

Voyage to the Stars: Interaction between fans and musicians on cruise ship music festivals

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Abstract:

Music festivals are celebrations of music within and usually engaging with a specific geographic place; however some festivals – referred to as post-festivals – are less concerned with place than the construction of the festival experience. The increasingly numerous music festivals on cruise ships go one step further, removing place as a consideration and hosting a music festival within the fabricated, mobile, and liminal non-place of a cruise ship. They construct a festival experience that encourages interaction between fans and star musicians. Para-social relationships shift, and fans and star performers are temporarily united within a constructedly intimate society referred to as ‘ship fam’. This paper is the result of a series of interviews and open-ended surveys conducted in 2015 with 129 musicians, fans, and organisers of these festivals. It finds that the socially and physically encapsulated festival held within the non-place of the ship, is purposefully designed as an intense and liminal experience for musicians and fans. Relative strangers who spend only a few days onboard develop temporary and intimate friendships that are maintained after the festival on social media. Whereas open-air festivals are often held in fields with little encouraged (or permitted) interaction between fans and star performers, shipborne music festivals are luxurious and designed to generate an intense experience for participants.

Key Words: cruise, tourism, music, festival, fan studies, liminality

Aboard a recent music festival held on a cruise ship, one dedicated to alternative rock, a festivalgoer headed back to her cabin for a late afternoon nap. It was needed. There was no other way she’d stay awake for the all-night performance-and-dance marathon that lay ahead. Down the corridor from her room, she found a corridor party going on, someone

strumming on a guitar, people collectively singing old rock songs. There was nothing particularly special about that. Festivalgoers often got together on these ocean-borne music festivals. What did stop her in her tracks was the recognition of several star performers, including members of Georgia-based alternative band *Collective Soul*. Of course, she had to sit down on the floor and join in. She would later note, 'the chance to sit next to my favourite rock stars and sing songs was a dream come true'. It was an unexpectedly intimate encounter with band-members that were typically encountered at a distance, on a stage, or in the para-social experience of television. Of course, not all encounters with star performers were as familiar as this; however, cruise ship festivals do bring a certain informality and familiarity to the festival experience. Star performers, such as those in *Collective Soul*, are stuck onboard along with the two thousand-odd guests. They have the option of staying in their room for three days and ordering room service, or getting mingling and experiencing the festival along with the fans. Most get out and about. They encounter fans, relax, attend other gigs, and enjoy the festival. As one festivalgoer noted:

Unlike typical festivals, on a cruise ship, the artists and fans are all living in close quarters for days. It forces everyone to mingle. It was nice to see bands out spending time with old fans and making friends with new ones.

Cruise ships, as one festivalgoer observed, are 'an ideal place to hold a music festival'. If one can forget for a moment the popular cultural images of overweight and elderly tourists playing bingo and dancing the Macarena on boat deck, this aptness becomes obvious. The difficulties of organising accommodation, dining, and drinking, faced by many festival organisers, are alleviated by existing luxurious cabins, and well-stocked and staffed dining rooms, and bars. A well-trained security division is in place to control excessive revelry. Multiple venues with state-of-the-art production facilities are onboard. Due to their location within the a-legal and uninhabited ocean, there are no noise concerns. There is no local community to either distractedly engage with the festival, or to complain about it. Physically and experientially, cruise ships are set up to provide just about a perfect festival experience.

However, regarded from another angle, cruise ships are not a perfect 'place' to hold a music festival because they are not places at all. The concept of place implies a geographic point, and cruise ships are not places in that sense. They are constructed, mobile, and liminal spaces. Consider the process of naming practices. Relph (1976) asserts that places are constructed by naming them. While cruise ships do have a named internal geography – events are held 'on lido deck' or 'in the main theatre' – they have no fixed geographical place in which they exist and interact with a local human society. Their natural domain, the ocean, does not permit permanent human habitation and is not as rigorous with common human names. The location of ships are often named in relation to points on land ('off the coast of Italy', 'today, ladies and gentlemen, the ship will dock in San Diego') or in general terms ('Atlantic Crossing', 'a Mediterranean cruise'). Occurring onboard placeless cruise

ships, such festivals can be considered postmodern festivals attracting post-tourists (Van Aalst and van Melik, 2012; MacLeod, 2006).

Music festivals on cruise ships are an increasingly significant way to experience a particular genre of music. From the first modern offerings in 2000, they have increased in number in recent years. Electronic Dance Music (EDM) music festival *Holy Ship!* moved from a single annual sailing to two sailings a year in 2015. The longest running rock festival on cruise ships, *The Rock Boat*, is now in its fifteenth year. The company that organises the rock boat, Sixth Man, runs multiple festivals annually in various genres, such as country music (*The Outlaw Country Cruise*), blues (*Keeping The Blues Alive At Sea*), EDM (*Mad Decent Boat Party*) or specifically featuring star performers such as the seventh Kid Rock Cruise, or the fifth KISS Cruise. Despite the relatively low attendance figures (imposed by the size of the ship), they are financially successful, and combine the hedonism, neo-tribal, and high-octane experience of a rock festival with the luxurious and constructedly exotic space of a cruise ship.

This essay considers the construction of the intense and short cruise ship festival experience within the hyperreal and liminal space of cruise ships. I argue that this intense experience is designed to create an artificial and intimate experience where both fans and musicians form a temporary and intimate society. Festivalgoers are likely to return in following years to experience the same temporary and intimate society. Data collection occurred in the first four months of 2015. The views of 129 festivalgoers were sourced via an open-ended survey. Follow-up interviews with key informants were conducted, and analysed using a grounded theory approach. Resulting themes – including audience reaction to fan encounters – were considered and analysed. The datasets were further enhanced by my own experiences as an orchestral pianist on board cruise ships between 2004 and 2008.

The experience of cruise ship music festivals

Festivals, like cruise ships, are social and physical containers for experiences. Pine and Gilmore (2011; 1998) argue that the construction of experiences, rather than service or goods businesses, creates a sustainable and effective competitive advantage, a point several scholars have discussed with regard to festivals (Morgan, 2006; Morgan, 2008; McClinchey and Carmichael, 2010; Ralston et al., 2007; Pegg and Patterson, 2010; Cole and Chancellor, 2009). Quinn and Wilks (2013) have discussed the social and physical space of festivals as a series of concentric circles comprising the ‘hinterland zone’, ‘locale zone’, ‘congregation zone’, and ‘performance zone’, each with varying levels of accessibility. Performers and festival organisers, for example, can access the ‘performance zone’ of the stage, and audience members can only access the ‘congregation zone’. Cruise ship festivals are different to this model. As a mobile geography, cruise ships do not occupy a single humanly-populated geography, so the concept of a ‘hinterland zone’ is meaningless. A temporary ‘congregation zone’ is set up if the cruise ship visits a humanly inhabited port, but this is not assured. Further, the barrier between ‘performance zone’ and ‘congregation

zone' is blurred. Informants reported sitting in the hot top at the side of the stage during performances, of joining bands on stage, and unusual temporary intimacy between fans and musicians. This blurring of the usually more structured festival zones reflects and permits interaction between performers and fans.

Festivals are also social events, broadly involving 'social interaction with family, staff, and other visitors, leading to a sense of *communitas*' (Morgan, 2008: 84). *Communitas*, a concept originally considered by Turner (1974) within a religious context, involves a close, temporary bonding generated by shared experience. Many scholars have noted the relationship of festivals, liminality, and the generation of *communitas* (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; Heerden, 2009; Rutherford, 2008; Turner, 1978). Cruise ship festivals are a particularly strong example of *communitas* in music festivals. Several participants noted this strong sense of *communitas* referred to as 'ship fam'. Respondents noted:

- Artists are segregated from fans at land-based festivals. Also, the land-based festivals have never felt as **communal**. We walked away from The Rock Boat with **new friends who felt like family**.
- Land based festivals are **very, very crowded** and little chance of even getting to meet a band member.
- You tend to get a **more dedicated crowd** on a ship-based festival. Oftentimes, land-based festivals are about going somewhere just to say you been there, and to be seen. Most people don't know ship-based festivals exist.
- Much more **camaraderie between people**, because it's SO much smaller than most festivals, mostly.
- It's more of a **community** on the Rock Boat. The same people go over and over and it's a smaller group than at a land-based festival.
- There was a lot more interaction with the artists, and everybody **felt like a family** on board.
- I definitely like **the intimacy of the ship**, the **family feeling** that we have.
- I think I'm getting a bit too old for regular music festivals. By the time the boat party was over, everybody knew each other. **Everybody was friends** on the boat whereas you don't really get that at music festivals – land based music festivals anymore. Yeah, and obviously it was a lot smaller, so there was only about 2,000 people on the boat as well. So after being on there for four or five days you kind of knew everyone's faces and so on.
- **Everyone is there for fun and people respect each other's space**. There are a few outliers but you rarely see people fighting or pushing or shoving unlike I have seen in land based festivals.

Festivalgoers contrast the sense of *communitas* in a cruise festival and that of a larger festival. One of the key features of a ship festival is that the *communitas* is more intense

than the larger festivals on land due to the smaller numbers and more intimate nature of the festival, and that ship festival *communitas* includes the star performers, a feature that is not part of larger land-based festivals.

Cruise ship music festivals are organised and run by a production company that charters an entire ship from a cruise line, sells tickets, and hosts the festival. Festivals are musically themed, and may revolve around rock, singer/songwriters, bluegrass, the music of Elvis, or any number of others concepts. A line-up of featured artists is gradually announced over the year. Festivalgoers book packages that include both the cruise experience (including accommodation, dining, and access to public areas) and the festival experience (including all performances and events). The period leading up to the event can involve pre-festival parties and gatherings. Once onboard, festivalgoers attend concerts, autograph signings, and cheesy themed games. With concerts organised from mid-morning until sunrise the following day, there is no shortage of shows to attend. Due to the limited numbers of berths available (typically about 2,500), and the high profile of many of the artists, these festivals often sell out months in advance of the sailing.

Despite differing themes and production companies, there are broad similarities between festivals. Participants generally wake up around mid-morning. Several stages around the ship – including the main theatre, a large open-air stage set up on lido deck – host performances from 10am and continue, often until just before sunrise. Festivalgoers move from stage to stage as their fancy takes them, perhaps stopping to attend a signing session with their favourite stars. During the day, there are special somewhat cheesy festivities organised, such as belly-flop competitions or music trivia. If the ship is in a port or (more likely) anchored off one of the cruise ship's themed, renamed, and leased islands, festivalgoers can choose to go ashore and join in the party. The nights often comprise theme nights where festivalgoers are encouraged to dress in costume; many have organised their costume months in advance. Some festivalgoers consume large amounts of alcohol, to the distaste of other festivalgoers; however the ship is constantly praised as a safe environment for participants. A few hours before sunrise, the last dedicated party people stagger back to their cabin to crash, and start again in the morning. This basic formula, repeated on rock cruises between different companies, comprises a standardised and profitable approach similar to the approach of cruise ships; guests know what to do, how the festival operates, and consistency of product is ensured.

While rock music cruises are recent phenomena, they emerged from previous models of cruising. In particular, their origin is in excursion shipping, a tourism model that originated in the mid-nineteenth century. Commercial estuary and coastal steam-powered vessels of the early nineteenth century were financially affected by the development of the faster and more convenient railways. In an effort to reverse declining fortunes, pleasure or excursion cruises were organised, where a ship would take passengers on a short voyage, returning them to their origin at the end of the day. The provision of professional musicians, still decades away on ocean-going vessels, was often offered on these trips as an

inducement to partake in the pleasures of such cruises. Even when musicians began appearing on oceangoing steamers in the 1880s, pleasure cruises continued play the waterways – and still do; over the years I have played for dozens of weddings and functions on pleasure cruises in Sydney Harbour. With the rise of the modern cruise industry in the 1960s, new opportunities for pleasure-cruising arose. In 1970, a promoter named Richard Groff attempted to charter Greek Line's SS *Queen Anna Maria* for a waterborne reconstruction of Woodstock, which Groff reported that he liked, except for the mud. This ultimately failed because Bermuda, the destination, felt the cruise was 'alien to the way in which Bermuda has been promoted over the years'; also the Greek government, which flagged the ship, had recently voiced disapproval of rock music (Rosenberg, 1970). However, the idea of chartering a ship for a music festival was a sound one, and between 1974 and 1979, Holland America's SS Rotterdam hosted a biannual jazz cruise. The idea was revived from 1983 aboard the SS Norway. Classical cruises began appearing in the eighties in the Mediterranean (Miller, 1991), but rock cruises would have to wait until the new millennium. On the Labor Day weekend in 2001, the first Rock Boat was launched aboard Carnival's tiny MV *Jubilee*. Organised by Floridan alternative band Sister Hazel for 450 of their fans, it proved so successful that it became an annual event, with 2015 marking the fifteenth consecutive Rock Boat. Sister Hazel (now trading as Sixth Man Productions) began to organise other cruises themed around performers (KISS Cruise, Kid Rock Cruise) and genres (roots-themed Cayamo, country cruises, blues cruises, EDM cruises). So successful was this formula that other companies began organising similar cruises such as EDM-themed festival Holy Ship (organised by American music festival HARD) or 70,000 Tons of Metal, organised by Swiss promoter Andy Piller. These festivals keep increasing in number and success.



Image 1: Indoor from balcony (Research participant's photo)

The business model for these festivals is reasonably straightforward. The production company charters the ship; although in the early days of festivals, this would mean buying a number of cabins on a regular cruise and gaining access a proportion of the venues, modern festival cruises book out the entire ship and the cruise is run for them. Musicians are booked on one of two models. Under the host model, no fee is guaranteed, and musicians take a cut of the overall profit, potentially generating more revenue. This model is popular among 'name' acts, such as for the Kid Rock tour, or the KISS Kruise. Under the 'festival' model, the festival spends about \$100,000 per day on talent (Kennedy, 2012). Fans pay for a bed in a four-room cabin, or for two room cabins, and may not know their cabin-mates until they board.

Fan Studies and Cruise Ship Studies

Two areas of research particularly illuminate this study: fan studies and cruise ship studies. The relationship of fans to their idols is a key aspect of cruise ship popular music festivals; however the location of the festival on a cruise ship requires the consideration of the ship as social geography, in particular its consideration as a post-tourism product. Both these areas have received critical attention, though rarely have they been brought together.

Popular music generates fan cultures. Some cultures are small, such as fans of the particular band or particular period in rock music, such as surf rock or punk. Others are broader, such as fans of heavy metal or rockabilly. Certainly cruise ship music festivals cater to specific fan groups. The rock cruise festival 70,000 Tons of Metal, for example, caters specifically to metal fans. The KISS Kruise caters to fans of 70s supergroup KISS, and the Kid Rock Cruise similarly caters to fans of Kid Rock. However, some festivals draw their net more broadly. The Rock Boat caters to fans of alternative rock, a genre so broad as to include bands such as Sister Hazel, Michael Franti and Spearhead, The Trews, Melodime, and Gaelic Storm. However the marketing in particular festival necessitates a label on which to hang the advertising, and festivals are known as metal festivals, alternative festivals, EDM festivals or other marketing genres.

One thing all cruise music festivals have in common is that they make star performers available to fans. In everyday experience, fans are often kept at arms' length from their idols. They see star performers in music videos, interviewed on television, in large (or small) performance, but always mediated. Such relationships are described in the fan literature as para-social. This term, coined by Horton and Wohl (1956) and enthusiastically adopted by fans studies scholars, describes the relationship of fans to stars that is seemingly intimate yet mediated by television, radio or the distance of a performance hall.

Cruise ship rock festivals reduce the distance between fans and stars, turning a para-social relationship into an in-person encounter. When asked why they undertake cruises festival, festivalgoers generally gave three answers: for the experience, for the music, and to encounter their idols. When fans encounter star performers in real life,

worlds collide and dichotomies collapse. The ordinary and the extraordinary meet, reality and fantasy merge, and character and actor occupy one body. The fan-celebrity encounter is an interactional moment that highlights the idiosyncrasies of media fandom in the age of film and television. For fans who actively seek out such moments, these encounters are especially significant (Ferris, 2001: 26)

Clearly, many cruise ship festivalgoers actively seek out such moments. Realising this is one of the motives for undertaking a cruise festival, organisers create an environment in which this is likely to occur. Some even mandate interaction with fans.



Image 2: Therion Meet & Greet (Research participant's photo)

Cruise ships are post-tourism products. Post-modern tourism (also known as post-tourism) is distinct from earlier models of modern tourism. 'Modern' tourism describes tourist-related activities before the 1980s by authors such as MacCannell (1976) and Boorstin (1961). It is intentionally focused on the authenticity (or lack of it) in tourism encounters. Post-modern tourism considers authenticity less. The name was first used by Feifer (1985), and was taken up by other authors (Cohen, 1995; Berger, 2011; Ritzer and Liska, 1997; Wood, 2005; Urry, 1990; Urry and Larsen, 2011; Rojek, 1997; Hollinshead, 1997). Within its models, tourists are less concerned with an 'authentic' experience; rather they engage knowingly and playfully with simulations. Hollinshead (1997, 192) calls it 'pastiche tourism', and Rojek (1997: 62), 'collage tourism'. Cruise ships construct a hyperreal environment with which cruise tourists interact above, and often in preference to, the actual destinations of the cruise (Kulhanek, 2012; Cashman, 2013). This hyperreal environment, encapsulated in an experiential, social, and physical cocoon (Vogel, 2010), have been described as a 'mobile tourism enclave' (Weaver, 2005) or as 'cathedrals of consumption' (Ritzer, 1999). Pine and

Gilmore (1999; 2011) discuss the concept of experience as an encapsulated event where value is ascribed because of time is spent enjoying the corporately constructed experience. This is very much the case in regard to cruise ship music festivals, the producers of which construct an environment focused on music and social interaction within a precisely determined time constraint.

Cruise ships can also be considered as liminal space. This concept, pioneered by Van Gennep (1909) and Turner (1974) considers spaces outside everyday life. Liminal spaces include actions (Domash and Seager, 2001: xxi) and social interactions (Preston-Whyte, 2004: 353), but are 'outside or on the peripheries of everyday life' (Turner 1974). The inhabitants of a liminal space 'dress differently, eat in drink differently, sleep differently, act differently, play differently, and feel differently' (Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005). The temporary society of liminal space exhibits *communitas*, a temporary and deep social involvement. By these definitions, tourism scholars have come to regard both festivals (Kim and Jamal 2007; Gibson and Connell, 2011) and cruise ships (Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005; Wood, 2000) as liminal spaces. Using this analogy festivalgoers enter the festival, have an intense and life-affirming experience, and at the conclusion of the festival go back to their lives; however *communitas* and liminal space continue as participants maintain contact through social media.



Image 3: Pool Stage (Research participant's photo)

Method/Data

The data on which this research is based is drawn from survey responses from 129 festivalgoers, and follow-up interviews with eight key informants. This data collection was

undertaken between February and May 2015, just after the key cruise festival season. Informants in this research are considered to be mostly typical of cruise festivalgoers.¹ They came from a variety of backgrounds and were of various nationalities. One respondent noted that cruisers were

Demographically: 95% Anglo/White, average age is probably between 30 and 45, about half/half females/males, there were actually maps showing how many people were from what state, country, and then how many previous Rock Boats they had been on verses 'virgins'.

Another noted that they were

Music lovers of all kinds. There were several different styles of bands on board, so a wide audience with one thing in common, a love for live music. No real age or gender stuck out though.

They were of various nationalities:

At the moment [festivalgoers come from] all over. I think that is going to change if the American dollar stays as strong as it does. [...] I believe Germany actually represented the most people onboard followed by the USA. I think Canada was third or fourth and I think if I remember correctly, Australia was the sixth most. So I don't know what the number was this year but on previous years there's been out of the 2,000 cruisers there's been, you know, 150/200 Aussies onboard.

Among respondents there were some common trends. Cruisers were typically employed (75%) or self-employed (11%), understandable considering the costs involved in attending a festival. Just under half (49%) were single and 36% were married. Most (70%) had some degree of tertiary education, the most common being a bachelor's degree (31%) or master's degree (25%). They did indeed come from a wide range of ages with the largest groups being 41–50 and 31–35, higher than would be expected at many music festivals. However, the sample was skewed towards female respondents² (75%) though several respondents reported no gender imbalance.

Together, the sample reported on nineteen different festivals, though the largest groups were from The Rock Boat (58%), 70,000 Tons of Metal (23%), Ships and Dip (10%), Live Loud (6%), Rombello (6%) and Mad Decent Boat Party (5%). Many (68%) had attended more than one cruise festival with the average for this group being five festival attendances. One respondent reported attending fourteen festivals.

Fan encounters and Ship ‘Fam’

While musical performance is purportedly (and reportedly) the focus of music festivals, the social environment of festivals is also a highly significant factor of the festival experience. Aboard the short and intense experience of cruise ship festivals, a community is constructed between organisers, festivalgoers, and musicians, who refer to themselves collectively referred to as ‘ship fam’ – implying a stronger relationship even than friendship, that of family. This is partly because of the mediated encounters between fans and star performers. Festivalgoers encounter star performers within the formalized setting of shows, within the semi-formal setting of autograph signings, or informal encounters around the ship.

The experience of music festivals is intense, hedonistic, and short. Ties with everyday life – family, work, and home – are severed and participants are placed in an experiential cocoon. This cocoon acts as a social, environmental, and experiential barrier to the outside world. It becomes a liminal tourist space – to use Augé’s (1992) term, a non-place, unnamed and not existing in terrestrial geography, yet enclosing a named and mobile geography. Many cruise music festivals simply don’t approach human habitation and culture for the duration of the cruise; the only lands they may approach are the hyperreal and constructed cruise line-leased islands for a hedonistic beach party. This liminality separates participants from their daily lives and permits immersion in a constructive and hyperreal festival.

The formalised settings of musical performances encourage a familiarity and intimacy by the use of intimate and quiet performances, by managed blurring of fan/star relationships, and by the use of humour. The data for the non-metal festivals³ regularly utilised words such as ‘intimate’ and ‘relaxed’, and combined ‘acoustic’ with descriptions of approval. When asked to describe their favourite performance, various festivalgoers noted a preference for performances that stressed intimacy and accessibility, in particular acoustic performances:

- Paramore’s send-off show. Sunset in Miami, small **intimate** setting on a cruise deck (compared to their regular arena shows) with other screaming fans was amazing.
- [I loved] Melodime at The Great Outdoors, because of the **intimacy** at the venue, and the beautiful backdrop [...] also to hear all those songs in a different way: **acoustically**.
- Chuck Cannon on the last day. Simple **acoustic show** on the outside deck at the rear of the ship, with the sunset behind him [with an] **intimate** but enthusiastic crowd.
- I prefer [cruise festivals] compared to larger festivals such as Wacken Open Air with 90,000 attendees. It can be large and also **intimate**. It provides a unique and memorable environment to watch and meet bands, plus opportunities you won't find anywhere else.

- My most memorable performance was the first show I saw. My favourite artist performed on board in the Stardust theatre. During one **song the band suddenly began playing so soft** you could barely hear them, all that was left was the lead singer. The room was silent except for him. It was like kind of moment when music gives you goosebumps.

The small size of the performances and festival which leads to such intimacy is regularly cited as a positive. No festivalgoers reported wishing for a larger cruise ship. Indeed, several attendees of 70,000 Tons of Metal reported a negative reaction to the festival moving to a larger ship.

The data also described the blurring of the boundary between performer and fan in a positive fashion. This was a feature of all festivals – both metal festivals and others.

The last full set from Barenaked Ladies, my favourite band. Lots of other people I've met through the cruises were there. But what made it so amazing was the laid-back atmosphere between the artists and the fans: The sons of lead singer [Singer and Songwriter] Ed Robertson joined the band on stage for one song. Another fan from Switzerland attending her 100th Barenaked Ladies show sat in with the band on drums for one song. Robertson announced that the band likely would do its own cruise again. A great, great time.

Such blurring constructs a fabricated intimacy and friendship between the band and fans. That woman playing drums up on stage, guests think, could have been me. Humour is also used within the performances. In a heavy metal festival, Scottish metal band Alestrom, pointed out a particular member of the audience dressed as a banana and announced 'I want you all to kill the banana!' Another fan spoke of Ken Block and Drew Copeland, 'two guys from Sister Hazel who do their own show, which usually ends up with only about five songs and lots and lots of jokes and laughter instead of music.'

Fan encounters with star performers occur outside of performance spaces such as in organised signing sessions, and in random encounters around the ship. While a consistent feature of cruise festivals, the implementation of fan-star interaction varies. Some, such as the Rock Boat, reportedly contractually stipulate that performers must mingle with guests. Others attempt to segregate the performers from the fans. One of the informants, a participant in the heavy metal festival 70,000 Tons of Metal, acknowledges:

some really good conversations with the musicians, which is obviously another one of the key attractions of 70,000 Tons. I mean they advertise it like, you know, they say it's like having a backstage pass and it really is. On some of the other music cruises like Ship Rocked and Monsters of Rock, they do tend to kind of corral and segregate the musicians from the fans somewhat, whereas with

70,000 Tons, they don't do that. Obviously if a musician wants to just do their show and then return to their cabin they can. But you know, by and large, most of them, you'll see them wandering around the ship everywhere and having food and chatting with fans and getting drunk or gambling in the casino and things like that, so that's another real attraction as well.

Some random encounters, such as that described at the start of this paper, are particularly memorable. Another festivalgoer described:

One of the things I'd take away more than anything from this year was that when we were in Jamaica for the day, we went on a cruise to one of the oldest sort of plantations in Jamaica. And ended up having lunch with the bass player, the band *Cannibal Corpse*, and you know, even though I'm not a fan of that band at all, it was just awesome to have a chat to this guy and not be sort of star struck by him and yeah, we chatted for well over an hour I guess. And saw him a few times around the boat afterwards and gave him a nod and that. And when we were leaving he sort of wished us a safe trip home, which was really awesome. So that's certainly a memory I will definitely hold on to from this year.

Others noted:

- [A cruise festival] also allows the fans to really **interact with the musicians**, they may even be in a cabin next to yours! They are also there to have fun and a little vacation too...it's a very relaxed way to really get to know them as people also!
- The musicians can't escape! They have to **intermingle with the fans** (at least on the Rock Boat, it's required by Sister Hazel). It's a community bonding like no other because you are all basically trapped together at sea.
- Yes, you get **closer to** all the other attendees (and **artists**) than you would have at a normal festival. It's a family feeling.
- I did manage to have some really good **conversations with the musicians** as well which is obviously another one of the key attractions of 70000 Tons.
- My girlfriends and I are also already **friends with some of the musicians** playing, so we get to meet new people through them- some of whom have become really great friends.
- I am so fortunate to be able to see such **wonderful musicians and interact with them**. I wish more people could have that experience.

There is an apparent disconnect between festival cruises as fabricated and inauthentic and festival cruises as spaces where authentic things take place (experiencing the music, interacting with star musicians). The hyperreal festival environment, while recognised by festivalgoers does not appear have an impact upon perceptions of encounters with music and musicians. The fabricated nature of the cruise experience is certainly noted by festivalgoers.

- A festivalgoer contrasts the fabricated world of the ship and having to ‘come back to the **real world**’ outside the ship.
- Another noted that ‘The chance to sit next to my favorite rock stars and sing songs was a **dream** come true’, something that he would never have expected to occur in their real world.
- Another noted that before they joined their cruise, they had thought it **too good to be true**.

Despite this realisation of the ultimate fabrication of the experience, performances and interactions with artists was perceived as authentic and close.

- The ability to actually meet and **hang out** with band members.
- You’ve got that really **close interaction** with the bands.
- You’re on the **cruise with the bands** and see them all the time, not just at the concerts. There’s lots of interaction.
- It allows for **incredibly intimate relationships and interactions** between the artists and the attendees.
- Wintersun's first performance in the indoor arena brought me to tears, it was so technically brilliant. here I was the mother crying in the pit! I got to tell Jari that, too and he was touched. He took my hand and put it on his heart and said ‘that means so much to me. Thank you.’

This apparent disconnect between the perceived fabrication of the space and the perceived authenticity of the music can be explained by the focus on music and musicians rather than the cruise experience. Festivalgoers regularly reiterated that they went to experience the music, for access to the musicians, and to socialise with like-minded people. One noted that the cruise ships are a good space for festivals because

everyone is there for the same reason and we all have the same love of music, it also allows the fans to really interact with the musicians, they may even be in a cabin next to yours! They are also there to have fun and a little vacation too ... it’s a very relaxed way to really get to know them as people also!

Thus the sense of reality (*really* interact with the musicians) and authenticity comes from the experience of the festival, not the opulent and convenient, but fabricated environment of the ship.

Constructed interaction with star performers is a key feature of popular music festivals aboard cruise ships. They can occur within formal performance settings, or around the ship in semi-formal autograph signings, or in informal encounters around the ship. In doing so, the para-social relationship becomes an actual physical encounter.

Results and Implications

Music festivals on cruise ships remove guests from their everyday lives and place them into a liminal, encapsulated, and themed experience. It is an intense experience, socially and physically confined, that captures the essence of Pine and Gilmore's (1999; 2011) experiential model. It isolates participants, not only from their regular, everyday life, but it creates a hyperreal experience with which participants engage. They do not even go on a normal cruise, with its constructed tourist enclaves and tourist bubbles, but often avoid any aspect of the actual for the constructed, engaging with only the ship experience, the extensions of the ship experience (themed islands, cruise ship tours) and the theming of the festival.

As liminal spaces, cruise ships festivals construct an experiential cocoon conducive to the evolution of quick but intense friendships, a manifestation of *communitas*, among fans and star performers. Several accounts in academic literature, in fire camps, within the anthropological field, within expat communities, and within cruise ship crews, document the development of intense relationships within the combination of intense experience and unfamiliar surroundings. The anthropological field is an area that an intense experience and unfamiliar environments can lead to intense platonic and sexual relationships (Altork, 1995; Killick, 1995; Cupples, 2002; Kaspar and Landolt, 2014), as can living within an expat community (Walsh, 2007). Altork (1995), for example, describes the experience of documenting the world of rural firefighters in North America, an intense and unfamiliar environment, led to unusual intimacy and even eroticism between firefighters and support staff. One of her informants notes:

I'll tell you, after five days men get horny as hell and they will proposition anything they think they can bed. We call them fireline romances. You're very tight with people and shut off from the outside world (Altork 1995, 123).

Both in my own experience, and within Forsythe's research (2012: 29–30), working in the crew on board a cruise ship suffers the same disconnect, the same intensity of experience, and the same powerful platonic and sexual relationships. It is not unexpected then that the music festivals aboard cruise ships engender that same quick intensity of relationships within participants within a cruise ship festival, whether star performer or festivalgoer. All

are in an unfamiliar and hedonistic environment where excess is actively encouraged both by the production company interested in creating a memorable experience, and the cruise line, interested in maximising profit from onboard revenue streams such as the casino and alcohol sales.

Within the experiential cocoon of the cruise festival organisers are essentially creating a hyperreal festival within what is already a hyperreal and constructed tourist cocoon. They add the fabrication of a music festival to the fabricated tourist environment of a cruise ship. Creating a hyperreal (Eco, 1987; Baudrillard, 1994) music-themed festival-like experience within the cruise ship (Kulhanek, 2012), consumers are encouraged to engage both with the object of the experience, in this case the musicians.

However this hyperreal construction does not impact upon festivalgoers' experience. They describe fellow attendees and musicians as being *like family* and having *genuine compassion*, and the ship having a *real community feel*. Some cruise festivals mandate interaction between musicians and festivalgoers and the experience may occur in a liminal and mobile geography, but this does not seem to impact upon the sense of family and authenticity among participants. No-one described the experience as artificial or fake.

Conclusion

Cruise ship festivals construct a hyperreal and liminal space in which bands and star performers feel comfortable and relaxed enough to play and encounter each other outside the typical para-social relationship that governs fan-star interaction. They do this in a number of ways. By removing fans from their everyday lives, they create a liminal space, placing them in an environment in which they already to play, and act in ways out of the ordinary. Further, by situating the festival on a cruise ship, they remove the festival from terrestrial geography creating an encapsulated space within which festivalgoers are enclosed. Participants – star performers included – can choose to interact, or stay in their rooms. Due to the liminality of the experience though, they are encouraged to get out and interact.

In his humorous description of life at a university, *Small World*, David Lodge noted 'Intensity of experience is what we're looking for, I think. We know we won't find it at home any more, but there's always the hope that we'll find it abroad' (Lodge, 1984: 69). Certainly participants on a cruise music festival seek an intense experience, and part of this involves the chance to meet people whose work they admire, and with whom they have had up until this point a para-social relationship. Along with the performance, and the cruise experience, such meetings form a key aspect of music festivals on cruise ships. It is one of the reasons the people undertake music festivals on cruise ships. These are experiences that they will rarely find at home; but there is always the hope that they'll find it, perhaps not abroad, but certainly within the liminal space of a cruise ship.

Appendix: Methodology

This paper gathered data using a grounded theory methodology, of the Strauss and Corbin school, using the classic methodology of preparation, data collection, coding, memoing and theorising. After acquiring ethics approval from my institution, I designed a survey ([which may be viewed here](#)), which combined open and closed questions, and Likert-scales. I promoted this survey through [my personal website](#), through university press releases, and through social media, including twitter and groups dedicated to certain cruises (with the permission of the moderator). These resulted in 129 responses (though forty-three responses declined to provide demographic details, and eight did not complete the entire survey). Of these, six volunteered to be interviewed, and two further interviews were sourced through word-of-mouth. After a period of three months' collection, the data, survey responses and transcribed interview, was imported into NVivo a qualitative analysis program, and coded. The data was memoed and themes considered.

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Notes:

¹ Rabhan (2014) described the cruise festival attendees as a 'smaller, intimate group of loyals' comprised of 'diehards' and 'casual music consumers'. Cruises 'cross all genres and reach all audiences'. This description matches the demographics found in the sample. Similar descriptions exist in other popular publications.

² One possible explanation of this gender imbalance is the tendency of women to complete surveys more readily than men, as argued by Smith (2008).

³ Heavy metal festivals did not draw on intimacy and acoustic performance as much because of the stylistic features of the heavy metal genre.