

Diversity of approaches on Popular Music and Crisis: a review on the IASPM UK and Ireland Branch Postgraduate Conference 2025

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The IASPM UK and Ireland Branch Postgraduate Conference 2025: *Popular Music and Crisis* took place on 4th and 5th September in the School of Music at the University of Leeds, in the United Kingdom. During the event, postgraduates presented and discussed their research.

The conference began with two postgraduate training workshops. Dr. Scott McLaughlin (University of Leeds) and Prof. Simon Zagorski-Thomas (University of West London) discussed, in *Practice-Based Research in the 21st Century*, how researchers may choose to present practice-based components, whether as finished artefacts or as documentation of creative processes. In the workshop *Careers Outside of Academia*, Ruth Winden, Careers with Research Consultant at the University of Leeds, presented employment possibilities for graduates in the Music field, and how to enhance their knowledge and skills to find interesting jobs. Next, in the panel *A Guide to Academic Publishing*, Prof. Abigail Gardner (University of Gloucestershire), Prof. Bethany Klein – *in absentia* – (University of Leeds), Dr Ellis

Jones (University of Leeds), and Prof. Steve Waksman (University of Huddersfield) discussed publishing academic work, and strategies to achieve better research outcomes.

The second day featured postgraduates paper panels. *Crisis in UK Music*, chaired by Richard Smith (University of Leeds), comprised *Crisis in UK psychedelic trance culture*, by Jacqueline Anderson (University of Central Lancashire), *Disparate Voices: Mapping the origins of UK Music*, by Jacob Simmons (University of Liverpool) and *'Beth yn Wirioneddol ydy Cymru Ni?': Popular Music, Bilingualism and Cultural Duality in Cymru*, by Ella Beavington (Cardiff University/Prifysgol Caerdydd).

Crisis in Live Music: Venues & Industry, chaired by Yafei Wang (University of Leeds), encompassed *Do Booking Agencies Still Matter in an AI-Led Live Music Industry?*, by Toni McGee (LIPA), *Managing Crises: Artist Management, Mental Health, and the Burden of Care*, by Brenda Combs (University of West London), and *Emancipating the Venue: Wharf Chambers and Building Community Resilience Within Independent Music Venues*, by Melanie Delaney (University of Leeds).

The papers *Authenticity and Generative-AI: How The Use of Voice Cloning Technology on TikTok Has Fuelled an Authorship Crisis in The Music Industry*, by Isabel Gawne (University of Liverpool), *Cyborg Voices and the Synthetic Self: Ethics, Creativity, and Identity in AI Vocality*, by Chloe Kirson-Jones (Kingston University), and *Towards a Feminist and Cyborg Reimagining of the Concept Album*, by Eva Dieteren (Kingston University) were presented in the panel *Digital Crises: Streaming, Cyborgs & AI*, chaired by Jingyi Bai (University of Leeds).

In the *Lunchtime Lightning Talks*, chaired by Prof. Sam Murray (University of Leeds), Jack Pyatt (University of Leeds) presented *Moshing with the Boys: Gender, Authenticity and Exclusion in Hardcore Punk*; Owayne Smith (Aston University), *The role of Policy in Efficient Music Ecosystems*; and Rhun Gwilym (University of Leeds), *The Exploration of How a UBI Model Would Affect the Behaviours of EDM Artists and if a Credible Way Forward in the UK*.

The panel *Challenging the Gender Paradigm*, chaired by Prof. Abigail Gardner (University of Gloucestershire), featured the papers *GENIE: Spreadsheets as activism*, by Grace Goodwin (University of Liverpool), *Unveiling the Experiences of Women Tour Managers*, by Rose Ward (University of Leeds), and *Managing Gender, Managing Contradiction: A Social Justice Case for Challenging the Dominance of Human Resource Management Paradigms in Music Organisations*, by Yvonne Kiely (Dublin City University).

The subsequent panel, *Global Musical Resistance*, chaired by Dr. Belisa Zoehler Giorgis (University of Milan), comprised *Sonic Solidarity: DIY Internet Radio's Role in Facilitating Networked Sonic Solidarity*, by Sean Finnan (TU Dublin), *Indie music and the national crisis: A Taiwanese case of cultural resistance*, by Hou-Wen Chiu (University of Bristol), and *Amplified Histories: The Politics of Anatolian Rock and the Resonances of the Saz*, by Şebnem Altunkaya (University of Huddersfield).

The papers *Climate, Crisis, and the Popular Depiction: Musical Representations of 'Attack by the Elements'*, by Katherine Wiseman (University of Leeds), *Affective Cultivation and Cultural Shift: The Rise of China's Fostered Idol Industry in the Post-Hallyu Era*, by Yafei Wang (University of Leeds), and *Sustainability of Independent Non-Film Musicians in India in the Age of Platformisation*, by Aditya Lal (University

of Leeds), were presented in the panel *Climate, Sustainability and Cultural Shift*, chaired by Dr. Ivan Mouraviev (University of Huddersfield).

The panel *Disco, Drag and Queering the Sonic*, chaired by Lou Aimes-Hill (University of Leeds), closed the conference, with 'Free Yourself' – *The Pandemic-Disco Diva Through the Lens of Race and Queerness*, by Jack Williams (University of Bristol), *Drag in Pieces: Spliced Collage and the Politics of Trans Audibility in a Time of Crisis*, by Sarah Cooper (University of Bristol), and *Reconfiguring Rupture: Sonic Queering and the Politics of Identity in Arca's KiCk I*, by Lucia Affaticati (University of Sussex).

Considering the conference's title, *Popular Music and Crisis*, prevalent themes throughout the panels comprised a diversity of approaches. Ideas of survival, resistance, marginalisation and collapse regarded political agency, the need to support practices that are unrepresented by the music industry, and cultural preservation in genres.

Key examples included papers on psychedelic trance culture, preserving Welsh language music in Cymru's festival, UBI (Universal Basic Income) and grants for EDM artists in Ireland, Taiwanese indie music and resistance to Chinese dominance, Anatolian rock and diasporic heritage, DIY internet radio and the networking practices of 24 Hours Palestine, the survival of UK music identity through mapping, and depictions of climate disasters in American blockbusters. Alongside that, resistance ideas were also present in the paper on exclusion of women tour managers in live music industry, contradictions in HRM social justice, the Gender Equality Networks in Europe (GENIE), whitewashing in modern disco, trans audibility, Arca's reconfiguration of genre and queer sonic identity, masculinity in the emo/hardcore scenes, mental health of artist managers, Wharf Chambers' commitment to social justice, and platforming independent non-film musicians in India.

Ideas of automation and agency in the music industry were evident in AI-assisted booking, AI-assisted music creation, the ethics of AI vocality, the cyborg concept album and agency-based activism to combat issues of gender inequality. Another aspect that was discussed was the tension between the artists' personal agency and the automated industry processes.

Crisis as perceived across this conference might be split into two subcategories: lived and imagined crisis. Lived crisis encompasses the challenges of structural and systematic barriers, that might be seen through the lens of genre, country, or cultural belonging. Mental health, AI undercutting wages and authorship, and male dominance are also issues related to this crisis mode. Furthermore, crisis was considered in relation to inequality in tour management, to HRM structures, sexual harassment and exclusion.

'Imagined crisis' might be expressed in film and film scores, in China's response to a possible future cultural dependence on Korea, in emergent forms of resistance in the emo/hardcore scene, and in the structural neglect of nightclubbing and projections of possible collapse. Other subjects included possible inequalities in future dependence on digital platforms, the reimagining of identity through sound, and future frameworks for surviving possible crises.

The conference fulfilled its purpose of being a space where postgraduates could share their research, counting on feedback on ideas and arguments, in a positive

environment. They were also encouraged to chair the panels and prioritised on asking questions in the Q&A moments.

Considering the current circumstances in music industry, discussing the theme *Popular Music and Crisis* corresponded to a contemporary need on the rise of technologies, political and social debates, ethical issues and the new challenges linked to them. Therefore, the diversity of proposals and approaches in the conference consisted in a very important debate focused on understanding nuances of these aspects and envisioning possibilities of pathways and scenarios.