Riffs

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Experimental writing on popular music

Autoethnographic and Qualitative Research on Popular Music

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Riffs is published twice a year.

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Experimental writing on popular music

Riffs is a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal which provides a space for experimental ways of thinking and writing about popular music research. It is a space for creatives of all backgrounds, experiences and interests.

Riffs emerged from a writing group at Birmingham City University, established in 2015 by Nick Gebhardt and supported by the Birmingham Centre of Media and Cultural Research. As popular music scholars, many of the original 'Write Clubbers' straddled disciplines: music; sociology; media studies; anthropology; dance. Some felt adrift, on thin ice.

'Write Club' offered an opportunity of 2,000 words and the space of a table and eight chairs to explore what it meant to research popular music, to write about it, to construct an argument, a description, a song, a line. Once nerves were finally quashed and it became comfortable to watch another read your work, the writing became better and better until it seemed a crime to keep them under wraps, hidden away from curious eyes on a private blog.

In the founding issues of *Riffs*, we offered up some of our thoughts and writing in the hope that we would be able to read yours, and that each of us will in some small way change the ways in which we think and write about popular music. We have not been disappointed.

Our Editorial Board has now expanded from its BCU origins, and includes PhD researchers, ECRs, mid-career, and senior academics based at universities in the UK, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, and the US. Many of the editorial board are also practicing musicians, composers, artists, dancers, designers, curators, and writers.

We hope that you will consider this your official invitation to Write Club.

Contributor Guidelines

Riffs welcomes pieces from all disciplines and from contributors from academic, industry, or creative backgrounds. Each issue will be based on a prompt, but responses can vary depending upon the contributor's interest and experience. As the journal title suggests, we are most interested in pieces that take an experimental approach to the consideration of popular music. For examples of previous interpretations, please visit our journal website.

Abstracts submitted to *Riffs* will be considered by the editorial board, with full submissions subject to peer review.

Word Limit: 2,000-6,000 (excluding references)
Please do not submit full dissertations or theses. All contributions should respond to the prompt and take an experimental approach to undertaking and/or communicating research on popular music. We also welcome shorter written pieces, audio, and visual pieces to include photo essays.

Abstract: Please provide an informal, blog-style abstract (under 300 words) and a profile picture. This abstract will be hosted on our journal website and social media platforms. As ever, links to external websites and the use of images, audio and video clips are also welcome, subject to guidance which will be issued at the point that your abstract is accepted.

Format: Please email submissions as attachments to the editorial contact given below. All articles should be provided as a .doc or .docx file. All images and web-ready audio or video clips should also be emailed as separate files, or through a file-sharing platform such as WeTransfer or Dropbox.

Bio: Please include a short (up to 300 words) bio with your name, institutional affiliation (if appropriate), email address, current research stage within your article, and other useful/interesting information, positioned at the end of your piece.

References: If you refer to other publications within your piece, please list these in a 'References' section at the end. All clear formats of referencing are acceptable. Discographies and weblinks can also be detailed at the end of your contribution. Please use endnotes rather than footnotes.

Submission: Abstracts for our bi-annual prompts should be emailed to info@riffsjournal.org

Please note: *Riffs* shall be entitled to first use of the contribution in all the journal's different forms, but the author remains the copyright owner and can re-publish their contribution without seeking the journal's permission. *Riffs* reserve the right to decline to publish contributions if they are submitted after the agreed deadline and without the assigned editor being informed (and agreeing to) a new submission date.

EDITORIAL

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON POPULAR MUSIC:
Exploring the blues, jazz, grime, John Cage, live performance, SoundCloud and the masculinities of metal

Shane Blackman and Robert McPherson

Introduction: Autoethnography and Popular Music

This special edition of *Riffs* focuses on autoethnography and qualitative research in relation to popular music. The journal publication is twinned with a forthcoming book entitled: *Popular Music Ethnographies: practice, place, identity*. The intention of these studies is to uphold the principle that 'music is good to think with' (Chambers 1981: 38). *Riffs* was founded in 2015 to promote experimental writing on popular music, with a strong DiY ethos and space to offer flexibility and diversity of outputs through challenging interdisciplinary boundaries. At the same time there is a degree of similarity with specialist popular music magazines including *Mojo*, *fRoots* (1979-2019), *Rolling Stone*, *Record Collector*, *Prog*, *Mixmag,* and *Uncut*, through a focus on visuals and creative images. This suggests that there has been an increased growth at the 'popular' end of biographical and autoethnography within popular music. Critically, popular music autoethnographies work across and within disciplinary boundaries of anthropology, social anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, and popular music studies.

In using the term autoethnography rather than auto biographical, our approach is based on an understanding developed by Liz Stanley (1993) and explored by Elizabeth Ettore (2017: 2) which puts an emphasis on the social and cultural dynamics impacting on people at a political level. It is this broader social context which Heewon Chang (2008: 146) sees as the analytical and interpretive basis to creative writing to show connectedness and develop critical theory. Further, in this collection the authors use a range of qualitative research methods which go beyond the first person and include observation, interviewing, and engaging with visual and audio material. The critical framework for the authors' 'stories' operates as a self-reflective form of writing

concerned with events, thoughts, feelings, adventures, and experiences that give priority to the researcher's subjectivity. Karen Lumsden (2019: 70) sees autoethnography as an autobiographical genre of writing where we as researchers cannot be divorced from 'our own background' and experience. The aim here is that the papers offer multiple layers of meaning and insight on popular music as they move from the personal to the cultural (Bartleet 2009). Autoethnographers are fully engaged in a complex act of writing, thinking, and feeling as they integrate themselves and the narrative they are producing into a wider picture. It is a collaboration with the self which is naturalistic and seeks affirmation in wider cultural understandings. In one sense it is a style of realism, but the departure is through the imagination. In one sense it is a style of realism, but the departure is through the imagination, and at the same time the story, of necessity, requires plausibility, autoethnography is not confessional in the sense of a 'kiss and tell all story': it is an analytical, reflective, and cultural interpretation.

As a research method, autoethnography gives voice to personal experiences and feelings through the writing of biographical stories. At the same time, Brent Luvaas (2017: 260) warns us against the invasive practical risk of autoethnography on the researcher's "state of mind." This is captured well by Adams, Ellis, and Jones (2017: 7), who note that where autoethnographers write on the 'auto' – the personal part of their experience – this might be seen as narcissistic or open the researcher to danger, whereas if the autoethnographer remains at the level of the 'ethno' their experience is integrated into a wider cultural understanding. Carolyn Ellis (1991) contends that there is considerable opposition to the development of the emotional side of social research. For Hochschild (1975) this relates to the masculine domination of research, we affirm her stance that subjectivity and emotion could only enter the discipline from outside the mainstream through ethnographic and feminist work (Blackman 2007). For us, autoethnography powerfully employs the imagination of interpretation on a theoretical platform which seeks creative insights informed by voices, practice, and collaboration. Qualitative methods collect data where feeling and emotion also guide the writing through the researcher's knowledge and experience via the mechanism of a narrative. This makes autoethnography personal through its focus on self-explored stories on music.

These ideas of how the personal relates to the larger historical scene were first explored by C.W. Mills' (1959: 14) *The Sociological Imagination,* where he urged us to examine individual biographies and histories within the social structure, to focus on our 'self-consciousness.' At the same time the personal also becomes the social because when conducting research through creative writing, the author is focusing on experience and identity within a theoretical and critical context. Carolyn, Adams and Bochner (2010) suggest that autoethnographies should be written in a compelling way so that readers are affected.

In this sense, the art of writing to tell a story should permit both the reader and the author to experience the similar emotions (Park 1940: xiv-xv). For Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Carolyn Ellis' (2012), autoethnographies on music centre on the methodological side of telling personal stories through music. It is a method through which musicians might feel freer to explore themselves via what they call embodiment. The link is that music and autoethnography is about creative opportunities of expression and emotion, in that they explore the art of listening as a human skill for true sensitivity. An advantage the autoethnographer brings is that they are articulating the story from the inside: they have invited the reader into the author's own world of taste and trust which hinges upon dual recognition of respect and authenticity. Qualitative and autoethnographic research are ways to write about culture from a personal and holistic basis informed by patterns, values, and rituals of the everyday. All ethnographic studies involve degrees of participation or co-production. It is the nature of fieldwork to generate intimacy and exchange. Although there are different approaches towards autoethnographies of popular music, here the determining influence

is through fieldwork, based on observation, participation, and reflection on the cultures under study.

The Issue

This guest-edited issue of *Riffs* offers a critical and analytical engagement on popular music where researchers employ their research imagination to interpret the personal, political, and social context of music within a range of settings and genres. In this collection, we are interested in descriptions of music and cultures and importantly how work is written and what it seeks to argue through qualitative methods and autoethnography.

In these chapters, Stuart Slater introduces us to how John Cage – and his eponymous silent piece *4'33"* – influenced his own practice and creativity as a music educator, music consultant, and performer. Chloe Fenech takes us inside the Blues vocals of Julie Driscoll and how Chloe's own voice, tone and vocal delivery as a singer and performer recognises the inflections of Driscoll's own performance of the Blues in a male-dominated vocal genre. Joy White and Johnny Ilan journey us into their reflections of the UK rap and grime scene, exposing their own individual identities and how these impacted upon their interpretation of individual creative outputs of songs and videos in the genre that are rich in ethnographic detail. Marina Arias and Pablo Espiga introduce SoundCloud as a fruitful, creative space, where musicians locate often raw, unfinished, and experimental work away from the glare of commercial success; recognising that audiences and users consistently change practices in the rapidly changing digital world. David Cashman, Waldo Garrido and Tim Kelly consider the role of spectacle in the creation of successful live performances, arguing that musical technique alone is not enough for success in the contemporary music industry where a combination of skill and spectacle are now the driving force of audience participation and engagement. Robert Smith provides us with a fascinating insight into musical utopias, focused on community projects he participated in which saw both unknown and renowned artists performing on the same bill on an equal status and footing. He argues that these utopias should be recognised when they are there, as they can disappear as quickly as they arrive and can never quite be replicated in their ethos. Finally, Karl Spracklen examines the heavy metal scene in the north of England, considering social class, gender, and ethnicity as markers of identity within the genre, before locating a shift in social and cultural diversity within audiences based upon his own observations of the scene at live concerts within the region.

Shane Blackman is a Professor of Cultural Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. His books include *Youth: Positions and Oppositions, Style, Sexuality and Schooling* (1995); *Drugs Education and the National Curriculum* (1996); *Chilling Out: The Cultural Politics of Substance Consumption, Youth and Drug Policy* (2004); and *Young People, Class and Place,* edited with Tracy Shildrick and Robert MacDonald (2010). He has recently published papers on ethnography, subcultural theory, anti-social behaviour, and alcohol and young women. He is an editor of the *Journal of Youth Studies* and *YOUNG: Nordic Journal of Youth Research* and a member of the *ESRC Peer Review College*.

Shane says: I have been collecting records since I was at primary school, where I also used to read the *NME* and *The Melody Maker*. When I was 13, I went with friends to see rock groups in Folkestone and London; I saw Thin Lizzy three times before I was 14 and Joan Armatrading at Hammersmith Odeon when I was 15. At the same time, I was introduced to playing guitar riffs, but after initial success fine art took over! As an undergraduate I saw many popular music concerts, but few had

an impact of seeing Weather Report at the Rainbow Theatre, six rows from the front with Wayne Shorter and Jaco Pastorius; you were literally blown away. The following week it was Kraftwerk at the Hammersmith Odeon: no instrument on stage. Everyone suffered a culture shock! But it was enjoyable. After gaining my degree, I got employment working at *Our Price Records* in London. After a year within popular music retail, I left to take up an ESRC scholarship to do a PhD in Sociology at the Institute of Education, University of London. I was supervised by Professor Basil Bernstein and Phil Cohen. This was the beginning of my academic career in ethnographies of youth culture: their guidance was inspiring.

Rob McPherson is a Senior Lecturer in Media & Communications at Canterbury Christ Church University. He is published in the field of youth studies, alcohol studies, sociology, and ethnography with a specific focus on young people, intoxication, and autobiographical research. Rob's research interests also include urban studies as well as popular music and popular culture. He is a peer reviewer of the *Journal of Youth Studies* and *YOUNG: Nordic Journal of Youth Research*.

Rob says: Growing up, music was always important to me, and I was introduced to the rhythm of Motown and unity of The Beatles during drives in the car with my parents, besides much more at an early age. These experiences formed my interest in music, but it was the electronic punk/dance crossover of The Prodigy that awoke my teenage self to music which – I felt – belonged to me. Or rather, I belonged to it, along with many other young people growing into teenage years in the early to mid-1990s. This sense of identity led me into the world of dance music and to late nights and early mornings drenched in sound, surrounded by friends and strangers in the legal and illegal rave scenes, before moving into the festival scene of the late-1990s and early-2000s. I feel privileged to have enjoyed my youth at a time which can be defined by the way musical diversity was embraced by audiences; straight from the concert into the rave (and sometimes back again!). This formative and affirming experience became my escape from the ritual of everyday life, and then became the subject of my undergraduate work in Media & Cultural Studies where I was able to focus on the commercialisation of the UK dance music scene post the 1994 Criminal Justice Act. This then led me into undertaking my ethnographic PhD research on young people and alcohol consumption within city-centre spaces. To me music represents youth, freedom, talent, community, live performance. All these thrilling elements of the musical experience – whether as creator or consumer – are represented in the diversity this issue presents for you and more. Shane and I hope that you enjoy reading these contributions as much as we have enjoyed collaborating with the authors in this exciting issue of *Riffs*.

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PERSONAL IMMERSION:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY WITHIN THE WORLD OF JOHN CAGE

Stuart Slater

Introduction: 'Adored or Ridiculed?'

Simply put, in Stephen Montague's words (1985: 205), John Cage hardly needs an introduction. Nicholls (2002: Preface) epitomises the view that Cage is 'without doubt one of the most important and influential figures in twentieth-century culture', a judgement echoed by Cox and Warner (2017: 27), claiming 'no figure has had a more profound influence on contemporary musical thought and practice'. At the same time, Cage is also recognised as being 'one of the least understood' composers, his work still treated with disparagement and scorn (Nicholls 2002: Preface). Revill (1992: 6) neatly captures the tension: 'at first ignored or ridiculed, Cage is now in an even harder position - adored or ridiculed'. The extent of this debate motivated me to focus my research for a Master's degree in Musicology, and this paper now addresses my autoethnographic position with Cage. It uses my lived experiences as a musician, educator, and music examiner in the popular music industry, applying my work as a musicology researcher. I am seeking to demonstrate that far from being an object of ridicule, Cage, and specifically his seminal silent piece *4'33"*, remains powerful: a dominant influence to the present day and (specifically for me) a luminary, assisting at a fundamental level in pinpointing and understanding my position in popular music. In essence, I am using autoethnography to help understand what I perceive as an incomplete musical journey to date, affording greater meaning, purpose, and direction to its future course.

    I have deliberately avoided a lengthy preamble 'justifying' the approaches taken. At the same time, it is prudent to recognise considerations given to methodology briefly; namely, an autoethnography within the context of Merrill and West's articulation of post-modernism: the 'liberation' of dialects, cultural, perhaps, aesthetic voices 'finding more space'; a 'plurality of perspectives', distinct from a sanitised or single agent (Merrill and West 2009: 191). In a sense, this orientation echoes Kerman's 1980s musicological shift, calling for an approach to move beyond 'outmoded positivistic' thinking (Pontara 2015: 4), for musicologists to engage with 'humane' praxis 'orientated towards criticism' (Bohlman 1999: 99). It is, therefore, also worth reminding ourselves of Kramer's positioning here, advocating 'aesthetic insight into music with a fuller

understanding of its cultural, social and historical dimensions' (Kramer 2003: 6). Accordingly, the underlying theme is an auto/biographical, self-reflexive, in part confessional approach, and it is from this platform my journey with John Cage begins.

Self-Framing

I was raised in a non-musical family in which I was the only one who tended towards music as a serious interest. Because there was little direct influence in my immediate milieu, it required several years and a first (non-music) related degree and career before the field of music emerged as a viable profession, and in turn, an academic research possibility. Now in my early fifties, it took until my thirties to move into full-time music, initially as a performer and studio session player (drums), then as a music education provider (drum school established in 2003). Such percussion groundwork extended into melody, harmony and theory and subsequent incorporation into a music school. From here, my reach extended to the role of examiner for a contemporary rock and pop music board, initially a UK appointment, soon spreading to international regions, ultimately becoming worldwide. My examining and music board representation work over the last 15 years has, to date, required tours of c.30 countries, several visited numerous times. As a graded music exams specialist, this function developed into broader consultancy for the board; firstly, as an author, including writing pieces and syllabus content creation across the full instrument range; secondly, into management and strategic roles, including creating and delivering examining procedures, examiner training, judgement, and process alignment systems, feeding collectively into overall service quality delivery. My current professional position comprises line management of the entire exam panel globally, whilst in the meantime, my music education provision continues to serve local communities, and as a live performer, my theatre shows continue to be enjoyed by audiences throughout the UK, the latter retaining a (necessary) relationship with my first discipline.

Fig. 1: The author as performer (UK, 2018).
Photo: Personal Collection.

From the outset until my mid-twenties, the dual paths of my first career and music proved to be enlightening; at the same time, I did not recognise myself as being on a musical pathway in professional or academic terms. I was also not aware of John Cage. The progressive journey into, and as, a full-time music professional, has occurred in stages, admittedly accelerating over the last 20 years, from slow, organic steps initially. The absence of formative co-ordination, readily available formal instruction, an immediate musical environment, or direct encouragement in the early years did not signpost the musical experiences to follow.

With each successive advancement in my music career, my response has been non-celebratory, matter of fact, without anticipation beforehand or meaningful retrospection afterwards. I have consistently employed a phrase that each development is, simply, '*not enough*'; instead fleeting, pragmatic, a stepping-stone to the next progression. Of course, each step has played its part, to a point enjoyable in itself, adding to my arsenal of musical experience and skill sets to call upon, but never a deeper fulfilment. Ellis and Bocher (2000: 746) explain that the 'work of self-narration is to produce [a] sense of continuity: to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and restorying the events of one's life'. I am not suggesting my musical story has ever reached the point of having 'fallen apart'; however, I would say it has been 'arbitrary', unsatisfied. I am also very aware that more professional years are behind me than ahead; therefore, increasingly mindful that a more targeted approach is necessary.

In parallel with this, as I have become acquainted with other musicians, educators, examiners, and performers, I have recognised much less in common than expected. For example, in terms of early musical development and training paths, I am conscious of a 'less-orthodox' route into senior music education positions and an extensive international musical social construct, seldomly a comfortable 'fit'. Moreover, I have been struck by the limited philosophical approaches to addressing music and the easy acceptance of the rules of convention. My feeling is a directly proportional link here – I have increasingly realised that I have much more in common with Cage.

Fig. 2: The author as lecturer (Singapore, 2017)
Photo: Reproduced with kind permission from Cristofori, Singapore.

Cage-Framing: Setting out the breadth

Described as 'one of the fathers of experimental music' (Goehr 2015: 16), employing 'techniques and practices that have become central to contemporary music-making (Cox and Warner 2017: 27), Kahn captures Cage's aesthetic, observing simply that he 'concentrated on sounds of the world and the interaction of art and life' (Kahn 1997: 557). A summary of his canon and impact is, sensibly, impossible to achieve, spanning 300 compositions, with considerable influence extending 'in many directions, affecting not only musical practice and the theory of composition, but postmodern choreography, poetry, performance art, and even philosophy' (Carroll 1994: 93).

In his early 'composition' period, Cage wrote using the 12-tone method established by his teacher Arnold Schoenberg. Later termed 'serialism', each note of the chromatic scale needs to be sounded an equal number of times, 'such that no priority is given to [any one] note' (Campbell 2015: 19). Early examples include *Sonata for Clarinet* (1933) and *Sonata for Two Voices* (1933), the more mature latter using two chromatic octaves, in which no pitch in either octave repeats until all twenty-five notes are played. By the late-1930s, Cage's invention manifested more considerably with the 'prepared piano' (Figure 3); namely, the fixing of screws, bolts, rubber, and weather stripping to the strings, seeking a wider range of percussive and auditory possibility than the traditional piano (John Cage Trust 2016). The modification was a solution to the logistics of percussion music, for instance, acquiring instruments, transportation, multiple arrangements; therefore, impractical as an accompaniment for dance recitals. As Cage recounts, Cornish School dancer Syvilla Fort requested music for her dance *Bacchanale, Cage* duly obliging, adapting the piano as a replacement for a complete ensemble. In his book, *Empty Words*, he exudes: 'I wrote the *Bacchanale* quickly and with the excitement continual discovery provided' (Cage 2009b: 7-9).

Fig. 3: John Cage at work: the 'prepared piano'. Photo: Cromar, W. (2011). *Photograph: John Cage at work: the 'prepared piano'.* Available at https://flic.kr/p/97QdPT. (Accessed: 16 October 2021)'.

Such experimentation extended to Cage's use of emergent technology; a praxis he maintained throughout his life. *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1939) is one of the earliest electro-acoustic compositions in music, with Cage's ongoing use of live electronics characterised by *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), for 12 randomly tuned radios and 24 performers; *Fontana Mix* (1958), a piece superimposing graphs for the arbitrary selection of electronic sounds, and *HPSCRD* (1967–69), a vast multi-media work, amplifying performed harpsichord and computer-generated sounds 'in whole or in part in any combination with or without interruptions to make an indeterminate concert of any agreed-upon length'. Also of note, during Cage's latter years, *Roaratorio* (1979) is an electronic composition employing thousands of words taken from James Joyce's novel, *Finnegans Wake,* the piec*e* described as translating the book 'into a performance without actors' (John Cage Trust 2016).

It is worth contextualising that Cage turned to Indian philosophy from the mid-1940s, mainly influenced by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gita Sarabhai. Both helped him to discover, respectively, 'that the function of Art is to imitate Nature in her manner of operation' (Cage 2009a: 31), and music serves to 'sober and quiet the mind and thus make it susceptible to divine influences' (Cage 2009c: 1). For example, *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–48) – credited as his prepared piano 'masterwork' – was Cage's first composition using Hindu philosophy. The piece replaces composer expression with eastern-philosophy 'expression'; specifically, the permanent emotions of Indian tradition: the Heroic, Erotic, Wondrous, and Comic (the four light moods); Sorrow, Fear, Anger, and Odious (the four dark moods), and their 'common tendency toward (central) Tranquillity' (John Cage Trust 2016).

Increasingly drawn to Zen Buddhism, the 1950s saw Cage's use of 'chance operations, employing the Chinese I-Ching method of coin-tossing to 'ask questions', distinct from 'making choices' (Cage, during interview with Duckworth, 1999: 27). Cage explains this beautifully: 'if we proceed non-intentionally, then nature remains our proper teacher (Scheffer 2012: c.28'40"). As such, 1951 saw *Music of Changes*, a ground-breaking indeterminate piece using the I-Ching, and 1952 saw *4'33"*, indisputably Cage's most famous work, a 'silent' piece, intending to *reveal* ambient sound. It is arguably his principal contribution extending the definition of music to include *all sound*, reinforcing that: 'In India they say: "Music is continuous, it is we who turn away". So, wherever you feel in need of a little music, all you have to do is pay close attention to the sounds around you' (Cage, during interview with Montague 1985: 213).

4'33"

4'33" holds the central position in my relationship with Cage. Gann (2010: 10) summarises the impact of work, that 'Cage's so-called silent piece is as resonant with philosophical, historical, and acoustical complexities as many a noisier composition…[I]t was a logical turning point to which other musical developments had inevitably led, and from which new ones would spring'. The piece does, of course, present something of an ontological dichotomy. Pritchett (1996: 37) observes 'the majority of concert-goers and musicians in New York seemed to miss the point', treating the work 'as some kind of joke'. Campbell (1992: 90) succinctly captures the predicament of most interest to me when he attests '(o)ur mind struggles to make sense of *4'33"*. Is it music?'. Quite simply, entirely subjectively, the answer is yes. For me, it feeds into 'the corporealisation of the intelligence that is in sound' (Wronsky, quoted in Cox and Warner 2017: 20), and the interpretation of musically framed noise and ambience as 'sound objects', with 'chance' as composer and performer. Moreover, I share the view 'the grammar of music is ambiguous, subject to interpretation, and in a perpetual state of evolution' (Roads 2004: 12); therefore, Brian Eno's observation is most pertinent, illustrating the post-Cagean-shift in music form and teleology: 'if

you sit in Hyde Park…it's such a beautiful sound…as good as going to a concert hall at night' (Cox and Warner 2017: 85). With Murray Schaffer's conclusion that the 'blurring of the edges between music and environmental sounds is the most striking feature of twentieth-century music' (ibid.: 88), not only is *4'33"* a work of 'music', it is in my view one of the pivotal works *creating* the ontology of its own definition.

Convention

Cage is undeniably frank in his self-perception of 'conventional' music limitation, for example, reinforcing that innovation 'was the only thing I would be able to do in the field of music' (Duckworth, citing Cage in an interview, 1999: 8). He readily acknowledges 'I don't have an ear for music, and I don't hear music in my mind before I write it. And I never have' (ibid.). Relating this to my circumstances, it would be incorrect to claim a comparable absence of musical ear; however, the parallel of diminutive yearning for conventional music composition or, in its reciprocal, the aspiration for combined 'sounds' within the framework of time and percussive structure, offers meaningful connection underpinning our relationship. It is worth adding that a greater professional reliance on harmony and melody has, for me, surfaced and forms an integral part of my work today. However, this is borne of commercial realities, a necessary step to reach the point where I could progress from sole dependence on professional live performance. Interestingly, this gives rise to a notable paradox: the need to embrace a core characteristic of orthodoxy that Cage rejected to gain access to Cage today.

In a different conversation, Schoenberg explained to Cage that in order to write music, there needs to be a 'feeling for harmony' (Nicholls 2002: 93-94). Cage's response was resolute, confirming this was a feeling he did not possess. As Cage explains, '[Schoenberg] then said that I would always encounter an obstacle, that it would be as though I came to a wall through which I could not pass. I said, "In that case, I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall"' (Cage 2009c: 261). The symmetry in this regard is reassuring, giving impetus to continue the same path in contemporary music: on the one hand, there is a need to pay commercial deference to the needs of convention, but on the other, for me, there is a corresponding need to follow non-convention in post-Cagean context.

Music

Cage's effect on me intensifies with his extended episteme of 'music'. His tenet that all sound is 'music' is encapsulated in his own words (Cox and Warner 2017: 36): 'music is sounds…heard around us whether we're in or out of concert halls'; however, several academics and commentators are troubled with this stance. For example, Davis (1997: 23) argues that *4'33"* does not show that "music is all around us"', claiming it is more appropriately attributable as 'performance art'. Kania (2010: 343-353) similarly concludes the work is not music, but 'sound art', and Dodd (2013) contends *4'33"* exclusively amounts to art, adding his view that it demonstrably represents a valid 'comment' on music, without amounting to music in itself. I cannot share these views, which seem arguably entrenched in the restrictive parameters of tonality and easy attribution into 'art'. To my mind, Cage here provides illumination, correctly 'rescaling' tonality, for me permitting much academic and professional roaming in a much broader scope of musical possibility. Furthermore, I am not alone. In selecting from numerous observers, Eno writes, 'John Cage made you realise that there wasn't a thing called noise, it was just music you hadn't appreciated' (quoted in Wilcox 2013). Carroll (1994: 93) also posits 'new music' is 'new listening', the 'attention to the activity of sounds'. Katz (1990: 204) writes that Cage helps us recognise sounds that were not considered 'musical' at one time, targeting percussion, 'including found objects and "prepared" pianos', and electronics,

'in amplifying things like pens and cactuses'. As he clinches: 'All these sounds were gradually becoming part of the music'.

In effect, Cage is taking us to first principles, questioning the nature and scope of 'music'. Such a challenge to established convention is the most significant aspect of my association. It becomes immediately apparent that by repositioning all sound as musically viable, tonality becomes a 'pinprick' in the infinite vastness of sound and, in turn, all component material, contributors, and outcomes in tonality take on an infinitesimally small scale. Of course, that is not to say to the point of invalidity or irrelevance, but much as pre-Kerman music analysis has not been removed from new musicology (Kerman 1980: 331), Cage has simply served to realign the weighting, with traditional analytical emphasis and overall heed to tonality now in more appositely-scaled proportion.

Function

I must confess to having difficulty resolving Cage's musical role, his 'function'. It is the moment to admit I have never been entirely convinced that he was either a 'composer' or 'musician'. This said, there are ample grounds to advocate Cage did not see himself as a composer or musician either. For instance, as Schoenberg proposes, he is less a composer than 'an inventor of genius' (Haskins 2012: 37). Cage also readily concedes that he offers 'what he can' to the musical world, 'namely, invention' (Duckworth 1999: 8). Less subjectively, Revill (1992: 20) and Gann (2010: 27) respectively explain that Cage's grandfather (Gustavus) and father (John Sr.) were both inventors; therefore, putting 'considerable emphasis on innovation' in Cage's immediate domain. Gann also cites Cage's delightful, oft-told observation, which I include here for emphasis: 'I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas…I'm frightened of the old ones'. Here, Cage reveals an approach that sits comfortably with me, specifically that his aesthetics tend much more towards philosophy than music. As such, it is easy to agree with Pritchett (1996: 2), who posits that, for Cage, the 'philosophical underpinnings' are more significant than the manifesting sound. Thus, Cage has become 'a philosopher, not a composer'. In Cage's orbit of 'silence', it is not without irony this conception resonates most loudly.

Silence

Having established the premise that 'silence' *is* music, can it be subject to traditional music 'analysis'? I am reminded of Bartlett and Ellis (2009: 6), suggesting 'there is still a musical dimension that remains open for further investigation in autoethnography…a dimension that goes beyond text and moves into the auditory world of musical sounds and relationships'. With Cage, I can further the reach of this proposal, that autoethnography is, in fact, capable of moving into Cage's auditory world of *silence* and relationships. I opted to test the hypothesis using one of my Cage-influenced pieces, written during a UK Covid lockdown. The composition, *Cageance* (Slater 2020) is a worldwide collaborative website, extending Cage's *4'33"*, combining new (externalised) performances of *4'33"*, each successive participant increasing the uniqueness of chance-determined website combinations (Figure 4).

Fig. 4: A moment from *Cageance*: combined performances of *4'33"* (Denmark and New Zealand, 2020).
Photo: Personal Collection

To better contextualise my conclusions, it is necessary first to outline the central tenets of *4'33"*. It is a piece framed in units of time, namely 'durational structuring', the 'keystone of [Cage's] compositional technique since 1939' (Nicholls 2002: 103); on the basis that 'duration' is the common factor between sound and silence (ibid.: 54). As Akiyama (2010: 54) explains, this achieves an 'unmediated world of sound; by inviting listeners to attend to an acoustic experience not structured by a performer', where, in heeding Cage's directions accompanying the score, the work may be 'performed by any instrumentalist(s)' (Cage 2012). It may also be performed by 'means of any instrument' (Nyman 1999: 11), each delivery comprising 'essentially one long rest or silence' (Weagal and Cage 2002: 250), where the duration of each performance is accordingly a decision for each performer. Therefore, the audience is 'given the opportunity to concentrate and listen to the sounds around them' (ibid.). As claimed by Kania (2010: 348), 'it seems clear that Cage intended audiences at performances of *4'33"* to listen actively to the sounds in the performance space', in order to oppose 'the valorisation of traditional musical works' (Davies 1997: 4).

Cageance
Cageance's objectives can, therefore, be précised as follows:
- Extend *4'33"*'s reontologisation of sound in contemporary settings.
- Create musical experiences 'analogous to life and feeling' (Campbell 1992: 83).
- Continue manifestation of Cage's chance operations.
- Continue Cage's musical possibility via new technology.
- Widen the scope of participation and audience to an international arena.
- Bring people and nations together during the global Covid lockdown through *4'33"*.
- Reinforce Cage's locus in a broader art context.
- Align with Cage's epistemology for the future of music.

With this in mind, *Cageance does* offer a sound basis for Cagean-inspired non-conventional music analysis. I achieve this by converting Cage's environmental sound into written format, to which can be applied a hybrid of 1) 'Schaferian' Analysis: investigating soundmarks, signals and keynotes plus

assessing ecological broader references: biophony, geophony and anthrophony (Figure 5), and 2) 'Musical' Analysis: attributing conventional musical characteristics and employing Schenkerian layer reduction principles to chance-emergent environmental sound (Figure 6).
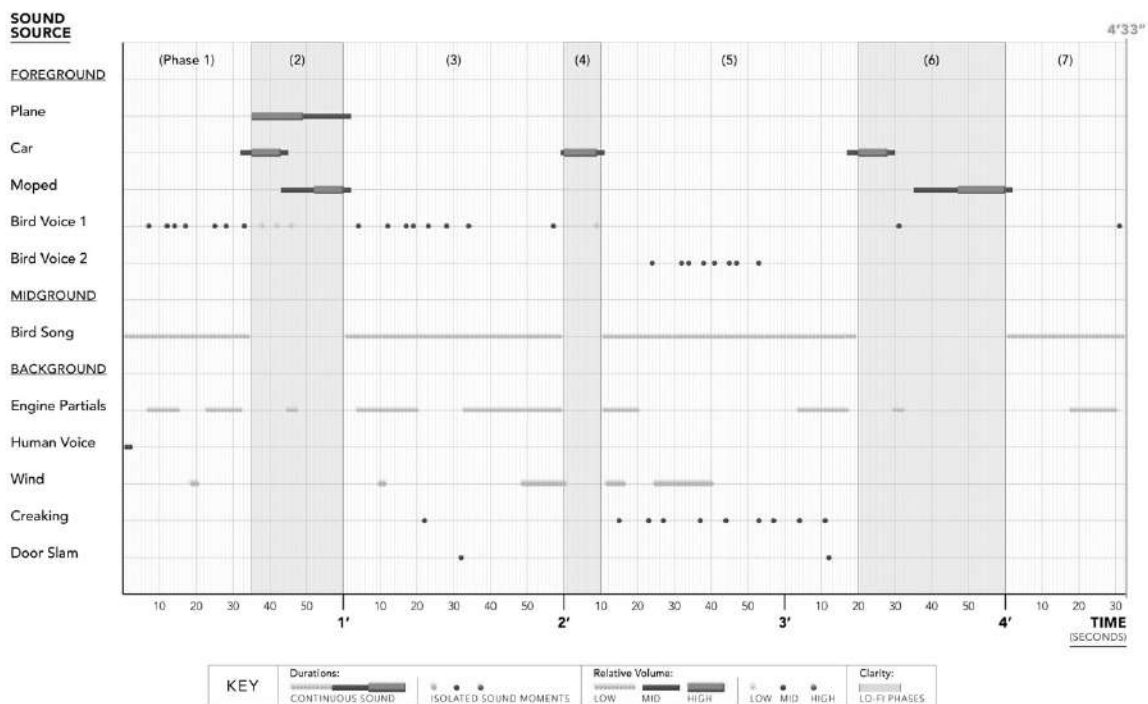

Fig 5. Analysing 'silence': the author's creation of 'sound lines' to base Schenkerian Reduction (Slater 2021).

This conclusion recognises the advancement of discourse stemming from Cage's (McKinnon 2013: 71) 'repurposing of the intentional listening of music' and Schafer's subsequent ecological soundscape context. On balance, the analysis is arguably more suited to macro and supra timescales (see Roads 2004) within larger spatial environments, and the application of Schaferian thinking to such a mesoscale piece (ibid.) achieves limited analytical potential from a single visual vantage and recording location. Additionally, the assignment of ecological classifications yields only partial insight. However, the technique successfully attributes conventional musical features to environmental sounds, framing the fluidity in fixed time, suggesting a form of 'notation' to display Cage's silence. Interestingly, the exercise also revealed validity in extending Cage's re-definition of music and musical roles into the arena of 'drama', in the context of a real-time play, the soundscape portraying the narrative, with scope for progressive tension and anticipation; acted out on chance-determined stages and settings.
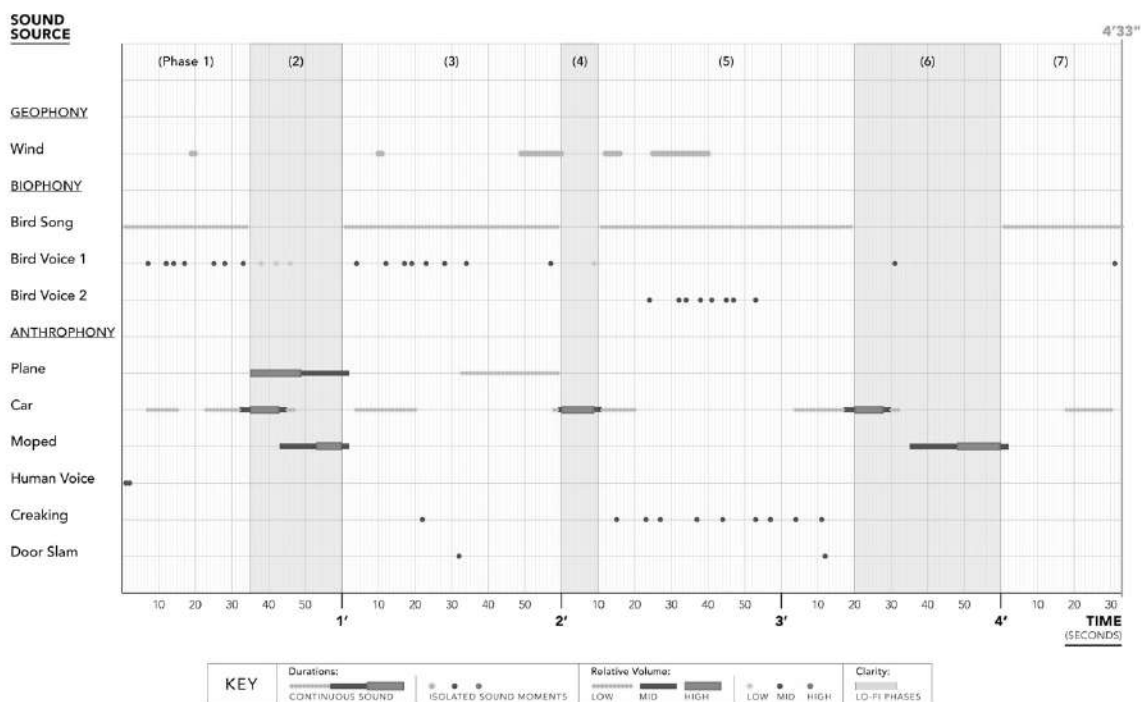
Fig. 6. Analysing 'silence': the author's creation of 'sound lines' to base Schenkerian Reduction (Slater 2021).

Community

There is no question Cage has affected my taste and appreciation of other artists and genres. Most notably, environmental soundscape artists, including The Wandelweiser Group (to whom Cage is similarly, centrally important); minimalism (notably Steve Reich and Philip Glass) and Brian Eno: predominantly his use of 'ambience', *Music for Installations*, the iterative *Reflection* app and his creativity-prompting 'Oblique Strategies'. Over recent years, many artists have also acknowledged Cage as a direct influence, for example, Cage student John Cale (Velvet Underground), Thom York (Radiohead), and Sonic Youth. Further, excluding *Cageance*, there are specific pieces that derive directly from Cage's work. For instance, Bang On A Can's *An Open Cage* (2015) is a brilliant work where Florent Ghys' reads an excerpt from Cage's *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)*. Here, the music steadily subsumes the words as the piece progresses, gradually, then altogether.

With regard to *4'33"* itself, the piece stimulates what seems to me three objectives in subsequent use: ongoing cover versions, jest or protest. For example, in 2010, Cage Against The Machine collaborated with numerous artists, including Pete Doherty and Billy Bragg, recording a version of *4'33"* to prevent an X Factor winner from reaching No 1 in the UK charts (Michaels 2010). In 2016 the Death Metal band Dead Territory recorded a YouTube performance in 2016, with viewing figures currently sitting at two-thirds of a million, and during a Covid lockdown, one of The Guardian's suggested songs to achieve the government's recommended 20-second hand washing duration was, of course, *4'33"* (Dowling 2020). In the same period, 400 musicians played 20% of Holst's *Mars* in Parliament Square before standing in silence, reflecting the maximum 20% salary

support that freelance musicians were eligible to receive from the government's then-latest version of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (Moore 2020).

Finally, the paradox of the BBC's 2004 live-televised performance of *4'33"* cannot go without mention. Initially, this suggested to me that Cage may perhaps be better understood since 1952, perhaps for reasons best summed up by Kostelanetz (1993: xiii) 'once the majority has caught up to something new, whether as creators or as an audience, what is genuinely avant-garde will, by definition, be someplace else'. On the other hand, Cage's 'acceptance', from a position of classical high-culture rejection, does not sit comfortably as authentic. As Thomas observes, 'within the classical musical establishment', Cage is 'still considered a joke' (quoted in Toronyi-Lalic 2010).

Subversion

At this point, it is fair to say that my immersion into the world of John Cage is not a case of infatuation. Indubitably revealing, unequivocally thought-provoking and decidedly influential, but also critical. Accusations of Cagean subversion are, for me, well-founded; for instance, Cage's use of chance to exclude his preferences (Brown 2009: 23), rejecting composer authority, is a clear challenge to the western concert tradition. Additionally, his negation of the piano, Classical music's primary instrument (Pepper 1997: 32), is, for me, a strong indicator of seditious gesturing, both in its alteration as a prepared piano (Pritchett 1996: 24-25), and potentially more impacting in its arguable 'humiliation' through non-performance at *4'33"*'s 1952 premiere.

Further, in shifting responsibilities away from composer and performer, elevating the audience's role, it follows that *4'33"* feeds into musical ethics. Beard and Gloag (2016: 92-93) contend there exists behavioural expectations, 'rules' of participation within music creation, delivery and reception. As such, the disapproving reaction to David Tudor's 1952 *4'33"* premiere, knowingly anticipated by Cage (Cage 2012), is a strong justification for an indictment of audience maltreatment alone. More than this, Gann (2010: 4) reinforces that at the Woodstock premiere, Cage appreciates 'all kinds of interesting sounds as [the audience] talked or walked out', a provocative elucidation as to how Cage views such an unfavourable response. Not for the audience reaction in itself, but how the sounds of rejection *contribute* to the performance.

4'33" was in effect a rally cry to *listen,* a position underscored by Wilcox (2013): 'Although it was Luigi Russolo who opened our minds to the art of noises, it was Cage who opened our ears'. It consequently seems a considerably unjust imposition when Cage expounds, with more than a hint of condescension, the audience 'thought' the audience were sitting in silence 'because they didn't know *how* to listen' (Gann 2010: 4, my emphasis). We have to question the extent to which the audience was likely to recognise, or accept, Cage's definition of 'music', to appreciate the requirement to listen, given the onus of burden and reliance on the necessity to 'understand'. Riethmüller (2008: 169) stresses that music is capable of engendering such *dissociation* with ethics, and this is my contention with *4'33"* in 1952. The inequitable liability placed on the audience, coupled with the creation of musical material which permitted contributory sounds through audience repudiation, 'in the same gesture where they abandoned it' (Lau 2015: 6), arguably, overwhelmingly, breaks the ethical, collaborative, 'norm'.

Ridicule

This all said, if we take *4'33"* – arguably the quintessence of Cagean derision – and further explore the allegations of the piece being a 'joke', it is clear Cage intended it as a serious work, 'out of the world of art into the whole of life' (Cage, quoted in Larson 2013: xviii); a culmination of much causal stimulus at that time. In addition to his 'burgeoning interest' in Asian philosophy (Campbell, 2015: 108), we can include, for example, Rauschenberg's 1951 White Paintings, which Cage advocates as a 'passivity against composition and order' (Díaz 2014: 97), and Cage's oft-told 1951 Harvard

anechoic chamber experience (Robinson 2011; Scheffer 2012: c.25'30"). This experience, of course, resulted in Cage's infamous declaration, 'until I die there will be sounds…One need not fear about the future of music' (Campbell 2015: 13-14; Díaz 2014: 88). Amongst others, these events inputted directly into Cage's then-emerging thinking, centred on removing self-expression from composition (Dodd 2018: 630), deftly summarised by Katz (1990: 204): substituting 'chance and silence' for 'taste'.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate why Cage remains influential, provoking, necessary, and far from an object of ridicule. By studying and interpreting Cage's approach to music, I recognise that his philosophies and approach impact significantly, helping me understand my motivations in music; also redirecting what has hitherto been an unsteered journey onto a more gaged, fulfilling course. Irrefutably, autoethnography has played a predominant role. As Webber (2009: 268) describes: 'That's the point of it, observing what you are doing and how you are doing it, constantly evaluating, critiquing…so there can be a tendency for the two processes to feed off each other'. Similarly, borrowing from Bartlett and Ellis (2009: 9), autoethnography 'frees musicians from writing dry descriptions or reports of musical experiences', such an approach encouraging the conveyance and meaning of musical experiences where the 'focus becomes telling a tale that readers can enter and feel a part of'. It is, therefore, worth further sharing that following a relatively 'successful' career to date, perhaps one even giving a perception of 'accomplishment' over the years, it is a little difficult to admit a certain directionlessness and this extent of unfulfilled feeling. However, I feel unexpectedly comfortable yielding to this exposure. Furthermore, the thought of unlocking my position has been stimulating; indeed, I have needed to write this paper in several sittings, such is the depth of immersion self-reflexively, which, I would add, still has potential for further exploration.

  In short, I acknowledge Cage's outlook and practice have become profoundly pivotal, indeed, vital, shaping my understanding, involvement, and direction in music, to the extent of opening up a PhD pathway that seeks to target his use of silence in current and future contexts. As Clandinin and Connelly (quoted in Bartlett and Ellis 2009: 181) explain, 'in ethnography, people are viewed as embodiments of their own lived stories'. Relative to my narrative, I am, overall, moved to recognise the extent to which Cage has become integral to my direction, against whom I can measure past and present musical orientation, and with whom I will continue to confer as my principal reference point from here.

Acknowledgements

Stuart Slater is a music educator, worldwide music examiner (contemporary repertoire), music consultant, and performing musician. As a musicology researcher (Canterbury Christ Church University, UK), Stuart is currently investigating contemporary applications of John Cage's work and praxis, specifically the musicological perspective of 'silence' as an extended episteme of 'music'. 2022 is the seventieth-anniversary of Cage's seminal silent work: 4'33"; therefore, Stuart's research aims to capitalise on the piece's anticipated spotlight, with articles establishing historical salience and critically exploring its repurposing, ongoing influence, and current/future relevance.

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JULIE DRISCOLL'S VOICE IN THE BLUES: A MODEL FOR AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE RESEARCH

Chloë Fenech

Autoethnography, Researcher Positionality, and Reflexivity

This article considers singer Julie Driscoll and her role within British blues. This article aims to give Driscoll her own space and to study her vocals from a practice-led and autoethnographic perspective. Here I specifically analyse songs 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?', 'Tramp', and 'Road to Cairo' from her album *Open* (1975) with Brian Auger's band Trinity, as they

'Road to Cairo' Performance Video.

highlight her quintessential sound as a singer in this period of blues-influenced repertoire. Through vocal analysis, I will consider my own performance and the insights that I have developed by singing her song 'Road to Cairo' (see 'Road to Cairo' Performance Video). From this autoethnographic performance perspective, I reflect upon how studying and recreating Driscoll's vocals have influenced my own practice.

As Manning and Adams (2015) note, autoethnography brings a number of strengths to popular culture research. These include the use of 'personal experience to write alongside popular culture theories and texts, especially to show how personal experiences resemble or are informed by popular culture', and to 'create accessible research texts that can be understood by a variety of audiences', which are both important concepts to this research (199-200). Regarding this work, I feel it important to highlight Driscoll's story, vocal style, and how it has impacted my own practice. I also believe in the importance of offering alternative ways to access her music, and have done so through performance, examples of which have been drawn into this article.

An awareness of researcher positionality and reflexivity is central to the autoethnographic element of this article. Holmes (2020: 1-2) explains that researcher positionality is 'where the researcher is coming from', which is influenced by factors including, but not limited to: culture, religion, social class, gender, and race. Reflexivity is the focus on an individual's beliefs, and practices, and how they can influence research, as stated by Soedirgo and Glas (2020: 528). As a woman and a fan of 1960-70s blues music, the persistent lack of known women in this genre and period in the UK originally inspired me to undertake this research. Equally, I am a scholar, performer, and singing teacher, and I wanted the opportunity to unpick vocal styles of women that I have explored, as well as observing the impact of this process on my own vocal style. In terms of my vocal training, I was at first classically trained, but later developed a love for singing popular styles (particularly R&B, soul, gospel, blues, and blues-rock), which positions me in relation to engaging

with Driscoll's blues repertoire. Because I am looking at blues repertoire in this research, it is also important to note that my own practice has been influenced by the genre. Therefore, before I examine how Driscoll's vocals have influenced my own vocal style, it is important to firstly understand my vocal traits and influences before this research.

In terms of my 'sound', I argue that any sound produced by one's voice is ultimately specific to themselves, as singing is merely an extension of speech. I therefore had a 'toolbox' of vocal traits that were already specific to me before I began this research. The most notable and obvious trait is the 'huskiness' and 'fry' in my voice, which is apparent even in my speaking voice. This is something that I have always included, particularly in my chest voice, and is something that I can turn on and off when I am teaching or singing repertoire that this sound is unsuitable for. Other traits that I developed before this research are a neutral American accent, and a low resonating chest voice, a generally round and rich tone, partially because of my musical influences such as soul and gospel, and small areas of distortion which lean into my rock influences.

The fact that I am a singing teacher with various musical influences has impacted this research. For ease of reading, the small amount of repertoire discussed has been chosen carefully as examples that encapsulate Driscoll's 'quintessential style' of singing within her blues repertoire. Of course, there are vocal traits that are not mentioned in this article, but I have identified the ones that make her voice unique and recognisable. This automatically impacts upon the angle of this work, as there are elements of her vocal style that are excluded from analysis. As a performance researcher, I wanted to explore what vocally made Driscoll's voice special, whilst recreating sounds in ways that were comfortable and sustainable, rather than vocally perilous. This has also affected the outcome, as I put my vocal health first in the recreation of vocal choices. Some of this work has been achieved with great success, and some not. I have come to find ways to recreate some sounds very easily, and other techniques have been problematic.

In the following section, I will analyse Julie Driscoll's vocal style, alongside the process of performing, my vocal style, and insights in relation to my performance of 'Road to Cairo', and how I have been influenced by her. Importantly, the instrumental section of this song was pre-recorded due to COVID-19 restrictions and my vocals sang over the top later. This has impacted the performance which may be different to how I might have performed the song had it been live. I will also refer to video footage (available through QR codes and links) to highlight changes in my voice that have come about due to my engagement in this research project.

Artist Biography

Julie Driscoll, also known as Tippetts (1947-present), was not commonly associated with blues music, but rather – as Webb explains (2013: 136) – with the psychedelic-pop scene, 'space-age hairstyle and vinyl-black eyeliner' in the 1960-70s era of her career. However, by listening to her repertoire it is clear that several of her songs demonstrate blues influence, pulling away from the psychedelic and positioning her vocal repertoire more into the blues genre. She is most well-known for her cover of Bob Dylan's 'This Wheel's on Fire' which featured on the BBC television programme *Absolutely Fabulous*. Driscoll was performing professionally as a teenager, recording her first single 'Take Me By The Hand' aged fifteen, as well as playing nightclubs with her father's band (Heining 2016). Myers (2007: 90), writes that Driscoll was influenced by Nina Simone and singers signed to Tamla Motown.

Webb (2013: 136) explains that whilst working for Giorgio Gomelsky (The Yardbirds manager), she met Brian Auger when he was called in to play on one of her records. He asked her to join his band, Steampacket, after being impressed with her ability. They only stayed together for a year (1965-66) but toured with artists such as The Rolling Stones, Rod Stewart, and Elkie Brooks who were all themselves influenced by blues music (Rees and Crampton 1996: 852). After the

demise of Steampacket, Auger, the bassist, the drummer, and Driscoll became the Trinity, with Driscoll being their frontwoman, and were signed by Polydor Records (Coryell and Friedman 2000: 179). The Trinity had minor success in 1968, reaching the UK singles chart for sixteen weeks, peaking at number five with a cover of Bob Dylan's 'This Wheel's on Fire' (1968), and their blues-influenced cover album *Open* made the album chart in the same year. Although as a band they had little chart success following this, Ankeny notes that by 1969, Driscoll had recorded with Centipede and released her debut album *1969* (2019), and toured across Britain, Europe, and America with artists such as Led Zeppelin (see also Heining 2016).

Vocal Analysis
Tessitura and Melody
Like all of Driscoll's blues repertoire, 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?' utilises traditional blues scales and conjunct melody. This song, along with much of Driscoll's other blues repertoire, also makes use of ascending slides in the melody, all of which are standard traits that can be heard throughout blues music to varying degrees. However, in this song in particular the ascending slides are exaggerated and are the foundation of the melody in the verses, rather than used as stylistic 'add-ons' like in much other blues music where it is used as an inflection. All her melodies sit in Driscoll's chest [2] and mixed voice [3] range, with the omission of the head voice [4]. This means that all her melodies utilise the lower to mid-range of her voice, whilst completely abandoning the highest extremes in vocal range.

'Tramp' highlights several examples of where she broke the typical conjunct melodies that construct many of her songs (which is also stereotypical of blues) in an improvisatory way. For example, 'I own three Cadillacs' shows the use of a large ascending leap from her chest voice into her upper mixed voice on the word 'Cadillacs'. This is a technique that she uses in other songs, and was virtuosic and passionate, similar to the vocals of her male contemporaries in the blues-rock scene, such as Robert Plant in 'Since I've Been Loving You' (1970) for example. What is interesting about Julie Driscoll's use of melody is the false sense of security that she created, with mellow sounding, conjunct melodies that were expected by the listener, combined with hard-hitting disjunct, high, climactic notes that showed her complex identity as a performer.

In terms of my performance of 'Road to Cairo', it was important for me to capture this contrast in melody. The arrangement of the end of the song was going to be like the original. However, after playing it in rehearsal, I felt completely underwhelmed by the feel of the vocals in this section, as it did not have the hard-hitting contrast that I wanted. From my first listen to this song, I noticed the contrast in volume and approach to vocal choices throughout the song, and this was missing from my performance which lacked the contrast in this section. Instead, I envisioned a small amount of silence before speaking the line 'they're better thinking', which would contrast with the loud, cutting, 'dead' concluding section. As a band, we tried variations of this section (Clips 1, 2, and 3), that allowed me a little space to bring the vocals down and back up again.

| Clip 1 | Clip 2 | Clip 3 |

Phrasing and Lyrics

Lyrically, Driscoll's material is sung in two ways. Firstly, and most prominently, the lyrics are based around 'typical' blues themes such as love, loss, money, sex, and general anguish. 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?' and 'Tramp' both fall into this category. 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?' contains lyrics such as 'ask him why, he don't love me no more', and is typical of the song which is about lost love. 'Tramp' also follows this lyric pattern in terms of themes. These lyrics consider independence, money, and material possessions, giving the impression of female empowerment, independence, and the conviction of Driscoll as a vocalist.

Secondly, other material such as 'Road to Cairo' unravels a story but this is a far less common trait within her work. The song is about the journey travelling to Cairo to see loved ones that the singer has not seen for a long time. As they get to Cairo, they cannot continue the journey, with the song finishing with adlibs on the line 'They're better thinking I'm dead'. This story-teller style is similar to traditional Delta blues and 1950s male skiffle. This was a cover of the David Ackles song and Driscoll was clearly drawn to it to sing it. This form was also gendered, reflecting traditionalist female ideals of singers in the 1960s, particularly in folk music. In folk, storytelling was common, with good examples offered by Buffy Sainte-Marie's 'Cod'ine' (1964) or Joan Baez's 'Farewell, Angelina' (1965), where women often opted for what Riley (2004: 36) calls the 'story-teller' or 'daydreamer' role. However, because the storyline does not revolve around – or even involve – a love interest, it is unusual and an anomaly in relation to both Driscoll's style, and the normative 1960s female singer styles.

Also important to Driscoll's lyrics is her use of accent. She mainly uses a neutral American accent (bordering on transatlantic) and stays faithful to the practice of having less of an identity through a 'lack' of regional British accent. Transatlantic, or neutral accents gave the impression of respectability and middle, or upper class, as Queen states (2015: 241), which was more fitting for the contemporaneous expectations of respectable women and helped her sound more polished. However, in the section of 'Road to Cairo', she sings 'I can't, I can't, walk down this road to Cairo'. She very clearly uses an English accent on the repeated word 'can't'. This suggests that she experienced conflicts in identity as a British performer singing blues, negotiating American musical influences in her performance. In terms of my own performance of 'Road to Cairo' and the sound that I like to adopt, I also opted for a neutral American accent, as can be heard throughout my cover of the song (see Road to Cairo Performance Video). This is due to my musical influences and training, but also because I prefer the sound of brighter vowels, compared to the darker vowels that an English accent produces.

The phrasing of Driscoll's blues repertoire is standard for the genre in terms of the utilisation of offbeat entries and pulled rhythms, and varying uses are heard in 'Tramp' and 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?'. However, 'Road to Cairo' is particularly fascinating as it takes the form a story, the use of these phrasing techniques is exaggerated when compared to other repertoires. Offbeat and syncopated entries are utilised throughout, with an example included on the entry of 'Hey thanks for stopping' half a beat after the second beat of the bar. This is used in combination with entries that are on the first beat of the bar, like with the entry of 'me, I've travelled some'. It makes the entries within the song non-uniform and gives an improvised feel, but also produces an element of solidarity with the chorus which continues with entries solely on the first beat of the bar. This shows that as much as Driscoll was confined to the tempo of the band, she had the ability and virtuosity as a singer to push and pull entries and to reintroduce uniformity when it was needed.

Pulled phrasing and speech-like rhythms are also used throughout this song, with the latter being more prominent. However, these speech-like rhythms do not feature as heavily in her other blues repertoire in this article, with phrase pulling being the main way in which phrasing is altered in 'Tramp' and 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?'. An example of phrase pulling can be heard on the lines 'ask him why he don't love me no more' in 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?' where the 'why' in particular moves through a particularly lazy-feeling melisma, but still ensures that the phrase ends in the correct place, so the tempo of the song is not altered. Speech-like rhythms can be heard throughout 'Road to Cairo' with an example at the beginning of the song on the words 'a fella told me'. Again, the use of controlled and phrase pulling combined with speech-like rhythms used in this song show Driscoll's virtuosity, not only as a singer, but also a storyteller.

In my performance of 'Road to Cairo', I felt that the storyteller aspect was crucial to the song. Because of this, I used Driscoll's ideas of pulled and speech-like rhythms throughout to keep the melody relaxed in places such as the entry of '*hey* could I *try* your cigar', where I linger on the italicised words. This allowed for space to approach other sections – such as the choruses – in a contrasting way. However, I wanted to push this idea slightly further than Driscoll with a more relaxed version of pitched speech in conversational sections of the song such as 'Hey, thanks for stopping'. This technique is like some musical theatre repertoire, where particular words are 'acted' rather than sang which helps to emote the music and bring it to life (as musical theatre is based upon storytelling).

Tone

Julie Driscoll uses a wide range of tone colours throughout her blues repertoire, which are often used in quick succession. There are two ways in which she changes her tone, firstly through vocal placement, and secondly the alteration of sound colour, which is discussed in more depth in *Decoration and Vocal Effects*. In terms of standard vocal placement, Driscoll uses her chest, mixed, and belt areas of her voice, with different songs containing different combinations of the three. Firstly, examples of her using her chest voice are included in 'Tramp'. The use of her chest voice in this song is stereotypical of the rest of her repertoire. It does not hold a particularly low resonance and sits very naturally with what appears to be a neutral larynx [5] for the most part. Her vocals in this area of her voice are not rich and exaggerated like other women that sang blues, such as Ella Fitzgerald, but seem more natural and understated, particularly when not singing climactic sections of repertoire. Her use of pitched speech, also encompassing her chest voice, can be heard in 'Road to Cairo' on the line 'hey, thanks for stopping'.

Other areas of her voice that she uses are her mixed voice, as in 'Why Am I Treated So Bad?', which is bright and can cut through an electrified band. Lastly, the use of her belt [6] and pharyngeal placement [7] are included in 'Road to Cairo' in quick succession at the end of the song. The line 'dead, they're better thinking that I'm dead' shows her belting until the word 'I'm' where she moves

to a pharyngeal placement. The sound turns from weighted and powerful, to tinny and cutting, which drives this climactic moment in the song forwards. The fact that all her voice apart from her head voice is used shows that her singing style in her blues influenced songs was virtuosic and impressive sounding. This can be heard particularly towards the end in 'Road to Cairo' where she commands and drives the band, cutting through the instruments with the use of twang in her high belt voice.

The use of the lower registers can be viewed as intimate, especially because of the incorporation of pitched speech. It draws the audience in and aids the storytelling aspect of the music, similar to Rings' (2019: 40-41) analysis and conclusions of pitched speech in Hank Williams' 'Luke the Drifter' (1954). The quick changes in tone qualities suggests a singer who knows their voice well and how to play with it in a virtuosic way. It is interesting that her tone matches that of contemporaneous men artists, such as Robert Plant, with the use of high powerful notes used to develop a raw, sexual approach to singing. Yet on the other hand, Driscoll also incorporated this 'expected' sound with light, 'pretty' sounding parts of her voice, developing a vocal style that drew upon both typical masculine and feminine styles of the time.

Decoration and Vocal Effects

One of the most striking and distinguishable factors about Driscoll's tone is her ever-changing creation of lighter and darker tones using an altered larynx position. 'Road to Cairo' illustrates the various changes in the tone of her voice that can be heard throughout her work in different combinations. Firstly, Driscoll begins the first verse in Sadolin's 'neutral mode' which is particularly prominent on the higher notes. This helps to ease the audience into the song, and leaves space for the more climactic material later. Secondly, she uses 'curbing mode', this again is used in combination with 'neutral mode' in the first verse but displays a much less breathy tone quality. Thirdly, she uses 'overdrive mode' at the most climactic part of the song, and particularly in the improvised-style outro. Throughout her repertoire, with 'Road to Cairo' possibly being the most intricate example of sound colour alteration, the changes between Sadolin's modes are quick and seamless which shows her virtuosity as a singer. Importantly, all Sadolin's modes can be used in conjunction with the chest, mixed, or head voice.

In terms of my own performance of 'Road to Cairo', I sang this song in the original key, due to where the verses sat in my voice and the final section being at the top of the mixed voice for a sustained period. This allowed me to challenge myself and learn how to correct any vocal placement issues. At first, I had difficulty with sustaining 'neutral mode' (Clip 4) in my mixed voice and not tiring my voice out in the end section of the song, with both problems affecting the tuning. This breathy sound in my mixed voice always tended to not sit forwards and cause slight tension when sustained for a long period of time, as can be heard in an old performance of 'Hard Time Killing Floor Blues' (Clip 5 00:21-00:33), as well as this excerpt of a rehearsal of 'Road to Cairo' (Clip 3). It is a combination that I did not have much experience of, other than in short excerpts, and this was always an abandoned area in my practice, partially because I did not sing much material that required it. I spent a lot of my personal practice doing exercises to strengthen this area, alongside watching and imitating artists such as Billie Eilish (Clip 6), who has essentially based a career upon this sound. I found that opening my mouth vertically, dropping my jaw, and visualising a forward placement encouraged the sound forwards and released tension, particularly on '*ah*' vowels, which are what I found especially problematic.
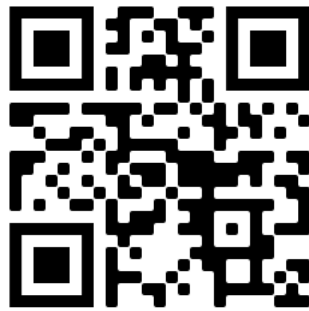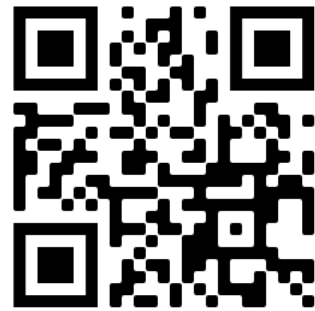
| Clip 4 | Clip 5 | Clip 6 |

The fluidity in tone altering was specific to me before this research and is a large factor in what makes Driscoll's sound unique and recognisable. In terms of my own authenticity, this means that combining many sounds and techniques throughout my vocals is important to my style also. I have always been drawn to a rich sound, particularly in the chest voice (unlike Driscoll's which is neutrally placed), but it is not always practical from a vocal health or a sonic perspective. This is because this weighted chest-dominant sound can create tension if the larynx is too heavily weighted as the pitch ascends, pulling the chest voice up. Also, sonically, this way of singing is not as effective in cutting through the sound of electrified instruments as the resonance remains low. A brighter, tinnier sound is more effective in this scenario. As a vocalist I have the ability, through different techniques and choices, to match the tone of an instrument and melt into the sound or cut through it. An example of tone altering can be heard in the performance of *Road to Cairo* where I wanted to blend into the verses slightly, so used very breathy 'neutral mode' at a quiet volume, which contrasts with the last section of pharyngeal placement that cuts through the band ('Road to Cairo' Performance Video 03:38-04:17).

Driscoll's vocals also contain sparse elements of distortion that come in two forms: vocal tightening [8] and the use of grit. Importantly, these qualities are only included in repertoire that do not play with sound colour to the same extent as 'Road to Cairo' but contain a generally more powerful sound throughout (more 'overdrive' and 'curbing'), such as 'Tramp', which I use to discuss these choices. The lyrics '*Stetson* hats' are vocally tightened in verse one, as well as in the choruses on the words 'Mama was papa *too*', and 'loving is all I know how to *do*', with the italicised words highlighting which are tightened. Driscoll uses this to lean into particular words, with the italicised words being the ones tightened. Secondly, she uses grit and gritty onsets to notes in the second verse onwards when the brass section is added into the instrumentation. Vocal tightening alludes to the impression of difficulty in the vocal lines, whereas Driscoll's use of this effect contrasts this as she demonstrates so much skill with her voice. Due to Driscoll's ease throughout the registers, the vocal tightening comes across purely as a stylistic blues characteristic that she adds to make her tone sound a little rougher at times, which is in line with traditional masculine vocal traits in the blues-rock scene at the time.

The final section of 'Road to Cairo' contains 'overdrive mode' combined with mixed voice in Driscoll's recording. This was challenging to get right in my own performance of the song, particularly towards the end where I also incorporated vocal tightening; a combination that I wanted to learn. When trying to emulate it with the band in rehearsals, I found myself burnt out quickly which suggested that I was not executing the technique in a healthy manner. Studying past performances of various repertoire highlighted that it was an area of my voice that I thought I had mastered at the time. However, upon reflection this was something that I needed to adjust so that

it was sustainable, as it was not for prolonged periods of time. I always approached this technique by compressing air, which I have achieved successfully for really short periods of time, like in an old cover of 'I Want You' by The Beatles ('I Want You' MA Video 03:37-03:40). However, when an extended period of this technique was required, I noticed that I was singing with too much vocal cord tension as heard in a previous performance of 'Fool For My Stockings' by ZZ Top ('Fool For My Stockings' MA Video 03:05-03:09).

'I Want You' MA Video

'Fool For Your Stockings' MA Video

The way to healthily create vocal compression is to close the glottic valve, constricting the air flow, which creates a distorted sound and can be altered to create varying levels of distortion. It essentially forces you to increase your air pressure (not to be confused with air flow). This can be likened to the sound that you make if you were to pick something heavy up and make a '*huuh*' sound. With this technique, it was important to sing the phrase clean before trying to distort, with the distortion being a gradual process and slowly pushed further and further. In the clip of 'Oh Darling!' by The Beatles ('Oh Darling!' Clip), I show an example of sustainable vocal compression. Other methods of distortion were also useful for this project, such as vocal fry [9]. A common misconception is that vocal fry, which is a creaky sound created by relaxed vocal cords and small amount of airflow, is the 'lowest register of the voice', when in fact you can fry throughout your voice (Clip 7). By elongating the fry sound through the mixed voice territory, you can physically feel the distortion in the mask area. This is not a technique heard commonly in Driscoll's repertoire; however, this is something that was important to me and my vocal style.

'Oh Darling!' Clip

: Clip 7

Influence on My Practice

In terms of looking at how Driscoll's vocal choices have influenced my performance of 'Road to Cairo' and my practice away from this research, it is important to remember the vocal traits that were already specific to my singing style before, such as the American accent, slight huskiness, or light distortion, and a low resonating chest voice. I have certainly found new elements of my voice that I now think are authentic to my style, such as 'neutral mode' in the mixed voice since studying Driscoll's vocal choices as a singer. Techniques such as this have allowed me to push the idea of contrast in my voice further, which I now realise is a fundamental trait to my singing style. It is particularly evident when singing repertoire with a full band, which can be heard in the performance video of 'Road to Cairo', but also away from this research in this cover of 'Oh Darling!'. With stripped-back material, it feels more natural to have less contrast and a more mellow vocal style, which can be heard in a cover of 'Call Out My Name' by The Weeknd. In the case of stripped back material, it does not seem authentic for me to utilise extremes of distortion. However, I still use vocal fry onsets to keep elements of the rough texture to my voice.

'Call Out My Name' Video

'Penicillin Blues' MA Video

Comparing an old performance video of Maggie Bell's 'Penicillin Blues' (2016, see 'Penicillin Blues' MA Video), and this performance of 'Road to Cairo' from this research project ('Road to Cairo' Performance Video), I notice many differences in my voice. Firstly, I have much more control of my voice generally, and there are clearly more thought-out choices. My 'neutral mode' in the mixed voice is much better placed, and the changes between this technique and others is more seamless. My gritty and vocal fry onsets are still there, but I also use sustained moments of vocal compression. I also have much rounder, lower resonance to my voice throughout when I choose it, which contrasts with the 'twangy' pharyngeal placement, and utilise far more contrasting tones in quick succession now as a singer. When thinking about my authenticity as a singer, I speak with an English accent, so I would also like to further explore the use of pharyngeal placement combined with an English accent in the future. I think that the option of pharyngeal placement is important to my sound but would like to see whether it is possible to achieve the same bright tone – that is achieved with an American or transatlantic accent – when using an English accent.

Conclusion

There are many answers as to 'what made Julie Driscoll's voice unique'. Her vocals encompassed blues-influenced melodies in the chest and mixed voice, but in the extremes of the upper mixed she utilised a pharyngeal placement, which helped to cut through the sound of that band. She

utilised Sadolin's 'neutral', 'curbing', and 'overdrive' modes, all of which offered varying levels of metallic qualities to her tone, as well as vocal tightening. Overall, I deem her lyrics less important compared to other factors in what made her voice unique, as some of her songs were covers. However, the way that she utilised lyrics was interesting. Pitched speech, alongside pulled phrasing particularly in story-telling pieces helped to draw the listener in and guide the audience through the song.

Driscoll's individual techniques that she used in her voice (when isolated) were common to hear throughout many vocals of the time in the blues genre. However, the autoethnographic element to this research has highlighted the ways in which she combined them, and the idea of quick succession between vocal extremes. This is what I argue as fundamentally the most important and defining feature of her style, and the most influential factor of her style in my own practice. Because of this method of research, it has made me reflect on my own vocal choices both before and after this research, as well as understanding my own authenticity as a singer.

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Endnotes

1. Sadolin's modes of the voice (2000):
Importantly, Sadolin's 'neutral', 'curbing', 'overdrive' and 'edge' modes are vocal effects that can be used in conjunction with registers of the voice.
  1. Neutral mode is low in volume and with a soft, airy tone, non- metallic (p.88).
  2. Curbing mode is medium volume and half metallic (p.96-99).
  3. Overdrive mode is loud, shouty and fully metallic (p.106-107).
  4. Edge mode is loud, scream-like and fully metallic, and contains a lot of 'twang' to achieve the sound healthily (see 'belting') (p.116-117).
2. Chest voice It is the richest and warmest tonally and the sound resonates in the chest or mouth cavity. Vocal cords become shorter and thicker.
3. Mixed voice is a blend of chest voice and head voice and resonates in the 'mask' area of the voice, which is around the cheeks, nose and under the eyes; it creates a more 'whiney' tone because of the placement. Vocal cords begin to elongate and thin.
4. Head voice is one of the parts of the voice that sits in the head resonator. It is bright, round and 'pingy' and had a much more piercing tone than the mixed or chest voice. It is produced with fully connected vocal cords. The vocal cords become even longer and thinner here than in mixed voice (this is like falsetto which is 'airier' in sound and only utilises partial cord closure).
5. The larynx is the part of the vocal apparatus that is partially responsible for tone. It moves up and down in response to pitch. In contemporary singing, it is common practice to adopt a 'low larynx' position to create a full, round tone; this is commonly thought of as the 'healthiest approach' to singing.

6. Belting is a loud sound that utilises the short, thick vocal cords, decreased breath pressure, a narrowed epiglottic funnel, and a slightly raised and tilted larynx, and increased intercostal pressure.

7. Pharyngeal placement involves the creation of wide pharynx position (the pharynx is at the back of the throat near where the back of the tongue lies and behind the nasal cavity). This is achieved by placing the back of the tongue close to the pharyngeal wall, by lifting of the cheeks and zygomatic muscles. The resulting sound is nasal and bright.

8. Vocal tightening is a vocal effect that is generally avoided in current vocal tuition, and involves a tightening of the throat muscles, giving a strained sound. However, this is something that can be done safely by trained singers.

9. Vocal fry has crackly, or creaky qualities, and can be achieved throughout the vocal range. It is caused through loosening and relaxation of the vocal cords whilst a steady flow of air moves through them, creating irregular cord vibrations.

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ETHNOGRAPHER SOUNDCLASH: A UK RAP AND GRIME STORY

Joy White and Jonathan Ilan

Introduction

Ethnography is a form of social research that generates insight from engagements with the lives of those being researched (see Brewer 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Reliant on the relationships that form between researcher and participant, ethnography seeks to build deep findings over time which tend to reflect the specific people involved. As two different researchers of UK Rap and Grime, we are using the format of the soundclash to tell a story of the genres we study. Our identities, approaches to study, and musical tastes inform the tracks that we have chosen for this purpose and in dialogue they tell a more expansive story that we might have come up with alone.

Rationale

The ethnographic imperative to immerse oneself in a field and culture of study manifests in a great variety of practices, experiences and data. For those of us who study music scenes and cultures, it involves finding a means of 'tuning into' the lived experience of being a part of them, whether as musicians or fans. In the contemporary Black British music forms of Grime, UK Rap and UK Drill, lyrics and creative content can themselves be forms of ethnographic data (see Barron 2013). As scholars of these genres, however, we are too often restricted to more conventional forms of presenting our research and findings. It can be difficult to find the space to explore, process and showcase insight outside of the rigid format of standard academic journals and books. How can we research music scenes with creativity and conviviality at their hearts if it is challenging to become excited about the ways we present? With this ethnographer soundclash we present an ethnographic picture of the genres and scenes we study, trading YouTube videos, 'tune fi tune' (song for song).

Our decision to present research-gained insight in the form of a soundclash is born of our appreciation of and affinity for the lifestyles, heritage, and modes of practice that gave rise to these musical forms in the first place. UK Rap and Grime music are imbued with the stylistic one-up-manship of street

culture to the extent that 'clashing' and lyrical 'beef' are woven through them. Clashing presents as an adversarial component where lyrics are spoken or sung over the same beat, often building an interaction between the performers and the audience. Performers will often throw down a lyrical challenge and 'send for' (challenge) another artist (see Ilan 2012; White 2016; White 2020b). They are, moreover, heavily indebted to the legacy of reggae soundsystem culture where rivals compete for supremacy through their capacity to select and play the most apt and current records (see Stolzoff 2000; Bradley 2001; Henry 2006; White 2016). The clash is steeped in the language of competition, violence, and war, it is however anything but a declaration of true antagonism. Rather, the clash is part of a rich circuitry of mutual respect, camaraderie, conviviality, care and support through which music scenes develop and foster talent (see Bramwell 2015; White 2016). The ethnographic eye can pierce through the thick layer of racism and stereotype that perceives Black youth leisure through unhelpful cliches of violence and indeed 'the gang' (Gunter 2017). What can appear to be aggressive can in fact be a much more ambivalent and mournful expression of suffering and a prefiguration of what is required to overcome it (White 2017; Ilan 2020).

Although black music videos had been in existence since the 1980s, YouTube offers an accessible way to share musical output. UK Rap and Grime are established Black musical forms, drawing on a sonic genealogy of Hip Hop, Reggae, Jungle, and UK Garage, nourished by Black Atlantic flows (see Gilroy 1993). Our point of entry in this article is via YouTube music videos which, since 2005, have offered an accessible way to share musical output. As Malcolm James explains in Sonic Intimacy:

> 'YouTube music videos tell a story of a moment in the transformation of black diasporic sound culture in Britain, in which autonomous infrastructures are absorbed by capitalist imperatives, treble supplants bass, hyperlocal presence is embedded, social media becomes the centre and the screen starts to sing' (James 2020: 81)

As ethnographers our selections reflect both the hyperlocal presence as well as the global reach of Black Atlantic musical flows. Ethnographers, furthermore, are open to research questions and strategies taking shape in the field while research is ongoing and truthfully we were unsure where our convivial musical sparring would take us. We are different as people and as scholars. Joy is a Black British woman of Jamaican heritage with working-class roots and hails from the original dancehall generation. Johnny is a white Irish man from a middle-class background and the same age as the original Grime generation. Joy's ethnographic engagement with the Grime and Rap scenes has been centred on traditional participant observation and interviews together with exploring material across a range of media. Johnny meanwhile combined insights from years DJing and promoting with experiences of ethnographically researching urban marginality to inform his immersive media analysis. As we 'trade discs' (or more accurately YouTube videos) we show how ethnographic difference can be generative, how iterative exchange can build more fulsome insight, and that what appears to be musical conflict can in fact be collaboration and development.

Over the course of two weeks we traded tracks and commentaries at regular intervals. In this way our story took shape in dialogue as we appreciated the other's contribution and developed our subsequent selections. The tracks we have drawn may say something about who we are as individuals and scholars, how we tell stories and how we have reflected on some of the social issues that the music is affected by or comments on. The reader will have to judge.

We have presented our soundclash choices in a slightly idiosyncratic way, beginning with Johnny's selected five and then turning to Joy's. A picture of the scenes and genres emerges that is ethnographic in depth and attention to detail (Bramwell and Butterworth 2019). This approach to understanding the music seems particularly important and apt given the ongoing criminalisation of the genres that have seen extremes of censorship, restrictions on performances and the use of

lyrics and videos (shorn of appropriate context) to convict young marginalised (usually Black) men of crimes they might not have otherwise been prosecuted for (see e.g. White 2017; Fatsis 2019; Ilan 2020). As part of this we begin to explore scene participation as a form of 'care', a concept that is arguably bound up with femininity and tending to the vulnerable (see e.g. Fine 2005). In the material below we see tough men showing interest in their youngers, their communities and culture and committing their energies in the hope of securing better outcomes. Music provides the space for a wider range of emotional states to be experienced and explored in contexts where strong street cultures might otherwise seem mostly hospitable to anger and conflict (Ilan 2015; Stuart 2020).

We have also created a Spotify playlist of this soundclash, which is available through the following QR code:

Selected Tracks
Johnny Ilan
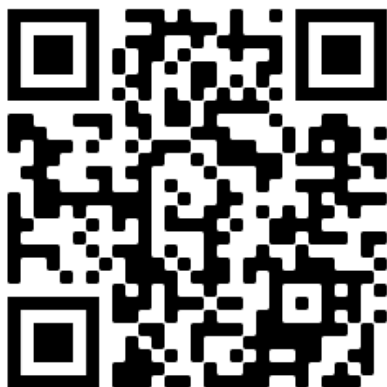
Sticky ft. Tubby T- Tales Of The Hood (2002, Social Circles)

First up from me, a UK Garage track released at the dawn of the Grime era, its upfront bassline and street themes share something with the newer more pugnacious genre. Singer Tubby T's uplifting vocals in a Jamaican Dancehall style highlight the rich cosmopolitan backstory possessed by all the genres of Black Atlantic music. The lyrical content further sets this piece apart, unabashedly conscious, an older head shares the advice he received from his own mother: avoid the pitfalls of life 'on road' through eschewing violence and conspicuous consumption.

Ethnographers are often left with the unenviable task of making sense of contradictions they observe in the field and going beyond an 'impressionistic' account of what is most striking. Conscious lyricism is not abundantly common either in aspirational Garage or confrontational Grime, but certainly in the case of the latter, careful listening reveals Grime artists valuing craft, creative entrepreneurialism, and education. Moreover, there are clear ethics of care in operation, where senior figures guide and mentor up-and-coming artists with much the same love exhibited by Tubby T's narrator. Ultimately, much like Rap, Grime needs to be understood as shot through with 'dissonance' (Jeffries 2011), the simultaneous adoption and display of seemingly contradictory tropes. It has been too easy to dismiss Grime as 'violence music' but it also (or perhaps more accurately) community music, care music, and music to bridge generations.

Ghetto – Mountain (2008, J Clarke Enterprises)

For my second tune I have selected a gold standard battle (clash) track by one of the MCs I rate most in the Grime scene. Ghetts (as he is now) has numerous different flows, with word-play and clarity for days and days. Spitting vitriol over a jumpy riddim [instrumental track] he has scorn for the scene and its supporters as much as rival MCs.

Ghetts is essentially daring anyone else in the scene to match him in flow and lyricism. He boosts the quality even of his lesser lyrics [32 bar verses are considered superior to the shorter 16 bar variant]. Later in the song he makes thinly veiled references to top MCs ensuring that his challenge cannot be ignored. He equivocates in his prognosis of the scene, proclaiming on the one hand his passion and belief, whilst decrying on the other the lack of support (financial and otherwise) provided to him by it. He boasts that he can best any other MC but that his musical profession would never see him able to apply for a mortgage. Much later in 'Listen' (2019, Sony) he corrects himself on the latter point, admitting that his musical career has allowed him to buy a five-bedroom house. Ghetts embodies the transformation of UK Rap and Grime music. Once underground, niche and concerned so centrally with internecine rivalry, it is now big business. Ghetto once rapped about the lengths he is willing to go to defeat other artists in the lyrical clash – now Ghetts speaks of attending art galleries and his success in the industry.

67 ft Giggs - Lets Lurk (2016, 6IX 7EVEN)

Given that I have written against the criminalization of Drill Rap (Ilan 2020) I had to draw for a tune from that genre. UK Rap's influences are distinctly American and South London has had a particular heritage in translating US 'gangsta' tropes into a UK context. Brixton's 67 exemplify and indeed pioneered the UK drill sound, delivering cold-hearted tales of drug-selling, stabbing, and shooting. The opening verse by Monkey, for example, could be translated as follows:

I will send a younger associate armed with a gun to find you and they will find you and shoot,
My associates are authentically street while you rivals are posers/fakers
The police pursue us and my friend is killing time in prison. It is not fair.
Selling drugs remains lucrative. Addicts continue to have cravings and phone me to procure drugs.

Poetic in their original, slang heavy form these lyrics are shockingly graphic in their depiction of life on London's roads, and indeed can seem incendiary. And yet for all those in the Drill scene convicted of and victimised by criminal activity – the violence remains more creative rhetoric than literal reality. This song implicitly rebuts lazy assumptions made about young, disadvantaged Black men. Far from revelling in territorial bloodshed, it celebrates collaboration between artists from Brixton and Peckham – areas notorious for their rivalry. Far from embodying predatory behaviour, it is a

moment of care and respect between generations as the well-established 'Landlord' Giggs passes the baton to a new generation of rappers.

Roddy Ricch x Chip x Yxng Bane - How It Is (2019, Kobalt)

This is not just a catchy tune, but an example of the deep reservoirs of creativity and commercial acumen at the heart of UK Rap and Grime. Now in the top-tier, Compton's Roddy Ricch was arguably then underappreciated in the US but had been making an impression here. Executive producer 'The Plug' through his experience of specialist retail had built an extensive contact book of rappers and began to facilitate a string of trans-Atlantic collaborations, of which this is my favourite. On the one hand the song covers familiar themes. Roddy stacks his racks of Dollars, boasting that his Patek Phillipe watch is 'luminescent' with diamonds, but conceding that his wealth might need defending. Simply doing this whilst attributing his authority to speak on matters street to his own origins 'from the bottom', he lays down the hook around which the entire song rests.

The tune also veers away from Rap cliché. Resonances between experienced marginality and material ambition in the US and UK become a major theme as Chip drops a surprising verse. Though once firmly identifiable as the 'Grime scene saviour', here he spits in a melodic trap style better associated with the other artists on the track. Doing this not only showcases his versatility but also confirms his relevance to a new generation of fans. Finally, Yxng Bane comes through to bring the UK Trap Rap sound to the table. He is filmed enjoying the lap of luxury in a mansion, but as his verse ends he sneaks out an admission that he is emotionally numb, using consumerism to distract himself from this and the pain that must exist somewhere. This again confounds accusations of gross materialism. Similarly, in as much as the video (and lyrics) sexualise women, this was an early outing for the supremely talented up-and-coming (female) British film-maker Ashleigh Jadee.

KB - Boys Don't Cry (2021)

My final track is a less obvious selection and has a lot of work to do. It represents for 'the regions' (UK Rap is largely divided between London and outside of it), but arguably Birmingham has a significant Rap/Grime ecosystem of its own. It also represents for music distributed outside of the framework of the music industry, whether independent or major label. KB is incarcerated, explaining the animated video and many of the themes explored in the song. A prime example of the sub-genre becoming known as 'Real Rap', the lyrics in this one are unflinching in their examination of road life and how it is embroiled with various emotional states. KB bares all, admitting that he has experienced so many different painful emotions but reflects on the fact that men living at the tougher end of street culture cannot allow these feelings to come through, sublimating them in favour of aggression. He reminds his

listeners of the high sentences attaching to murder and serious criminality advising young people to avoid it if they are not willing to risk thirty years of imprisonment.

So whilst lazy stereotypes view the 'roadman'/ 'gang member' as a coldblooded killer, KB paints a different picture. Not only is the violence at the more extreme ends of road life underpinned by experienced trauma, but participation in that life itself is brutalising, traumatic and removes individuals from the nurturing embrace of family. KB's lyrics reveal the kinds of complex realities that are signature of the best ethnographies - see Reid (2017) and Bakkali (2019) for rich depictions of life on London's socio-economic margins. KB urges younger people to think about the privations of prison and the implications of a long sentence. This flies in the face of misunderstandings about Rap 'glamorising' violence and criminal lifestyles – KB's words and the place from where he speaks them are the antithesis of luxury lifestyle and their honesty means that they cannot be dismissed as inauthentic. Whilst the popularity of Rap music is tied up with its supposed embrace of 'real life' (as opposed to the artifice of carefully constructed pop music and pop musician personas see Ilan 2015), pondering through contradictions is considerably more authentic (or true to life) than the unreflexive adoption of 'roadman' or strong street cultural cliches.

Joy White

Kano - Can't Hold We Down (feat. Popcaan) - E02 (2019, Parlophone Records & Bigger Picture Music)

Kano is a 'Grime original', by that I mean he was there at the outset as Grime emerged in the early years of the twenty-first century. Moving on through almost two decades, Kano continues to be an original in that he cannot be pinned down to one genre. In this track, backed by violins, piano, and a choir, Kano calls in the vocals of Jamaican Dancehall artist – Popcaan. I cite the YouTube episode because, to fully make sense of the track, the visuals have to be seen in combination with the sound. In a previous film, Kano talks about meeting Popcaan in Jamaica, and going to the studio with him. Popcaan also cooked for Kano and his family. While Popcaan is in London, Kano returns the favour.
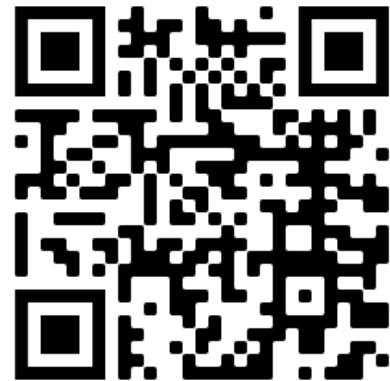
As he walks into the group setting, Popcaan introduces himself to one of the older women, and in respectful gesture, gives his full name - Andre Sutherland. Turning to introduce his companions, Popcaan sings a line from one of his songs 'Family' (Popcaan, 2018), while the rest of group join in. It sets the scene for a domestic setting. 'Can't Hold We Down' is about family, kinship, and community, it is intergenerational, it takes in the past and accounts for the present. Popcaan sings the hook, alluding to the struggle it takes to rise up and move on, Kano continues the theme and gives thanks for being able to make it out. Making it out through music is a common trope (Ilan 2012; White 2016).

Scenes of happiness, laughter, cooking, and sharing food, setting up the jerk pan. Around the table, in the background, we glimpse some legends of contemporary Black British music - Giggs, Lethal B, Ghetts. In each scene, the frame is filled with more and more people, and it is a joyous celebration of Black family life. Then, at 4.09, all who are present room join Popcaan on the chorus which is also the title of the track, offering a truly afro-diasporic moment as young men and women adopt similar gestures and pose.

The final frame takes us outside into the garden, we see the groups of people dancing, drinking, and eating. As Kano draws the track to a close, he provides a moment to reflect on how music offers a sense of belonging that crosses time and space (White 2019).

Chip - Family feat Loick Essien (Official Audio) (2017)

My next track continues the family theme but from a different perspective. It is unusual in my selection as it has no video. However, it is uploaded on the artist's own YouTube channel – offering a nod to the 'DIYness' of these musical forms. Chip (formerly Chipmunk) is another genre crossing veteran of the Grime scene. Loick Essien's vocals provide the chorus and lays out a meaning of family that takes us beyond blood ties.

On 'Family', he revisits themes that he has covered before. He talks about the complex make up of contemporary family life – refusing to use the category of 'half' when referring to his siblings. Chip shouts out his mum and his dad as young parents who gave him a positive upbringing, and instilled the value of a good education. And yet, somehow, his brother ends up with a four-year prison term for a serious offence. Chip's bewilderment regarding his brother's situation is evident.

Another unusual feature is that this track is almost six minutes long. From 4.19, it is Chip's brother's voice that we hear, in a warm, affectionate snatch of conversation. Using nicknames, his brother offers positive feedback on the work that Chip has been doing. He lets him know that the whole wing 'bangs their doors' when they listen [a sign of appreciation]. And we hear an appeal to not glorify jail as if it's something positive. In a society where Black families are stigmatised, framed as a problem and often rendered invisible, the song offers a powerful meditation on what family is, what it means, and why it matters.

#7th Snizzy - Home (Music Video) | @MixtapeMadness (2020)

I have written at length about gentrification in Forest Gate in Newham, an outer east London borough (White, 2020a). In 'Home', Snizzy presents another side of the same place. 'Home' offers a soft, sweet sonic backdrop to a profound, narrative reflection on people and places that are gone or forever altered. Looking straight at the camera, and delivered with a wry smile, this is a somewhat melancholic track. Snizzy is accompanied by only one other person in the video – Baseman – a UK rapper that he has musically collaborated with in the past. The rapport between them is evident. Contrasting cut-aways show radio appearances and prison life, as well as local markers by way of street signs and locations. The first 18 seconds of the video, shows scenes outside Forest Gate station. It calls in another track 'Nerve' – Snizzy's 'fresh home' output recorded within days of his release from prison (2020). References to living in a pandemic show how contemporary this track is. We can only imagine the irony of being released from jail during a UK wide lockdown. The prison trope is common in UK Rap, and Snizzy is no different as he talks of his own lived experience of being incarcerated. Knowing that he has recently been released makes these references particularly poignant. Despite some fierce adversarial lyrics, Snizzy states clearly that he is not seeking to glorify the kind of life that will leave you locked up or dead.
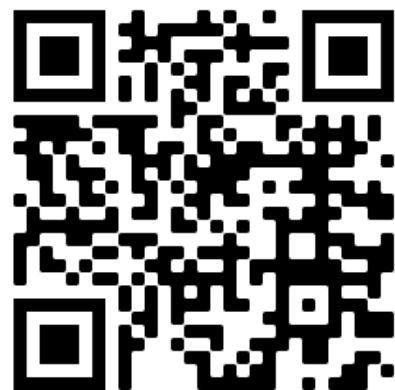
At the same time, an unresolved tension exists, with a recognition that life on the outside has its own challenges, even though Forest Gate is home, enemies and treachery still feature. At its heart, 'Home' is a song of mourning, love, and loss. Snizzy articulates poignantly how being in jail disconnects him from his relationship with his child. And when he asks his son for forgiveness, I feel it.

Lady Leshurr - D.I.V (2020)

From the first bars to the final bars, Lady Leshurr brings fire to this track. Hailing from Birmingham, Lady Leshurr is a genre-hopping veteran of contemporary Black British music. Lyrically, she's unstoppable, her wordplay is complex, clever, and articulate, opening with a clear statement that she is the best, so do not attempt to test her.

Over a UK drill beat, she responds to UK rapper Ivorian Doll, who implied in a Daily Duppy freestyle that it was time for Lady Leshurr to hang up her crown. As a 'diss' track, it works on a number of levels. In the video, visually Lady Leshurr is dressed for combat, the title of the song is an anagram of Ivorian Doll's other stage name – IVD. DIV (in some places) is also slang for stupid and, as a final reminder, the track is released on Ivorian Doll's birthday - although the original diss was in October, because Leshurr 'didn't want to kill her in Black History Month'. A reference to her previous series *Queen's Speech* 1-7 (Ep.1, 2015; Ep.2, 2015; Ep.3, 2015; Ep.4, 2015; Ep.5, 2015; Ep.6, 2016; Ep.7, 2017), reminds us that whether signed or independent music is often presented as a route out, as well as a way to generate wealth and resources (Ilan 2012; White 2016)

Although it's a rapid-fire response to a perceived verbal slight, and despite the seemingly aggressive posturing, the track exudes humour throughout. And, for three minutes and 41 seconds, not a single swear word is uttered.

FFSYTHO - Bop Through Ya Manor (Official Visual) (2019)

For my final track, I have selected 'Bop Through Ya Manor' by FFSYTHO (pronounced 'for f sake why tho'). Produced by Filthy Gears, it has an old school/new school vibe. It feels like how Grime was in its early days, but it is filtered through a contemporary social media affect. In many ways, FFSYTHO's story is a classic Grime narrative, from spitting a 30 second freestyle from her windowsill in 2017 on Twitter, to being lauded on mainstream channels [BBC 1 Introducing, BBC 1Xtra]. Lyrically, her word play draws on a familiar competitive trope as she revisits her journey so far (Diallo 2015). At the same time, she uses her words to locate her Irish/Caribbean cultural heritage, as well as a sense of place and belonging.

Visually, the first 30 seconds take the form of a phone call, then the video flits between domestic and outdoor scenes, from the kitchen to a graffiti covered underpass, from an armchair to a stairwell in a block of flats. When the police and the regulating authorities cracked down on Grime events in London, areas such as Northampton[1] (where FFSYTHO is from) kept going. The

artist embodies that turn of the century Grime spirit and energy. Bop Through Ya Manor is an aggressive, uncompromising rally locating us in Grime past and present. Listen when you need a lift.

Discussion

Our approach takes into account Les Back's suggestion that as ethnographers we should seek 'the outside story that is also the inside story' (2007: 9). In other words, we look and listen beyond the obvious bravado and toughness of the lyrical expression. What emerges from the selection are some common themes. Inherently ethnographic, this is a representation of UK Rap and Grime that goes beyond impressionistic and sensational renderings to consider depths, dissonances and contradictions. Throughout, the ethnographic character of our story is evidenced by descriptions of songs and videos that are rich in detail and analysed for deeper significance. Grime artists and rappers paint an ethnographic picture of matters significant to those at the socio-economic margins of Britain; and as ethnographic researchers ourselves we offer a picture of what is significant within these scenes. Perhaps some of our individual traits have revealed themselves in our selections and story-telling, with Johnny dwelling on genre-classification and historical ordering, whilst Joy teases out how lyrics and life relate to each other.

These are genres shaped by craft, creativity, and entrepreneurialism, themes that can be complicated by the simultaneous embodiment of aspiration and a hyper-individualism. The trope of marginality, coming from the bottom, going through the struggle and rising up through music and enterprise is an aspect of transformation that underpins many of the selected tracks. But what happens when you've stacked the cash, and you are embedded into and wedded to a neoliberal hegemony that does not mitigate against systemic and structural racism (Gilroy 2013)? Even in the most aspirational scenario, success cannot ensure friendship or loyalty. The ways in which transformation takes place are evident. Artists cross borders into the possibility of new identities as lyricists, mentors, voices of reason and as messengers/interlocuters from the 'hood' as well as inside the industry.

Incarceration looms large as a feature, either lived or observed, experienced both as loss of freedom and as an absence of connection (Dyson and Daulatzai 2009). In the rush to take fright at the lyrics, and to curtail the perceived celebration of criminality (see Fatsis 2019), what is often missed is the importance of connectedness and relationships. By placing family, an aspect that is often muted in both academic and popular literature, at the heart of their tracks the significance of ties of kinship, love, and belonging is brought to the fore. Nestled amongst the beat and the swagger, intense conversations can be heard that try to make sense of systems at work and how that relates to individual behaviour, as well as life on the block. Performing Grime, UK Rap, and UK Drill allows individuals to display a sonic rendering of their environment. Usually urban, these perspectives are also gendered, reading as a predominantly masculine narrative (Barron 2013). However, it is important to note an increasing presence of women MCs. In our selection, Lady Leshurr and Ffsytho lyrically cover similar ground in terms of reflecting on their musical achievements, MC skills, family connections, and of course their progress in the industry. What is not evident from these MCs are references to incarceration and coming home, although this may appear in other work.

Conclusion

The story of UK Rap and Grime is one of development, evolution, and perpetual challenge. Styles of music and particular artists have eras of particular popularity, but the themes explored in the music have wider resonance with the experience of being Black in Britain, or being marginalised more generally. Our soundclash has allowed us to tell this story in an original way that pays tribute to the musical heritage of the genres themselves. Outside of the realm of organised competition, clashes

are often designed without a mechanism for determining 'who won'. It might be obvious from crowd reaction, or moot when everyone has enjoyed the music. Similarly in this ethnographer soundclash, our story about Grime and UK Rap has emerged interactively and it may well be of little import to discern a 'winner'. Then again, you might take a view on this question.

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Jonathan Ilan is Senior Lecturer in Criminology at City, University of London. He was awarded a PhD in 2008 for his ethnographic work on marginalized young people, community, crime, justice and policing in inner-city Dublin, Ireland. In 2009 he relocated to the UK where he spent seven years at the University of Kent, developing a deep knowledge of and appreciation for cultural criminology. In 2015 he published *Understanding Street Culture: Poverty, crime, youth and cool* with Palgrave MacMillan. He continues to publish and teach on a range of issues from urban violence to the policing of marginalized communities; from the criminalization of street music to the politics of subcultural practice.

Endnotes

1. Form 696 (a risk assessment form/process that could result in a jail term of up to to six months or a £20,000 fine) had been used to curtail or shut down live Grime events in London (Hancox 2010). In Swindon, Bristol and Northampton, the Sidewinder events provided a platform for MCs and DJs (Sidewinder 2006, 2007).

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SOUNDCLOUD: A CREATIVE MUSIC SPACE FOR EVERYONE?

Marina Arias and Pablo Espiga

In recent years there has been talk about "the SoundCloud kids" and the sonic and aesthetic innovation in their DIY work. In this article, we will discuss two main phenomena that we have observed through qualitative fieldwork on the platform: the nature of SoundCloud as a fruitful creative space for the development of more experimental forms and the advantages and disadvantages of the social dynamics it offers. Qualitative methods were applied through three different perspectives: as musicians, as listeners and as popular music researchers. We will discuss some points about the applications and the type of user SoundCloud has, and how it evolved in recent years. We will apply this to the Spanish independent music scene, exemplifying it in DJs, producers, podcasters. We will also observe how internet (micro)genres proliferate on the platform, like SoundCloud rap or wave. Indeed, these music categories co-exist with communities encouraged on SoundCloud social dimension via comments, like, reposts, follow, and other social dynamics. Nevertheless, this "culture of connectivity" (Hesmondhalgh et al. 2019) usually conceals problems that can put at risk the participatory understanding of the platform, as we will examine in this work.

SoundCloud: Space for amateurs or experimental music?

SoundCloud's social dimension and collaborative potential benefit the collective component, artist-audience interaction, and the bloom of virtual music scenes and new music genres. Several stages in the history of the platform can be distinguished. The one that mainly characterises the SoundCloud ethos is that of the pre-regulation context (2009-2014), marked by genres such as SoundCloud or mumble rap, as stated on multiple YouTube videos that idealize this period [1]. In contrast, since the mid 2010s, some changes have taken place in social media, especially the online media monetisation and new copyright policies, marking a period of change and the consequent decline and almost disappearance of SoundCloud. Nevertheless, this platform is still different from any other social network or music listening service due to how it is experienced by the communities that are generated around it. To demonstrate why SoundCloud offers a different landscape for musicians and musicologists, we have conducted this research through interviews with musicians who are users of the platform and virtual fieldwork. This qualitative study of SoundCloud has

been developed through three types of user roles: **musician**; **listener**; and **musicologist**.

As millennial/postmillennial **musicians**, we have developed the necessity of not only creating but also sharing our work. We both have used SoundCloud to broadcast our personal music projects. We agree with other users that we can upload content immediately and for free without worrying so much about the control over the content and its quality. You do not have to feel completely sure that you have a finished project; publishing in this context represents more of a snapshot of what you are creating. Indeed, as with YouTube, SoundCloud is commonly used in music schools as a pedagogical tool for students to delimit a project, as we explored when we uploaded our tracks and DJ sessions for class assignments in our user roles as music production students.

As **listeners**, we noted that SoundCloud still has some particularities that make discovering music different from other platforms: bidirectionality between artist and user and platform functions such as reposting or the now extinct user groups. For example, we consume DJ sessions and podcasts through SoundCloud that cannot be found elsewhere due to copyright issues. However, the sheer amount of content and lack of clear hierarchies makes it difficult for the listener to access what really interests them. Therefore, we usually access the SoundCloud profile of artists we have previously discovered on social networks or even in person, like wave producer Hermei or lo-fi artist Defrvtos, who we both met in Madrid.

As **musicologists** interested in popular music, apart from offering access to many underground artists, SoundCloud provides us with a large amount of extra-musical material, from library samples to podcasts. SoundCloud fieldwork has helped us to observe how music-related activities occur on the Internet. We have tracked hashtag, repost, comment, like and (more broadly) post dynamics that led us to analyse how virtual (and physic) relations are built, how users interact with other agents – audiences, curators, other artists, or labels – and which kind of strategies they employ in their music scene participation.

SoundCloud is a platform oriented to any kind of sound material with a social media component that differentiates it from other streaming services such as Spotify or Apple Music. From its inception, it achieved success among amateur musicians due to the absence of aggregators, offering users almost total control over their work. Moreover, it started as a free service that interested some major artists, so users began to upload content of a more spontaneous nature, without economic expectations and with the sole intention of disseminating it. The platform was particularly relevant in a context prior to the regularisation of copyright on the internet [2], so it was common for a musician to use it to disseminate versions of other artists' songs without paying royalties. As with YouTube, SoundCloud collaborated with the music software industry to encourage amateur musicians to share their work, including direct export functions to the platform. This fits perfectly in a context characterised by the rise of prosumers in the millennial and Z generations. Arguably, SoundCloud, like MySpace in its day, has functioned as a portfolio for amateur musicians or for experimental works that musicians choose not to include in their streaming catalogue, not to mention other content such as live performances, remixes, rehearsal recordings, etc.

Regarding professional musician usage of SoundCloud, the Spanish example is characterised by independent artists who participated in a very weakened peripheral industry after the 2000s music industry crisis and the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. SoundCloud was particularly relevant in Spain in the independent rock and urban music scenes as many recording studios and labels disappeared (see Novoa 2013). Thus, self-production and the use of this platform became almost necessary for musicians in the sharing of their work. At the same time, there was a confrontation between musicians and the SGAE (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, the Spanish music copyright organisation), which made the use of these platforms into a

kind of vindication act [3]. For example, the band Los Punsetes published some of their first albums under Creative Commons licenses claiming their support of open access cultural movements. There are multiple testimonies of Spanish musicians at that time who offered free access to their work through platforms or their own websites, protesting against the abuses of record labels or the SGAE. Therefore, live performances were still their income stream.

SoundCloud also offered DJs several alternatives to present their work through playlists and mixes, becoming the main DJ platform in Spain. DJ César Muela commented that, although there are other alternatives, SoundCloud is still essential in our country to show his work:

> "What makes the difference in favour is visibility. And also, validity. I don't sell my music, but it allows me to have visibility and to be hired to perform as a DJ in clubs." (…) In his opinion, it is very noticeable in the North American market because there they use Mixcloud "but many switched to SoundCloud," he says. "Another advantage is the navigability, and it is very fast and instantaneous" (Muela in Herranz, 2020).

SoundCloud is also a platform to get original sound material for DJ mixes, since more "experimental" forms can be found, which resonates with the ideas of "alien creativity" exposed by Phillips (2021) on SoundCloud rap. Similarly, Hermei, from The Withered, explained his sonic conception of SoundCloud:

> If you tell me "SoundCloud sound", for me it's crappy sound, homemade, not professional. It's also a more experimental sound, people who play with distortions and moves that you don't find elsewhere. (Hermei, interview with authors in 2021)

SoundCloud is also a space where new internet microgenres are born. With a very limited life hope, they comprise a wide variety of styles, with highly vague borders and an endless restructuring in new tags. From lo-fi hip hop to vaporwave to witch house, there are many internet microgenres that can be found on the platform, but also on YouTube or even Spotify. What makes SoundCloud different is the hashtag. The platform contributes to the creation of new tags because users can upload their music with whatever hashtag they choose or create from scratch. Users upload their material either with well-known music genres or styles, such as "EDM" or "techno" or with more evocative tags like "anime", "rompecadera" (hipbreaker) or their own username. However, nowadays the hashtag search does not work well enough on the search option, so it is not a reliable tool for research, mainly because it does not redirect to the tag you are looking for. Instead, the results are a blurry mess of songs that can be tagged with another hashtag or with none. Therefore, while this tool is useful to identify genres, styles or aesthetics, it is not effective when looking for similar content on the platform.

Another SoundCloud functionality is its social dimension. As stated earlier, SoundCloud combines the options of a music streaming service and a social media platform, allowing users to connect with other creators or with their audience. This feature has helped to create communities around microgenres, which are fuelled through following, like, repost, comments and other dynamics. Users can support each other by reposting material they like and can comment on the waveform of the track to share opinions or feelings that emerge from their listening. However, these social dynamics hide a negative impact: spam and bots spread through the platform, generating a feeling of disenchantment among the users. These "culture of connectivity" problematics were addressed by Hesmondhalgh et al. (2019), who consider the development of hierarchies and competitiveness inextricably linked to the platform. Nevertheless, we can observe some community dynamics underpinning the jungle of content and users entangled on the

platform. This is the case for DJ Club, a Madrid DJ collective whose objective is to spread mixes from women and LGBTQ+ DJs, uploading a new guest mix each Tuesday on their SoundCloud profile. Thus, DJ Club activities exemplify how social dynamics help to fuel marginalised communities' creativity by creating safe spaces.

Beyond practices such as DJing, SoundCloud communities can also emerge simultaneously with new music genres. Wave music, an internet microgenre, has been characterized as a collective movement where artists seem to have an "egoless attitude" (see Jenkins 2017). SoundCloud has been claimed by wave scene as the starting point of this sound, being "solidified" as a new tag by Wavemob collective and DJ Plastician [4]. In Spain, wave music has been produced by The Withered collective which, as Hermei explains, was created as a result of a personal and creative nexus:

> We met through the internet, through social media, I only met one of them in person (...) We chose SoundCloud because it had the perfect balance between the musician's community, discovering new music and social media. You could make yourself known, it allowed you to download and to put links to other sites. (Hermei, interview with authors in 2021)

However, around 2017 SoundCloud entered a phase of decline due to the departure of users, abusive copyright control, errors in company policy, and the consolidation of Spotify as the main streaming service. In this new context, free platforms such as SoundCloud are now mainly used to distribute secondary works and remixes or are used by amateur rather than professional musicians. However, SoundCloud is still alive, with a large number of users claiming its benefits. Hermei refers to these tensions between advantages and disadvantages:

> Nowadays, SoundCloud is half dead; the people who use it now are because they've been using it all their lives. Now they use Spotify, Bandcamp even. YouTube is not for discovering small artists; that's what SoundCloud is for. On YouTube, you have to make a really good video with the quality, the microphone, etc. On SoundCloud you can upload something of lesser quality. On Spotify I upload more finished stuff, SoundCloud is more experimental. Anyways, I don't upload just any shit – Soundcloud is for more or less listenable stuff and Spotify for what is finished. (Hermei, interview with authors in 2021)

Indeed, faith in the platform's resurgence is shared by many musicians, such as DJ Bruno Garcia, who acknowledges that, although "green is the new orange" – in reference to Spotify's reign – he still uses the platform through a nostalgic mood (Garcia in Herranz, 2020). Similar nostalgic attitudes are also perceived in many YouTube videos where users stand up for SoundCloud in an increasingly restricted internet paradigm. The resilience of SoundCloud users demonstrates that, despite the dynamics of big industry control, the internet still offers space for a limited exploration of the utopian idea of collectivity, plurality, and open culture.

Conclusion

In this work we have highlighted that qualitative research methods can be efficient to explore our contemporary cultural contexts. Thus, when studying SoundCloud, two perspectives have been set against each other. At first, we started from pessimistic visions present in the media, which predicted its disappearance, and our own nostalgic perception of the platform. On the other hand, by applying qualitative research methods we became aware of a more complex reality where the platform is built through the specific and constantly changing practices of the users. In fact, in a context where algorithms have been imposed, personal visions about the use we give to this

platform and, more broadly, the way in which we consume and distribute music become increasingly necessary. This becomes even more compelling when dealing with underground and peripheral music scenes that depend on their tight relationship with the internet, a medium that facilitated the free distribution of music, but also generated filters that distort its reception.

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Endnotes

1. Soundcloud Era - The Era that changed music forever...
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCfUy4GjXBO&ab_channel=TriggerMusic [accessed November 2021].
2. Soundcloud was sued for copyright infringement by the three major music companies. Universal unilaterally took control to reclaim and remove user contents.
3. ¡Copiad malditos! https://www.rtve.es/play/videos/el-documental/copiad-copiad-malditos-codecmaster-web-169/1075737/ [accessed November 2021].
4. DJ Plastician states that "in 2015 a style of music [wave] came to light that was seemingly spawned out of Soundcloud" https://soundcloud.com/plastician/plastician-wave-pool-mmxv [accessed November 2021].

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MUSICAL MICRO-UTOPIAS

Robert Smith

The many excellent studies of local music scenes (such as Cohen 1991 and 2007; Bennett 2004; and Berger 1999) do not throw much light on *pleasure* at the grass roots and participatory levels. I will focus here on music scenes in South Wales and one community music band. I will ask what works at this level in local music scenes; what held these scenes together pre-COVID and how they might fare in post-COVID times.

This article discusses the ideas of musical pleasure and micro-utopias by referring to three examples as briefly as possible in the full knowledge that the subjects merit a much longer and more detailed study. That is beyond the scope of this iteration. Apart from the Brecon Jazz section, which compares my personal experiences of the festival with published reports, the examples here are drawn from interviews with community music big band *Wonderbrass* and members of *Creative Republic of Cardiff* who run the Moon Club and organise the HUB festival.

We create micro-utopias for the enjoyment of music where music becomes the shared currency leading to other interactions around food, drink, and friendship. DeNora acknowledges that music is 'part of the cultural material through which "scenes" are constructed' (2000: 123), though here the reference is to choosing existing recorded music to facilitate social interchange. How much more powerful is this 'cultural material' when people are choosing to see it performed live or even constructing it themselves through playing it? Many people leave behind the cares and problems of everyday life (or attempt to) and enter a time and space where they are immersed in music and surrounding activities, either as performers, audience members or both. According to Hersch, *time out of time* opens up spaces in time for escape where people can stand in enjoyment and absorption of moments outside their work and other responsibilities; 'an opening to experience time for its own sake' (2007: 45 – see also 207). Hersch is writing about New Orleans here around the turn of the 20th century but his idea of *time out of time* strongly resonates with today's music festival attendees and participants in music-making activities.

Time out of time can be short and intense, such as at music festivals, or long and thin such as a regular meeting for a community music group. Here I link these times with the concept of micro-utopias. Writing about art, aesthetics, and participation in 'Micro-utopias' (2016: 8), Blanes et al. cite Bourriard's concept (2002: 31) of 'everyday micro-utopias'; the real-world successors to the collapsed idealistic utopias of the Situationists. They define the idea of a micro-utopia as a form of democratic and participatory arts environment. If we accept Christopher Small's idea of 'Musicking' as meaning *'…to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing'* (Small 1998: 9 – his italics) then music cultures,

particularly popular forms of music outside of the recording industry mainstream, have perhaps been ahead of the art world in focusing on *relational aesthetics* (Bourriard, 2002). The examples I investigate below are clear illustrations of both Small's definition and of *relational aesthetics:* 'community and neighbourhood as spaces where utopias can be actualised' (Blanes et al 2016: 9). Furthermore, Blanes et al, in discussing what they call the *'cartographies of relational art',* cite *'social, relational, participatory, community or activist art'* (2016: 10). I have chosen a 29-year long community music project to illustrate this notion of *distributed creativity* (ibid: 12) but similar things could be said about community music projects around the world.

Definitions and Methods

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) lays down the essential conditions for pleasurable 'optimal experience' as immersion into a loss of self-awareness, and an accompanying sense of transcendence of self, and transformation of time (1990: 58-67). It is much easier to imagine how performers can experience Csikszentmihalyi's concepts of *flow* and *optimal experience* than it is to imagine an audience experiencing these. The advantage to looking at music at a local level is that audiences and performers are more likely to interact, intermingle and have individuals in both camps (performer/audience member).

I am interested in how communities can form around music. People come together to spend time with like-minded people who share their musical interests or can agree on a shared musical agenda for a single gig or a weekend festival. They are usually there to do what they enjoy, meet people who enjoy the same things, eat food they like, wear what they like. Of course, such gatherings are not restricted to musical agendas; people also gather to celebrate shared religions, real ale, sport, and steam engines, to name but a few.

In this paper I want to explore the idea of musical micro-utopias using examples from my own experience of festivals and of organising a community music project. I want therefore to interpret the term *musical micro-utopia* as engendering large numbers of people coming together to enjoy music in *time out of time* for a short period – as in the case of the two festivals described here, or a small number of people coming together to dedicate weekly slots for years to making and enjoying music together – as in the case of the community music collective.

I also want to explore the idea of a music scene which is more about participation than passive consumption. This might be a legacy of a communal notion of music-making, but it could also be seen as a legacy of punk and the move towards a do-it-yourself aesthetic in the late 1970s. Certainly one of the major achievements of the punk movement (at least in the UK) was to break down barriers between bands on stages and their audiences. These barriers seem to have arisen as rock and pop music grew into a business then big business through the nineteen sixties and seventies. The Community Music (Higgins 2012) movement seeks to facilitate *participation* in music making rather than merely *consuming* it. Since no human culture has ever been found that does not have music, then making music must be a condition of humanity itself and therefore it must be everyone's right to participate. Community Music is largely a movement of so-called 'advanced' societies where people specialise to earn a living and allow others to do the 'other things' for them. On one level the movement can be seen to be trying to redress the balance between this state-of-affairs and other societies where everyone is expected to participate in music-making (Turino 2008: 28-51). There might be music specialists in these contexts, but these specialists will lead the music making, not just make the music for us. Even in western Europe and the euro-centric sphere, specialised professional music-making is a relatively Johnny-come-lately profession.

The examples I present here are chosen from projects I have personal experience of, and that there is available data for. The Brecon International Jazz Festival (which for its early years was known as Brecon Jazz) commissioned a report into its viability after its instigator Jed Williams passed away in 2003 and attempts to keep the festival going in its original (1984-2003) modus operandi began to fail. *Wonderbrass* is a community music big band which has been going since 1992 and continues to thrive; the data for this was gathered for my own PhD portfolio and thesis (2013) and the band's own WB25 project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (2017-19). Finally, the HUB festival in Cardiff's Womanby Street is centred around The Moon Club venue and my observations of the festival are presented alongside interviews with two of the venue's main organisers.

My personal involvement in all these three examples means that a strand of autoethnography runs through them. In beginning to examine how these localised music scenes work, I have firstly taken a research journey that begins with autoethnography, comparing my own experiences with the findings of a published report on Brecon Jazz. I then move onto research that is based on the participants' own accounts of their experience of participating in *Wonderbrass*, summarising findings from my PhD which used methods inspired by Berger (1999). Finally, I conducted fresh interviews with two key players in the Moon Club and HUB festival, contrasting their aims with Cardiff Council policy and another commissioned report, this time on promoting the musical health and marketability of Cardiff's live music economy. Rather than a pick and mix of ethnographic methodologies, this feels like an opening out from my own personal experiences to the experiences of others in the local music scenes, comparing these with the official assessment of the relevant music scenes that have led to policies for change. These methods and this research make a contribution to research that looks at how grassroots energy and investment fare in local planning and arts policy scenarios.

Example 1: Brecon Jazz 1984 – present [1]

In my twenties, I was one of the up-and-coming artists who benefitted from being paid to attend and perform at Brecon Jazz. Started in 1984 by Jed Williams and marketed as a 'New Orleans beneath the Beacons' (after a city that has had, at times, music everywhere and everyone playing music), Brecon Jazz was an attempt, for many years very successful, to turn a small Welsh market town into, for one weekend per year, a place with *jazz everywhere*. There were extremely popular and well-attended free events in the street. The purchase of a weekend stroller ticket gave access to numerous additional venues where one could see the best of Welsh jazz alongside the best of UK jazz and visitors from Europe and beyond. There were also individually ticketed events where one could see the best of jazz in the world.

There was a conscious bias towards engaging Welsh and Wales-based musicians as performers. The festival worked with the local scenes and performers, allowing them to perform alongside, see for free, and rub shoulders with the best jazz players in the world. This was one of the largely unacknowledged and tangible achievements of Brecon Jazz. In this sense it was participatory and proactive in building relationships with the Welsh jazz community (itself quite spread out amongst geographical hubs such as Cardiff, Swansea, and the northwest of Wales) to facilitate this participation and sense of creative investment in the festival.

There were also open-access jazz workshops as part of the festival. In 2004, I was given the brief of visiting every junior school in the Brecon area to run workshops and get the children making music. There was an ambition to get local school children on a jazz stage at some point, and this ambition speaks of the festival organisers' commitment to linking entry level participation with the finest jazz in the world and presenting multiple points on the journey between those two levels.

This commitment to participation is mirrored by the intense focus of the festival's 52-hour timespan and its practical takeover of the small town that hosted it. It allowed all attendees, whether punters, performers or myriad combinations of these statuses, to feel like participants and experience the intensity of this *time out of time*.

This annual weekend felt like being in a jazz utopia. It was something to work towards each year, or to hang on in there for in a lean year. I got to see amazing world leaders in jazz for free. I got to meet, and occasionally play with, amazing players. This was my jazz utopia, and I was in it every year from 1984 to 2013.

In 2016 Nod Knowles, a jazz programmer and animateur who runs the jazz part of the Bath International Music Festival, was commissioned by Brecon Town Council to write a scoping study around the possibility of revitalising the festival. After Jed Williams' death in 2003 a small team had been appointed to run the festival. Eventually this task fell to the Hay Festival, then to Orchard Entertainment (Knowles 2016). The festival took two other major blows to its openness and inclusivity.

Firstly, Williams fought hard to keep a programme of live music in the streets for free. This is where local businesses made most of their money. People were able to come to the town (Brecon, population around 10,000 [2], is actually a city by grace of its cathedral) and enjoy outdoor music for free in a car-free centre whilst drinking beer out of plastic glasses and eating takeaway food from shops and cafes in the centre. For most people this was the festival and the small food outlets, and pubs made a lot of money. But the police did not like the street music as it caused them problems late on Friday and Saturday nights. Drunken brawling probably happens in Brecon on non-jazz weekends, but it is harder to police in a large crowd. People converged on the town for the festival bringing their habits, problems, and scores to settle (such as Cardiff City versus Swansea City supporters). After Williams' death the street music was quickly dropped, and the local businesses suffered and many withdrew their always qualified support for the festival.

The second blow, introduced by Peter Florence, founder and guiding spirit of the Hay International Literature Festival, was to drop the stroller programme and focus on a series of individually ticketed events around the town. This turned the festival into a concert series rather than a 'jazz everywhere' festival. The stroller programme (1984-2008) had attracted visitors who would pay a moderate price (around £40 in the mid 2000s) to have 30 hours of live jazz, experiencing a mixed bill of Welsh jazz and other acts as outlined above. For many, the stroller programme *was* the festival. The 'disappointing but inevitable' conclusion to Knowles' 2016 report is that:

> There is no organisation waiting in the wings with the capacity or ability to attempt to revive it – the experience of professionals such as Hay and Orchard is proof that the model no longer works. (2016: 11)

This was not what Brecon Jazz supporters wanted to hear, but all good things must end. But wait a minute, which model is it that no longer works? The Orchard model of a series of high-profile, expensive, one-off events, peppered with ad hoc street events? A tented area outside the town such as Hay had tried to run, or the 'music everywhere' approach of Jed Williams? Is it possible that the festival has, since 2003, largely been run by people who never understood why it worked in its heyday? The list of interviewees for Knowles' report does not include any musicians beyond those interviewed for their other interests (Paula Gardiner as head of Jazz at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and Wayne Warlow as director or Porthcawl Jazz Festival). Two 'regular attenders' were interviewed. Two out of how many?

It is easy to expect too much of a report into the viability of reviving the festival to understand anything other than the business case for the festival. But lots of people made money in the first 20 years of the festival (The Williams era: 1984-2003). It is generally acknowledged that Brecon residents, on the whole, regarded the festival as an invasion, bringing them nothing but trouble and were glad to see the back of it *until the money disappeared*. The problem with these musical utopias is they do not last. The trick is to realise when you are in one.

Example 2: *Wonderbrass* 1992 – present

Formed in 1992, *Wonderbrass* made its first appearance at Brecon Jazz in 1995 (Smith 2015). The band then appeared every year for a long time in the street until the street music was discontinued. In 2005 and 2006 *Wonderbrass* appeared in a joint concert with Capetown's *Amampondo* singing and drumming group with specially commissioned and jointly written music. At other times *Wonderbrass* appeared with Claude Deppa, Jason Yarde, and King Django. In 2012 they appeared in a music-playing flashmob to coincide with (and paid for by) the London Olympics. Research into the band members' experience of participation has shown in many cases that playing at Brecon Jazz was a peak event for them (Smith 2013: 99 and 2015: 171-2).

The band is thirtyish strong, a community big band (sometimes parading) that aims to give people a forum for creating and playing music together (performing, composing, arranging, and improvising). It is open to anyone interested but people need to know how to play their instruments to a basic standard. They need to learn core repertoire before they are invited to perform publicly with the band. The band also operates as a collective, pooling its playing labour and earnings to pay the band's professional directors, fund travel, buy instruments and so forth. The band therefore represents a musical micro-utopia in its own right; a place where people can meet, share musical interests, perform together, and make friends. The band's weekly rehearsal sessions are social gatherings and are supplemented by gigs, tours in UK and abroad, festival performances and the occasional residential weekend. All these 'time(s) out of time' are experienced as enjoyable, challenging, and therapeutic.

The band is intergenerational, has an even gender balance and the effects on well-being of band membership are discussed elsewhere (Smith 2013 and 2015). This positive influence on wellbeing is not unique to *Wonderbrass*; it is a well reported and documented feature and benefit of musical participation (DeNora 2013).

Beyond this basic definition of what the band is, and how it organises itself, there is an idea that membership of *Wonderbrass* gives added value to musical participation beyond that afforded by membership of other amateur music-making groups. People who have participated in other projects feel more attached to *Wonderbrass* than their previous groups because they feel they make a *creative* investment in *Wonderbrass*: learning original music (nobody else plays the music that *Wonderbrass* plays), improvising within it (they are partly making it themselves at every iteration) and in some cases making their own arrangements and/or original compositions for it (making repertoire themselves) (Smith 2013).

Wonderbrass then represents another kind of micro-utopia; different from the festivals that sandwich this example in that it is long (in time) and thin (in terms of numbers of people involved and time invested). Festivals, viewed as micro-utopias, are short and fat by comparison.

Example 3: The HUB Festival, Womanby Street, Cardiff

For this section I interviewed two members of Creative Republic of Cardiff – a crowd-funded collective formed in 2017 to re-open and run the Moon Club which the previous owners had closed due to threats based on noise-levels emanating from the two bars it owned: separate venues on different floors of the building. The noise issues were raised by a large chain company wanting to

develop their huge bar next door to the Moon by adding hotel rooms above it. At the time there were four full-time venues on Womanby Street [3], but two other venues on the street were occasional music venues [4]. The threat to all these venues sparked the 'Save Womanby Street' (SWS) protest in 2017. The Moon and Full Moon clubs closed for a short time in 2017 but by the end of the year Creative Republic of Cardiff had taken over and re-opened the Moon whilst the old Full Moon had been taken over by an outside company and re-opened as 'Bootleggers'. Both are still live music venues.

The two interviewees were Liz Hunt via email (joined The Moon as a music programmer and promoter in 2016) and Tommy Ingrams, interviewed in person at The Moon on 6th May 2019 (Tommy had worked in the bars since the venue's inception in 2010 but became joint owner as a member of Creative Republic of Cardiff in 2017). The Moon is the focus of the HUB festival, hosting the festival office, providing a venue but also administrative support and infrastructure. It is also a first port of call for many emerging bands looking for exposure at the beginning of their performing careers. The venue has given some bands who are now touring extensively their first gigs and it continues to welcome new acts, new ideas and experiments.

> I think we can just take chances, you know (…) we don't have a specific genre of music we do… we do a bit of everything… so we can take those risks and do things which normally wouldn't work in other places. We haven't got that specific niche to protect and defend. (Tommy Ingrams, interview with author, May 2019)

Liz Hunt told me:

> HUB was founded in 2013 by the team who used to run The Moon Club and Full Moon. I joined the venues in 2016 and started helping the organisation of Hub, (…) We've now got a small team running Hub and it's growing every year. (Liz Hunt, email interview with author, May 2019)

The aim of the HUB festival was always to bring fans and performers together to celebrate the local music scene in its energy and diversity:

> We try to make it affordable, and its aim is to represent as much of Cardiff's music scene as possible, working with different promoters and covering multiple genres (…) We want the festival to provide a snapshot of Cardiff's live music scene across Womanby Street and the surrounding venues. We also try to give an opportunity to musicians who might not always get on other festival bills, or from genres that aren't widely represented. (Liz Hunt, email interview with author, May 2019)

The festival itself is a celebration of the vibrancy of the Cardiff music scene, but according to Ingrams, another aim of the festival is:

> showing not only music in South Wales, but showing what we're doing here on Womanby Street… (Tommy Ingrams, interview with author, May 2019)

Successful local bands and solo performers play HUB for little if any money but more to connect with people with similar outlooks and often to try out new things in front of a broadly sympathetic audience. There are two main reasons why I wanted to present the HUB festival in this article. The first reason was to show another example of musical activity as a micro-utopia – in this case one

localised to a particular street on a particular weekend (August bank holiday) but also promoting the music of a particular area; Cardiff, Newport, the Vale of Glamorgan, and the South Wales Valleys.

The second reason is to show how much the people active in this scene, whether as fans, musicians or both, care about the scene and have shown that they are prepared to march, campaign and petition to save it. The SWS campaign is generally thought to have led to Cardiff Council's Music Strategy of 2017-18 – a report by Sound Diplomacy [5] commissioned by the council. The council were persuaded to take the campaign very seriously it seems.

> We've certainly noticed more people at gigs throughout the street and in The Moon (still not enough, but it's a good start!). The campaign raised a real awareness of how fragile our live music scene is. (Liz Hunt, email interview with author, May 2019)

The marches certainly caused ripples; Cardiff Central MP Jo Stevens 'drew attention to the successful grassroots campaign to save thriving music venues from redevelopment' (Musicians' Union 2017: 17). Since the SWS protest, Cardiff has gone on to lose two more small-scale venues; Buffalo and Gwdihŵ – the latter being a definite victim of redevelopment [6]. But redevelopment is not always the enemy of local music. Womanby Street's Clwb Ifor Bach has been given the adjoining derelict building to expand into. This will create a larger independent venue than Cardiff has seen some time; around a 350 capacity in its expanded largest room. This donation of derelict property to Clwb can be seen as another example of Cardiff Council's response to the SWS campaign. A tangible outcome for local music scene activists' investment of time and energy.

Cardiff Council's response to the SWS protests has been interesting. Aside from giving Clwb the derelict adjacent property, it also commissioned Sound Diplomacy to conduct a major consultation with stakeholders in Cardiff's live music economy, alongside a survey of the 'economic impact of Cardiff's music ecosystem' and create a report on the state of this economy (Sound Diplomacy, 2019a: 2).

The consultation by Sound Diplomacy appears to have been focussed simultaneously on two developmental fronts. Firstly, there was a view towards Cardiff's potential as a Music City tourist destination that fans might visit to hear music. They might be attracted to a mid-scale show but also spend the weekend soaking up the local musical culture(s). On the other hand, there were recommendations for building a ladder of progression from workshops for primary and secondary school children, through mentoring, small scale gigs up to professional musical activities (Thomas, 2021). This ambitious range of recommendations seeks to represent the desires of a wide range of musical participants. Widely seen as acting on some of the opinions expressed during the consultation, the help given to Clwb Ifor Bach to expand has largely been welcomed as an attempt by the Council to address grassroots concerns about the state of the local live music scene in the city. This attempt to link the higher echelons of the live music economy with Cardiff's tourist industry whilst addressing concerns at community level is an interesting balancing act. But it does recognise the strength and health of the grass-roots-level local music scene.

Music and Communities

Brecon Jazz has always been clear on what kind of music it is promoting though its working definition of jazz has always been open, and it was possible some years to find New Orleans revivalists/purists on the same bill as avant-gardists such as Cecil Taylor. But Wales-based jazz musicians were always important to it too.

Wonderbrass is a musical community built, musically speaking, upon the *modi operandi* of jazz such as structured arrangements with space for solos, head arrangements, spontaneous backing lines and so forth whilst exploring non-jazz rhythms of popular music forms. Like many other musical forms in the world that celebrate improvisation, it is communally created in a spirit of collaboration. This balance between cohesive communication and spontaneous contribution is a model of 'the good life' for Terry Eagleton in his little book *The Meaning of Life: a Very Short Introduction* (2007).

> Take, as an image of the good life, a jazz group. A jazz group which is improvising obviously differs from a symphony orchestra, since to a large extent each member is free to express herself as she likes. But she does so with a receptive sensitivity to the self-expression of others. (…) As each player grows musically more eloquent, the others draw inspiration from this and are spurred on to greater heights. There is no conflict here between freedom and 'the good of the whole', yet the image is the reverse of totalitarian. Though each performer contributes to 'the greater good of the whole', she does not so by some grim-lipped self-sacrifice but simply by expressing herself. (Eagleton 2007: 98-100)

This is of course idealistic but also probably a fair representation of what most group-minded jazz (and other community music activists and participants) are striving for: 'There is self-realisation, but only through a loss of self in the music as a whole' (ibid: 100).

The Moon Club, as can be seen from the quoted interviews above, is an inclusive venue that consciously positions itself at the centre of the grass-roots music scene in Cardiff and surrounding areas. It has the confidence to promote new and emerging bands and artists, some of whom go on to wider success and even music industry careers. But it is also a live music venue offering immersive and pleasurable musical experiences (the venue is intimate) and establishing relationships between performers and listeners, culminating in The Moon's summer HUB festival where the experience spills out onto the streets and neighbouring venues.

The Hub festival is an open-genre festival featuring jazz alongside local indie bands, folk singers, metal, hip-hop, reggae and music in both the languages of Wales [7]. But the most interesting feature of the Hub festival seems to me to be the fact that the huge majority of bands are active on the local (Cardiff, Newport, the South Wales Valleys, and the Vale of Glamorgan) scene. The scene comes together at HUB to celebrate itself. The South Wales music scene probably feels it earned the right to do this when it fought the SWS campaign in 2017 to defend Womanby Street as an all-year-round hub for live music venues after developers began to move into the vibrant area and restrict noise levels. These protests in the summer of 2017 managed to change the city and county council's mind regarding this issue and on the issue of live music policy (it decided it ought to have one).

In this example, an inclusive grass-roots local music scene was able to resist change that threatened it. This suggests that people care enough about their local music scene to fight for it. They are prepared to defend their micro-utopia.

Conclusion

One person's musical utopia, potentially if it is as noisy and annoying as jazz played by predominantly brass instruments in the street, can equally be someone else's idea of hell. Music can be a weapon if you feel excluded by that music or find it an intolerable listen.

The events, organisations, and activities I have mentioned here seem to all point to one important fact: a healthy music scene is united [8]. Confidence and vibrancy are also desirable, but they follow from that unity and strength. People can be supportive of the fact that a particular style of music

is present and represented at an event even if they themselves would not choose to listen to it. People who do not themselves make music can feel as involved and invested in it as those who do.

As we emerge from the COVID lockdowns and are allowed into music venues (this has only been possible for less than three months in Wales at the time of writing) there is an enormous sense of goodwill in the resurgent South Wales music scene. Venues have been lost but the store of pre-COVID good will is evident in those that have survived. Some artists have been helped through the crisis by small grants (including *Wonderbrass* who moved activities online until recently and are now blending their activities between online and live http://www.wonderbrass.org.uk/category/project/) and government schemes. Despite this, venues have been lost and therefore opportunities to lose ourselves in *time out of time* and the pleasure of live music have been lost too. So, a picture is presently emerging of a whetted appetite for the pleasure of live music, a goodwill towards the opportunities for that pleasure and those providing it, but also the beginning of a realisation of what has been lost and a resurgent anger about those losses. How these forces play out in the coming years will be interesting to observe. Paul Carr, in a report to the Senedd (Welsh Government)'s Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee [9], recommends a 'three-year music industries' recovery strategy, which takes the ongoing impact of Covid-19 into account (2020: 6-7 – see also 34-44).

Apart from the SWS protest in 2017, it is at festivals and gigs where the different stakeholders come together to enjoy, celebrate, and participate in the local live music scene. When blocks of time can be set aside and people can immerse themselves in the pleasures of the music, spend time with the right sort of music, the right food and drink, and the right people, these places – and the periods of time in which they are visited – are micro-utopias [10]. Groups like *Wonderbrass* [11] represent a different kind of micro-utopia; keen, non-professional musicians spending quality time together, learning repertoire together, and performing all over Wales and further afield. *Wonderbrass* has also proved, for many people, to be a route from being in the audience at a gig to being on stage. Both these micro-utopian models are primarily about communities. In such communities, participants are seen as broadly equal and mutually dependent, whatever their role. This model, based on participation rather than consumption, might be a useful way of looking at local musical scenes; more useful than viewing the music as a product in a producer/consumer economic model (see Turino 2008: 225-231). They would certainly, for most people involved in the cases I have studied, be a truer picture of how they enjoy their music.

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Endnotes
1. The festival is still operating but has (in the period 2010-21) undergone huge changes and had fallow years. The history of the festival falls into three main periods:
    1. The Jed Williams Years (1984-2008) where the founder Williams directed the festival followed, after his death in 2003, by a small committee who tried to run the festival in line

with his vision. Williams had always held out against the local police wanting to stop the street music. The small committee that succeeded were unable to do so.

2. The period 2008-2015 when professional companies ran the festival according to their own business plans.

3. The period 2017 to present when the festival has been run by small voluntary groups and local associations of jazz lovers.

2. This figure, people in the town boosted from the normal ca 10,000 to 35,000 for the festival weekend is my estimate. It is based on estimates of attendance published in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In 2002 the BBC estimated attendance at 50,000 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/2187810.stm) so my estimate based on memory and similar sporadic figures.

In his scoping study, Nod Knowles writes:

> Scoping Brecon's audiences past and present and attempting to size up potential cannot be a reliable or scientific process. What data and research there exists is neither consistent nor sufficient to make finally definitive statements. Anecdotal observation, however, and the experiences of other festivals and their audiences presents some convincing impressions. (Knowles, 2016)

In short, nobody, least of all it seems the Arts Council of Wales, cared enough about the festival to find out how popular and significant it was. So my estimates, when compared with the BBC's, are a little conservative, but as a guide across the festival's heyday, the Williams years and the few years thereafter, I stand by them.

3. The Moon, The Half Moon (now Bootleggers), Clwb Ifor Bach, Fuel. The Four Bars Inn (or Dempsey's) closed as a music venue in January 2017.

4. City Arms and Tiny Rebel Bar.

5. https://www.sounddiplomacy.com/about

6. The vacated building on Guildford Crescent is currently an empty cleared site, almost three years after the club was made to leave.

7. Wales is an officially bilingual nation with Welsh (spoken by around 20% of its residents) and English as its two (official) languages.

8. Spillers Records in Cardiff (reputedly the world's oldest, but definitely now Cardiff's main independent record store) has survived recession and a recording-sales crisis by treating its 'customers' (surely now an outdated term but I can't think of a better one) as discerning friends. The shop has put itself at the heart of the local music economy, branching out into ticket sales, t-shirt and merchandise, placing itself at the heart of campaigns like 'Save Womanby Street' and working with local bands to launch their releases, often with in-store performances. The synchronicity between Spillers, the local scene and small-scale venues and promoters is an effective survival strategy. At least it has been until now.

9. Available online at: https://livemusicexchange.org/resources/the-welsh-music-industries-in-a-post-covid-world-a-report-for-the-culture-welsh-language-and-communications-committee-professor-paul-carr/

10. Other examples I've not mentioned would be Green Man festival, Chepstow's Green Gathering and the quickly growing Swansea Jazz Festival.

11. Similar groups would be Baracŵda samba drumming group, Cardiff Gamelan based at St David's Hall and Cardiff Canton Singers - a community choir in the Canton area of Cardiff.

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THE ROLE OF SPECTACLE IN CREATING SUCCESSFUL LIVE MUSIC PERFORMANCES

David Cashman, Waldo Garrido and Tim Kelly

We've all been there. We've all gone to a boring, unengaging musical performance. The type that turns minutes into hours and makes you wish you were somewhere…anywhere…else. The singer/guitarist performing to the back of heads in a pub. A student performer so focused on technique that they don't engage with the audience. A technique-limited performer overcompensating by getting in the audiences' face. Art music genres that demand the audience to make a concerted effort to understand and appreciate the music. Ugh.

These performances eschew spectacle and engagement. Sometimes this is by choice in a noble search for musical purity. Sometimes it is because the performer is uncomfortable with audience engagement. Sometimes performers don't understand why experience is essential. And yet, if we were to ask them … or you for that matter … for the best concert in their experience – the most memorable one that has become the metric for measuring all other performances – it's almost certain that, no matter the genre, there was some element of spectacle in it.

There is a divide in contemporary musical performance practitioners on the primacy of technique and spectacle in creating a successful musical performance. Many musicians, particularly those undertaking education, concentrate on developing their technique. Highly technical players are lauded and rewarded in technical exams and performances. Many regard spectacle as cheating, as fluff designed to detract from serious art and are uncomfortable incorporating performative aspects in their gigs. However, industry professionals focus on (to use a gendered term) showmanship and spectacle. They consider it key to creating exciting performances citing musicians who possess extraordinary technical ability and create successful performances and careers. They cite legendary concerts, such as Queen at Live Aid, as evidence for the primacy of spectacle in creating a successful experience.

In this paper, we draw on the voices of musicians and industry professionals to consider the role of spectacle and technique and consider how popular music performances are situated across the spectacle/technique divide. Data is drawn from interviews with musicians, venue owners, and industry professionals and analysed using a grounded theory methodology. While we acknowledge that this data is drawn from before the live music gamechanger that is the COVID pandemic, we argue that the ability to construct an engaging and memorable performance has become more complex, but even more critical

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during the pandemic with many performers performing online. It is notable that this performance mode omits a lot of what creates the spectacle in live performance – the visceral, sensory adventure that is more than merely the aural experience of the music. Performers need to find new ways of incorporating the spectacle in online live situations. We find that musicians tend to focus more on the role of technique – aspects that are under their control and capable of being worked on in private. Other research participants, often within the industry, recognise the importance of the spectacle and experience of live music.

The Experience

Humans experience. It is part of the human condition. However, an *experience* is different. If we are talking about performances as experience, we need a working definition of an experience. The answer is complex as an experience can be different things to different disciplines. Significantly, Dewey (1932) distinguished between experience in general, something ongoing and a part of human existence, and *an* experience with significance and duration. To anthropologists (such as Turner 1982, 1983), experiences are significant and memorable events. They are a mixture of the sensory, ritual, and spectacle and may be a liminal process. Musical performances exist within this paradigm. Spectacle is an aspect of the experience. Palmer and Jankowiak (1996), performance studies scholars, distinguish between the spectacular and the mundane. A "participatory spectacle" (St John 2020) is one where the relationships between audience and performers are blurred in the way that live music performances often are. In business studies, the "experience economy", a concept articulated by Pine and Gilmore (2011), an experience is a commercial venture designed to immerse consumers and generate revenue by constructing a hyperreal (Eco) and fabricated (Baudrillard) immersive event. It is designed to be captivating, sensory, have duration and place, and to be memorable. Popular music performances certainly fall under these banners. Although often it is the recording industry that receives attention from many music scholars (Darmer 2008; Tschmuck, Pearce & Campbell 2013), live music is also palpably (and more demonstrably) an experience (Morrow 2013; McCarthy 2013). A musical performance in the modern industry is either a commercially viable event or at least designed to move towards being a commercially viable event. It exists within the music industry to generate revenue. At its best, it is carefully designed to be sensory, immersive, or engaging. However, some performances are not sensory, immersive, or engaging.

Live music is a lived experience, regardless of whether it is lived by attending a venue or lived by watching an online performance. Take the example of classical music. Despite its reputation for conservatism and careful ritual, we invite you to consider the Hungarian pianist Franz Liszt. Liszt was a masterful pianist and composer, but he also knew how to exploit the sensory experience of art music, within the confines of the genre of the day. Schumann described a performance:

> Within a few seconds, tenderness, boldness, exquisiteness, wildness succeed one another; the instrument glows and flashes under the master's hands [...] he must be heard and seen; for if Liszt played behind a scene, a great deal of poetry would be lost. (Schumann's quoted in Morgenstern 1956: 155)

Some of the most broadly successful performers in art music have gone beyond these strictures, establishing a more engaging performance experience and seeking a wider, popular audience. Consider the widespread fame and success of Władziu Liberace, Richard Clayderman, or André Rieu. The classical music world may dismiss these performers, but they were extremely successful to a wider audience. Liberace was reportedly worth $110m when he died (Larry King Live 2001). While critics have called his act schmaltzy, Rieu wrote that he was not bothered. "I rather see it as a

compliment," he said. "I'm trying to create a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' where music, décor and costumes all add up to a magical evening" (in Siegel 2016). In short, an experience.

The Role of Technique and Spectacle in Creating Successful Performances

Musical ability and spectacle are two of the most significant aspects of creating a performance. Through spectacle – meaning the performance environment plus the non-musical aspects of performance – musicians engage the audience. At the same time, musical ability permits musicians to perform to a professional standard. While often asserting that one was more important than the other, our research participants acknowledged the existence of both in popular performance. In our research, we sought the opinions of 121 industry professionals on the role of spectacle and technique in creating a successful performance. 107 musicians, venues, and music industry personnel completed a survey. This was followed up by interviews with fourteen participants drawn from the industry. While this research draws dominantly on the views of Australian professionals, it was also informed by previous research undertaken in the UK, the United States, and India. This data was analysed using a grounded theory methodology. When our participants were asked to choose whether they thought musical technique or the creation of spectacle was more important in the creation of a successful musical performance, participants were divided in their views almost precisely in half. 51% stated that they believed that technique had the greater role, and the rest asserted that spectacle was more important. However, the majority acknowledged that the other aspect also carried significance.

Spectacle has its roots within performance studies and anthropology. Debord's (1970) seminal work on spectacle saw it as a fetishised and superficial performance, tied to Marxist work on *Warenfetischismus* (the fetishisation of commodity). Initially regarded as a reading of texts and structures, Conquergood's (1989) work with the Hmong refugees in Thailand changed the emphasis to the creation of meaning within the performance itself. Turner (1986) believed performance to be reflexive and reveals humanity to itself. Whittam (2015) observes that musical spectacle can include colourful costumes, non-musical accessories, and other strategies. Beeman (1993) includes a broader definition describing spectacle as presentation to an audience of a symbolic reality in a way that is meant to be entertaining.

Early anthropological work saw spectacle as primarily visual, perhaps understandably. The word itself comes from *specere*, Latin for "to look". There is a parallel here with tourism studies, which also considers spectacle part of the tourist object or performance. Tourism studies, basing its early work in the occularcentrist views of Urry (1990), initially regarded tourism experiences as a primarily visual experience. However, as our understanding of tourism has deepened, the tourist experience has come to be regarded as multisensory. The spectacular experience can be regarded as involving many senses (Andrews and Leopold 2013, Whittam 2015, Moss 2018, Cashman and Garrido 2020). Spectacle within music has been relatively little studied. We argue that spectacle is an important multisensory performance mode within live music. While visual engagement is important in, for example, the costumes of a performer, the stage lighting, and the venue's design, the construction and performance of spectacle and experience is an active process and can include audience interaction, multisensory engagement, and other performance processes.

Musical technique is an important aspect of a musician's life and their performance. It is the ability of instrumental or vocal musicians to exert fine control over their instruments or voice to produce the music they require. It can involve sight-reading from sheet music, playing difficult work without error, or improvising within popular song forms. It is developed by musical practice which can range from scales and instrumentally based practice regimes, to improvising using backing tracks such as those produced by Jamie Aebersold or programs such as iRealBook Pro. A period of

intense practice designed to increase technique – often called "woodshedding" – exists in various music cultures, including jazz (Haidet and Picchioni 2016), Indian traditional music (Cashman and Garrido 2020), and Barbershop vocal music (Brandt 1993). Musical technique is emphasised as one of the core masteries when studying an instrument (Schiavio et al 2019; Reid 2001). This focus shapes many musicians' value system, according greater social status and value to musicians who have strong technique. For example, highly virtuosic players such as Jaco Pastorious, Sting, and James Jamerson are valued more highly than other bass players whose ability to contribute to play "in the pocket" (play appropriately, but not necessarily spectacularly, to the genre).

The Primacy of Musical Technique

The development and the exhibition of musical technique is an important aspect of live music. Some of our participants, often musicians, asserted that musical technique was of greater import than the construction of spectacle. This is, perhaps, understandable given many musicians' focus on developing and maintaining technique. Research participants that focused on the role of technique asserted that technique fascinated them, ensured sustainable and successful careers, created what they considered to be good performances, and was authentic. While some (not all) acknowledged the role of spectacle, they maintained that it was less important than having good technique.

It is understandable, then, that many musicians prefer technically brilliant music. Musicians (and some musically-informed audiences) comprehend and assess the virtuosic merits of such performances more easily than performances that rely on spectacle. One research participant, a well-known and talented performer, confessed:

> I'm guilty of being someone who entirely focuses on performance excellence and quality of performance. And being a performer and an instrumentalist, I set a very high bar in what I think is quality playing. And despite my best endeavours I find it very hard to listen to music that's poorly played. I can do it, but my preference is definitely technical expertise.

Musicians may even focus on technique to the abrogation of all else. Another participant observed, "I'm not here to hear you talk; I'm here to hear you play."

Different research participants had different explanations for their support for the primacy of musical technique. One participant believed that musicians with good technique had a greater chance of sustaining a successful musical career.

> Anyone can dance and put on a show, but the technical skills shown in the musical ability will always keep fans loyal for many years. If there's no musical ability there's no show really. A showman with a rubbish voice is forgotten soon after.

Clearly in some cases this is true. The annals of the music industry are filled with people like Lil Hardin Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Karen Carpenter, Steve Vai, Jaco Pastorius, Aretha Franklin, Jon Batiste, Alicia Keys, Lady Gaga, Sarah Barelis and Snarky Puppy, and the like, whose technique was a core component of their success. However, equally there are many others for whom an average technique (of a level appropriate to the genre, for not all genres require enormous technique) was compensated for by other aspects, such as the development of extraordinary experiences. Ed

Sheeran is not a technically brilliant guitarist but is a master of live performance. He recently completed the most financially successful tour of all time.

Many musicians equated musical technique with authenticity and spectacle as detracting from the pure art, permitting less technically proficient musicians to create a career. One observed:

> A gig of pure showmanship and no skill is an episode of Australian Idol. It's superficially entertaining, but empty and unsatisfying. The McDonalds of music.

The role of authenticity or "realness" in music is an academic minefield. It is not our intention to attempt a detailed discussion of technique as authenticity but to report and analyse our research participants' view. Some of them derive authenticity in performance from two demonstrated skills: high-level technical ability and masterful songwriting. High-level technical ability, these participants asserted, was not possible to 'fake' as other aspects of the performance. Others observed that songwriters such as Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Joan Baez, Joan Armatrading, Adele, Taylor Swift, and Ed Sheeran are (or were) not particularly strong technical players, but have technique as songwriters. Musicians with less technique who performed covers were cited as inauthentic. Their shows may have been spectacular, but without demonstration of either performance or songwriting technique they were considered inauthentic. Musicians, however, acknowledged that such shows were successful performances.

Some research participants equated technique with good performance and showmanship with poor and 'empty' performance. One participant posited:

> You can make a good concert with a shy but wonderful musician, maybe it's not a show in the bigger sense of the word but it's a good concert. With only showmanship you have an empty concert, which can become boring fast.

While some acknowledged the role of spectacle, they saw it as less important than the role of technique.

> If there is musicianship without showmanship, the audience will be satisfied. If there is musicianship with showmanship as well, the audience experience will be greater and more intensely satisfying and memorable. If there is showmanship without musicianship, the audience will feel conned.

Technique is an important aspect of music, and many musicians are fascinated by it. They understand it and rightfully claim it as a central aspect of creating a live music performance.

The Primacy of Spectacle

Half of our research participants proposed that spectacle was more important than technical prowess in constructing a performance. While some of these participants were musicians, others were industry professionals. Just like musicians understand technical facility in music and struggle with spectacle, live music workers struggle with understanding technique. They are at home with the construction of spectacle. It is their job, after all, to construct compelling musical experiences. Some venue owners, in particular, spoke of spectacle. One said:

> We've found many a time with many of our bands, those who put on shows or have interaction with the audience will do a lot better than those that get up and play their instruments and then walk away again.

Others will refuse to book an act that does not perform a show. A known performer summed up these feelings.

> Well, I think spectacle's more important [than technique], I really do. I mean you can have an absolutely amazing musician and they're boring to watch, it kind of ruins it for me. I like to see performing, showmanship, spectacle. I've seen plenty of musicians I've thought just absolutely amazing, but to sit there for two hours and watch someone who doesn't move, doesn't talk to the audience, but is just an absolutely brilliant musician, that's great but, yeah, I think it's a bit boring.

Other research participants agreed with this assertion of the primacy of spectacle. Some observed that it was important for musicians to concentrate on developing stagecraft to construct such performances. Some participants even dismissed technique as an active participant in creating a successful performance.

> To me, [technique is] very unimportant. I deeply appreciate it, but I'm not a technically brilliant musician myself. I adore lo-fi performances with zero musicianship, and high-tech performances with zero live performance chops required.

Research participants that asserted the spectacle stimulated the senses (an important aspect of Pine and Gilmore's experience) and permitted greater audience engagement.

As observed, the visual is a crucial sense stimulated within a spectacle. Musical performance has never been an entirely aural art (Thompson, Graham and Russo 2005). Some research participants observed the importance of the environmental aspects of performance. In particular, they spoke of the space within which the experience occurs and how the performers looked. One participant, a venue owner, observed that a

> great performance will certainly be made much greater if things like the audio quality and the lighting and the ambience of a room is being taken care of, definitely. And you can make an ordinary performance better with better lighting and better production for sure.

This participant spoke of two visual aspects (the lighting and the ambience of the room) and one auditory (the audio quality). It is possible to perform in poorly designed venues. Indeed, much music (such as busking that adopts spaces) needs no lighting and other music (such as festivals) adapt spaces (Kronenberg 2012). However, this participant regards considering and improving these aspects as enhancing performance. Certainly, audio is a critical performance aspect. One participant told us that she regards the sound engineer as the most significant member of the band as far as performance goes. Another participant, a high-ranking industry executive, acknowledged the importance of the appearance of the musicians.

> Studies show that we are very quick in judging ourselves as human beings. When we meet someone, we will make a huge number of assumptions within the first

second of meeting them. Those assumptions are quite difficult to break. So, in performance, appearance matters. That doesn't mean you've got to dress [for] people, there's got to be a correlation between what you're doing and your appearance.

Another participant observed that the multisensory experience of being at a concert – the rumble of the subs, the smell of sweat from dancers, the taste of alcoholic beverages of dubious quality, the proximity of other humans – heightened the experience of being at a concert. Another spoke of the "buzz of being at the performance".

The other aspect of spectacle that research participants cited as essential to creating a successful performance was in-performance audience engagement. Audience engagement means interacting with the audience, making the performance memorable and personal. In practice, there are several stages in an arc of engagement occurring both before and after the performance (Brown and Ratzkin 2011). In this instance, we are interested in audience engagement while the performance is happening. Our participants often regarded the success of a performance in terms of engagement with the audience, describing aspects such as attentive listening, eye contact, movement, connection, and enthusiasm. Research participants sometimes articulated the results of negative audience interaction.

I went and saw [redacted] when they played out here at the Big Day Out. I was just bored out of my mind. They just stood there and sang. There was no interaction with the audience, they just stood there and played. I thought what's exciting about this? There was no communication with the audience, there was no, you know, I could have been listening to the record. So, you know, you've got to have some pizzazz, you've got to make it personal.

Another research participant said that successful engagement requires

communication skills. And some artists are better at it than others. I saw the [redacted] at the Sydney Opera House. They've got some great music, but God, it was dull as dishwater. They looked like they were playing for themselves individually. There was no interaction with the audience. I'm not saying that artists should have to speak to the audience and all the rest of it, but there's got to be some tension between what's happening on stage, with what's happening off stage.

The Importance of Both Spectacle and Technique

Despite some research participants on both sides of the discussion proposing that technique or that spectacle was all one needed to construct an effective performance, the majority – sometimes grudgingly – acknowledged at least some requirement for both. Most proposed the primacy of one or the other, but a few proposed that both were needed to create compelling live music performances. One participant, a venue owner, observed the necessity to intertwine spectacle with authenticity.

For me showmanship is best when it's completely intertwined and genuine with the musical message. When showmanship is as an add-on, it repulses me, I can't

> watch it, I don't enjoy seeing that. […] Gary Bartz, Freddie Mercury, their showmanship is coming from every cell of their body. It's not like "I'm going to play this music and I'm going to do all those physical attributes that make people like that I'm engaging". It's the personality.

When asked how a performance was memorable, one music industry participant said

> Generally speaking, [a performance is memorable] when everything just connects – the artist, the audience, the acoustics of the room, the interface with the instruments and the technology, the PA mix, the material, the pacing of the show, the artist's responsiveness to the audience… those are all the ingredients of a classically successful show. But I'm also attracted to downright weird renditions, which break all the rules of what good conventional performance practise is.

Analysis

A pianist we interviewed summarised the quandary between technique and spectacle for musicians. She said:

> I'm quite happy sitting in front of a piano all day and practicing. But how can you practice playing to an audience unless you're sitting in front of one? It's only through actually doing it that we get better at it and the stakes are higher in performance. It's all I can do to not hit wrong notes let alone smile and wave at an audience. In your head you're going "What if they don't like me? What if they don't like my music?" It's very confronting.

To performers, technique is a tangible and quantifiable aspect of music. A musician can play their scales at crotchet one hundred and twenty-one day and then upgrade it to one twenty-two the next day. They may laud someone who can play even faster. The development of good technique is something a musician has control over. The development and reception of spectacle, by contrast, is something that involves other people; audiences and technical staff. As our participant noted, it is harder to learn how to create a spectacle. Musicians can undertake stagecraft classes or perform in front of a mirror. However, there is little substitute for actually performing in front of an audience. As this participant notes, the stakes are higher in performance than in rehearsal. Another participant spoke of their mistrust of spectacle because it is constructed in partnership with non-musician industry personnel.

Among our research participants, there were very strong views on the role of technique and spectacle. Many musicians equated technique with authenticity and spectacle with artifice and fakeness. This was summarised in one particular pair of comments. A young musician said:

> I would rather watch musicians who stand stock still focusing on their parts and playing them well than a pop singer who struts about the stage amongst an entourage of dancers, with no real instruments in sight and no technical ability on display. The latter feels incredibly fake/hollow/inauthentic.

An industry booker, however, observed:

> I think Tina Arena is absolutely brilliant. But then you've got Kylie Minogue who is not even close to being as good as Tina Arena. But she is one of the most financially successful female singers ever out of Australia. With limited vocals. She didn't want to be a singer; she wanted to be an actor. But she fell into the singing thing and people just love her and she's just, […] it's the performance. I know some amazing singers who [will] only ever be singers because they haven't got that performing gene.

Kylie Minogue's performances clearly fall into the realm of the former category of performances. Minogue is not a songwriter nor the most technically brilliant singer. Yet she is a very successful performer. Her performances are memorable and financially rewarding for all concerned. This is due to the spectacle of her shows and her constructed authenticity as a performer rather than by her musical technique.

Perhaps this divide is because of the fundamental differences in how musicians and industry perceive a show. Musicians can prepare their technique. They focus on it for many years before they perform and continue to develop it their whole life. They admire musicians who are technically accomplished and denigrate ones who are not. Musicians understand technique and music and are suspicious of performance aspects (like spectacle) that are not directly aligned with the music. However, industry personnel are more involved with ensuring the success of the performance. They worry less about art and more about viability. So, they deal with audience engagement and with spectacle. If they are not musicians, they may not understand the processes of technique and art, and are likely to be as suspicious of these.

Conclusion

One of our older research participants spoke of their most memorable performance as seeing Duke Ellington's band perform. He said every aspect of the performance – spectacle, technique, publicity – was:

> important to engage them with a broad audience. They were incredibly talented and skilled and had great people working with them. And to see them go from playing the Royal Antler in Sydney to 100 people, to playing to 10,000 people at the LA forum or, you know, in one of those many other major venues that I saw them in when they sort of became international, that was pretty exciting. And to be a part of it, you know, to know that I've been involved in […] the machinations of it all was exciting.

In large performances like this, or in a Pink or Taylor Swift, or Michael Bublé tour, where there are separate publicity personnel, arrangers, producers, directors – different people to manage the experience and the musicality – musicians can afford to be specialists and focus on making their music extraordinary. However, many musicians do not have that luxury and have to do it all themselves. If they focus entirely on musical technique, they risk becoming one of the performances outlined at the beginning of this article. We do not assert that technique is unimportant: it is vitally important to have the level of technique appropriate to the genre that is being performed. However, it is not the entirety of the performance. In recent years, musicians such as Dirty Loops, Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande, Florence Welch, Jon Batiste, Vulfpeck, Adele, Janelle Monáe, Cory Alexander Henry, and MonoNeon have begun to merge technical brilliance with the

creation of spectacular performance. Musicians, especially emerging musicians, need to engage with both in order to construct a sustainable and successful career.

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METAL MUSIC AND THE RE-IMAGINING OF MASCULINITY AND PLACE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION ON WHEN GRAND MAGUS CAME TO KEIGHLEY

Karl Spracklen

In Spracklen (2020), I explore the history of the construction of heroic, hegemonic masculinity, place, race, and nation in heavy metal. I show how the heroic masculinity (Butler 2006; Connell 1987) and national heritage ideology at the heart of black (folk) metal emerged from similar myths and narratives in earlier heavy metal genres and bands – such as Iron Maiden (1975-present) and Manowar (1980-present). As I write in the conclusion (Spracklen 2020: 183):

> Heavy metal normalised the Gender Order of the late twentieth century, and metal bands became representations of a heroic, warrior masculinity that became hugely popular among fans. While much of this was just heterosexual male fantasies of groupies, and of conquest and rape written for young men who had never had a girlfriend, it normalised the idea that women were inferior to men and the Other to be conquered (Butler, 2006; Connell, 1987). This narrative of heroic masculinity emerged at a time when gender roles were being challenged and overturned in the West in the 1970s and 1980s, when traditional male working-class jobs were disappearing with the new global order of neo-liberalism.

Furthermore, I show that the interest in Vikings in metal, while present in earlier bands such as Led Zeppelin (1968-1980) (or at least their 1970 song 'Immigrant Song'), grew exponentially with nationalism and bands that play music and songs that are designed to evoke the romantic mythology of pre-Christian times in northern Europe. Bathory (1983-2004), for example, took the heroic masculinity of Manowar and added in nationalism and racism. Other extreme-metal bands followed Bathory in the late eighties and early nineties and took the anti-Christianity of metal as an excuse to sing heroic songs of their own blood and soil, creating their own racial myths that denigrated outsiders. While some bands flirted with these myths of heroic warriors fighting for their race against the outsiders while it was transgressive and part of their bid to be successful in the underground, others rejected their early misdemeanours or have distanced

themselves from it without admitting their mistakes. Others, however, remain unrepentant about their nationalism, their racism and their anti-semitism, and are deeply contested within the metal scene. As part of my account of how heroic masculinity and nationalism has become challenged in metal itself, I show that metal has become more diverse, filled with fans and musicians who are not white, not British, not American, not working-class, heterosexual men (Spracklen, 2020). It is these bourgeois, liberal globalised metal fans who campaign against and reject the racism of National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) and bands aligned with that, and the rise of fans and musicians who reject the hegemony of heterosexual, masculinity and the elitism of race and nation has been explored by many academics (Clifford-Napoleone 2015; Hill 2016; Jocson-Singh 2019). Metal has become more respectable, more about self-help and belonging and less about burning churches and masturbating over 'rock bitches' because of the involvement of these fans and musicians in the global metal scene, both in the mainstream and in the underground (Hill 2016; Kahn-Harris 2007). It is these fans and musicians who work to make sure metal is no longer a space for working-class white male resistance against grown-ups, and I argue that this is a good thing. Metal has outgrown songs about having sex with groupies. It has become something that accepts different stories and songs, different bands and singers, although metal is still fixed on the rules of its sub-genres. Epic, folk, Viking metal, for example, has to be about standing up as individuals, standing strong with one's comrades, against those who reject us. And the lyrics and the visuals have to be inspired by Viking mythology, even though much of that mythology is deeply contested by historians and archaeologists (Spracklen 2020).

This paper uses the theoretical lens of Spracklen (2020) – metal as leisure space; metal as site for the construction of hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity; metal as a site for the construction of imagined and imaginary communities of race and nation - and its historical analysis to frame new ethnographic reflections about extreme metal. In particular, I want to explore the construction of the heavy metal communities in the north of England using Keighley and Yorkshire as my focus – and how they intersect with other communities in metal and in the region. The ethnographic reflection that immediately follows this introduction describes the moment when Grand Magus (1996-present) came to Keighley, a mainly working-class town in West Yorkshire, with a significant British Asian, British Muslim minority-ethnic community [1]. The paper then discusses the social, cultural and political context of Keighley and Bradford, and the tension between poor whites and others settled in each place. I then turn to Grand Magus and report on their success, before introducing a second reflection undertaken at Bloodstock Festival. I then end on noting how metal has become more diverse, but elements of it in the north remain places where whiteness and hegemonic masculinity continues to be a norm. All discussion of ethics and methods can be found in Spracklen (2020), out of which this project has emerged. I am a metal fan and an insider, and all my reflections are based on the expert knowledge I have of the ethnographic field combined with my own diaries (Blackman 2007; Hodkinson 2005). More importantly, I am from a white working-class Yorkshire background, with working-class tastes and customs and practices, even though I have been to University and remain in academia [2]. I still live in Yorkshire, but I have moved to the edge of the Yorkshire Dales, the pretty national park that is the subject of feelgood television programmes such as James Herriot, to a town that is in Airedale, just beyond Keighley, but in the posher North Yorkshire.

Reflection One: Manorfest

It's a Saturday in May, 2017. Keighley Victoria Hall, on the edge of the town centre. Victoria Hall is out towards Keighley Cougars rugby league ground at Lawkhome Lane, past the big Mosque by the new Asda, and through terraced streets filled with British Muslim families. We walk down from the

railway station with excitement, following a handful of others making this pilgrimage. The people ahead of us are all white, all male, metal fans, with long hair and the current metal uniform: denim jackets with back patches on them. We are here for Manorfest, a one-day metal festival that has got bigger and better each time it has announced its line-up. The festival was started by a local metal musician who wanted to raise money for the Manorlands hospice. Today we have come because Grand Magus, a well-known Swedish epic heavy metal band, are headlining. We (Beverley and I) first saw the band in 2005, when they played in Bradford supporting British band Orange Goblin (1995-present). That was at Rio's, up from the university across the road from a mosque. In a previous work [3] I reflected on the way black metal fans standing outside Rio's waiting to see Mayhem's (1984-present) frontman throw a pig's head into the moshpit was uncomfortable for the British Asian mosque attenders and the fans. The British Asians that night would not have known what was happening at Mayhem gigs, but they would have sensed the danger and the hatred from some of the black metallers. The metal fans standing in the same line for the Orange Goblin gig received the same funny looks as the black metal fans waiting for Mayhem, but no-one for Orange Goblin was wearing a Burzum tee-shirt. That tour line-up, with Finnish band Witchcraft (2000-present) as the openers, showcased the best of the Rise Above Records label, the independent label set up by Lee Dorrian of well-known British doom metal band Cathedral to sign and release the best alternative, underground, dark, doom metal. Doom metal and alternative occult metal was not as big as it became at that time, so the gig in Bradford was barely full even for the headliners. Witchcraft were channelling the sound of a seventies occult rock that had never existed, using analogue technology. They had their debut album on vinyl before vinyl became a fashionable, hipster thing. They were amazing but not as good as Grand Magus. Grand Magus played Rio's with the bored Orange Goblin fans in front of them as if they were Iron Maiden playing Long Beach. JB the band's singer-guitarist frontman and writer of all their songs, was losing his hair but he was too metal to care. His backing band moshed with every riff. They blew us away then, and we have seen them rise up the metal premier league. From Rise Above Records they graduated to major metal label Nuclear Blast. They have headlined concerts in Europe and the rest of the world, releasing nine albums of classic heavy metal.

And now they are in Keighley, West Yorkshire, once and forever still the West Riding of Yorkshire, the rough end of the county that backs into the Pennines and the Dales and cradled the Industrial Revolution. Keighley is now part of Bradford Metropolitan District Council but it has its own sense of identity, and is physically cut-off from Bradford by fields, hills and some moorland above Bingley. It is the home of Timothy Taylor's Brewery, makers of the finest real-ale in the country. Importantly, Keighley is just down the road from where I live, my most local metal town. And Grand Magus are playing here! The last time we saw a band in Victoria Hall was the goth-rock band The Mission (1986-present), who played it at a low ebb in their career because the drummer at the time had a local connection. Victoria Hall is a small publicly owned venue in Victoria Park, with a modern leisure centre built next to it. It is in reasonable working order but it has seen better times, and has clearly suffered from generations of austerity measures imposed by respective national governments on local governments since the 1970s. It is usually used for other things: we have been to it many times for real-ale festivals and for bellydance haflas. But tonight it is the turn of metal fans to embrace the delights of its council bar and Victorian toilets.

The first band we see is Valafar (2013-present). Our friend Nigel is their bass player. We bang our heads at the side of the room. I raise my hand and give them the devil's horns. One of Valafar's musicians is responsible for setting up Manorfest (I forget which one). Valafar are from Keighley, this is their home crowd, and they are here as a support act for the professional bands later in the evening. This is all for the good cause of charity and I think how amazing it is that they have brought family and friends in to watch them. These are all white, working-class Yorkshire

people, mainly men but some women who are obviously relatives of the band – even some that look like mums on a night out in any Wetherspoon's, all dresses and lipstick and blonde hair and without the standard metal uniform: black jeans; band shirts; Thor's hammers; spiky jewellery designed to prove one is anti-Establishment. As the band plays music designed to emulate the attack of the Norsemen on the soft-handed monks of Lindisfarne, the music gets me excited. I scream along to every chorus even though I do not know the band enough to have learned the lines. None of the band looks particularly Viking or Anglo-Saxon, apart from Nigel, who stands taller than his mates. He looks like he is loving every moment. When I first met him, the partner of a friend of my wife, he was playing in a progressive rock band doing music that musicians want to make but metal fans tend to avoid. Valafar allows him to drink huge amounts of alcohol and to metaphorically raise the hammer high. It allows him and the others in the band to be adored by the small group of Valafar fans who they meet every time they play a gig across the north of England. It also means the musicians are adored by the fans who have known them for a long time in Keighley itself, neighbours and workmates, fans who talk to them before and after shows as if they are metal gods, though northern enough to bring them back down to earth with humour. All the band members are amateurs. That is, they have normal working-class jobs to pay their bills, and the music is something they do because they love it, in their leisure time. Our Nigel bangs his long hair in a very manly manner and his Thor's hammer bounces up and down close to his guitar, but he keeps his cool and the band finish. One of the other musicians in the band thanks everyone for coming and mentions we are all here for a good cause. Then the room empties as everyone heads off to drink, to smoke outside, or to grab a pie. The meat and mushy-pea smell of the latter begins to fill the venue, as this is tea time for Yorkshire folk, as well as Viking warriors. Being bourgeois vegetarians with our fancy Leeds ways, we have to make do with chips. Not proper chips, just catering chips, but in a white teacake and with plenty of salt, vinegar, and tomato sauce. This is my food of the gods.

As the night goes on, and the support acts play, I am getting more drunk. There is no real-ale in the bar because real-ale needs regular customers or it goes off. So I am forced to drink the least worst alternative: Newcastle Brown. I have a problem when I drink this beer, but I can't help drinking more and more of it. Others there have done the same, so we are now out of Newcastle Brown and I am forced to drink Tetley's in a can. But beer is beer. I am getting more and more excited! Everybody has come in from the fag break and the crowd is shouting for Grand Magus. There is a cluster of people up front, a mosh-pit in waiting. The rest of us stand back slightly, in the mob but out of the way of any mental pushing and jumping. The space where I have watched Beverley dance is half-filled with us metalheads. Not a sell-out, but the best crowd Manorfest has had I imagine. We are all waiting, impatiently, as the band, seasoned pros that they are, lead us on with their preparation: the lighting, the music beforehand, the mundane fiddling around with bits of kit on and off stage. Then, suddenly, they are there! And in front of us is Viking god JB. And he blows us apart while the rhythm section behind him makes us jump and bang our heads. I am so drunk that I cannot tell if there is a second guitarist that night, or whether JB just plays all the guitar parts as he does on all the albums. When we first saw them, they were more of a doom metal band with some classic heavy metal influences. In the last few years, they have grown into an epic heavy metal band drawing on all the old and true metal musical styles: they have drawn on the heroic, warrior masculinity of Manowar, Iron Maiden and Judas Priest (1969-present), and the imaginary Viking landscapes of Bathory. JB sings in English, and already we are all singing along. Every song is about being true, being strong, defeating your enemies in battle. Here, in Keighley, in West Yorkshire, we stand up AND YELL and we are strong.

I cannot believe this, I tell the person standing next to me. I cannot fucking believe this! He looks at me, I don't know him at all. But he grins and gives me the horns. He replies: Can't fucking believe it! Grand fucking Magus in fucking Keighley!

It is necessary here to understand the modern history of Bradford and Keighley to make sense of the reflection and to understand the intersections of identity that are being constructed and contested in the first reflection. In the English Civil War, Royalist forces took control of Parliament-supporting Bradford. The leader of the Royalists, the Earl of Newcastle, decided to spend a night at Bolling Hall before he executed the locals. At night, though, he received a visit by a ghostly woman who told him to 'pity poor Bradford' [4]. He did, and 'pity poor Bradford' has become a catchphrase for the city that is used to summarise its fate. In the seventies and into the eighties, Bradford suffered the enormous collapse of its main industries. It has yet to recover from that economic decline, unlike other cities in the north of England such as Leeds, Manchester and even Liverpool. This decline evokes more pity when one realises how wealthy Bradford was at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a new city built on the new money, entrepreneurialism and confidence of people migrating to the place from the Yorkshire Dales, Germany, and Ireland (Koditschek 1990). Through the twentieth century it continued to grow, contributing to both world wars. Its economy rested on two industries in this period. The first was wool, and wool processing in the huge mills built in the nineteenth century. This industry had grown up in Bradford when steam-engines replaced watermills as the way of moving machinery. But it had older roots in the relationship between Bradford and the hills of the West Riding, and the sheep farms that sent their wool down to its traders and weavers for hundreds of years before. The second industry that appeared and expanded in the twentieth century was mechanical engineering. New factories were built all over Bradford with assembly lines run on the Ford model, producing all kinds of goods and products.

After the Second World War, it expanded even more to contribute to the wellbeing of the British economy, and took in a wave of immigrants: Italians, Poles, Serbs displaced as refugees from the war, but especially people from what became India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. These latter migrants came here because of the history of imperialism and the long but unequal relationship between Britain and her colonies. Like migrants from the Caribbean who arrived in the same period in Bradford, these non-white migrants came to work because they were invited by factory owners and agents. They saw Britain as a land of opportunity and of fellowship. The British Government wanted the emerging nations of the Commonwealth and the former Empire to still feel part of Britain's cultural and political sphere – even though many in power and in the street never wanted non-white people to feel they belonged in Britain (Hansen 2000; Jackson 1992).

Bradford's British Asian community's first generation came as single men. They came to work in night shifts in the mills, and they were initially denied employment in other places by the activity of white trade unions. Many of these men became self-employed, opening shops and restaurants if they had some capital, becoming taxi-drivers if they had none (Akhtar 2012; Jackson 1992). Meanwhile, Bradford's white British working-class community moved out to the new council estates where they had homes with indoor toilets, gardens, and space to have a car. For a while the jobs survived for both ethnic communities in Bradford, and although there was racism and racial tension and some poverty, Bradford in the nineteen-sixties was still prosperous. People still wanted to move to Bradford to find work, whether they came from Mirpur or Manchester. Although there was some segregated housing as just described, there were many streets and districts where white, British Asian, and black families lived alongside one another. Then Bradford faced a series of catastrophic declines through the seventies and into the eighties. The wool trade collapsed and the mills were closed. Heavy engineering also collapsed. Even before Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, Bradford was shrinking. Thatcher's decisions ensured mass unemployment, increasing crime, and the hollowing out of Bradford's city centre. The arrival of the New Labour government of Tony Blair brought some good policies and money to Bradford, but not enough to tackle the poverty, the lack of jobs, and social exclusion

(Alexander 2004). Bourgeois families from all ethnicities moved out of the city, and Bradford became more racially divided, with an inner-city of British Asians who were mainly Muslim and an outer ring of white council estates, all of which suffered multiple problems of social deprivation. The credit crunch of 2007 and the austerity measures of the Coalition Government of 2010 have exacerbated the divisions and the deprivation, with large parts of the city centre left derelict. In recent years, migrants from eastern Europe and from war-torn countries such as Syria and Iraq have rejuvenated Bradford's public sphere and its community and culture, but many of these are resented by some white people and by some British Asians because they are willing to work the long hours that all young migrant communities do in their attempt to be successful (Duda-Mikulin 2020).

Everything that can be said about Bradford can be said about Keighley, but on a smaller scale given the size of the town in relation to its neighbour. Keighley suffers from racism and racial tensions between its white and British Asian communities. Keighley sits in the shadow of Rombald's Moor to the north, and Brontë country to the south. The gritstone moors above Keighley shine clear on a good day – more often than not they are lost in cloud and rain. Tourists in their thousands flock to Haworth to see the Parsonage and to walk out on the South Pennines to dream of Heathcliff at Top Withens (Spracklen 2016). But not many of those ever walk through the Airedale Shopping Centre to the indoor market. Surrounding the steam railway station and its mainline equivalent are abandoned mills and factories. The only new thing is a Further Education college built like a police station.

Grand Magus may not be the most obvious band you might expect to see in Bradford and Keighley. When we saw them in Bradford, they had just started out. Bradford at that time had a thriving heavy metal scene, centred on Rio's, a venue and nightclub housed in an ugly industrial building in a post-industrial area beyond the University. Bradford had shops in the city centre that sold metal records and merchandise. It was common then to see white people walking around wearing metal t-shirts: mainly classic metal bands from the seventies and eighties but some underground ones, too. Rio's was in the middle of an inner-city district that housed mainly British Asians, yet it never had any of those neighbours present as far as I can recall. As the number of metal fans in Bradford declined the number of people attending Rio's declined, and the venue moved to Leeds before coming back in a smaller club format. Grand Magus in Keighley in 2017 is strange for me as I associate Victoria Hall with the other leisure activities I do, because the venue is almost on my doorstep. But it was also strange because Grand Magus in 2017 were at the height of their career.

Grand Magus were founded in Sweden in 1996 under a different name by guitarist-vocalist-songwriter Janne (JB) Christoffersson, along with long-time bassist Mats (Fox) Skinner. These two remain at the heart of the band, though there have been various drummers. The band changed its name to Grand Magus when they changed their style, which on their debut album *Grand Magus* (2001) displays a mighty combination of doom metal with lyrical themes from classic heavy metal. Their 2003 second album, *Monument*, is the first one to reveal the band's love of Manowar, Judas Priest and Iron Maiden. There are songs that are explicitly based on Viking mythology: 'Ulvaskall (Vargr)'; and 'Chooser of the Slain (Valfader)'. There is also the fan favourite 'Baptised in Fire', where JB combines the lyrical themes with the enormous hooks of epic metal. This is the song every long-standing fan cries along to when the band plays it. I cannot remember for sure if they played it at Bradford or Keighley, but it would have been odd if they had not. With *Wolf's Return* (2005) and *Iron Will* (2008) they perfected a combination of lyrical affirmation of being yourself, being a Viking, being a warrior, with the vocal inflections of Rob Halford and the thundering riffs of Quorthon. The last track on *Iron Will* is 'I am the North', a song that can be sung as easily by a metal musician from Sweden as well as a fan from Yorkshire. They then signed to Roadrunner Records for *Hammer of*

the North (2010), an album title that captures perfectly what Grand Magus want us to think they are: these are anti-Christian pagan Viking warriors telling their fans to stand up proud and fight for the cause. Of course, the fact they are from Sweden gives them a sense of authenticity, even though JB and Fox are not Vikings, and have never been Vikings, and just happen to have been born and raised somewhere in that country. They are as authentic as if I decided to write songs about Anglo-Saxons fighting against the evil Norman invaders – we are all too far removed from the historical events to do anything other than perform the roles. But like fellow Swedish metal band Amon Amarth (1992-present), they won over fans around the world who wanted to believe they were tapping into something true about the North (La Rocca 2017; Sellheim 2018). From Roadrunner they were swiftly signed to Nuclear Blast, and their career as professional musicians headlining festivals was assured. So they are obvious headliners for a metal festival in Keighley, even if Manorfest is tiny (hundreds of fans) compared to the ten thousand who attend Bloodstock, the sixty thousand who attend Download, or the hundreds of thousands who attend Wacken in Germany.

It is to Bloodstock festival that this paper turns next, to consider how metal fandom has changed since I first saw Grand Magus at Rio's. This second reflection also allows me to remain in the north of England, where Bloodstock takes place, and to keep sight of the people of the working-class heavy metal community I have been discussing.

Reflection Two: Bloodstock Festival, August 2018

Bloodstock started out as an indoor festival in Derby that championed power metal and true metal at a time when these forms of metal were deeply unfashionable, caught between the underground nastiness of black metal and the mainstream of stadium nu metal). We went to the indoor version in 2005 just as power metal and female-fronted operatic goth metal was being replaced as the music of choice for the nerds by folk metal. Since then, Bloodstock had partnered with Wacken, the big German festival held near Hamburg, and developed into a multi-day open air festival. Like other rock festivals, Bloodstock has spaces for people to camp, basic shower and toilet facilities, and an arena with different stages and places to eat, drink and shop. The festival has attracted big names from the mainstream for its main stage evenings, yet at the same time it has had a stage/tents for new (amateur, up and coming) bands, and a stage (the Sophie Lancaster, actually another big tent) for anything non-mainstream: black, folk, death, doom, thrash, prog. Grand Magus played early on the main stage in 2008, then headlined the Sophie Lancaster in 2019.

The last time we were at the extreme/true metal festival had been in 2014. On that weekend, we camped in the so-called VIP area, because it had access to decent toilets, showers and a real-ale festival tent (a sign that good beer is now middle class). The bands that time had been excellent, the ones we had aimed to see – Emperor up on the main stage watched by half-asleep fans in corpse-paint sitting in comfy chairs (no one is too old to raise the horns, but of course time and biology move on), Winterfylleth (2006-present), Old Corpse Road (2007-present), Orphaned Land (1991-present), Rotting Christ (1987-present), and especially Bradford band Conquest of Steel (1998-2014) playing their last-ever show – but the camping experience had left me feeling too old. Of course, it is a non-mainstream metal festival and we are all Vikings who drink beer and listen to Judas Priest and Manowar all night. But I missed the feeling of having any sleep. And the toilets. Was it really a manly metal warrior thing to break the toilets and block them with rubbish? On the final day we gave up and escaped, fortuitously just before the rains came.

This weekend we are back at Bloodstock because Orphaned Land – Beverley's favourite metal band (Progressive metal from Israel with lots of Middle Eastern and Jewish musical themes) – are headlining the Sophie Lancaster stage. We are not camping, however. I have chickened out

and we are staying in a hotel in Burton-on-Trent and driving in. At breakfast that morning, everybody is wearing the metal uniform. Everybody here is in their forties or fifties. All white, maybe a third women with their male partner, the rest small groups of older metal men. One group is speaking some foreign language, maybe Dutch? Everyone at breakfast is white. This feels like a normal non-mainstream metal crowd, the profile I had observed in 2014

When we park up and walk in, I can see this crowd has changed. In 2014 it had been filled with mainly white men, screaming their heads off to the English Heritage Black Metal of Winterfylleth [5], or moshing before Emperor (1991-2001, 2016-present). Now there seems to be a number of different things. There are more women, lots with male partners but some in bigger groups of friends, and some all-female friend groups. There are more non-white fans, not many but enough to be impossible to count. The fans also look younger, though this maybe because I am four years older. We walk through to the main stage. There is a real-ale tent now in this part of the festival, now that real ale has become the beer of choice for metalheads. I remember when real ale was a working-class man's drink rejected by the middle classes who drank wine. I remember when young working-class white men drank lager because it was fashionable. They mocked men who drank bitter as old, sad, granddads. Even metalheads in the eighties and nineties preferred lager or shots to real ale. When I first started going to gigs, no place served real ale. Rio's in Bradford only had Newcastle Brown as an alternative. The same went for the second version of Rio's in Leeds. Yet here we are: real-ale has become socially acceptable not just for the middle-class hipsters seeking authentic tastes, but for the average metal fan at a not-quite-mainstream metal festival. We stand in the queue and in front of us is a whole bunch of white people dressed in Viking outfits. They are all drinking the real ale from horns. The drinking horns look real, I know you can buy them now, and that being a Viking seems to be a cosplay choice for the metal elite. These are the hipster metal equivalents of the Sealed Knot or the people who dress up as Nazis: they no doubt claim they just like the costumes and do not really want to sack Christian monasteries in England. When we get to see Valafar playing on the New Band Stage, some of the horn-wielding pretend Vikings are in front of us.

Metal fans in the UK are changing in the same way they are changing around the world. Metal fans here seem to be more middle-class, seem to be more diverse in their gender and ethnicity. Things that used to be deemed acceptable – such as wearing a Burzum (1991-1999, 2009-2018) tee-shirt – are now rare sights, because metal fans have judged themselves that the nationalism and racism in folk/black metal is not part of heavy metal. Still claiming the right to wear such merchandise is supposedly about embracing the communicative rationality of metal's transgressive history, as I once argued myself (Spracklen 2006). But there is no longer any excuse, and the old guard black-metal fans are finding themselves being squeezed out of the public sphere of opinion by younger metal fans. These younger fans still perform as Vikings, but they do not actually want to be them. Moreover, even the older, white working-class metal fans in the north of England prefer the fun of Valafar and Grand Magus to the evil of NSBM. They prefer to drink real-ale and cosplay at the festival precisely because they want to perform authentic working-class northern identities at a time when working-class society in the north of England is under threat. They want to be Vikings, as well, because being one allows them to embrace a heroic, hegemonic male fantasy that runs against the reality of their working lives: where traditional men's work has disappeared.

I am aware that this naming and identifying around race, gender and indeed class is deeply problematic – especially from someone who is a white British man. The moral, political and ethical objections to this labelling are well-rehearsed (Leaney and Webb 2020). On race and ethnicity, it is impossible to know anyone's family background by simply taking note of the supposed colour of

their skin. It may be possible to say people are white, or British Asian, or black British in the context of British society in this century, but such descriptions are crude attempts to identify the absence and presence of people from different ethnic groups. There may well be many people from British minority ethnic groups who become counted as white, and not just those who are Irish or from Eastern Europe. My attempt to make sense of people's whiteness may well have missed people who were black British or British Asian, or from polyethnic backgrounds. But the people in these spaces presented as white. Gender is easier to ascribe if one accepts that the people we are describing are performing gender roles. The facts of biology will sometimes make it possible to guess whether people are male or female, but again those assumptions are based on stereotypes of sex that do not reflect the full complexity of gender performativity in a world where gender is blurred (Clifford-Napoleone 2015). Class is something that is easier to ascribe. The metal fans spoke broad Yorkshire, but an urban West Yorkshire accent, showing they were mainly working-class. These are the things I remember, the things that stood out for me. This is an ethnographic reflection of a number of key events and spaces in the metal scene of the north of England. It is based on my memories and my personal diaries, but I did not undertake formal fieldwork. I did not take notes at the events I am describing. However, I have been an ethnographic researcher since I started my PhD in 1993, and I have lived my life making observations, taking notes, and making reflections. I have been involved in research where I have had to ascribe race, gender, and class to others without asking them: in rugby league grounds (Spracklen, Timmins and Long 2010); in real-ale festivals (Spracklen, Laurencic and Kenyon 2013); and in heavy metal gigs (Spracklen 2006, 2020). So I think I have the ability, experience and caution to identify race, gender and class – and especially race and gender inequalities such as whiteness and hegemonic masculinity at work in the unequal arrangement of people in space.

Conclusion

Metal in Keighley, then, at least retains a sense of (white male) working-classness even as the UK metal scene has become more middle class, and more representative of modern British society. This ethnographic reflection is meaningful because I am an insider and have been all my life: an insider in the north of England, and an insider in the UK metal scene since I was ten-years old. I know what shapes both cultural spaces, the myths and the symbols and the practices that define them. I know how those myths and symbols define both belonging and exclusion. So, this reflection is validated by my long years and by my professional ethnographic preferences as a qualitative researcher in the social sciences. Metal in the UK has become a space in which polyvalent identities are celebrated and constructed, even if tensions continue to exist in wider society about race, Englishness and Britishness: further, metal provides an inclusive, global community that crosses borders even as populist politicians try to shut them down. Metal has become more comfortable with transgression and gender fluidity, too. But the struggle or who belongs in metal is still highly contested, and in the north this intersects with working-class resistance to the hegemony of the south of England. The myths about warriors at the heart of heroic masculinity in some metal in the north of England is playful and embraced by fans as a sign of rejecting the south and the hegemony of mainstream popular culture, even if such myth-making is problematic in a town and region that is divided by race and racial politics. Heroic Viking metal provides these fans a sense of belonging and identity, but at the same time it creates problems of exclusion.

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Endnotes

1. I use British Asian as a term accepted by British Asians, and by policymakers and used in the UK Census. In Keighley and Bradford, most of the British Asian community originally came from what is now Azad Kashmir in Pakistan (Akhtar 2012). There are smaller communities that draw their family roots back to India and Bangladesh. Some British Asians in Bradford are Hindu, but most are in fact Sunni Muslims of the Deobandi and Barelwi schools (McLoughlin 2005).
2. My dad was the first of his family to attend university. He did not travel from his Leeds roots, though, and I was born and raised in the same city. I lived in council housing, first a high-rise flat in Burmantofts, then a semi-detached house in Bramley, in different parts of Leeds. I attended the state schools on the doorstep. This upbringing accounts for my love of metal, which in the early eighties was deeply uncool and the preserve of working-class white boys like me and my friends.
3. Spracklen (2006: 33-34).
4. https://www.hauntedhappenings.co.uk/ghost_hunts/Bolling_Hall.php, accessed 21 January 2020.
5. Winterfylleth have attracted attention from anti-fascist campaigners. I re-appraise their work and their relationship to nationalism and racism in Spracklen (2020) after coming to a different conclusion in earlier work with Lucas and Deeks (Lucas, Deeks and Spracklen 2011; Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014).

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Discography

Grand Magus (2001), *Grand Magus*, London: Rise Above Records.
Grand Magus (2003), *Monument*, London: Rise Above Records.
Grand Magus (2005), *Wolf's Return*, London: Rise Above Records.
Grand Magus (2008), *Iron Will*, London: Rise Above Records.
Grand Magus (2010), *Hammer of the North*, London: Roadrunner

Riffs

Experimental writing on popular music

Riffs is a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal which provides a space for experimental ways of thinking and writing about popular music research. It is a space for creatives of all backgrounds, experiences and interests.

Riffs emerged from a writing group at Birmingham City University, established in 2015 by Nick Gebhardt and supported by the Birmingham Centre of Media and Cultural Research. As popular music scholars, many of the original 'Write Clubbers' straddled disciplines: music; sociology; media studies; anthropology; dance. Some felt adrift, on thin ice.

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References: If you refer to other publications within your piece, please list these in a 'References' section at the end. All clear formats of referencing are acceptable. Discographies and weblinks can also be detailed at the end of your contribution. Please use endnotes rather than footnotes.

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