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An Initial Consideration of (Popular Music Record) Collecting Aesthetics, Identities and Practices

By

Veronica Skrimsjö

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FOR SARA, 1980–2010

"And the songbirds keep singing like they know the score"
—Fleetwood Mac (1977)

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INTRODUCTION

This work aims to consider and present various aspects of record collecting and record-collecting practices, predominantly in the UK. As will be made evident, a number of troubling assumptions and stereotypes have been found to exist regarding record collectors, which have largely stemmed from perhaps outdated critical theories. Throughout this work, a number of approaches will be employed in an attempt to provide a more realistic—and optimistic—account of what record collecting entails and who the collector is. Various methods will be used, and each chapter aspires to provide another piece of the puzzle, as it were.

This work is largely theoretical, although several case studies are involved in the presentation of this theoretical underpinning. However, there are, broadly speaking, three theoretical positions around which this work revolves, and these help us to reconsider not only the record collector, but also the artefact. The first of these is discussed in Chapter One, where John Shepherd's concept of the matrix is discussed. This book takes that a little further, to consider the record as a *kinetic matrix*, in that it holds a vast amount of important information which, when being positioned as an aligned focus, can be extremely revealing and productive in our understanding of how mass-produced products can be representations of the individual. The second important theoretical proposition concerns discourse analysis, and this is principally involved in the understanding of the collector as an interpreter of information. The work, therefore, will proceed by examining how collectors are viewed as ostensibly male outsiders, perhaps even Orientalist "others", and how such definitions lead to the marginalisation of collectors—particularly those involved in popular music—as a potentially deviant collective. Further, this discourse analysis will at all times revolve around the object and, citing the work of Evan Eisenberg, will consider just how unbounded the possibilities are for cultural re-interpretation and re-examination through the medium of recorded sound. Further, from a historical perspective, the very use of the word "record" will be considered before, during and after the advent of recorded sound as a way of suggesting that the very presence of recordings was effectively a paradigm shift of enormous consequences. Recorded sound held unknown possibilities from which later technological developments emerged during the twentieth century via changing formats,

technology, and the role of the individual, and as such cannot simply be considered as a mass produced and mass-consumed artefact.

The third underpinning of this book involves the employment of textual analyses. In the first instance, the historical work of the Frankfurt School will be introduced and discussed; Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin will then be challenged via a contextual appreciation of their place in time, rather than simply an understanding of their time-bound narrative. Further to this, the *Vertigo Records* record label will also be contextually considered as a significant representational text within the activity of record collecting. At this point, the text will also consider sleeve art as providing a matrix from which the collector can create meaning. Further textual analysis involves ethnographic consideration of a dealer-cum-collector, a collector with a debilitating personal illness, a female collector (myself), and the methods involved in organising and representing collecting electronically in the twenty-first century. Each approach therefore interweaves and connects to the other and, it might be argued, sits within what might be described as a post-modern form of analysis. This in itself is based on theory, yet at the same time does appear to reflect more accurately the unexpected, the misunderstood, and the non-aligned facets of popular music involvement and participation. This writer states this from a position of understanding that even in the twenty-first century, popular music studies is, in effect, a post-modern discipline, and rather than accepting the conventional rhetorical tropes surrounding the persistence of a discourse that continues to conflate a high and low art position, popular music studies is validated by suggesting that issues concerning the popular require close consideration from the perspective of the individual, rather than merely mass production and mass consumption. It is from such theoretical standpoints that this book intends to suggest that the inherent creativity of record collecting has thus far been under-researched, and in fact lies in the hands of a co-creative universe of individual understanding and signification.

Whilst this text is, as discussed above, a predominantly theoretical work, ethnographic methods have also been used. This was mainly in the form of interviews, although observation of the audience in Chapter Six was also important. These interviews were regarded as a vital component by the author as they provided a real—albeit subjective—account of record collecting, from the "horse's mouth", if you will. As ethnography deals with people directly and, as such, involves ethics, it is worth offering the reader further clarification on the interviews and interview subjects in this work. As part of the research for this work, several informal discussions and/or interviews were held by the author with a wide range of

collectors (generally) and record collectors (specifically). These have all helped to inform and reinforce the thesis present here, but four interview subjects were included by name—Les, Dave, Sid and "George"—and given primary focus. These four were asked to give their informed consent to be included (all of whom are of sound mind and legal age) in this work, to which they agreed,[1] as they provided the author with useful information regarding record collecting. One may, however, note the absence of a named female interviewee. The author approached and spoke to several female record collectors, but found that—whilst happy to talk about their practices—they were not willing to be included in the book, or did not consider themselves to be record collectors.[2] Most of the collectors this writer spoke to were people encountered in record shops/fairs or in everyday situations. Les, Dave and Sid, however, were all introduced by "George", whom I have known for a number of years prior to undertaking this research.

The interviews themselves were, as indicated, conducted under informal conditions in an attempt to try to recreate an everyday conversation. The author felt those circumstances would yield to most "realistic" responses. Whilst each interview had a purpose, i.e. to gain further insight into record-collecting practices and identities, the author tried not to prompt responses, but to allow the interviewee to speak freely and then respond with comments and questions based on what the interviewee said. Furthermore, it is perhaps worth noting that every effort was made on the writer's part not to inflict personal opinions related to collected objects and/or musical taste(s) as there was an awareness that record collectors frequently encounter (negative) judgements and there was a desire to understand the collectors' (intimate) relationship with their collections without prejudice.

It is also worth bearing in mind how the term "musicologist" is used in this work. Whilst it is understood that there are many scholars and academics that refer to themselves as musicologists, in this work it simply refers to those scholars who give primacy to the score *at the expense* of any other aspects when trying to understand or critically evaluate any kind of music or musical event.

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[1] "George" is a *nom-de-plume*.

[2] As will be noted in subsequent chapters, it is very important in this work that the label of "record collector" is not imposed on someone who resists it despite displaying the "characteristics" of a record collector.

Chapters—an Overview

The first chapter details the premise and motivations behind this work. However, it also considers how both record collecting, as well as collecting in general, are viewed and written about. The chapter raises the issue of regarding record collecting as a form of musical consumption and how recorded sound can be viewed as a paradigm shift. Furthermore, it is indicated that *as a paradigm shift* recorded sound (and thus records) has been largely misrepresented. This is because the consumption of records has been defined through its production.[3] As will be argued, this is a flawed thesis, if only because the consumption of record collectors themselves has been interpreted through ideology that failed to understand popular culture and its usages (see Chapter Three) and the *individual* is forgotten.

Chapter Two further considers the different methodology used in this work, as discussed above, and then continues with an in-depth review of relevant literature. As academic literature on record collecting is limited, non-academic material is also included alongside relevant material relating to recorded sound and technology, music consumption, and literature relating to collecting generally. This provides a starting point, but also emphasises that this work is only one step in rectifying the lack of (academic) consideration given to the field of record collecting. As such, Chapter Two aims to provide the reader with a basis and an understanding of the climate and narrative that has surrounded the collector and record collector historically.

Chapter Three provides a discussion on a number of key issues within popular music studies, including the notion of "cool" and authenticity, as well as genre. These issues are central to the record collector's understanding of the artefact—or indeed, artifice—that is the record. The chapter then proceeds to consider the theories formulated by the Frankfurt School, particularly those of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, as this author will come to argue they have been fundamental in creating the demeaning stereotype of the record collector we now have, despite never considering the record collector as such. Finally, a response will be provided to the Frankfurt School's theories, by the end of which it will be clear to the reader that record collecting (and popular culture consumption) cannot be interpreted through such models as, crucially, there is no "one" objective reality.

[3] Generally, as mass production for mass consumption.

Chapter Four is perhaps the first chapter that overtly deals with record collecting as such. Les, one of the four central interviewees, is introduced as a case study, and his personal story is considered, including the profound impact record collecting has had on his life following serious illness and how his identity has been shaped and grown, and has evolved in relation to his treasured Lani Hall recordings. The notion of communality, particularly through electronic media, is introduced, and it is highlighted that record collecting is not an activity that requires you to lock yourself away from human relationships. So why, then, do we often believe the opposite? In addition to the theories presented to us by the Frankfurt School, this chapter also explores the notion of deviance in relation to the collector, and how this has been mediated to the general public; mediation is further considered in this chapter in relation to the *Record Collector* magazine. Additionally, the chapter provides a discussion on capital culture and its relevance, which will be of importance to the reader when approaching the following chapter (Five), on *Vertigo Records,* which will initially consider the cultural and historical climate in which *Vertigo Records* was conceived (in 1969) by considering the counter-culture and the musical developments—particularly relating to genre, album art and technology—at the time. The chapter will continue to consider Philips, the founding company of *Vertigo*; the advent of the subsidiary; and a selection of the records released on *Vertigo* from 1969–73. This will lead on to a discussion on why some regard *Vertigo* LPs as highly collectible.

In Chapter Six portrayals of the record collector (in fiction and documentary) will be analysed, followed by a discussion of how and why the record collector is often placed in a position of "otherness" relative to the deviance discussed in Chapter Four. Chapter Six will further indicate that record collectors are not a subculture, but need to be regarded as *individuals*. The majority of the chapter is, however, reserved for an initial discussion on the fictional film *High Fidelity*, followed by the documentary *Sound It Out*, where observational ethnography was employed at a local screening.

Chapter Seven consists of an extended interview with the aforementioned "George" who, in his role as both collector and dealer, was able to provide an interesting analysis of record collecting from the perspective of an "insider". The interview has been arranged in a relative chronology,[4] and is presented as a "whole", and only interrupted when academic literature appears to provide evidence of "George's" argument.

[4] See Chapter Seven for further details.

Finally, in Chapter Eight, this work considers how and whether record-collecting practices, communities and identities may have changed in our current digital, information technology age. The writer will consider trading/auction sites like eBay, and how they have come to influence taste and buying practices, but also websites that are centred around a community through various (record collecting) forums and how both these aspects—trading and communality—may come together in a website such as Audiophile USA. While it will become evident that certain aspects have evolved with the development of digital technology, many central aspects remain the same, perhaps only strengthening the impact record collecting has in the collector's life.

It is perhaps also worth highlighting again that, throughout this work, the writer believes in the autonomy of the individual and that the individual's consumption cannot be defined by mass production.

CHAPTER ONE

'I, ME, MINE?': AN INITIAL CONSIDERATION OF (POPULAR MUSIC RECORD) COLLECTING AESTHETICS, IDENTITIES AND PRACTICES

"Why pin and press these specimens when others, alive and just as lovely, will surely flutter by?"
—Evan Eisenberg (2005),
The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa

The aim of this work is to highlight record collecting as a form of music consumption, to demonstrate that it is an activity that can show us different, non-passive aspects of interaction with music as a catalyst, and to illustrate that record collecting can both shape identity as well as display aesthetic value in its own right. Previous research by the author[1] has shown that record collectors are largely misrepresented or misunderstood. Such stereotypes (for this is what they are) frequently suggest an eccentric male involved in a solitary activity, a view this book aims to challenge, and this will be achieved by exploring different collecting experiences through the examination of the collectors themselves (who might also be dealers), textual analyses of record collecting media, and an understanding of what it means to collect within the realms of mass-industrialised society. This research will also consider those methods and approaches, which have historically appeared to diminish the roles of such products in our daily lives.

Such modes of enquiry will be held together by a thesis in which the collection, rather than simply the collector, will be discussed as a *matrix*.

[1] Currently unpublished work.

This idea stems from the work of John Shepherd,[2] who has discussed how matrixes in popular music can be understood as fundamental to our perceptions of focus, and thus meaning. For example, Shepherd discusses how Elvis Presley can be regarded as a matrix that brought into focus issues related to culture and society in the United States that were previously unfocused. One might argue that this concept should also be used in relation to the record, for throughout the twentieth century the record has created and contributed to one of the most important paradigm shifts in society. Related to this matrix approach, this writer will also be utilizing five points raised by writer and record specialist Evan Eisenberg.[3] His points discuss how and why recordings are, in their own right, aesthetic artefacts, which also arbitrate meaning in some very complex ways not only for the collector, but also for the general public. It is via this combined thesis of kinetic matrixes (seemingly an oxymoron, however, directly connected concepts for this writer) that this work will proceed, drawing attention, perhaps in a post-modern way, to the authenticity and value of the artefact and artifice. It is important for this work to show that many people, perhaps more than one would expect, are engaged in some form of record collecting, and that each collector has their own motivations and strategies, indeed world views, all of which deserve further and deeper investigations. Such enquiries provide not only evidence for rethinking the collector, but also additional confirmation of the strength and diversity contained within popular music *fandom*.

At the outset, it should be emphasised that this work is not intended to be either a history of record collecting or an encyclopaedia of records—such a work would be a vast undertaking, given the range and diversity of recorded sound. It is, instead, intended to be a theoretical work based upon a number of approaches to the consumption of popular culture. For decades, a kind of cultural scholarship tended to dominate the way in which people's interaction with popular culture was theorised. There was, via the direct comments and then later influences of the Frankfurt School, a focus upon popular music consumption as a form of socially maladjusted behaviour culminating, perhaps, in fanaticism. Additionally, collecting in general, while considered to be evidently active, at least in a kind of solitary way, has similarly been considered to be a symptom of maladjustment—an obsessive, isolated pastime which draws human beings

[2] John Shepherd, "Definition as Mystification: A Consideration of Label as a Hindrance to Understanding Significance in Music" in *Popular Music Perspectives 2*, ed. David Horn (Gothenburg: IASPM, 1985), 84–98.

[3] Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records And Culture From Aristotle To Zappa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

away from the realities of the world and into a netherworld of mania rather than passion, of fixation rather than fascination. Two quotes illustrate this well. First, John Storey characterises what "mass culture" meant for Frankfurtian-influenced theorists: "[…] hopelessly commercial culture. It is mass produced for mass consumption. Its audience is a mass of non-discriminating consumers. The culture itself is formulaic, manipulative […] and is consumed with brain-numbed and brain-numbing passivity".[4] Secondly, St Etienne's Bob Stanley (himself both a musician and collector), suggests, with regard to football programme fairs: "The musky smell of a programme fair—so much damp plastic, the heating always a notch too high in an airless room—would make most serious people run for the hills. In the very male world of serious football programme collecting, aesthetics don't count for much".[5]

Clearly, opinions are formed both within and outwith popular-culture collecting, similarly obsessed by images of social deviancy. Joli Jenson argues that notions of "the fanatic" and "mass society" still occupied the minds of many cultural critics right up until the 1980s. Jenson suggests that "The fan is consistently characterized […] as a potential fanatic. This means that fandom is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged behaviour".[6] It is argued in this present work that this continues to be so, but with the emphasis perhaps falling less on the act of popular culture itself, or its fan bases, which have over the years become more understood, and more on the collector-cum-fan as the holder of the fantasist, pathological tags. While there have now been a host of titles dedicated to the understanding of fandom and its associated value systems (see, for example the works of Lewis,[7] Hills,[8] Cavicchi,[9] Ehrenreich,[10] and

[4] John Storey, "What is Popular Culture?" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, ed. John Storey (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 8.
[5] Bob Stanley and Paul Kelly, *Match Day: Post-war to Premiership Football Programmes* (London: Murray & Sorrell FUEL, 2008), 15.
[6] Joli Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 9.
[7] Lisa Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[8] Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[9] Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[10] Barbara Ehrenreich, Elisabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs, "Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 84–106.

Jensen,[11] etc.), there still remains the hoary question of "the collector". While there has been a continuity in the studies of fandom that has effectively "released" the fan from the grip of the Frankfurtian "gloom", this appears to be far less the case as regards the collector who is stereotyped, as in Stanley's comments above: predominantly men who are conducting an esoteric sacrament which is almost unknown, and possibly incomprehensible, to the general public. According to Stanley, they are seemingly collecting things that might crop up in car boot sales, exchanging items with other collectors as forms of Gnostic ritualism. Such is the condescension afforded to most collectors.

Yet, at least according to historian D.J. Taylor, "Any social historian worth his salt who wanted to discover what English life was like in, say, the period 1966–79 […] could do worse than assemble a couple of hundred football programmes".[12] Within each programme can be found various adverts for local pub cultures long-since vanished, brands of cigarettes no longer advertised, literary languages redolent of specific eras via their gender stereotypes, and so on. They are in fact social documents that actually *demand* to be collected and archived, if only to bear witness to the way popular culture was/is regarded and recorded. One might equally consider (say) the sleeves of LPs of a similar era to discover how, for example, *CBS Records* might have considered their "alternative" record-buying public, or how certain styles of music came to be categorised within what *CBS* called their "Rock Machine" series of samplers, viz:

> The Rock Machine is a machine with soul. The Rock Machine isn't a grind-you-up. It's a wind-you-up. The sound is driving. The sound is searching. The sound is music. It's your bag. So it's ours. It's the Super Stars. And the Poets. It's the innovators and the Underground. It's the Loners and the Lovers. And it's more. Much more…[13]

This marvellously stereotypical hipster language of the late 1960s adorns a sampler LP in which the songs of Big Brother and the Holding Company, Taj Mahal, Leonard Cohen and the Zombies *et al.* are showcased for less than £1 (in fact, 14/6d in pre-decimal UK currency).

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[11] Joli Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 9–29.

[12] D. J. Taylor cited in Bob Stanley and Paul Kelly, *Match Day: Post-war to Premiership Football Programmes* (London: Murray & Sorrell FUEL, 2008), 15.

[13] *The Rock Machine Turns You On*, LP (1968) CBS PR 22.

The sleeve is an historical artefact in its own right, and one should surely be thankful that somebody, somewhere, has considered such so-called ephemera worthy of collection—such is its cultural value. Perhaps irrespective of the sounds actually on the record, the signs on the sleeve carry not simply denotative meanings in the explicit messages of its letters, but also connotative expressions of other, perhaps more subtle meanings of its musical genres. Identification comes not simply through the explicit, denotative communication, but through almost literally “spelling out” (as above) the connotations implicit in its musical forms. Not only the recording, but its packaging and marketing help us to not only discover and consider the sociology of music consumption, but also how one should theorise consumption in a modern world. Perhaps like the football programme, these artefacts deserve our fullest attention.

The Record

Before recorded sound, the idea of a record consisted of several important meanings. A record could be the way that, for example, court proceedings have taken place—one might refer to the stenographer in court to be the holder of the keys to some kind of legal truth, making a note of information that could actually end someone’s life, or on the other hand release someone from suspicion. One might also say that a record in the nineteenth century is directly related to the expansion of literacy and printing. Popular literature in the nineteenth century gives us a glimpse of what different classes of people came to be influenced by, together with a fascinating picture of the advent of leisure pursuits. As with the above-mentioned twentieth-century football programme or record sleeve, some of this earlier literature was probably not written as a “record”, as such, for in the popular sphere such writings were probably regarded as ephemeral. But because of the appearance, content, and then popularity of the reading matter, and because of people’s increased literacy, what has been left is a different kind of document to those records from court proceedings. These are documents that similarly provide denotative and connotative meanings. The same documents can, of course, provide both, and they might even be mutually contradictory. For example, one of the very first football programmes from the nineteenth century was a charity match played at the Kennington Oval in 1886. It was a simple card that sold for 2d, and its main purpose, denotatively, was the identification of the players by virtue of the positions they took up on the field of play. However, connotatively the document provides a very different reading from the merely indicative. The match was between “Gentlemen” and “Players”—a representative

affair. One can clearly see that this match was indicative of the nineteenth century distinction between Gentlemen amateurs and professional Players, and that the cricket example of staging games between such demographic representatives was part of the authenticities surrounding the class system of the age—a period, one might suggest, of phoney certainties masking real uncertainties. Furthermore, as collecting specialist John Litster points out:

> The fluidity of player movement around amateur clubs is indicated by the lack of team names against the "gentlemen", for whom the famous twins A.M. and P.M. Walters filled the full-back positions. The "Players" came from no further south than West Bromwich. Most represented were Preston North End, and J. Costly of Blackburn Olympic took his place in the forward line.[14]

This is, perhaps, connoting a curiosity in "northern professionals" amongst the London-based elite, and therefore, like a Wilkie Collins "popular" novel, or a Gamages Department Store catalogue, remains of great importance to the historian of popular culture.

In musical terms, a record of music prior to the advent of recorded sound largely depended upon the strata of society at whom the music was aimed. Rather than being simply a tool for the preservation of music, the notated printed form became a representation of what music was supposed to be, and for which instruments. Under such circumstances, where the music score was something to be "afforded" by those fortunate enough to have a musical instrument on which to play it appropriately, music came to be a stylised indicator of not only sound, but also of the differences between class and economics, and as a result of a ruling elite and those who aspired to be part of that elite, good and bad taste. One needs only to look at the parlour music of the late-nineteenth century to see how demarcations via sheet music were made between what one (aspiring) class of society considered either good or bad.

Parlour music was a genre of popular music, which, as the name suggests, was effectively domestic and intended to be performed in the parlours of middle-class homes by singers and pianists. For our purposes it is of interest because it was disseminated and avariciously purchased as sheet music. Its heyday came in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and was the result of a steady increase in the number of households with enough spending power to purchase musical instruments and take musical

[14] John Litster, *Famous Football Programmes: A History and Guide* (Stroud: NPI Media Group, 2007), 7.

instruction. Parlour music is also connotative of issues to do with gender—the woman at home, increased leisure time—and therefore the cultural motivation to engage in recreational music-making. It is indicative, too, of the importance of domestic servants, thereby allowing more time for both the man and the woman in the home to practice playing and singing, and also of the growth of music societies amongst the middle classes, which evolved around domestic concert parties. In addition to the vast sales of individual pieces of sheet music, parlour songs were also collected into anthologies and sold in this format. The most notable collection in the United States, for example, was *Heart Songs*,[15] first published in 1909 by the Chapple Publishing Company of Boston, and repeatedly revised and republished for several decades. Interestingly, and despite its apparent elements of elitist constructions, parlour music is a very good example of how middlebrow tastes came to be despised by those adhering to European classical music. It is especially notable that by the late-nineteenth century classical tastes came to self-consciously distance themselves from the popular via parlour music.

Parlour music's popularity waned in the twentieth century as the phonograph record, and then radio, replaced sheet music as the most common method of dissemination of popular music. So the recorded state of music within what might be described as a bourgeois semi-classical environment (at least to begin with) came to indicate musical hierarchies and battlegrounds. While parlour songs certainly show elements of hierarchical and aspirational social climbing via music, from the elevated perspective of "art" music, they also came to be seen as inferior works and merely "popular". By considering the various written forms such as *Heart Songs* we can quite clearly see (via the explicit symbolism of the cover) and then hear (via the importance of chord-based melodies, rather than harmonic variations) how parlour music came to be looked down upon and considered the substance of the conventional and ordinary.

Other musical forms, which might also be described as popular, are more often than not neglected in terms of any record. But it is true that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, what come to be described as broadsides and ballads were printed by the growing print media surrounding music. Broadside ballads (also known as a "road sheet", a "stall", a "vulgar" or a "come all ye" ballad) were a product of the development of cheap print, initially in the sixteenth century. They were generally printed on one side of a sheet of poor quality paper. In their

[15] See Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: Norton, 1979).

heyday of the first half of the seventeenth century, they were printed in black lettering or gothic type, and included multiple, eye-catching illustrations, a popular tune title, as well as an alluring poem. By the eighteenth century, they were printed in white lettering or roman type, and often without much decoration (as well as the tune title). These later sheets could include many individual songs, which would be cut apart and sold individually as "slipsongs". Alternatively, they might be folded to make small, cheap books, or "chapbooks", which also drew on ballad stories and hymns—indeed several religious chapbooks were made available for lower class congregations. These printed records were produced in huge numbers, with over 400,000 being sold in England annually by the 1660s. Tessa Watt[16] estimates the number of copies sold may have even been in the millions.

Many were sold by travelling "chapmen" in city streets or at fairs. The subject matter varied from what has been defined as the traditional ballad,[17] although many traditional ballads were printed as broadsides. Among the topics were love, religion, drinking-songs, legends, and early journalism (such as, for example "The Murder of Maria Marten"), which included disasters, political events and signs, wonders and prodigies. But, then as now, such popular forms were frequently regarded as "here today and gone tomorrow". The evidence for such printed forms of popular music, which might have existed around a song based upon an important event of the day, thus remains scant. Broadsides are seen to have emerged from the beginnings of mass-print culture, and can still therefore be regarded as lacking in authenticity, hence their plight to be subsumed in semi-rarity.

So if the idea of a "record", as far as broader society is concerned, is something to do with recording events, such events, should they happen within different echelons of society, can be disregarded, hence lost to us completely or used perhaps as in the case of classical music, as primary evidence of the popular's lack of musical and/or social substance. The very word "popular", in fact, mutates through several different definitions during the nineteenth century—ranging from those who write about it as being "of the people" to those who suggest that it is a referent of "low and base". None or partial survivals suggest to us that such primary sources are of great significance, but that history is something of a political battleground. John Tosh states that:

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[16] Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991).
[17] *ibid.*

> The sanction of the past is sought by those committed to upholding authority [but that] near-universal literacy raises the stakes. In the days when only a minority could read and write, popular memory took shape more spontaneously and relatively free from interference; but […] mainstream establishment interpretations of our history penetrate everywhere.[18]

This is supported by Thomas Docherty, who concurs by suggesting that:

> The victors in history thus proceed in triumphal procession, bearing with them the spoils of their victory, including those documents which record, legitimise and corroborate the necessity of their victory. Such documents the victors call "culture". The historical materialist, unlike the historicist, is profoundly aware of what is being trampled underfoot in this process: the historical materialist remembers what the historicist ignores.[19]

Such, one might argue, is the relationship of pragmatic popular music histories to the histories of hierarchical art music forms. There is an enormous amount of good emancipatory thinking that can be used for, and drawn from, investigations into the popular. As such, several musicologists now suggests that the way musicology has developed into the twentieth century has been at the expense of popular music, in part given the modes of survival through the record being regarded as ultimately authentic. The score *as* record is therefore awarded primacy at the expense of the so-called pretensions of the popular. One might suggest that artistically, the use of conventional elements of music in what is regarded as ordinary music for the masses still evokes from musicologists associations from these past examples of "records". So the relational character of music as a discourse from this period in time—and its relationship with the score as a record—is precisely what permits the musicological generalisation of issues to do with good and bad taste.

The increasing formalisation of musical language brought about a set of relational logics that embraced the narrowly-defined, and helped bring about a discourse that is only relational but is perhaps ironically recognised as universal. The act of thinking and writing about music therefore stems from a period in time when recording music for specific taste cultures came to be defined by the relationship, as much as the music.

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[18] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Longman, 1984), 9.

[19] Thomas Docherty, "Postmodernism: An Introduction", in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 11.

In Richard Middleton's view, [20] the study of classical musicology being related so closely to a written score as a record can lead to an emphasis of those parts of music which can only be written down. Middleton suggested there were at least three areas where formal musicology had failed to take account of its own hierarchical terms of reference, especially when inappropriately applied to the popular: the value-laden uses made of terminology; the problems with unsuitable methodology (particularly the use of notation); and the outmoded ideology that supports the uses of musicology in the reproduction of tastes and hierarchies linked to powerful social groups. He suggested that such hidebound methods could not convincingly deal with the popular because of a rootedness in concepts concerned with value. The act of making and listening to popular music (with all of the enunciative strategies that implies) cannot, he suggested, be merely reducible to a "knowledge" of a musical "language", especially when that "language" was at least partly non-applicable (how does one, for instance notate the growl of an overdriven guitar? And, perhaps more is the point, why should one wish to?).

Studies of everyday life and its associations with popular music activities (singing, reading, writing, talking, walking, etc.) suggest that *relationships* determine their terms (not the reverse): each individual is a locus for incoherent, contradictory and pluralistic communications. Perhaps while certain musicologists concern themselves with a kind of singular "methodology-as-truth" approach, they are convincing themselves that they "know" the past via their own pre-chosen methods, and that such methods can indeed appropriate music. The temporal linearity implicit in score-based analysis of popular music should always be cut by an element of the lateral. In this way affiliations, which do not presuppose the overconfidence of a proleptic pronouncement (i.e. that this is the way to do it, and it should always be this way), are relentlessly proposed. Popular music is evidently a spatial horizon, across which affiliations and disaffiliations may occur; therefore a *range* of criteria for choosing how one studies popular music must be approximated. By doing so, we can clearly see that all meanings given to music are kinetic though time and space.

So, the traditions according to which popular culture attempts to define itself are not singular, but eclectic. The result is that, historically, the popular is gloriously "directionless" and amorphous. Via popular music studies, itinerant meanings can be scrutinised for their inherent contextual

[20] See Richard Middleton in Longhurst, Brian, "Texts and Meaning" in *Popular Music & Society* (Oxford: Polity, 2007), 150–179.

authenticities and values. Popular music studies uses interdisciplinarity in an attempt to understand the complexities of the sound picture, helping us in the process to question “givens” in society. Indeed, popular music studies helps us to turn issues primarily concerned with musical, political, aesthetic, ethical and cultural worth into discourses. We appropriate, rearticulate and give new meanings to the generative structures of music. These exist within a syntagmatic framework of connotations that refract, not reflect, and continue to ask questions about politicised values and authentications. By the time recorded sound emerged fully into the twentieth century such problematic understandings of what sound is, and how certain sounds are prioritised over others, came so much to the fore that, as the twentieth century moved on, sound recording, its very existence, was gradually seen as something more than just recording sound. The radical (let us say) “relationalist” status (i.e. its relationship primarily to itself) of recorded sound widens the relational logics so much that it opens up a pathway towards a new conceptualization of sound. It suggests new relations and introduces ambiguity.

So by the twentieth century, far from being simply a tool for the preservation of music, the record as it comes to be understood within the emerging music industry, is a catalyst. A catalyst is an interesting expression emerging from chemical equations; it is something that when added to something else speeds up a chemical reaction. One might argue, therefore, that when the record is added to late nineteenth-century society, it too creates an important reaction within society, speeds up change and is therefore no longer seen as something that is merely recording information. This gives rise to an unbreachable abyss between the previously considered “reality” of music and new ideas or concepts (what one might describe as “possibilities”), thus weakening the absolutist pretensions of the classical canon. It should be stressed that this “weakening” does not happen overnight, and in actual fact the classical canon is fully embraced (at least as technology allows) by the advent of recorded sound. However, little-by-little, the inherent vulnerability of musicological concepts, being formed only by and through hierarchical ideas that come to appear somewhat anti-diluvian, especially given the growing relationship of recorded sound with the plurality of our existence as technology advances, redefines them and their so-called status in an unpredictable way. This might be described as the emergence of a co-creative universe, as least as far as aesthetics are concerned.

One of the most significant aspects of the advent of recorded sound is discussed by Mark Katz,[21] and this is to do with the invisibility of the performer to listeners. The process of recording changes forever the relationship between the performer or musician and the listener, because an important channel of communication is removed—the visual. Yet this absence of the visual, he states, is not merely a negative concerning the difference between authentic and inauthentic sound. Katz quotes a 1912 article in the *Musical Courier*, which praises recording for stripping away all unnecessary aspects of the musical experience: "In listening to the talking machine the hearer must of necessity concentrate upon the tonal performance and does not have his attention diverted to extraneous matters, such as scenery, costumes [and] acting […] that keep him from directing his faculties to the music itself".[22] Actually, Frankfurt School cultural theorist (and anti-popular intellectual) Theodor Adorno appeared to agree with such an idea. He argued that opera, which one might argue is one of the most visual of all musical genres, was in fact best heard on record. In his 1969 article "Opera and the Long-Playing Record", he suggested that staging detracted from the musical experience, whereas "shorn of phoney hoopla, the LP simultaneously frees itself from the capriciousness of fake opera festivals".[23]

Of course, it was not only western classical performers who were affected by the absence of an audience, for it did not take long for the record to achieve a status far beyond its initial meaning. Recorded sound was one of those important technological developments of the late-nineteenth century that were not used for their original purposes. This industrial process cannot therefore be reduced to the sole constituents of either its invention or production—an error of colossal magnitude made by formalist Marxist thought. To Marx, this was the age in which "everything solid melts into air".[24] This was an age of breath-taking developments, of the expansion of material wealth, of the ever-increasing mastery of humankind over its natural environment. The means of production were already "social", both in their character and the private character of ownership. Soon, according to Marx, this private ownership would be the

[21] Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
[22] *ibid.*, 21.
[23] Theodor Adorno, "Opera and the Long-Playing Record" in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 284.
[24] Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), accessed 29 May 2013, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#060.

last "solidity" to fall. Yet the predetermined outcomes that Marx suggested would occur via such developmental processes have not, by and large, occurred, and increasingly less orthodox historical moments—at least according to the Marxist rubric—have rendered relationships in the modern age far from straightforward. For example, as soon as Edison's cylinder failed as a dictaphone, the intertextuality of human imagination and the co-creative potential of the individual re-contextualised this mass-produced artefact into something completely previously unintended. Historian John Tosh suggests that:

> The truth is that today the Marxist theory of history lies under something of a cloud. The reason is not simply to be found in a keener appreciation of the limits of its application in time and space. The wider intellectual climate has also changed to its disadvantage. Whatever their doctrinal disagreements, Marxists share an optimism about the progressive change in the world, and the ability of an overarching theory to understand and facilitate such change. But during the 1970s and 1980s the tide began to flow strongly the other way […] the grand theories which legitimate these ideologies lost their appeal.[25]

Many post-modernists have therefore emphasised such intertextuality (the way several discontinuous texts combine together to create a new meaning) as both a strategy and a contemporary reality. This has led to recorded sound being discussed in terms of two precepts; radical eclecticism and suggestive narrative: recorded sound was essentially double-coded and could never be part of a singular understanding of our imaginative universe, as might be suggested by Marxism, even though it could be argued that Marx's attitude towards the bourgeoisie was at times full of admiration for its civilising energies.[26]

This remarkable feat is a good example of the way in which industrial production is often misunderstood and considered to have only negative effects on society, stunting mankind's normal development, for rather than being an invention that was completely dependent upon its modes of production, recorded sound elicited responses from receivers in a completely unintended manner. It therefore might be argued that the social upheavals proper to an age of industrialisation necessitated even more complex articulatory practices than Marx could have ever considered, and as a result, operated in increasingly less orthodox historical ways than

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[25] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Longman, 1984), 178.

[26] For example, see introduction to Eugene Kamanka, ed., *The Portable Karl Marx* (London: Viking Penguin, 1983).

could have been predicted. Thus the question posed by such uneven industrial-cum-social development as recorded sound is, "precisely what is supposed to be normal development?"

One might therefore argue that rather than being part of an industrial production, with methodology as an ideology which strips the receiver of their autonomy, recorded sound, by being used against the grain of meaning in the first instance, has always been a relatively democratising form. Adorno and his ideas concerning atomised listening failed to grasp the concept that the unit of sound one listens to privileges the listener, not the music. While Adorno might describe listening to recordings as disconnected moments, one might ask the question, "Disconnected from whom, and from what?" One might even wonder exactly what Adorno means by "disconnected". Certainly, if one was considering the initial idea of a score as a record of a live performance, or of a movement of music, one might suggest that recorded sound does indeed separate the listeners from those intentions; however, if one were to consider reception strategies on behalf of the listener, such apparent *dis*connections are actually *conn*ections. Not to the rest of the music, but to the listeners' ways of life. It could therefore be argued that the recording increases access at a time when hierarchies, having already been formed in western classical music, were consolidating.

Recording technologies, therefore, helped to encourage new ways of listening to music, rather than simply facilitating the act of listening to a record of a score (and being manipulated, in the process). The systematic discovery of discursive areas and floating signifiers brought about by recorded sound, when such areas did not effectively exist prior to recorded sound, was a cumulative enrichment of society and added a different logic to our existence which could not be explained away via Marxist doctrine. It is common in popular music circles to incorporate the listener very early in our analysis of popular music, but this was not always the case. For, given the rise of mass-industrialisation, the growth of broadcast technology, and the development of mass-communication systems throughout the twentieth century, critics have often been inclined to suggest that listening is not a creative act but merely a mode of consumption. However, if one takes the record as a single artefact, rather than one of a million, and if one places that record into specific environments related to particular human interactions, understandings, and aesthetics, the recording itself, indeed the artefact itself, can quite clearly be considered as a matrix, and that this matrix creates, relatively autonomously, a platform within which one can reach for—and indeed at times discover—a sense of identity.