



## REVIEW | Popular Music Fandom: Identities, Roles and Practices

*Mark Duffett Ed.*

London and New York: Routledge, 2014

ISBN 9780415506397 (HB); 9781138936973 (PB)

## REVIEW | Fan Identities and Practices in Context: Dedicated to Music

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ISBN 9781138938755 (HB)

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In recent years, there have been important developments in fan studies scholarship that have redressed the earlier disparaging definitions of a fan as an obsessive fanatic. Cue images of Beatlemania and the screaming young girls allegedly wetting themselves from the excitement of being in the presence of their pop music idols (Jodelka 2015, cited in Duffett 2015: xv). More contemporary fan studies have now established a shift from this earlier discourse of hysteria and obsession to one that carefully considers the complexities of fandom previously overlooked: the role fandom plays in a person's identity; the fan as expert; the fan community; and the fan as producer of content, adding lovingly to a text's canon. Despite these positive steps forward, music fandom has still been relatively

overlooked, perhaps for choices of study where previous research got it so wrong: science fiction and television fans, football fans, and fans of stars and celebrities. Arguably, these are fan cultures that lend themselves more obviously to extreme cases of fandom or are able to more naturally utilize the digital landscape to demonstrate their fan practices. However, Duffett's two edited volumes, published in 2014 and 2015 respectively, focus specifically on popular music fandom to provide a comprehensive overview of music fan practices and identities to this rapidly developing field of fan studies.

*Popular Music Fandom: Identities, Roles and Practices* (2014) importantly includes chapters by some of those key fan studies scholars like Matt Hills ("Back in the Mix: Exploring Intermediary Fandom and Popular Music Production") and Cornell Sandvoss ("I <3 IBIZA: Music, Place and Belonging"). Both Hills' (2002) and Sandvoss' (2005) research on fandom helped to lay the groundwork for the new era of fan scholarship (see Jenkins 2006; Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington 2007; Otter Bickerdike 2015). This collection also includes contributions from well-established popular music scholars such as Duffett himself (2013), Fred Vermorel (1983, 2011), Roy Shuker (2011, 2012, 2015), and Tony Whyton (2013). Duffett's (2014: 1) introduction addresses previous "critics of mass culture" born out of the Frankfurt School tradition that dismissed audiences (fans included) of being passive consumers, getting the dregs of (low) popular culture that they perhaps deserve. By addressing this criticism of popular culture through the lens of music fandom, this volume argues that this is far from the case; instead, it evidences the ways, often from an interdisciplinary, social sciences approach, in which music fandom demonstrates the complexities, the value, and the artistry of popular music. Rather than merely listening to or receiving sonic and verbal messages, popular music fandom enables a conversation and a relationship with other enthusiasts and with the artists themselves. For example, Beate Peter examines the social practices and politics on the EDM dance floor to offer an alternative to Bourdieu's thesis on cultural capital, while Whyton uses the case study of John Coltrane fandom to unpack the role genre – in this instance jazz – can play in discourses of fandom, and also argues that musicians themselves are just as much fans of other musicians. Nedim Hassan's chapter redresses the biases in music audience studies towards privilege and public activities to consider the role of music in domestic spaces by drawing upon his anthropological expertise. Hassan specifically focuses on an ethnographic study of people with learning difficulties, providing a rich analysis in a similar vein to Evan Eisenberg's *The Recording Angel* (2005). Thankfully, Joli Jensen's reassessment of Jenkins' "aca-fan" finally makes an unapologetic claim for the worth of fan scholarship and fandom in general to argue that academics are fans too and there is nothing shameful in pursuing lines of enquiry that come from that fandom.

The only criticism of this volume was that as a female music fan, I did not always feel that these chapters related to or addressed my relationship with music fan practices, record collecting, or the rituals of gig going and live performance. I also wondered how easily my undergraduate students, who are often so focused on the case study as a way into understanding more complex theory, might relate to some of these chapters. Otherwise, this is a strong, highly recommended

collection that establishes critical frameworks for approaching popular music fandom.

Duffett's second edited volume *Fan Identities and Practices in Context: Dedicated to Music* (2015) addresses my earlier concerns by presenting a compilation of articles previously published in two key special editions of the journal *Popular Music and Society*. This volume is slightly more diverse in its range of topics and considerations of gender and sexuality's role in popular music fandom and the collection does feature a more even balance of contributions from female scholars than the previous volume. Duffett's introduction notes that despite the important inroads made in fan studies, mass media's representation of fans and fandom still tends to tread the same stereotyped ground and the old mythologized histories of 1960s youth music culture. Duffett (2015: xvii) also highlights that the work in this volume represent two notable paradigms: the research looks beyond the "traditional negativity of mass culture thinking" and most of the chapters are not "duty bound" to Jenkins' "transformative works paradigm" offered in his 1992 book *Textual Poachers* – a seminal work that established the role of new media and participatory culture in relation to specifically television fandom.

This volume is divided into two sections: "Identities" and "Fan Practices". While traditional fan community practices are still alive and well for Deadheads (Peter Smith and Ian Inglis), Rebecca Williams, Thomas Brett, Ross Hagen, and Anja Lobert all offer chapters that analyse the ways in which music fans are engaging with social media and other online platforms to establish levels of expertise and authorship pertaining each to their specific fandoms. While Lady Gaga's "Little Monsters" are well known for their interaction with the artist on Twitter and Instagram (Melissa A. Click et al.) and YouTube has increasingly become an archive of concert footage (Steven Colburn), what this volume offers are insights into the under-documented practices of Autechre and electronic music fans (Thomas Brett), and evidence to suggest that music fans are just as prolific in producing fan fiction as television fans are (Ross Hagen). Patryk Galuszka's chapter on the "New Economy of Fandom" captures the roles that have emerged out of fan practices online to finally solidify some of the earlier works on fan capital and the role of fan as "prosumer." This chapter will also be especially illuminating for those undergraduate students who have themselves turned their fandom into self-employment and entrepreneurial pursuits.

Like Jenson's afterword in the 2014 volume, a number of these chapters including those by Craig Jennex ("Diva Worship and the Sonic Search for Queer Utopia"), B. Lee Cooper ("My Music, Not Yours: Ravings of a Rock-and-Roll Fanatic"), Siv B. Lie's piece on Django fandom, and the concluding thoughts by Duffett, all provide refreshing, unapologetic insights into fandom and their subcultural identities and practices that enhance those fandoms in very rich and interesting ways. These insights move the scholarship away from stereotypes and instead provide useful templates in understanding these activities and motivations for fans and scholars alike. As there are currently no comparative works on popular music fandom that examine identity and practices in this detail, these two volumes make excellent companion pieces and are essential reading for both fans and popular music enthusiasts. In order to more successfully reposition these essays away from traditional, white, "dad rock" discourses, and in turn achieve

Duffett's intention to address the stereotypical representations of music fandom, further research around music "super fans", fan identity and coping with a musician's death, more geographically varied explorations of fan practices, and more ethnographic research around identity and the LGBT and ethnic minority communities would be welcomed. Duffett's objectives as outlined in both volumes' introductions are reflected in these works and provide the evidence that the music fan relationship is not one-sided. Both edited volumes demonstrate that through evolving fan practices that are becoming more sophisticated in the use of digital space as well as active consumption practices, fans are contributing beyond mere passive cash transactions in the market place. They are creating, inspiring, influencing, and challenging other fans and musicians alike.

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