Mixing Pop and Politics

Political Dimensions of Popular Music in the 21st Century

Edited by Catherine Hoad, Geoff Stahl and Oli Wilson

MIXING POP AND POLITICS

The political has always been part of popular music, but how does that play out in today's musical and political landscape? *Mixing Pop and Politics: Political Dimensions of Popular Music in the 21st Century* provides an innovative exploration of the complex politics of popular music in its contemporary formations.

Amid the shifting paradigms of power in the 2020s, the chapters in this book go beyond the idea of popular music as protest to explore how resistance, subversion, containment, and reconciliation all interact in the popular music realm. Covering a wide range of international artists and genres, from South African hip-hop to Polish punk, and addressing topics such as climate change and environmentalism, feminism, diasporic identity, political parties, music-making as labour, the far right, conservatism and nostalgia, and civic engagement, the contributors expand our understanding of how popular music is political.

For students and scholars of music, popular culture, and politics, the volume offers a broad, exciting snapshot of the latest scholarship on contemporary popular music and politics.

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Catherine, Geoff, and Oli

INTRODUCTION

Mixing pop and pandemics

Catherine Hoad, Geoff Stahl and Oli Wilson

As we write this introduction, from our respective home offices in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the future of popular music has perhaps never seemed more unclear. The unprecedented global lockdown of early 2020 in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on global music industries, the implications of which are still yet to be realised. In countless countries around the world, the industry experienced total upheaval virtually overnight.

Conventional live music performances – the main form of income for many musicians – have ceased. Festivals have been cancelled, tours postponed, innumerable gigs called off, and local venues have shut their doors, with fears over their ability to reopen and recover. In response, government organisations and funding bodies have adapted with surprising speed and agility to provide financial relief; meanwhile, charities and NGOs have mobilised to raise money and provide networks to support both financial and mental wellbeing. Further, consumer trends, such as digital music streaming, appear to have accelerated. This is a scenario with variations the world over, and one which has exacerbated the longstanding yet suddenly urgent question: what does the future of music look like?

Certainly, this question of music's future is by no means a new one, and has been grappled with by Popular Music Studies from its earliest academic incarnations. The nascent development of this collection in early 2018 was driven by the question of what the future of music might look like in the context of a seemingly 'post-pop', 'post-politics', and 'post-truth' moment, and how Popular Music Studies could respond to this emerging political paradigm. The assemblage of chapters here has thus developed with the aim to provide an innovative exploration of the complex politics of resistance, subversion, containment, and reconciliation in popular music in its contemporary formations. Recent history provides us with ample instances of the power of popular music to speak to, through, and

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against various political moments. The contemporary socio-political situation of the late 2010s into the early 2020s also offers countless opportunities to explore how popular music revisits, reconstitutes, rewrites, and reconciles itself to this past. This current context necessitates an awareness of the complex position of popular music and the new directions it must negotiate, as music responds to the shifting paradigms of power – particularly in the interweaving of the political and the pandemic – in which we currently find ourselves.

In light of these shifting global flows, this collection emphasises Popular Music Studies' role in pointing to pop's entanglements with politics beyond an assumed Western cultural and geographic centre, and the regional inflections of this relationship therein. Chapters in the collection span multiple regions and political themes. In providing a critical update of earlier scholarship mapping popular music's entanglement with politics (Frith 1983; Bennett, Frith, & Grossberg 2005; Cloonan and Garafolo 2009), here we ask what it means to mix popular music with the political in recent and emerging socio-political paradigms. How has popular music responded to, resisted, or been represented within the resurgence of far-right politics? What is the role of popular music in responding to climate change and environmental degradation? In what ways can the use, misuse, and abuse of musical technology be framed as political? What role has popular music played, both historically and contemporaneously, in contributing to the fluid renegotiation of gendered and sexual identities? How is popular music situated within the context of online activism, as international communicative flows target police brutality, state corruption, and sexual harassment?

This collection thus seeks to explore popular music's political implications and the nuances with which these impact upon constructions of identity, community, and practice in distinct locations and ideological epochs. The varied regions, genres, time periods, methods, and disciplines represented here similarly speak to the fluidity of Popular Music Studies, which can help us adapt and address issues facing the future of popular music. Yet there also remains a call for Popular Music Studies to critically revisit its own canons, practices, and frameworks, and to adapt these for a more inclusive and agentic mode of engaging with music in its myriad forms. We have been challenged to critically re-imagine the field through both epistemological and material processes of decolonisation and diversification to allow for new modes of understanding how music is enmeshed with socio-political paradigms.

Many of the challenges and opportunities for Popular Music Studies to respond to the rapidly changing political, economic, technological, and cultural dynamics of the contemporary global music industry are rooted in continued difficulties with articulating what Popular Music Studies actually, or practically, is – a discipline, methods, a field of inquiry, all of them at once, or something completely different? For Martin Cloonan, writing in 2005, the notion of Popular Music Studies, 'has a wide currency' and is linked to the institutions that support its study, as popular music is taught and practiced in a variety of contexts and in a number

of ways. This diversity, Cloonan continues, raises broader questions about the extent to which Popular Music Studies can be seen as a discipline in its own right. As he notes, in 2004, the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM), the leading academic organisation in pop music studies, had its own view on this matter, arguing 'popular music studies is not an academic discipline'.

Certainly, in this period in the early 2000s, many proponents of Popular Music Studies were convinced that it was not an academic discipline. David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus, two prolific figures in Popular Music Studies, confidently state that:

> The study of popular music is, at its best, a uniquely interdisciplinary area of research, drawing significant contributions from writers within a number of academic fields including musicology, media and cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, ethnomusicology, folkloristics, psychology, social history and cultural geography.
>
> *(Hesmondhalgh et al. 2002, p. 2)*

Hesmondhalgh and Negus' claim is certainly still evident close to twenty years later, where such discussions continue to circulate with a certain proclivity throughout the sphere of pop music studies. So there is, then, some consensus amongst Popular Music Studies scholars that it is not a discipline in its own right; rather, it is a field of study which appears to have only one unifying factor – Popular Music Studies is the study of popular music. While this is something of a tautology, it also raises as many questions as it answers – namely, what mode such study should take, or what such study should consist of in methodological terms, and, of course, what can be classified as 'popular', and through what means. These are all questions which we hope this collection can address and further nuance, particularly in terms of what these quandaries mean for Popular Music Studies, and popular music itself more generally, as it looks to the future while also casting a critical eye to its own past.

Unsurprisingly, Cloonan notes, the development of Popular Music Studies is inextricably linked to the politicised rise of popular music itself (2005). Thus, the origins of PMS in the United Kingdom, he suggests, can be traced back to the 1960s and the rise of the Beatles. Certainly, critical treatise on popular music predated the Beatles – Adorno and Horkheimer's analyses of the post-war 'culture industries' laid out vital preconditions for the ways in which scholars have considered pop as a politico-economic force, a 'corporatised and industrialised mode of meaning-making' (Louw 2001, p. 37). Nonetheless, for Cloonan, what is important in this 1960s context is that the band attracted the attention of 'intellectuals' in ways previously unknown in the history of popular music. Via such attempts to engage with the early 1960s mass musical zeitgeist, classical musicology, Cloonan argues, staked a claim to be an integral part of the academic study of popular music and what was to become Popular Music Studies. Even so, popular music was thus initially judged by how far it fitted into a Western canon.

While it did at least put the serious study of popular music on the academic agenda, much of this work now seems dated and reveals the Eurocentric – and we would argue patriarchal – leanings of early Popular Music Studies, a tension with which the academy must still grapple.

The relationship between classical musicology and popular music is hence fraught with difficulty and has been much commented upon. Richard Middleton begins *Reading Pop* (2000) by noting that Popular Music Studies 'has been marked by methodological hesitations which suggest deep-lying doubts about the viability of the enterprise itself' (2000, p. 1). Underpinning this state of affairs, argues Middleton, is an anxiety over what the inculcation of 'pop' into the academy meant for the particular histories of musical scholarship and the cultural rift between 'elite' and 'vernacular' values (2000, p. 1) in analysis which interrogations of popular music might be seen to undermine. Formative popular musicology, Middleton observes, drew on methods which were familiar from existing musicological traditions, where they had been applied to classical repertoires. Such modes struggled to grasp popular texts as they were understood within the context of the cultures in which they were produced. Expanding the disciplinary modes of engaging with the political meanings of popular music, alongside its formal qualities, was therefore a crucial endeavour. Developments in musicology (cf. Kerman, 1980) pioneered themes and perspectives which diversified the methodological tools for an oft-contested 'new' musicology, while the development of British Cultural Studies also offered new methods to the analysis of the texts of popular music.

An early exponent of this broader, interdisciplinary fluidity approach was the late Dave Laing (1969–2019), whose work explored how pop music existed at the intersections of Marxist accounts of culture (1978), semiotics (1985), and policy analysis (1999). Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2002, pp. 7–8) argue that during the 1980s and 1990s, 'a set of key themes and concepts crystallised' in PMS, which were those of musical meaning, studies of audiences, studies in the music industries and questions of place, and an increasing interest in questions of identity. PMS has broadened from the study of texts to the study of the political economy of popular music and various other extra-musical elements. It has also moved from the study of major selling artists to look at the lives of 'ordinary' musicians and fans, alongside questions of practice, context, and cultures (Green et al. 2015).

As the field has unfolded over the last five decades, marginalised voices and perspectives have increasingly made themselves known, offering critical perspectives that challenge the hegemon. Scholars of colour, women, and queer and transgender academics have fought to be heard in a field which too often suffers from the same systemic blank spots and hierarchies afflicting academia more generally (cf. Wald 1997; Taylor 2013). At various junctures, Anglophonic Eurocentrism has been called out for being just that, as Popular Music Studies slowly become institutionalised. Globally focused conferences and journals have also worked to provide a range of fora for these 'other' perspectives, as the parochial

tendencies of fields such as ethnomusicology have also been called to account (c.f. Jackson 2006, Loza 2006). In this way, then, we embark on this edited collection inspired by the call to arms of Catherine M. Appert and Sidra Lawrence, who ask 'What might it mean to radically transform a discipline? Where and how does change begin? What are the strategies and techniques of transformation?' (2020, p. 225).

Such radical transformation is, of course, a complex task requiring a widescale rethinking of the techniques and strategies through which disciplines such as Popular Music Studies imagine, narrativise, and critically reflect upon their histories and futures. The current political climate of 2020 nevertheless provides a timely opportunity for Popular Music Studies to reflect on the role, meaning, and purpose of music amidst this context. To again borrow from Appert and Lawrence, such reimaginings must find footholds from within the academy itself. Disciplinary histories and contemporalities then come into focus as fields grapple with their own compliance in the structural marginalisation of women, LGBTQ+ communities, and people of colour in wider social settings: 'Among the countless moments and movements that have sparked calls for change within academic institutions', Appert and Lawrence argue, '#MeToo provides a timely example of how broad social movements intersect with and affect academic spaces and offers a starting point for exploring the possibilities and pitfalls of calls for transformation within those spaces' (2020, p. 225).

These themes are very much at the heart of this collection. Moreover, we also hope that the discussions broached by the chapters in this book can aid not only in realising Martin Cloonan's call that Popular Music Studies 'should challenge existing industry practices and organisations' (2005), but also in considering how this approach – of challenging the status quo – can be extended to assumptions held by researchers or embedded within the research process itself (Stern 1989). As many of the themes raised in this collection highlight, the mandate that Popular Music Studies should challenge the practices and organisations of pop music, rather than being placed within them, must remain central to the future of our work in this discipline. What these challenges are in 2021 are immediately apparent, as the COVID-19 lockdown has sent the live music sector into an unprecedented downward spiral. The task remains, however, to consider what our responses can be and to ensure that popular music remains a thriving presence in academia and a critic and consciousness of society, industry, and politics more widely, as it looks towards the future.

Looking to the future also prompts the question: what does the 'popular' aspect of pop music itself consist of in 2021? This has been the subject of some academic debate for decades (cf. Middleton 1990; Shuker 1994; Longhurst 1995), with something of a consensus emerging that popular music is defined primarily in terms of its aspiration to find a mass audience – i.e. to be genuinely popular – rather than by any musical properties. Nonetheless, this notion of a 'mass' audience represents particular challenges in the contemporary context for music, when dissemination,

performance, and production models are rapidly changing, as are our definitions of what makes a 'star'. For more downcast critics such as Josh Herr, the current state of the industry tells us that 'popular' music is doomed – not a single album reached platinum status in 2014, the same year streaming experienced an unprecedented boom. For Herr, grim sales data are another sign of a music industry that is changing drastically, and along with it our notion of what makes it means to be popular.

Certainly, on face value, the figures do not look overly positive for the future of the popular music industry as we currently know it. Since 2000, 210 record labels worldwide have been disestablished. Sales of CDs and music DVDs have steadily declined over the past decade, and with them, retailers are experiencing severe precarity. Music venues are struggling with closures forced by climbing rental prices, business rates, noise restrictions, and parliamentary legislature. The UK Live Music Census from 2018 found that a third of all small music venues were 'severely' impacted by increases in business rates (Snapes 2018). In Australia, 176 Sydney music venues closed in the years following the introduction of 'lockout laws' in 2014, which severely restricted mobility in inner-city nightlife hotspots (Taylor 2018). In our own city, Wellington Council's Performing Arts Review from 2016 found that Wellington's reputation as the 'creative capital' was under threat from high venue hire prices, the closure of multiple inner-city venues, and the absence of a mid-size venue (2016). Certainly, these issues will be immeasurably amplified the world over in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Music's environmental impact has also increasingly come into focus. Every year, music festivals in the UK produce around 23,500 tonnes of waste, use 5 million litres of fuel, and emit 20,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide. Recorded music formats such as PVC plastic records take centuries to decompose; the production of modern records currently produces around 1.9 thousand tonnes of CO2 per year (George & McKay 2019), and despite the digitality of streaming, it has a higher long-term environmental cost – George and McKay estimate that 'streaming an album over the internet more than 27 times will likely use more energy than it takes to produce and manufacture the same CD' (2019; see also Devine 2019).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that with the unsustainability, decline, or shifting of the traditional models which had enabled and supported a consolidated 'popular music' market, many critics now argue that we are living in the age of 'post-pop', a term that arises from the assumption that pop music has long come to its end. This of course raises a whole set of related questions on what we ever really meant by 'popular' – popular for who, and to what ends? Rather than buy in to this despondent hand wringing for the past, we argue, there emerges a new opportunity for pop music studies to recognise that the old models by which PMS and the industry at large have gauged popularity need updating, and in their place exists a range of new mechanisms for engaging with what music means, what music does, and what music can be in 2021 and beyond.

There is, in this instance, a watershed moment for pop music studies in how it grapples with the varied forms of music which have emerged from the contemporary political climate and, moreover, how we can take a critically retrospective approach to the developments of popular music over the last few decades. Moreover, where traditional systems for gauging popularity have changed, and the internet has increasingly become a primary incubator for musical artists, practices, and their associated communities, PMS must consider not only how its methods and sites of analysis will expand, but also, crucially, how it can respond to the entanglement of music with what Mihaildis and Viotty have labelled the 'post-fact society' (2017, p. 441). The work in this volume, we hope, can extend a conversation, going into the future, around the need of academia to engage with the nuanced anxieties and tensions that have accompanied the rise of the 'post-truth' paradigm – a resurgence of far-right populism, ecological disaster, online social justice movements, humanitarian crises, and the politics of labour and capitalist systems, to name a few – and, crucially, to consider the role that music is playing within this nexus across multiple contexts.

In the first chapter of the collection, 'Navigating a neoliberal city: Experimental music-making in Aotearoa/New Zealand's "cultural capital"', Geoff Stahl explores how particular discourses play out in relation to two performance venues in Wellington, the country's capital. In examining two sites dedicated to hosting experimental and avant-garde musical performances, Stahl situates these in relation to two discourses that dominate the country's national imaginary: neoliberalism and its DIY ethos, exploring how cultural spaces in Wellington navigate the complex ways these discourses, and their impact on musical practices and the experimental music scene's distinctive cartography, overlap. In the second chapter, Katelyn Barney and Lexine Solomon, in 'Sharing languages through contemporary song in the third space: A case study of intercultural collaboration between Indigenous Australian, Polynesian and Melanesian women', offer a collaborative exploration of perspectives often neglected in the study of popular music and politics – namely those of indigenous women. Through a lyric-focused textual analysis of the works of the Women of AustraNesia, they examine how women use contemporary song to maintain and revive their languages, express their resilience, and highlight their diverse identities. analysed here as expressions of resilience and empowerment.

In 'The personal and the political: African popular music and diasporic heritage in Australia', Bonnie McConnell investigates diasporic heritage and belonging through the lens of contemporary African Australian popular music. The chapter presents a flexible, and sometimes fracturing, notion of African heritage that provides the basis for building local notions of belonging and solidarity that are connected to global discourses on African diasporic culture, against the negative depiction of African diasporic cultures in the mainstream Australian media. Gülüm Şener, in 'Resisting through music under the neoliberal authoritarian regime: Political themes in Turkish rap songs', examines a new rap/hip hop culture

emergent in Turkey as a reaction to the authoritarian regime of the ruling party AKP. Rappers such as Ezhel, KC, Boykot, and Gazapizm, as Şener explores, have criticised police violence, poverty, repression on minority groups, corruption, and violations of human rights amidst a paradigm in which censorship is widespread in Turkey, thus rendering rap music a key space for resistance.

In her chapter, 'Civic imagination through hip hop: The case of a South Korean variety show, *Infinite Challenge*', Jeeyun Baik explores how hip hop can facilitate civic imagination during political upheavals, via a case study of a South Korean variety show *Infinite Challenge* (2005–2018). This chapter examines how *Infinite Challenge* helped re-imagine the political situation of South Korea via the presentation of hip hop as political commentary, considering how civic imagination is fostered via a television format that required participants both to draw on aspects of Koreans historical narratives and to present their themes and values via original rap musical performances. The following chapter, 'Yes indeed: Trap and politics', by Eduardo Barros-Grela, provides an original reading of Spanish trap music and its various political intersections – particularly as they relate to emerging divisive party-politics. Central to this is the political and economic climate of the last few decades, which culminated in an economic crisis and provided the basis for the rise of right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric. As Barros-Grela argues, trap music is the soundtrack of the social consequences of the crisis, where trap occupies a space between party-political delineations, allowing it to function politically in an effective and uniquely *apolitical* way.

In 'Looping alone, together: Music, community, and environmental self-sustainability in Aotearoa/New Zealand', Catherine Hoad and Oli Wilson consider how musical labour and the materiality of music-making can be examined within critiques of contemporary neoliberalist climate change politics. Through a focus on the practice of live looping – i.e. the recording and playback of a piece of music in real time using loop pedals or laptop-based audio interfaces – as it is situated in Aotearoa/New Zealand, they explore how the relationship between looping, ecological sustainability, and self-reliance can be considered within wider neoliberalist approaches to 'green' politics in the performing arts. In '"Half-Moghul, half-Mowgli": Desi hip hop and the representation of South Asian diasporas', Julia Szivak offers a musicological analysis of the work of several *Desi* hip hop artists. Szivak explores how Desi hip hop artists confront Western representations of the South Asian diasporas in their music on the level of both lyrics and instrumentation, arguing that they are working towards establishing what can be seen as a 'Brown Atlantic': a space of diasporic consciousness that counters the mainstream narrative in the age of closing borders.

Ellis Jones, in 'Locating labour subjectivities in contemporary popular music texts', examines the working conditions of contemporary professional musicians, arguing that an empirically and theoretically rigorous conceptualisation of musicians as workers allows for a fresh contribution to the traditional study of popular music texts, wherein pop songs themselves offer models for

self-governance and ruminations on art-versus-commerce tensions. Artur Szarecki, in his chapter 'Beyond hegemony: Siksa and the politics of affect', examines Polish punk artist Siksa's outspoken persona as it operates against the backdrop of culture clashes following the rise of neo-authoritarian, right-wing government in Poland that repeatedly attempted to limit women's rights, sparking mass protests. Here Szarecki argues for a scrutinisation of the political potential of Siska's music in light of its preoccupation with meaning and ideology and attends to the corporeal and affective dimensions of Siska's work.

In '"A message etched on broken ships": Extreme environmentalism for extreme metal?', Ian Collinson examines extreme metal's environmentalist politics via case studies of French death/progressive metal band Gojira and British metalcore band Architects, where he argues that ecometal's attraction to the radical environmental organisation might be understood within the genre's commitment to transgression more generally. In their chapter 'Good citizenship, telethon, and benefit concert: The politics of the achievable', David Baker and Andy Bennett explore a 'less glamourous' political tradition in popular music history – the radiothon, telethon, and benefit concert. Here Baker and Bennett defend the radio/telethon as a pragmatic, goal-oriented political technique which enables the formation of brief but effective affective communities whose price of inclusion is low enough to include 'basically anybody' who seeks involvement.

In 'Solidarity as strategy: Feminism and anti-racism in Swedish popular music', Ann Werner explores the intersections of feminism and anti-racism in popular music via a case study of the Swedish artist Titiyo. In this chapter, Werner examines the political strategies deployed by Titiyo in the context of Swedish popular music and a national revisioning of racism and racist histories in the region in contemporary public discourse. In looking towards alternate articulations of gendered politics in pop, in the following chapter, 'Nostalgia, anti-victim discourse, and neoliberalism in early 1990s pop: The postfeminist approach of Wilson Phillips', Saesha Senger offers a musical and lyrical analysis of the early work of the group Wilson Phillips, examining how, with the continued influence of the New Right in the 1990s, these songs articulated the confluence of the shadow of the 1960s with the principles of self-reliance and self-centeredness in contemporary American music and politics – elements of the musical and political past that remain relevant in the present day.

In his chapter, 'White skin, black masks: Die Antwoord, post-apartheid South Africa, and the hip hop industry', Seth Cosimini uses a case study of South African act Die Antwoord to propose a shift in critical attention to the use of hip hop music, and American blackness, as vehicles to remake non-black cultural identity that ultimately reproduces the violent and profitable equation of blackness with abjection. In '"I am the cause to all your problems": Brand New, tattoo coverups, and (im)permanence', Paige Klimentou stages a critical investigation of the ways bodies can create (temporary) records of music scenes through affective, ephemeral archiving. By discussing the intersections between music fandom, tattoos, and (im)

permanence, and specifically the process of covering up tattoos based on bands that have perpetrated sexual abuse or misconduct, Klimentou considers how these processes affect living, bodily archives. In the final chapter, 'Neon Nazis: A fascist foray into vaporwave's synaesthetic lifeworld', Alican Koc examines the rise of 'fashwave' (fascist vaporwave) in the context of the late 2010s. Here, Koc questions what happens to the time-honoured relationship between extremity in content and musical form when it takes a postmodern nosedive into the surreal troll-scape of internet forums questioning what, exactly, this might sound like.

The work in this volume canvasses a wide array of geographic locations, political contexts, genres, artists, practices, and cultures. In doing so, this collection explores popular music's political implications across a series of sites, spaces, and histories, and the sometimes subtle, sometimes profound gradations with which these impact upon constructions of identity, community, and practice in distinct locations and ideological epochs. Such work, we argue, can remind us of the need for PMS not just to exist within industry practices and organisations, but also to challenge and change them. With this collection, our hope is that such challenges emerge not only through these critical engagements with the relationship between music, meaning, and culture, in advance of a future which increasingly looks marked by shifting understandings of what it means to be popular, and ongoing navigations of the rapidly changing industry models of production, performance, and dissemination. It also means turning a critical eye towards the field itself, to ask what kinds of studies of popular music we are advancing, in support of what industries, and in support of what kinds of pedagogical frameworks and knowledges.

To draw towards any kind of conclusion, then, it remains pertinent for Popular Music Studies, and indeed this collection, to be reminded that what ultimately connects people across the field is a concern with questions about the relationship between music meaning, political economies, social power, and cultural value (Hesmondhalgh et al. 2002, p. 2). At its best, PMS offers all citizens the chance to understand their world better and, more importantly, to try to change it (Cloonan, 2005). As this collection demonstrates, engaging with popular music in the current political paradigm – wherein music scenes and industries face their #metoo moments; where music is entangled with the realities of the climate disaster, and where music's intersections with the online has seen a rise in reactionary, far-right music – is crucial. In the immediate present, the ability of live music and the workforce which supports it to recover from this period is also of urgent concern. The mixing of pop with politics offers us a way through which to map the uses of musical texts as political and ideological resources, to continue to engage with and analyse the political economy of music and music-making, and to be self-critical and self-aware performers, fans, and consumers alike.

Finally, to quote from Cloonan, Popular Music Studies offer resources of hope (2005). Certainly, as we write this introduction, cities and countries around the

world have adopted differing strategies to keep the global pandemic at bay, some quite laissez-faire and others much more stringent, where hope seems a rather predictable and, dare we say, naff commodity: as we face the unsurety of the post-pandemic world, it is nonetheless vital.

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1

NAVIGATING A NEOLIBERAL CITY

Experimental music-making in Aotearoa/ New Zealand's 'cultural capital'

Geoff Stahl

Introduction

While COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on live music scenes and the venues which serve them since it first appeared, prior to that many cities around the globe were already witnessing a precipitous decline in live performance spaces (see, for example, Whiting and Carter, 2016; Webster et al., 2018; Green and Bennett, 2019; van der Hoeven and Hitters, 2020). The disappearance of live performance spaces, though for reasons that may vary in cities around the world, often includes some combination of lock-in laws, rent increases, noise control issues, gentrification and/ or policies, and militating against noisy or aggressively drunk patrons. A number of these cities have been home to well-known and highly regarded musical cultures, recognised locally and many internationally, and some have drawn on this aspect of their cultural life to class themselves as 'creative cities' and, more recently, 'music cities'. In select cities, music scenes are mobilised as a semiotic resource, a sign and index of urban vitality – taking the form, on the one hand, of policy buzzword and, on the other, a lived experience for those who create and populate these cultural spaces. The latter generate the creative and social energies urban cultural policy makers reference as part of a suite of strategies aimed at promotion, branding, development, and investment, targeting not only local interests but also the lucrative tourist and real estate investment markets, often creating an adversarial relationship with those directly involved in the very scene being packaged and promulgated. In this fraught context, as Janet Wolff reminds us, it is important to consider artistic practice as multidimensional, as 'situated practice, the mediation of aesthetic codes, what Bourdieu calls the "cultural unconscious," and ideological, social and material processes and institutions' (Wolff 1993, p. 137).

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