

## **Music audiences: An introduction**

Lucy Bennett

This special section of *Participations* is focused on music audiences. This collection of articles touch upon a variety of the different ways audience members, including fans, can approach and receive popular music, the different platforms that are used by these individuals to express their understandings of this medium, and how technology is working to shape listening and nostalgic experiences.

To a degree, music audiences have yet to receive strong attention in academia. There still remain relatively few explorations in this area, in terms of empirical studies that work in an attempt to question, unravel and understand these viewpoints and experiences by asking, or closely observing, the audience members themselves. Writing in 2000, Mark Duffett warned that if music scholars ignored or gave little concern to the voice of the audiences, then they would be unable to “fully understand the appeal of popular figures, explore the music's contingent social effects, or contest the representativeness of existing accounts”. Ultimately this oversight would prevent them from being able to “accurately explain the shared nature of pop as a meaningful source of personal experience” (2000, 79). This section seeks to drive this notion forward and underline the importance and value of empirical music audience studies.

Of the work that has been conducted in this area, most notable is Daniel Cavicchi's (1998) work on Bruce Springsteen fans, which provided a rich insight into a particular fan culture and their behavioural practices at live concerts, ticket queues and in terms of relating to other fans. A Springsteen fan himself, Cavicchi's insider ethnographic work analysed succinctly how the music conjured meaning for these audience members, and how these feelings worked to form a dynamic and powerful world. This was achieved by accessing the “thoughts, words and insights” of the fans themselves (Cavicchi, 1998: xi) through interviews, observation and discussion. Other studies that have pursued a similar rich methodological line of enquiry include works on fan cultures of Elvis (Doss 1999, Duffett 2000), Kiss (Bailey 2005), Rolling Stones (Baker 2009) and Michael Jackson (Hills 2007). John Aizlewood's collection, *Love is the Drug* (1994) of first-hand recounts by pop music fans also provides a vivid account of the passion and meaning that music can ignite in listeners, as does Craft, Cavvichi and Keil's *My Music* (1993).

Other valuable work in the area of music audiences has centred on youths and their subcultures. Early ethnographic studies that gave a voice to these audiences include Simon

Frith's investigations on everyday engagements (1981), Dick Hebdige's explorations of British subcultures (1979), Cohen's (1991) analysis of youths in the 1980s Liverpool music scene and Steve Redhead's (1993) collection of rave culture. Later works questioned the impact of music on young people's everyday lives and routines (Williams 2001), with others considered the rise of radio technology (Albarran et al 1997) and music television (Gerrit et al 2000) on their music listening practices.

Subsequently, the arrival and widespread use of the Internet and technology has been strongly influential on music audiences. With new frameworks for music consumption, communication, distribution and reception being adopted, many elements have been re-negotiated and re-modified, often altering our traditional understandings of music audiences and their role in these practices. The popularity of online communities in particular brought forth a number of online explorations of music audience and fan behaviour, such as Christine Scodari's examination of Beatles fans and their gender-related subjectivities (2007), Nessim Watson's case study of the Phish.net community and arguments within (1997), Marjorie Kibby's examination of John Prine fandom (2000), William Echard's investigation on poetics of Neil Young fans (2005) and my own work on R.E.M., normativity and Murmurs.com (Bennett 2011, 2012). Nancy Baym's work on Swedish independent music fandom (2007 and 2011) took these initial explorations further, by providing a compelling snapshot of how online music appreciation was shifting and how individuals began to use multiple and interlinked sites online. With the dawn of social media, and with it the ability for music fans to send messages to, and converse with, their object of fandom through mediums such as Twitter, the impact of this mode of communication on both parties has started to be explored in other ethnographic studies (Beer 2008, Burns 2009, Marwick & boyd 2011).

These changing elements of online music fandom are one of the issues touched upon in **Nancy Baym's** paper on the connection between musicians and their fans through social media in this special section. Undertaking interviews with thirty six independent musicians, Baym focuses on the perspectives of artists who use the social media platforms, and examines how they perceive their relationships and interactions with their fans online. In doing this, she discovers how the distinctions between fans and friends, for some musicians, are becoming blurred and less rigid, with many of the musicians engaging with their fans as equals. These first-hand accounts provide a vital insight into the complexities of these online communications and the changes that are occurring in relations between fans and musicians.

**Liza Potts** similarly explores technology shaping the connections between fans and musicians, yet also considers how this can impact upon the role and importance of record labels. Focusing on American singer songwriter Amanda Palmer, she applies de Certeau's (1984) theory of strategy and tactics to understand how the power dynamics between artist, fan culture and music label work. Examining tweets and online activity from the artist and her fans, Potts show how Palmer works in an effort to redefine the ways in which artists and their audiences connect, using an embracement of participatory culture to rewrite

traditional norms about the significance of record labels. This study demonstrates dynamically how the music fan community participates with Palmer and other fellow fans to circumvent the strategies of the traditional recording industry.

**Melissa Avdeeff's** article twists the examination of technology to explore how this affects contemporary practices and engagements of listeners. Focusing on portable playback devices, such as iPods, and undertaking a large scale survey and interview study, she discovers a culture of eclecticism with regard to musical genre, a form of listening that is extremely personalized and fluid. Avdeeff also discovered that genre preference between those who use MP3 players and those who do not was largely different.

**Anne Kaun and Fredrik Stiernstedt** also examine technology, however they focus more specifically on the processes through which media are remembered and how social media changes the way that memories are performed. Focusing on a case study of former East-German youth radio DT64 through analysing interviews with former listeners and examining a Facebook group, Kaun and Stiernstedt find that social media offer new potentials and avenues for media memories of music audiences, that are collaborative and publically performed.

**Tonya Anderson** explores similar themes, in terms of how nostalgia plays an important role for music audience members, by focusing on an ethnographic analysis of adult female fans of Duran Duran. She explores life-long fandom, analysing how these fans engender empowerment from performing similar activities that prevailed during their fandom of the band when they were teenagers. Anderson shows that a characterisation of this particular female fan behaviour as pathological has resulted in it often being immersed in shame and subsequently, hidden.

**Mark Duffett's** paper begins an injunction to the work in this collection on technology and online practices. Instead, Duffett suggests that more attention should currently be paid towards offline behaviour of fans. To do this, he explores the workings and editorial stories of an Elvis fan club magazine that provide a snapshot of matters important to this particular fan community during those times. Examining them over a ten year period (2000-2009), Duffett draws on the concept of "boosting" (Barbas 2008) and Durkheim's (1912) theory of religion to show how, under the motivation of keeping their object of fandom's memory alive and subsequently maintaining a strongly populated fan base, Elvis fans participate in a dynamic and thriving offline culture.

Continuing the focus on offline practices, and moving onto cinema audiences and their relation to music soundtracks, **Lauren Anderson** analyses different patterns of response that arise within four semi-structured individual interviews, with regard to how audience members heard and related to Joni Mitchell's 'Both Sides Now' with its appearance in Richard Curtis' *Love Actually* (2003). Anderson particularly explores how 'knowing' the song impacted and resonated with their ways of responding to the film, its narrative composition and characters. She shows how these particular audience members seemingly became "connected" knowers (Hermes, 1995) who discursively negotiate their involvement with the film and its musical soundtrack in complex ways.

Finally, **Rafal Zaborowski's** investigation into Japanese youth and their experiences of popular music also focuses on offline behaviour and explores how common patterns can be recognized in audience engagements with song lyrics. Zaborowski identifies these patterns for the Japanese youths participating in the study as focusing on a school/work divide, gender and lastly a perception of 'ordinariness'. This study shows a rich insight into how youths within the social context of contemporary Japan interpret, and relate to, popular music.

A thread that I have tried to maintain through this special section is how music appreciation, for listeners, can be paradoxically personal and communal at the same time, a sentiment that is echoed throughout these papers. As Simon Frith explains: "we all hear music we like as something special, as something that defies the mundane, takes us 'out of ourselves', puts us somewhere else.... it is this sense of specialness... that is the key to our musical value judgments" (1996, 275). This special section of *Participations* has sought to provide a revealing and empirical insight into how music audiences are currently situating themselves, and the processes that are impacting upon musical experience, meaning making and value judgements. It is on these foundations that I hope the following selected papers, with their important inclusion of the voices of different music audiences, give readers further insight into what happens when this "something special" is conjured by music upon listeners.

### **Biographical note:**

Lucy Bennett graduated with a PhD in online fandom at JOMEC, Cardiff University, with a thesis focusing on online R.E.M. fans. Her research examines audiences and their use of the internet, with particular focuses on fandom, music and social media. Her work appears in the journals *New Media & Society*, *Transformative Works and Cultures* and *Continuum*. She is also the co-founder of the Fan Studies Network and editorial assistant for the journal *Social Semiotics*. Contact: [bennettlucyk@gmail.com](mailto:bennettlucyk@gmail.com).

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the following reviewers: Martin Barker, Paul Booth, Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore, Michael Bull, Kelli S. Burns, Daniel Cavicchi, Annette Davison, Erika Doss, Mark Duffett, Joanne Garde-Hansen, Joke Hermes, Matt Hills, Andrew Hoskins, Jason Mittell, Cornel Sandvoss, Will Straw, Patrik Wikström.

I would also like to thank Martin Barker, Will Brooker, Bethan Jones, David Machin and Rebecca Williams for their support and encouragement towards this special section.

### **Bibliography**

Albarran, Alan B., Anderson, Tonya, Ligia Garcia Bejar, Anna L. Bussart, Elizabeth Daggett, Sarah Gibson, Matt Gorman, Danny Greer, Miao Guo, Jennifer L. Horst, Tania Khalaf, John Phillip Lay,

- Michael McCracken, Bill Mott, Heather Way, "What Happened to our Audience?" Radio and New Technology Uses and Gratifications Among Young Adult Users', *Journal of Radio Studies*, 14 (2), 2007, pp. 92-101.
- Aizlewood, John (ed.) *Love is the Drug*, London: Penguin, 1984.
- Bailey, Steve. *Media Audiences and Identity: Self-Construction in the Fan Experience*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.
- Baker, Andrea J, 'Mick or Keith: blended identity of online rock fans,' *Identity in the Information Society*, 2 (1), 2009, pp. 7-21.
- Barbas, Samantha, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars and the Cult of Celebrity*, New York: Palgrave, 2008.
- Baym, Nancy K. 'The new shape of online community: The example of Swedish independent music fandom', *First Monday*, 12(8), 2007. [WWW document] URL [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue12\\_8/baym/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue12_8/baym/index.html) [visited 02/09/12].
- Baym, Nancy K. 'The Swedish Model: Balancing Markets and Gifts in the Music Industry', *Popular Communication*, 9(1), 2011, pp. 22-38.
- Beer, David. 'Making friends with Jarvis Cocker: Music Culture in the Context of Web 2.0', *Cultural Sociology*, 2, 2008, pp. 222-241.
- Bennett, Lucy. 'Delegitimizing strategic power: Normative identity and governance in online R.E.M. fandom', *Transformative Works and Cultures*, No. 7, September 2011. [WWW document] URL <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/281> [visited 02/09/12].
- Bennett, Lucy, 'Music Fandom Online: R.E.M. fans in pursuit of the ultimate first listen' *New Media & Society*, 14 (5), 2012, pp. 748-763.
- Burns, Kelli.S, *Celeb 2.0: How Social Media Foster our Fascination with Popular Culture*. California: Greenwood Publishing, 2009.
- Cavicchi, D, *Tramps Like Us: Music & Meaning among Springsteen Fans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Cohen, Sara, *Rock Culture in Liverpool*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1991.
- Crafts, Susan, Cavacchi, Daniel and Keil, Charles, *My Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1993.
- de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Doss, Erika, *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith and Image*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999.
- Duffett, Mark, 'Transcending Audience Generalizations: Consumerism Reconsidered in the Case of Elvis Presley Fans,' *Popular Music and Society*, 24 (2), 2000, pp. 75-92.
- Durkheim, Émile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1912].
- Echard, William, *Neil Young and the poetics of energy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Frith, Simon, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
- Frith, Simon, *Performing Rites: On the value of popular music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996.
- Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning Of Style*, London, England: Methuen, 1979.
- Hermes, Joke, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
- Hills, Matt, 'Michael Jackson Fans on Trial? "Documenting" Emotivism and Fandom in Wacko About Jacko,' *Social Semiotics*, 17(4), 2007, pp. 459-19.

- Kibby, Marjorie D, 'Home on the Page: A Virtual Place of Music Community', *Popular Music* 19 (1), 2000, pp. 91-100.
- Marwick, Alice and boyd, danah. 'To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter,' *Convergence* 1.7, 2011, pp. 125-137. DOI: 10.1177/1354856510394539
- Redhead, Steve. (ed) *Rave Off: Politics and Deviance in Contemporary Youth Culture*. Aldershot: Avebury, 1993.
- Scodari, Christine, 'Yoko in Cyberspace with Beatles Fans: Gender and the ReCreation of Popular Mythology', in Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (eds.) *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, New York: New York University Press, 2007.
- Van der Rijt, G., d'Haenens, L. S. J., Jansen, R. H. A., & de Vos, C. J., 'Young people and music television in the Netherlands,' *European Journal of Communication*, 15(1), 2000, pp. 79-91.
- Watson, Nessim, 'Why we argue about virtual community: A case study of the phish.net fan community,' in Steve Jones (ed.), *Virtual Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Williams, Christina, 'Does it Really Matter? Young People and Popular Music,' *Popular Music*, Vol. 20, No. 2, May 2001, pp. 223-242.