



Editorial Introduction Music Journalism

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With few exceptions (Frith 1996; Jones 2002; Lindberg et al 2005; Negus 1996), the central role of popular music journalism in the construction of meaning out of a musical form has remained a relatively under-studied topic of scholarly discourse. This apparent lack of academic focus has seen a slow repositioning in recent years with the publication of special editions of journals (*Popular Music History* 2004; *Popular Music and Society* 2010), subject-focused chapters in critical texts (such as Hearsum 2013) and articles in journals (Atton 2009; Brennan 2007; McLeese 2010). This special issue of *IASPM Journal* on popular music journalism is intended to add to this growing body of literature.

In a British context, this increased interest among a research community resonates with a growth in undergraduate honours degree courses in music journalism. At the time of writing, this amounts to ten programmes of study. In a German, Austrian and Swiss context, there is a similar incorporation of popular music journalism into the academy. On an international scale, music journalism-focused PhDs are increasingly commonplace, while modules of study are emerging as elements of music and journalism courses. Moreover, within such contexts, intellectual music journalism itself has had a crucial influence on the establishment of popular music culture as an academic subject. In addition, outside of the academic realm, the last two years have seen the emergence of music journalism as a serious genre in the UK with the launch of *Louder than Words*, the first festival of music and words which draws on music journalism in all of its forms as a central axis and offers a platform for the serious consideration of music journalism as a cultural and economic force.

Clearly, music journalism is emerging as an area of study with an increasingly critical force. However, despite the huge number of texts on popular music that draw upon music journalism for context, the study of the field still appears to take a lowly position within popular music studies. It is a situation that reflects the tensions that exist within popular culture discourses and within the popular music industries through what seems a common misconception that music journalists are often failed musicians. The music journalist is all too often portrayed as the scourge of the music business. This negative view also exists within the wider journalism industry where an Arnoldian hierarchy (Storey 2003) exists. The medium of popular music journalism is often viewed as taking the position of either an extension of arts and entertainment or celebrity journalism, rather than being a form of writing unto itself. Within the structures of the news press, where the defining lines are more clearly inscribed, music journalism is often dismissed as an untutored or unskilled branch of journalism, a position that remains at the heart of the approaches to the study of journalism. This presents something of a challenge for researchers engaging with music journalism.

Within journalistic practice, writers working in the ‘untutored’ area of music journalism are generally treated with little regard in contrast to the ‘serious’ areas such as news, finance, health and education journalism, or even the more widely accepted areas of arts and entertainment journalism, such as those explored by film and theatre critics. Although popular music has found space within all areas of the media, music journalism has remained in this lowly cultural position, despite having stood at the forefront of numerous journalistic developments, ranging from the proliferation and popularization of ‘new’, or ‘gonzo’, journalism of the 1960s and 1970s (most famously through the works of Hunter S. Thompson, Lester Bangs, Tom Wolfe, Charles Shaar Murray, Nick Kent and others), to ‘cult of personality’ journalism of the 1980s and 1990s by writers such as Paul Morely, Ian Penman and Everett True. Rarely do writers succeed in traversing the distance between the ‘pop’ pages into the ‘serious’ arts pages. Rarer still is the music journalist who makes the transition from music critic to the more revered position of cultural critic. The few who have succeeded, such as Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons in the UK, are greatly outnumbered by the sheer weight of music journalists who fail to climb the hierarchical ladder towards the more ‘serious’ areas of the journalistic trade.

It is useful here to consider the historical perspective of the medium’s lowly position. Music journalism’s initial emergence some 100 years ago came through the gradual interest in music coming from newspapers in their attempt to engage with the ‘low’ forms of popular public entertainment. With little in the way of immediate antecedents, the craft of music journalism arrived without direction or ground rules and was considered to be a lowly form of criticism in contrast to the role of the theatre critic. This position was especially apparent within French culture where the popular press were dynamic advocates of arts critics. French society considered itself as a nation of literary rather than musical people (Looseley 2003), awarding the music critic little respect. This position was echoed in London, where the music critic was regaled in the face of the literary and theatre critics who were awarded higher esteem, often due to the historical knowledge (a sign of education) required to understand the very texts they were critiquing. Music was considered to be more ephemeral and therefore less grounded in academic discourse. Thus, the London press regarded music criticism as a lowly order of journalism.

As a result, music journalism and the later music press developed through an almost separate form of writing and organization (Forde 2003). In terms of writing, the music journalist emerged into a terrain that was, perhaps, more squarely aligned with the science fiction fan prose of the fanzine, existing in denial of the restrictive style codes of print or news journalism. Similarly, the organization of the music press has emerged through the proliferation of untutored DIY music fanzines since the 1960s. Thus, popular music journalism became represented as an anyone-can-do-it area of journalism. Therefore, key to its lowly position in contemporary journalism is the fact that, unlike

other areas of newspaper print journalism, to engage with and succeed in music journalism does not require completion of industry-standard qualifications.

Within the academic realm, approaches to journalism reveal a similar hierarchy. For example, sports journalists also made a start as ‘outsiders’ of journalism without a reputation as ‘serious’ journalists, yet the area is now considered an important site of academic study (Rowe 1999). Also, extensive research into women’s magazines (Hermes 1995; Winship 1987) has significantly contributed to the study of popular culture. Even within the realm of arts and entertainment journalism, literary and film criticism are now treated as extensions of academic study, and are thus awarded the combined respect of both theoreticians and practitioners.

Nunes (2004: 132) argues that, “music journalism is relatively devalued within both the fields of journalism and culture and quite obviously within the fragment of cultural journalism”. However, Shuker (2001) has suggested that music journalism and the associated music press is integral in investing music with cultural significance. He further draws on Frith’s suggestion that readers of (rock) music journalism “act as opinion leaders, the rock interpreters, the ideological gatekeepers for everyone else” (cited in Shuker 2001: 83), in order to argue for music journalism as a literary genre through which the boundaries between music journalism and academic writing on popular music are blurred.

Jones (2002) notes with justifiable disdain a claim by DeRogatis that “two camps dominate rock criticism today: the two-thumbs-up consumer-guide careerists who treat rock ‘n’ roll as mere entertainment and the academics who drain it of all the joy and fury” (cited in Jones 2002: 9). The distinction between the two camps is, Jones suggests, actually quite blurred:

Writers often have one foot in each camp, or migrate between the two. And what are we to make of critics who moonlight as musicians (and vice versa)? [...] Where might their camp be, and is the campfire still burning there? (*ibid.*)

This view, offered by DeRogatis, is not uncommon. Paula Hearsum (2013) notes the tension that exists between the practising journalist and the academic and suggests that each could learn from each other. Drawing on Anderson’s (1991) notion of the “imagined community”, Hearsum argues that the ideological position of press as gate keeper has shifted in line with a fall in music magazine sales. She subsequently suggests that at this crucial time of economic and cultural threat, academics and practitioners should develop an awareness of what unites us all: “The imperative is for us to collaborate and understand how this musical reading community has shifted so we can be in a better place to secure its future” (2013: 109). Indeed, of current concern are discussions concerning the role of music journalism in an Internet age, where journalists are very often described as superfluous promoters for the industry (Jacke and Passaro 2014).

This special issue of *IASPM Journal* will contribute to these debates and may be viewed as a part of a move forwards for music journalism. The articles contained engage with the major concerns of current research — concerns that can largely be divided into two clear areas: a continuing analysis of music journalism’s ‘golden age’, and an ongoing consideration of music journalism’s future. Perhaps a new schism is emerging: one between the fetishism of the cultural impact of a particular historical period and its associated writers, and the technological essentialism of much of the post-Internet debates?

The issue begins with an exploration of the *Rock’s Backpages* database, one of the world’s biggest archives of popular music journalism, by Thomas Conner and Steve Jones. Undertaking a content and textual analysis of journalistic writings between the 1960s and the 2000s, Conner and Jones argue that popular music criticism during this time has shifted its focus from “matters of music to matters of business”. This shift, they suggest, in part stems from an increased engagement by journalists with the music

industry and with its particular issues of production, distribution and consumption. The article begins with a brief summary of the development of popular music journalism in the US and UK, tracing how the countercultural discourse of publications in the 1960s (such as *Rolling Stone*) has gradually been subsumed under a wave of consumer-centred approaches, made evident in the 'Top 100 ... of All Time' lists that regularly pop up in the contemporary popular music press. Continuing their analysis, Conner and Jones identify how key moments in the development of the music industry (for example, the boom of popular music as a business in the 1970s; the rise of digital file sharing in the late 1990s) can be identified through shifts in the terminology employed by music journalists during the same periods. Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates that a robust consideration of popular music, be it social, cultural or industrial, needs to engage with journalistic discourse. In so doing, the article provides a template for future research on popular music criticism. With so much writing (at least from the US and UK) now so easily accessible via websites such as *Rock's Backpages*, numerous possibilities open up for future explorations of the history of popular music journalism and the diverse ways it links to artists, fans and industries.

In contrast to the broad timespan covered by Conner and Jones, Jacopo Tomatis hones in on the 1960s in his article on the teen pop press in Italy during that decade. Focusing on two Italian teen publications (*Ciao amici* and *Big*), Tomatis employs the concept of 'community' to articulate how these publications brought together like-minded young people around shared ideologies and tastes that were in opposition to those of their parents. For Tomatis, a central aspect is the language this community used concerning music genre naming, classification and aesthetics. As Tomatis observes, little attention has been given to the 'commercial' teen pop press in discussions of music criticism, many studies favouring the rock authenticity of underground fanzines or iconic publications (such as *Rolling Stone* in the US and *NME* in the UK) — in other words, a preference for subculture-influenced (rock) genres over commercial chart music. After sketching the landscape of the Italian popular music scene of the mid-1960s, which fused imported American and English sounds with uniquely Italian interpretations, the article outlines how the two publications under consideration both took the approach of shaping their respective readerships into communities. Offering more than music criticism, these publications acted as a collective voice for the developing teenage market, forming a youth community around the concept of 'musica nostra' (music of our own). Through discourse analysis, Tomatis demonstrates how this teen pop press employed what, at the time, was an innovative journalistic discourse that appealed to a young audience. He concludes that, by analyzing the discourse in such 'mass' publications, it is possible to understand how specific generational communities have interpreted and valued music.

Taking a more contemporary perspective, Barbara Panuzzo conducts a discourse analysis of the coverage of female artists in US hip-hop journalism. Drawing on a selection of texts from US hip-hop magazines and personal interviews with some of their editors, Panuzzo explores the artistic and commercial tensions that inform hip-hop journalistic practice. Bound up with this are discourses of gender and race that serve to both undermine and reinforce female performers' authenticity. While the role of female artists in rap music has received considerable attention, there has been little discussion of the way in which these artists are portrayed within the specialist music press. Panuzzo's interviewee responses make evident the pressures that inform editorial strategies in hip-hop journalism, with writers and editors having to balance the demands of record labels with the perceived expectations of their readership and economic interests of publishing companies. Panuzzo highlights this has resulted in not only the objectification and hyper-sexualisation of female artists, but also a privileging of male artists in hip-hop journalism. She concludes that the male gaze is a key force behind the journalistic decisions to represent female artists in overtly sexual ways. While some artists may attempt to challenge or undermine this, many choose to embrace it. The stereotypes this generates interact with wider society, producing questionable role

models. In addition, Panuzzo also uncovers that female journalists are typically given preference when commissioning articles on female artists, which suggests these journalists similarly subscribe to the expectations of the male gaze. Panuzzo's research highlights how hip-hop music journalists are caught in between numerous financial and cultural pressures that shape their editorial decisions, and typically result in hypersexualised representations of female hip-hop artists.

Returning to Europe, Josep Pedro's contribution focuses on journalistic practice in the blues scene of Madrid. Through an exploration of the activities of three key journalists in the scene, Javier "Jay Bee" Rodríguez, Ramón del Solo and Eugenio Moirón, Pedro argues that their work constitutes a form of alternative journalism that sets them apart from conventional media. Employing an ethnographic methodology that involved participant observation, interviews and his own media work, Pedro sketches the development of Madrid's blues scene since the 1980s. As a scene that has been all but ignored by the general music media in Spain, its participants have had to develop their own mechanisms and media formats for promoting, disseminating and archiving blues music events. This has involved a blurring between professional journalism and amateur journalism, whereby music journalism is defined as more than written text on a page or screen, with these three journalists engaging in radio presenting, video production, gig promotion and social formation. Despite their different personal histories, their work intersects and goes toward sustaining the long-term existence of Madrid's blues scene, not simply documenting but also creating the scene. Linking his discussion of music journalism to popular music scene theory, Pedro shows how an analysis of journalistic practice can illustrate the dynamics, tensions and discourses that shape a music scene, and furthermore how music fans in a particular location adopt and adapt a sound from elsewhere within their own local context. The broad definition of journalism and its embedding within the specifics of the local act as a model on which to base further research on contemporary music journalism.

In the final article of this special issue, Simon Morrison explores electronic dance music (EDM) writing and club culture journalism. Combining a discourse analysis of interviews and publications, with a reflection on his own time as a club culture journalist, Morrison harnesses the reborn spirit of gonzo journalism to discuss the different literary approaches taken by writers working within the UK club scene during the 1990s. Taking as a starting point a stated expectation that "people who go clubbing don't read", the article weaves its way through subcultural theory and countercultural journalism to propose a new approach to academicism that incorporates some of the personal, poetic impulses of the gonzo approach that developed within 'New Journalism' of the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing on interviews with editors of some of the UK's key EDM publications, Morrison conducts a retrospective assessment of the various writing styles that characterized club culture journalism during the days of acid house in the late 1980s, and of superclubs and superstar DJs in the late 1990s, when the magazines *Ministry* and *Mixmag* were reputedly selling close to 100,000 copies per issue. Morrison contends that while EDM seemed to provide ripe cultural terrain for a journalistic approach inspired by the gonzo style of writers like Hunter S. Thompson, the factual reporting of EDM media ultimately failed to capture this. Instead, Morrison argues, the gonzo spirit spilled over into the world of club fiction, such as the work of Irvine Welsh. Morrison's analysis highlights the literary experimentation and vibrancy that has characterized some of popular music's key defining moments.

Finally, a word from the Editor, Hillegonda Rietveld: We hope you will agree with us that the area of music journalism is as varied as the music and scenes it represents, and that this issue of *IASPM Journal* will stimulate further research at the intersection of journalism and popular music studies. In addition to the five articles on music journalism, this issue of the journal shows examples of the breadth of IASPM research, including a research article by David Cashman on the touristic musicscape of a cruise ship (edited

by Carlo Nardi and William Echard), and an Italian-language contribution by Carlo Bianchi (edited by Giacomo Bottà and Carlo Nardi) on Vladimir Vysotsky's poetics in relation to Soviet society in Italy, plus five book reviews (edited by Penny Spirou). A very big thank you to our outgoing Editorial Assistant Elina Hytönen-Ng for ensuring a carefully presented issue, and for sticking with the journal for four issues through their various challenges; without you, this journal would not have been possible — we wish you every success in your academic career.

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