



# New Directions in Music Fan Studies

## Editorial Introduction

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Since its foundation, in 1981, IASPM has been a community of scholars from various fields bringing in different perspectives, traditions, terminologies and research methods, to “advance an understanding of popular music and the processes involved in its production and consumption” (IASPM n.d.: web source). Transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary exchange is what makes popular music studies stimulating, but at the same time also makes it hard to define. What is and what is not part of the field? It is beyond the scope of our editorial introduction to engage in a full discussion, but we note that various textbooks describe popular music studies in different ways. Longhurst (2007: 20), for example, separates three main themes: music production, the characteristics of the musical text, and music consumption. Shuker (2016) also includes topics such as film music, protest and policy. Work on audiences and reception in relation to popular music forms an important strand in this multi-faceted field of study.

When popular music scholars have looked at audience experience, they have often focused on additional factors. Music reception has usually been examined as something subsequent to music production, or in a collective, identity-based relationship with the music itself, for example through questions of gender, race or cultural capital. Frith and McRobbie’s (1991) early attempt in 1978 with a piece on “cock rock” and “teenybop”, for instance, opened its discussion with

genre conventions, which were extended as gendered options for the female pop audience. Since then, not only have its authors reconsidered their own work; others have proposed new perspectives to explore the reception of popular music, such as amateur musicianship, music education, music in everyday life, music and emotion, music heritage and listening. Three of the most significant historic trends in research on popular music audiences have focused on subcultures (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Hodgkinson 2002; Thornton 1995), scenes (Cohen 1991; Shank 1994; Straw 1991), and the sociology of taste (Hennion 2015; Prior 2013). These approaches all recognize a dedicated music audience but they “decentre” it too, bringing in abstractions or additional concerns rather than focusing solely on audience members and how they understand and pursue their interests. Things are beginning to change in this regard, however, as some popular music researchers are starting to adopt a more holistic approach. In a recent research project on live music, conducted between 2008 and 2011, for instance, Simon Frith and his colleagues not only took the perspective of the musician and the “music industry” but complemented it with perspectives emerging from concert promotion, government policy and, most notably, concert audiences (Live Music Project n.d.). Their study framed the live audience within a wider project, as one stakeholder in relation to music production. Although such holistic projects show that a reconsideration of the place of the audience is beginning, theories of music reception traditionally have had “one foot in the audience” and the other elsewhere. With few exceptions, such as Cavicchi (1998), the practices, understandings and experiences of dedicated audience have rarely been a central object of study. While they do not constitute all audience members, fans form the fraction that is most dedicated to music.

Inspired by a symposium *Popular Music Fandom and the Public Sphere* that was organized by the guest editors, Mark Duffett and Koos Zwaan, at the University of Chester in April 2015, the aim of this special issue is to build a bridge between fan studies and popular music studies in order to inspire further investigation of music fandom. Our efforts raise the question whether or not a focus specifically on this topic is academically productive. Is there something unique about music fandom that might advance our understanding of popular music from a fan studies perspective?

Inspired by Henry Jenkins’ book *Textual Poachers* (1992), media fan studies is, arguably, a relatively young field of study. Its primary focus is on the activities of dedicated audiences and how they form communities (see Duffett 2013; Zwaan et al. 2015). The field has its origin in cultural studies and media studies – most notably research on television and social media – and is now associated with its own academic journals and networks, such as *Transformative Works and Cultures* (since 2008), the *Journal of Fandom Studies* (since 2012), and Fan Studies Network (since 2012). In this field, “fan object” refers to the text or hero (for example, the Beatles), which forms the focus of a fan’s passion. Engagement by the fan with one or more cultural objects (for example, specific books, films, TV series, music) is, however, just a starting point; the artist or music is a *premise* for the formation of fan communities and new forms of textual productivity. It is not about what the text or performance does *to* fans, but what they do *with* it. Although popular music is a small but important topic within fan studies, the

discipline has been largely dominated by “telefantasy” fandom, with a specific interest in television science fiction (notably *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*).

We suggest that at least two aspects of fan studies might be useful to popular music scholarship. The first addresses research as a process that involves the identities of the researchers. The second considers our scholarly object, and the approaches we might take to it; as a field of study, popular music studies has had an interesting connection with fandom from the start. Most scholars start out as popular music fans and, for many, personal fandom is a strong drive and inspiration for their academic work. The ethical and methodological questions raised by our own fandom as scholars have rarely been broached within the IASPM community, yet such concerns remain central to fan studies, where Henry Jenkins (2006) popularized the term “aca-fan”. This complex idea, further defined in Duffett (2013: 289), relates to “an academic who usually teaches in cultural studies, studies fandom, supports the cultural legitimacy of fandom as a social identity and proudly attests to being a fan in his/her own life and work”. Music aca-fandom raises interesting questions for popular music studies; for example, should there be more self-awareness among popular music scholars about our subjective positions as aca-fans?

We also suggest that accommodating the perspective of fan studies can indeed help to shift our focus somewhat and bring in a vocabulary and terminology that yields a better understanding of audience experience as a generally occurring phenomenon. After all, making music requires creative inspiration; many of the most significant postwar popular musicians have been fans themselves, their identity containing fandom as a constituent role. Elvis Presley, for instance, had a very broad knowledge of American vernacular music and described himself in 1956 as “a pretty close follower of religious [gospel] quartets” (Osborne 2000: 30). John Lennon, meanwhile, registered his fandom by reportedly saying, “Before Elvis, there was nothing!” (Brode 2006: 3). Because such musicians were evidently fans, one way we could frame their music production is as a form of fan labour.

The field of fan studies is based on a holistic methodology that combines auto-ethnography with interviews and other forms of ethnographic study. Such approaches may help to widen the methodological scope of popular music studies, but the possible traffic is not all just one way. For example, popular music studies is concerned with the issue of race (see, for instance, Hatch and Millward 1987; McClary and Walser 1994; Haynes 2013), while fan studies has more recently become concerned with racial issues (see Gatson 2011; Wanzo 2015) and may benefit from attention to debates in our field.

The articles in this special issue of the *IASPM@Journal* address a wide range of aspects of popular music fandom. Toija Cinque and Sean Redmond focus on a specific fandom of the late David Bowie, and offer an illustration of how popular music scholars self-identify as fans. They discuss how migrants arriving in Australia relate their sense of identity and belonging to the works of David Bowie. Here, the narrative of being a stranger and outsider is constructed both through the interpretation of Bowie’s music and *personae*, as well as in the life stories of the participants.

Marion Wasserbauer and Alexander Dhoest explore a parallel notion, analyzing the ways in which popular music texts are used to construct particular

fan identities. Their study shows how stereotypical images of LGBTQ music fans can be challenged by offering “alternative” versions. In doing so, Wasserbauer and Dhoest outline differences that are often overlooked in academic discussions of both narratives of LGBTQ identity and popular music fandom itself. Their work helps us to reconsider scholarly assumptions that separate fans as specific cultural types.

Pilar Lacasa, Laura Méndez Zaballos and Julián de la Fuente Prieto concentrate on a different type of fan community: adolescent girls who are fans of the all-male pop group One Direction. They show the active participation of these young female fans in both offline and online fan communities, and find that the connections they establish are often intertwined. Their work shows the active nature of fans as they participate in the process of building communities.

Simone Driessen and Bethan Jones self-identify as fans by presenting an auto-ethnographic account of how their own boy band fandom developed over their life-course. They start by discussing how their Boyzone fandom started at a young age and then continue to describe how this transformed as their lives changed. This challenges stereotypical ideas of fandom by showing how fans of the same band can have very different experiences.

Chris Anderton examines a fan practice that is specific to popular music: the collecting of records. With the shift to online music distribution and consumption, new forms of record collecting have taken shape. Anderton builds on the work of Shuker on record collecting. Focussing on the archiving and distribution of digital music files, he expands Shuker’s typology of music fan attachment. “Primary involvement”, is with the persona of the musician. “Secondary involvement” is the accumulation of physical artefacts (records and memorabilia). Finally, as Anderton proposes, “tertiary involvement” includes the collecting and archiving of audio recordings as digitized music files, thereby linking existing research on bootlegging with fan practices on the Internet.

Changes in media and communication technology have transformed some fan practices, as Anderton shows, and the means for fans to interact with one another and participate in fan networks, as Lacasa et al. demonstrate. However, in the final article of this special issue section, Gayle Stever suggests that some fan practices have continued from the previous era of media communication. Drawing on extensive fieldwork pursued over the course of ten years, she discusses Josh Groban and his dedicated fan community. Stever shows how, in addition to mediated interactions, Groban fans build up offline interactions with the artist they admire, for example during “Meet and Greets” before or after shows. She argues that these kinds of interaction and relationship are driven more by a notion of deep affection, rather than by sexual attraction.

This issue also presents Rob Ahler’s discussion of auratic presence in live performance, as well as a selection of book reviews on popular music fandom, song interpretations, the vinyl format, underground punk, DIY dance parties, hip-hop in Europe and a rhythmic history of rock. We hope that, as a package, this issue will inspire further discussion and research in both popular music studies and fan studies.

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