assessment through examining various significant criteria

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and highlighting the many viewpoints from which an answer could be provided to the question "What is good and bad children's music?" This could further contribute new perspectives to music quality, in general, and, more specifically, stimulate debate in the field of children's musical culture among significant agents such as teachers, parents, media, children's music composers and music education researchers.

The first section of the article discusses various aspects of quality and the assessment of quality in music, providing arguments for understanding quality as something performative. In this context, "performative" refers to notions of quality being constructed in the active interplay between music as an aesthetic object and the listener's perception. The listener's quality appraisal is, again, enrolled in discourses of language and power. This interwoven approach to aesthetic objects and participating subjects is chosen as the theoretical point of departure because it allows the author to explore quality and value in children's music from different angles and perspectives. The approach is supported by social constructivism and is in line with phenomenological methodology (Nielsen, 2002). The article's theoretical foundation is further based on a pluralistic, relative view of quality, a view upholding that "quality can only be discussed within (...) a definite genre or a definite group of recipients" (Nielsen, 2002, p. 4). The question of good and bad children's music, then, seems to depend on two underlying questions: "Good or bad according to which criteria?" and "Good or bad according to which recipients?" These questions structure the article's second and third sections. In the second section, I examine various applicable criteria for assessing quality in children's music, and in the third, I examine quality by hypothetically contemplating the viewpoints of central agents and recipients within the field of children's music. Throughout the article, a number of normative judgments on children's music are thus presented. Rather than accepting these as universalistic, valid statements, the aim is to better understand the premises for these judgments and the contexts in which they appear.

Some Preliminary Notions of Quality and Value

What do quality and value mean when used in reference to children's music? First, quality refers, etymologically, to an attribute of some phenomenon or object. In placing the term "quality" after a noun—e.g., paper quality, food quality, time quality, or children's music quality—we use the concept in a narrow, descriptive sense (Nielsen, 2002). In this manner, quality relates to the objective nature of an object or phenomenon, to some extent, irrespective of our perception. Different people can objectively agree on the length of a piece of music, its form, its instrumentation, and its modus to name some attributes of the issue discussed—in our case, children's music. In this sense of the term, quality statements are hardly disputed (if the engaging audience has adequate knowledge and experience to make such statements). But in assessing the value of such music—in *this* form, in *this* instrumentation, and in *this* modus—there is a shift in the conception of quality from a descriptive to a normative form, which is what happens when we place the term "quality" in front of the noun (e.g., quality paper, quality food, quality time, or quality children's music). In this extended, normative use of the term, the concept of quality relates to value assignments based on established criteria or subjective appraisal of the phenomenon or object.

Quality as Discourse

According to Nielsen (2002), the concept of quality in a narrow, descriptive sense and the concept of quality in an extended, normative sense are interlinked. Nielsen argued that when searching for

evaluative criteria for, for example, children's music, we must seek to identify essential attributes related to the actual piece of music at hand. To assess quality in this matter means "finding one's way into, and proceeding from, the essential properties linked with a phenomenon, a fact" (Nielsen, 2002, p. 16). To treat music as a fact, or to search the musical object for its essential attributes, does not mean that the music itself has inherent value waiting to be discovered. Although philosophically disputed (e.g., Ruud, 1996), it is commonly accepted that people infuse so-called intrinsic value into musical objects because they have the vocabulary to do so. These values are socially, culturally, and historically constituted. Hence, music is attributed with value as part of an evaluation process, and quality judgments are therefore a matter of discourse (see Frith, 2004).

Quality as Effect

Ascribing descriptive, factual qualities to the appraised musical object is only a small part of the evaluation process. According to Odd Are Berkaak (2016), the term "quality" is linked to a variety of parameters. The term is often used to refer to the object's effect (i.e., the object's reception) in addition to its physical nature and content (i.e., quality in a narrow, descriptive sense). An aesthetic object such as children's music can be awarded quality for its effect regardless of the quality of its material condition, Berkaak asserted (p. 71). Popularity is one of these effects. If a children's song is downloaded many times from a streaming service, the song, its composer, and/or the performing artist is usually awarded acknowledgment. In Berkaak's terminology, this is a parameter linked to the term "quality." But quality in this sense is not necessarily referring to other quality aspects of the musical object. Acknowledgment does not necessarily mean that the music as an aesthetic object is valued as good quality. If we consider the reception of value in popular music, I would, rather, argue the contrary: popularity has historically been linked to commercialism and commercialism to mass production and capitalism, which have been associated with unauthentic and unoriginal objects, or phenomena of lower aesthetic value (Negus, 1996; Frith, 2004). In the case of quality and value in children's music, a high/low distinction between the good nature of quality culture, on the one hand, and commercial media culture, on the other, seems to be present (Dyndahl & Vestad, 2017). A high/low distinction also seems to occur between so-called pedagogical music, facilitated for a specific targeted group with aims ranging far beyond the intrinsic value of music itself, and autonomous, nonpedagogical, art-based music (Haugsevje, Heian, & Hylland, 2015).

Quality as Affect

Another effect Berkaak (2016) described is the emotional experience the object or phenomenon can stir in the individual respondent. When we talk about the qualities of music, this is usually what we refer to. Music critics can describe the various musical qualities of a recorded piece of music, but if the piece in its overall manifestation does not move the respondent, he/she could say it lacks quality. What is it about music that moves us and, thus, can be said to encompass quality? According to Berkaak, quality should be understood as something performative; quality is something material, something concrete, but it is also something that must be experienced and understood. Berkaak attributed the aesthetic object with agency, the potential to evoke strong emotional experiences and enrich listeners if they recognize their own agency in the object. Similarly, Nielsen (2002) argued that there is a correspondence between the structural and emotional layers of meaning in the musical object and the layers of consciousness of the

subject experiencing it—something in the musical object resonates with something similar in the listener (p. 15). In this sense, experience and understanding become key elements in quality appraisal.

Music's perceived effect on the listener has had, and still has, a profound impact on how the Western world has perceived music education and learning. When the aim of music education in school is musical engagement for aesthetic and existential experience (e.g. LK06 [the current Norwegian curriculum for primary and secondary education]), it is understood that cognitive knowledge about musical structure and content will enhance this experience. Berkaak also highlighted interpretive skills for valuing the factual layers of any aesthetic object, reminding us that a piece of music can contain more layers of meaning than the "general audience of amateurs can reveal" (2016, p. 72, [my translation]). Interpretive skills are also genre-specific, according to Berkaak. Thus, enjoying a piece of classical music requires different interpretive skills than enjoying a pop song.

Berkaak's cited interpretive skills correspond with Elliot Eisner's (1998) conception of connoisseurship. Connoisseurship is, in Eisner's estimation, "the art of appreciation," and a connoisseur is a person who has such thorough knowledge and expertise in his/her field that he/she is able to "make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities" (p. 63). According to Frith (2011), this understanding displays a Cartesian dualism, valuing intellectual engagement over emotional reactions, spiritual endeavor over bodily response, and "hard" listening over "easy" listening. What is valued is our understanding, not our feelings—at least, a valued feeling is a feeling constituted by knowledge. This understanding has also served as a basic condition for what children's music is, or ought to be. Following a Piagetian view of cognitive development, complex music—for example, advanced melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structures—has not been deemed appropriate for the developing child due to children's underdeveloped reception and/or cognitive structures (Ruud, 1983). This raises an interesting paradox in the assessment of quality and value in children's music. On the one hand, simple, understandable, and predictable music (e.g., music with a triadic, major tonality in a cyclic form) is acknowledged as good children's music with regard to developmental criteria. On the other hand, it would be considered lower quality if evaluated using conventional art music criteria. What is at stake here, involving the notion of interpretive skills or connoisseurship, is that a quality appraisal is not incidental—it also presupposes action (Berkaak, 2016, p. 72).

Quality and Action

Frith (1996) argued that all cultural activity involves "the constant activity of judging and differentiating" (p. 251). According to Frith, the actions of judging and differentiating are in many ways the very essence of being engaged with music, reminding us that "part of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about it; part of its meaning is this talk, talk which is run through with value judgments" (p. 4). As music fans, we strive to convince other people, through conversation, that the quality of music is found *inside* the music we like—in its form, its structure, its performance, and its production. In Frith's understanding, discourse of quality is thus a key concept in the appreciation of music. But in trying to grasp what quality in music means for children, notions of quality discourse and argument are likely not an adequate endeavor. Although children may well be engaged in talk about good and bad children's music, there are other, nonlinguistic, actions for quality appraisal that could be considered more prominent. Swanwick (1999) recognized the quality assessment of music in everyday life as a "filtering process" (p. 71). In our engagement with music, we make continuous choices based on our tastes. When we are in control, we filter out unwanted sounds; we turn off the radio when it plays music we dislike, or we change the channel. We can also filter in desired sound; we turn up the volume on the radio when

our favourite song comes on, we stand in line for concert tickets to our favorite artist, and we download music we want to own. These are all actions of quality and active expressions of cultural engagement, Swanwick asserted. In understanding action as a parameter central to the notion of quality (Berkaak, 2016), a sufficient approach to understanding quality in children's music would be, therefore, to observe children's filtering process, the way music is used by children, and which forms for interplay music offers them (Campbell, 2010; Vestad, 2013).

Quality and Power

Berkaak (2016) also described quality as a relational phenomenon (i.e., something is judged as garbage because something else is deemed brilliant). Good quality in this sense refers to the "those" or the "what's" on top of a value hierarchy. Art objects or agents of art that sit atop this hierarchy could be understood as reference marks for quality appraisals. When it comes to children's culture in general, Thorbjørn Egner, Anne-Cath. Vestly, Inger Hagerup, and Alf Prøysen are all Norwegian examples of significant reference marks in this manner. Equivalently, Lillebjørn Nilsen, Maj Britt Andersen, Knutsen og Ludvigsen, and Odd Nordstoga could all be appointed the same status when it comes to children's music. In later years, we have also seen a resurgence of so-called credible musicians from the independent music scene (e.g., Onkel Tuka, Rasmus og Verdens Beste Band [Rasmus and the World's Best Band], Katzenjammer, Christine Sandtorv, and Aslak og Igor) entering the children's music market.

In our first attempt to assess quality in aesthetic objects, we compare the object and/or artist, implicitly or explicitly, to other works and artists in the same genre. According to Nielsen (2002), these others constitute an "outside world" of reference for quality appraisal (p. 9). In this relational sense, where quality is assessed by comparing one piece of music, a performance, or an artist to another, quality also relates to power. Norms and criteria for quality appraisals are, in a Bourdieuan sense, at play in the field of art, where "leading standards setters may obtain approval for their quality assessments based on prestige and/ or rhetorical skills" (Berkaak, 2016, p. 73, [my translation]). Indeed, highly acknowledged musicians from the alternative scene, Martin Hagfors and Håkon Gebbard, of the duo Meg og Kammeraten min [Me and My Buddy], stated their evaluation criteria for good children's music in a feature article in *Morgenbladet*, an academic, cultural newspaper: "It has to be bad to be good" (Lien, 2016). This statement indicates a quality discourse embracing traditional Adorno-aesthetics, in which low-value children's music is understood as something that is commercial, prefabricated, perfectly designed, and flawless. In the words of Frith (2004), "bad quality" here describes a bad system of production (capitalism) leading to standardized and formulaic music designed to meet a market. Conversely, following this Marxist/Romantic reasoning, high quality emerges from artistic creativity, in which individual artistic agency trumps commercial interests. Criteria for quality are, in Hagfors and Gebbard's case, drawn from the independent, alternative scene; good children's music is authentic music in which musical "mistakes," disharmony, and inherent "resistance" are all positively acknowledged. As an attempt to distance themselves from the other (bad children's music), Hagfors and Gebbard labeled much of the children's music broadcasted by the NRK [Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation] "left-handers' techno pop productions performed by a teenager singing with auto-tune" (Lien, 2016, [my translation]). In the words of Frith (2004), this tag is an example of an evaluative statement that is "uttered communicatively, to persuade someone else of its truth, to have an effect on their actions and beliefs" (p.19). To sum up, quality relates to verbal discourse, aesthetic comparisons, and acts of power.

Summary, Section 1

In this introductory section, I have outlined some general aspects of the concepts of quality and value. Frith (2004) argued that there is no such thing as bad music or, in our case, bad children's music: "Music only becomes bad music in an evaluative context, as part of an argument" (p. 19). Furthermore, quality appraisals and value assessments are enrolled in discourses of power. To appraise quality for personal pleasure or to make quality assessments a part of an evaluative argument, several scholars argue that one must take into account the experience and competence of the listener. The more complex the music, the more intellectual capacity is needed. At the same time, this notion has been contested when it comes to children appraising music: children's interpretive skills may well depend on actions other than cognitive or intellectual engagement (e.g., emotional response, play, and movement). Like Nielsen, Berkaak (2016) argued for a correspondence between the work of art and the listener, between the object and the subject. Hence, quality is something performative; the aesthetic object is something that *is*, but it also must *become* through active experience, interpretation, and understanding. Quality can be understood in both a narrow, descriptive sense and a more extended, normative sense. If one should attempt to assess the quality and value of children's music in a factual sense, one must, according to Nielsen (2002), return to the musical object itself and its inherent structural layers of meaning. Thus, an inherent connection between the narrow, descriptive and the extended, normative concepts of quality exists. In the next section, I will follow up Nielsen's notion of a factual assessment by discussing and employing various significant criteria for children's music quality appraisals.

Children's Music Quality Criteria

In assessing quality and value in music, it would be inadequate to merely compare one piece, artist, or performance to another. To say something factual about the musical qualities one must, according to Nielsen (2002), make "the musical work itself the ultimate arbiter" (p. 11). But answering the question "What is good or bad children's music?" means, initially, one must compare the music to something beyond the music itself. As Ruud asserts, "Quality is always an adverbial phenomenon: it's always about the way *in which something is good*" (Ruud, 1996, p. 145, [my translation]). Therefore, employing Nielsen's main categories of externally functional, historicizing, and aesthetic criteria, in the following section, I will consider various ways children's music could be classified as good or bad.

Externally Functional Criteria

According to Nielsen (2002), quality in a musical work can be "determined on the basis of the question about whether it is suitable for achieving this, that or other functionally determined aim outside the music itself" (p. 11). In assessing quality in children's music, one could therefore ask questions such as, "Is this music good to dance, dramatize, and play along to?" and "Is the music produced to draw kids into a story, a scene in a film, or a theatre play, and does it successfully function in this manner?" Isolating externally functional criteria, as done here, is a theoretical, analytic exercise, and it does not mean that the music itself is abandoned. As Nielsen asserted, quality, in an externally functional sense, will "more or less strongly influence, or be influenced by, the internal musical structure, depending on culture, historical period, etc." (p.11).

Historically, children's music has been a medium for the adult world to pass on knowledge and values to the coming generation. In this external functional sense, it is pedagogically oriented. I must differentiate between two sorts of pedagogically oriented music: pedagogically intentional and

pedagogically functional.² Pedagogically intentional music is music produced and distributed with a clear aim of serving educational objectives, such as teaching the alphabet or how to behave according to society's expected norms and values. Conversely, pedagogically functional music is that which is not initially produced with this educational objective but nevertheless contributes through its lyrics to reflection, enlightenment, and growth. In that case, one could argue that all types of music conveying some message or another are essentially pedagogical. As a possible third category of children's music, non-pedagogical or anti-pedagogical music could be mentioned. This music, in its ironic or politically incorrect manner, opposes the expectations of good children's behavior, embracing poop and fart humor and boorish behavior.³

Ever since Adorno criticized pedagogical music, there has been a tendency to view pedagogically intentional music as something with lower aesthetic value than music free from instrumental objectives (Haugsevje et al., 2015). The manifestation of this dichotomous notion of aesthetic value is evident in NRK's distribution of children's programming, shifting between periods with pedagogically intentional and nonpedagogical television.⁴ The children's television series *Fritt Fram* [Free Forwards] (Borgemoen, Fridstrøm, & Berggren, 2006) was launched in 1999 as a clear alternative to earlier pedagogical children's television. The songs, composed by Jørund Fluge Samuelsen and performed by Asgeir Borgemoen, were largely responsible for the series' identity and success. These were songs with lyrics that creatively dealt with themes children may encounter in their daily lives, without displaying any overt educational motives. What could be seen as a quality indicator here was the music's ability to affect children's lifeworlds. Good quality in this perspective is a relevant correspondence between the aesthetic object and the listening subject. In some cases, this can mean that the music entertains the children because it meets the children's sense of humor. In other cases, this could mean that the music engages the children's reflection because it emotionally displays themes that are relevant and of great importance to them. Good quality, in this sense, is music that is "able to take the kids seriously" (Haugsevje et al., 2015, p. 31). Later programs such as *Barnas Super-show* [The Children's Super-show] (Solli, 2005) followed up on this pedagogically functional, or nonpedagogically intentional, position. By the beginning of 2010, with programs like *Tellekorpset* [The Counting Band] (Brym, 2013) and *Lesekorpset* [The Reading Band] (Wedø, Thon, Winje, & Alve, 2013), pedagogical intentional television and its corresponding pedagogically intentional children's music was trendy again.

Historicizing Criteria

According to Nielsen (2002), the quality and value of music—in our case, children's music—can also be assessed by applying what he labeled "historicizing criteria" (p. 12). From this perspective, quality in music relates to musical works' significance in past, present, and future history. A way of understanding works' significance in this manner is to apply the notion of cultural heritage: good quality children's music is music that we as Norwegians ought to know and should, therefore, actively preserve and pass on to later generations. This concept may mean maintaining or creating a sort of national identity, as was the case with the former Norwegian national curriculum for primary and lower secondary school (L97). Other manifestations of quality in children's music with reference to

² This is an adaptation of the terms "intentional" and "functional" as used in music education by Ruud (Ruud, 1983, p. 66ff), among others.

³ See also Dyndahl and Vestad (2017) and Vestad and Dyndahl (2017), both in this issue.

⁴ See Hake (2006) for a comprehensive discussion on this matter.

historicizing criteria could be grasped by researching the many children's songbooks or music compilations released in Norway after World War II and looking for any songs repetitively represented.

Another way of applying historicizing criteria and understanding quality in children's music is to evaluate the music's relevance. Relevance can refer to the notion of children's lifeworlds, implying that the composers of children's music show a genuine interest in children and deal with topics that are relevant to the contexts in which children grow up. Another angle is artistic relevance. Artistic development is usually perceived as a sign of quality. Applied to children's music, one could ask whether the work of art represents an effort to further develop the genre. A particularly characteristic and audible aspect of this notion can be found in the children's music productions that break with the expectations of how children's music should sound. The case here is that children may well endure (and deserve) an "adult" packaging when it comes to sound production, genre, and instrumental arrangement. It is in this context that we obtain newly composed children's songs in popular music genres such as pop and rock. The second audible characteristic is a tendency to revitalize existing children's songs by rearranging them in popular music genres (whether it is techno, salsa, rock, etc.). Here, the genre packaging could also function to ensure a type of pedagogically functional criteria in the sense that children are exposed to different genres, and the music offers new and different musical experiences for them. The question is whether the revitalization of songs, through transformation of the original expression, is contributing to good (or better than the original) children's music.

A third way of understanding quality in children's music through historicizing criteria is by examining the music's popularity. Music that is popular resonates with the target audience, whether through structural musical qualities, lyrics, or, as in most cases, a combination. But popularity as a quality indicator, established through sales figures, clicks, and "likes" on streaming services, does not necessarily indicate other quality aspects of the musical object. Only history can determine whether a popular children's song is a classic for the future canon of children's music or simply a passing fad.

Aesthetic Criteria

To apply aesthetic criteria means to examine the work of art as an aesthetic object (i.e., how the object is composed, what artistic means are in play, what kinds of artistic messages the object conveys, etc.). Aesthetics in this sense is about craftsmanship—the work's *Kunnen* (Langsted, Hannah, & Rørdam Larsen, 2002). It is the quality of techniques used in the composition, production, and presentation of the work as well as the work's "outer acoustic and structural level," to use Nielsen's (2002) terminology. Nielsen's understanding of an aesthetic object was that it also has an inner level, containing, for example, potential emotional, spiritual, and existential meanings—the work's *Villen* (Langsted et al., 2002). The aesthetic object's different layers of meaning do not exist "within" the object prior to our experience with it but rather are created by the experiencing person. Hence, they correspond with structures of meaning "in our own psyche" (Nielsen, 2002, p. 14). This understanding leads to Nielsen's phenomenological view of quality, stating that "the more multi-spectred, 'deep', cohesive and authentic the object is in its volume of meaning, and the more multi-spectred, 'deep', cohesive and authentic experience and perception it accordingly conveys and thus also can give rise to, the more valuable and 'rich' we can consider the object to be" (2002, p. 15). This conception of quality corresponds with what I described earlier as the performative aspect of quality (Berkaak, 2016) and affirms that such notions of quality will notably vary according to the culturally, geographically, and historically situated listener. I will not address here the problematic aspect of isolating music's aesthetic dimensions from its

functionality (see Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009; Frith, 2011). I will, however, look more closely into craftsmanship as an aesthetic criterion for assessing quality in children's music.

Again, bad music, in the words of Frith (2004), involves a "bad system of production" (p. 20). Bad systems of production could be the case when lots of children's music is produced using synthesizers and low-cost studio productions, leaving the impression that the children don't deserve better. Good quality in this isolated matter would then rely on the use of real instruments, real musicians, and good-quality recordings by means of expensive studio equipment. This notion, though, is problematic in several aspects. Even low-cost, mass-produced children's music is still capable of connecting with listeners in a significant manner, as was the case of Geir Børresen's *Smurfene* [The Smurfs] (Børresen, 2000), for example. Using production techniques to discriminate between good and bad quality, as in the case of artificial pop music vs. authentic rock music (Negus, 1996), is also problematic, due to the professionalism of present-day sampling technologies and the fact that much adult music is both electronically produced and highly acclaimed. If artists such as Kanye West and Justin Timberlake can profitably use auto-tune as a production tool or aesthetic effect, why can children's music artists such as Marcus and Martinus not do the same?

Another aspect of craftsmanship as an aesthetic criterion concerns the structural composition of the musical work—that is, musical qualities such as melody, rhythm, harmonics, arrangement, and instrumentation. According to Ruud (1983), children's music has traditionally been perceived as childish formula-song with a major diatonic tonality and sparse use of harmonic means. A criterion for quality in this view is originality, or in the words of Ruud, "an attempt to expand music of a more formula-based structure through a process, what we call regenerating code" (p. 96, [my translation]). This is much like the concept of historicizing criteria of artistic relevance. As for the notion of originality expanding previously confirmed codes, one could say that children's music has expanded considerably since the writings of Ruud, now offering a variety of genres and expressions.

Ruud also highlighted rhythm as an aesthetic criterion in assessing quality in children's music because this musical element activates children's physical reactions to music. He asserted, "Through emphasizing the rhythmical aspect, we're positioning bodily expression and spontaneity as values worth striving for (...) Our official or traditional music culture tends to prioritize contemplative values. There should be room for both sets of values" (Ruud, 1983, p.97, [my translation]). As the pop and rock genres are doubtless the dominant genres in children's music of this decade (see Dyndahl & Vestad, 2017), in light of Ruud's argument for both the contemplative and the bodily expressive, one could therefore understand diversity and variety, in the overall provision of children's music, as aesthetic criteria.

Summary, Section 2

In this section, I have applied Nielsen's main categories of externally functional, historicizing, and aesthetic criteria to various notions of quality in children's music, emphasizing that quality in children's music varies depending on which criteria one undertakes. Quality is, thus, an "adverbial phenomenon" (Ruud, 1996, p. 145). Applying aesthetic criteria in an attempt to say something factual about children's music qualities again clarifies that different people respond differently to different aesthetic objects. In other words, quality must be seen as something performative (Berkaak, 2016), which was one of the major points in this article's first section. If quality is performative, then, who acts? Whose voices do we take into consideration in our quest for investigating quality in children's music? In the next and final section, I will explore and discuss notions of quality from the perspectives of different recipients and agents in the field of children's music.

Recipients and Agents in the Field of Children's Music

Tastes differ, and people from various environments with different experiences will develop different aesthetic interests and musical preferences. In discussions about musical quality in general, the discourse of good and bad music is usually initiated, conducted, and maintained by an audience of peers—the grown-up world. These discussions do not seem to consider the viewpoints of the audience the music is intended for—namely, the children. In the following section, the question “What is good and bad children's music?” will be hypothetically queried to various relevant recipients and agents in the field of children's culture: the children themselves, parents, teachers, producers of children's television, and composers of children's music. The section that follows is not a comprehensive analysis of what quality means to different recipients and agents but rather an outline of what I consider highly relevant perspectives underpinning the complexity of quality in children's music.

The Children

If we ask children, parents, teachers, producers of children's television, and composers of children's music, the question of what is good and bad children's music might be answered very differently. Children might not even be able to distinguish between different genres and are, therefore, unconsciously unaware and maybe indifferent to the specific genre of children's music. In other words, music is music. Music first falls into the genre of children's music when it is intentionally produced for and distributed to children (Vestad, 2013, p. 19). That children can perfectly well consume and appreciate other kinds of music is undisputed. In fact, studies of musical preferences and tastes in childhood and adolescence suggest that younger children are more open-eared than older children and are more readily able to enjoy various kinds of music, including unconventional or unusual music (Hargreaves, North, & Tarrant, 2006). This indicates that different kinds of music not initially produced for and distributed to this specific target audience, including avant-garde, classical, folk, and jazz (to name a few), can be enjoyed by youngsters despite their possibly underdeveloped cognitive capacities. It also suggests that children's interpretive skills are somehow different from those proposed by Berkaak (2016). Children's interpretive skills may depend on actions other than cognitive or intellectual engagement (e.g., emotional response, play, and movement), as discussed earlier in this article. Hargreaves et al. (2006) asserted that the dip in open-earedness in later childhood “seems to occur around the age of 10 or 11 years old, and this typically shows itself in very strongly expressed preferences for a narrow range of pop styles, and strong general dislike for all other styles” (p. 147). What is at stake here is musical socialization: youths' views on good and bad music are formed by acculturation to the normative standards of “good taste” created by media and their peers. Children, like adolescents and adults, are shaped by the music available to them. Children's music is, therefore, all of the music that is made available to children through the media, parental choice, and school. When children themselves are too young to purchase or broadcast their own music (Vestad, 2013, p. 410ff), the responsibility for distributing high-quality children's music (whatever that is) will obviously lie in the hands of their parents, their teachers, and the media.

The Parents

Parents may consider several aspects if we ask them, “What is good and bad children's music?” First, they might look at their own childhoods, trying to remember the music they grew up with. If those memories inspire feelings of proximity, safety, happiness, and love, chances are that this is the music

they will pass on to their children. Thus, traditions are continued, music is canonized, and perhaps, the critics argue, music as an art form is cemented. The Norwegian children's music scene has its lot of cultural heritage superstars (e.g., Alf Prøysen, Knutsen og Ludvigsen), whose music is distributed through reprinting, reinterpretations, and adaptations to other media. Nevertheless, the cementation of cultural expression here does not seem to be as stable as in the field of children's drama, where very few new pieces for children enter major theatre scenes.

Parents also expose their children to their own adult music as part of musical socialization or a formative process. Herein lies an ethical query that only parents, within the domestic area, can answer: is all music suitable for children? Music as a cultural sign, explicit through language and implicit through form and expression, can inhabit themes and moods many do not find compatible with childhood. Profane language in hip-hop lyrics and aggressive, strident musical expression in heavy metal music genres are examples. In this perspective, the answer to the question of good or bad children's music can only be drawn from parents' personal moral standards.

Furthermore, the question could perhaps best be answered by the parents because they are the ones who observe what kind of music captivates their children. Good music, in this perspective, could be understood as the music that invites children to respond physically; the music they sing, dance, and play to (Vestad, 2013). Parents also become DJs for the music that kids request at home or in the car, and, through that, they can get a sense of what kind of music seems to appeal to their children. Good, in this sense—again referring to Berkaak's term "acknowledge" (2016, p. 71)—does not necessarily mean quality children's music. And as parents, providing a variety of cultural experiences could be seen as an analogue to a varied and nutritious diet—one wouldn't serve only pizza even if that were the only food the child requested.

The Teachers

If we ask teachers in general the question, "What is good and what is bad children's music?" the answer might vary depending on which instrumental role the music is meant to play in school. There are many pedagogically intentional songs, built up by rhymes and riddles, aiming for educational outcomes. If the purpose of a song is to teach children the alphabet or about animals on the farm, to count, or to do easy math, and if the music is fit to the purpose, one could say it is good children's music. Teachers also use music to frame the school day: a morning assembly song, a lunch song, a song to say good-bye, and so on. If these are songs both the children and the teachers enjoy singing together, one could say they are good children's songs for that purpose. Pedagogically intentional songs also have lyrics that are meant to encourage positive attitudes and morals. NRK-Super's "Blime" campaign is a good example of this genre, engaging thousands of young school children in singing and dancing and celebrating friendship, respect, and inclusion.

Music teachers have a profound obligation to reflect on the qualities of the music they present to the children. Reflections about quality in educational content—*music* for the music teacher—lie at the very heart of music didactics but are beyond the scope of this article. Some general aspects fall within the scope of this paper. If the aim is to train children's musical ears, a variety of genres, rhythms, and tonalities could be used. As we also learned earlier in the article, younger children are more open-eared than older children. This could indicate that music teachers don't have to promote adolescents' music culture in primary schools in the form of pop and rock songs. One might well argue that it is a law of nature that children eventually become socialized to adolescents' culture, and the school should not feel the need to accelerate this process. Children will inevitably be exposed to these genres anyway. This

last argument is necessarily not about pop and rock being unfit for children. It is about amount and uniformity. Good music for children in schools, the teachers may claim, is a variety of genres that offers different experiences, widens the musical reception, and develops the musical ear.

The criteria for choosing music to cultivate the musical ear and enhance musical listening competence differ in terms of educational objectives. If the aim is to enhance associative listening, music written to initiate associations, imagination, and creativity could be chosen. In classical music, several examples could be described as good children's music in this regard: Mussorgsky's "Night on the Bare Mountain," Britton's "Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," and Grieg's "Peer Gynt Suite," for example. Similar narrative music is also found in other genres. If the educational objective is to enhance pupils' formal listening—students' ability to discriminate between different instruments, capture form and structure, label the genre, and so on—the quality of music for that purpose will depend on the exemplarity of the works themselves. The teacher should thus decide on quality based on how many impressions, layers of meaning, or complexities the musical object can or should have (cf. Nielsen's aesthetic criteria, 2002).

The Producers of Children's Television

The children's music that, in recent years, has received acknowledgment and popularity in terms of sales, streams, or clicks has largely been music produced for television—for example, *Fritt Fram* [Free Forwards] (Borgemoen, Fridstrøm, & Berggren, 2006); *Jul i Blåfjell* [Christmas in the Blue Mountain] (Hagen, Ringen, Bøhren, & Åserud, 2006); *Fantorangen* (NRK-Super), *Jul i Svingen* [Christmas in Svingen] (Indregard, Knudsen, Borgen, Daniels, & Warholm, 2007); *Barnas Super-show* [The Children's Super-show] (Solli, 2005); *Tellekorpset* [The Counting Band] (Brym, 2013); and *Lesekorpset* [The Reading Band] (Wedø, Thon, Winje, & Alve, 2013). Producers of children's television also have a deep obligation to secure quality in distributed children's music. So these agents may contemplate several aspects when asked the question, "What is good and what is bad children's music?" First, the producer's personal views on good and bad children's music are founded in their own musical upbringing, musical preferences, and taste. In both initiating music and responding to composers' musical drafts, these markers of taste would initially be the first concierges. Second, producers are driven by artistic ambitions; they want to bring something new to children's music, as was the case for the music of Trond Viggo Torgersen's productions, for example.

Third, producers of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation have a duty to mirror the diversity of children's society in their programs, and good children's music should therefore include a variety of musical expressions. To mirror the context in which children grow up also means taking into account the previously discussed notion of children's lifeworlds. One choice here is to treat themes of importance; another is to give children more of the music they believe is a part of their daily lives (i.e., more popular music). An ethical dilemma also presents itself here, as shown by the controversy surrounding the artist Katastrofe [Catastrophe] (Malm & Braseth, 2016). One of the most requested songs on NRK's Radio Super, a radio channel for children, was Katastrofe's "Sangen Du Hater" [The Song You Hate] in the first part of 2016 (Clausen, Fjeld, Kristiansen, & Pedersen, 2016). With statements such as "I want beer" and "she had her period," this is a song obviously not initially produced for children, but nevertheless, it was a song children enjoyed and requested. One could argue that children's songs can address themes such as the (mis)use of alcohol and women's menstruation. But an obvious premise, if targeting this specific audience with these controversial themes, would be that the lyrics should be more sophisticated and child-oriented than is the case with this particular song.

The fourth aspect to consider is the notion of authenticity. Here, authenticity relates to children's responses to the actors in the series. Since the release of *Barnas Super-show* [The Children's Super-show] (Solli, 2005), in which children act as TV hosts, we seldom find adults as lead singers of children's songs on television (as was the case in former years). In this sense, quality in children's music is best safeguarded when many among the intended audience recognize themselves in the performing artist.

The Composers of Children's Music

Composers of children's music may respond differently to the question "What is good and what is bad children's music?" However, their answers will probably include that good children's music, first and foremost, is *good music*—music that the composers themselves believe in. If this music is simultaneously received and appreciated by the target audience, then it certainly also functions as good children's music. Eva Nordli Krøger (2014) interviewed six renowned composers of children's music for her master's thesis, and one of her major findings was that composers designated a piece as high quality if grown-ups also appreciated it. Maybe Nielsen's (2002) views of aesthetic criteria are applicable here. When music by the likes of *Knutsen og Ludvigsen*, *Meg og Kammeraten min*, and *Odd Nordstoga* seems to move audiences across generational boundaries, it may do so because of its multifaceted, deep, cohesive, and authentic structures of meaning offering different aesthetic experiences to different people.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, quality in children's music has been understood as a performative phenomenon, which means music's quality, in terms of good or bad, depends on the interplay between the music as an aesthetic object and the various listeners' perceptions. Quality is further understood as an adverbial phenomenon, which is the notion that good-quality children's music is always about the ways in which it is good. I have examined this notion through applying and discussing relevant criteria and by taking into account the various viewpoints of relevant recipients and agents in the field of children's music. This mapping of quality perceptions unfortunately leaves us with only a partial answer to the question "What is good and bad in children's music?"—namely, "It depends." At the same time, the exploration of different normative judgments, perspectives, and criteria leaves us with an understanding that quality in children's music could perfectly well be many things. Maybe this notion could serve as a normative point of departure for further investigation or discussion: Could good-quality music for children center on diversity and variety—in musical expression, themes, genres, production, and so on—both for securing children's own musical preferences and for safeguarding a variety of musical experiences that can pass on knowledge and values to the coming generations?

Author presentation

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