

# POPULAR MUSIC MATTERS

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF

# SIMON FRITH



Edited by  
**LEE MARSHALL**  
and **DAVE LAING**

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2014

ROUTLEDGE



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Essays in Honour of Simon Frith

Edited by

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# General Editors' Preface

Popular musicology embraces the field of musicological study that engages with popular forms of music, especially music associated with commerce, entertainment and leisure activities. The Ashgate Popular and Folk Music series aims to present the best research in this field. Authors are concerned with criticism and analysis of the music itself, as well as locating musical practices, values and meanings in cultural context. The focus of the series is on popular music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with a remit to encompass the entirety of the world's popular music.

Critical and analytical tools employed in the study of popular music are being continually developed and refined in the twenty-first century. Perspectives on the transcultural and intercultural uses of popular music have enriched understanding of social context, reception and subject position. Popular genres as distinct as reggae, township, bhangra, and flamenco are features of a shrinking, transnational world. The series recognises and addresses the emergence of mixed genres and new global fusions, and utilises a wide range of theoretical models drawn from anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, media studies, semiotics, postcolonial studies, feminism, gender studies and queer studies.

Stan Hawkins, Professor of Popular Musicology, University of Oslo &  
Derek B. Scott, Professor of Critical Musicology, University of Leeds

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# Notes on Contributors

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**Sarah Baker** is an associate professor in cultural sociology at Griffith University. She is currently chief investigator on the Australian Research Council Discovery Project, 'Do-it-Yourself Popular Music Archives: An International Comparative Study of Volunteer-run Institutions that Preserve Popular Music's Material Culture' (2013–15). Her publications include *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (with David Hesmondhalgh, 2011) and the edited collection *Redefining Mainstream Popular Music* (with Andy Bennett and Jodie Taylor, 2013).

**Barbara Bradby** is a sociologist who has worked on issues of gender and popular music, including how gender subjectivities are articulated and divided in the musical arrangements of lyrics. More recently, she has focused on what makes music 'live', and on interactions between performers and audiences in live events.

**Robert Christgau** is the dean of American rock critics, an accolade earned over five decades of reviewing, notably at the *Village Voice*. His books include *Any Old Way You Choose It* (revised edition 2000) and *Grown Up All Wrong* (1998). Since 2005 he has taught at New York University.

**Martin Cloonan** is Professor of Popular Music Politics at the University of Glasgow. He has worked with Simon Frith on a number of projects including a history of live music in the UK and a Manifesto for the Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2011. His latest project is a history of the UK's Musicians Union ([www.muhistory.com](http://www.muhistory.com)).

**Andrew Goodwin** was a professor of media studies at the University of California, Berkeley. With Simon Frith, he edited *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (1990). In 1992 he published *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, a pioneering study of music video. He died in 2013.

**Gestur Gudmundsson** is a professor in the sociology of education at Iceland's Pedagogic University. Apart from recent sociology text books in Icelandic he is

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**Michael L. Jones** is Programme Director for the MA in Music Industry Studies at the Institute of Popular Music at the University of Liverpool. His recently-reformed band Latin Quarter enjoyed chart success in the UK and Europe from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s.

**Dave Laing** is Honorary Research Fellow at the Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool and an editor of the journal *Popular Music History*. His books include *The Sound of Our Time* (1969), *One Chord Wonders* (1985), *The Marxist Theory of Art* (1987) and *Buddy Holly* (2010).

**Ulf Lindberg** holds a PhD in Comparative Literature, and was formerly a senior lecturer at Malmö University, Sweden. He is the author/co-author of several works on youth culture, popular music and literature, including *The Rock Text: Words, Music and Meaning* (1995, in Swedish), *In Garageland: Rock, Youth and Modernity* (1995) and *Rock Criticism from the Beginning: Amusers, Bruisers and Cool-Headed Cruisers* (2005).

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**Lee Marshall** is a reader in sociology at the University of Bristol. His research interests centre on issues concerning authorship, stardom and intellectual property, with a particular focus on the music industry. Previous books include *Bootlegging: Romanticism and Copyright in the Music Industry* (2005), *Bob Dylan: The Never Ending Star* (2007), *Music and Copyright* (second edition, with Simon Frith, 2004) and *The International Recording Industries* (2012).

**Peter J. Martin** graduated from Edinburgh University, and received MA(Econ) and PhD degrees from the University of Manchester, where he taught for many years. He was Head of Sociology at Manchester, and Dean of Undergraduate Studies in the former Faculty of Social Sciences and Law. Among his publications

are two books on the sociology of music, *Sounds and Society* (1995) and *Music and the Sociological Gaze* (2006). He is now a freelance author and musician.

**Morten Michelsen** is an associate professor in the musicology section at the University of Copenhagen. He is co-author of *Rock Criticism from the Beginning: Amusers, Bruisers and Cool-Headed Cruisers* (2005), co-editor of *Rock in Denmark* (2013) and chair of the European Sound Studies Association. He is currently leading a research project on music and radio.

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**Keith Negus** is Director of the Popular Music Research Unit, Goldsmiths, University of London. He has written books on Bob Dylan, the music industry and creativity, and articles on various topics including musicians on television, globalisation, narrative and the popular song, music genres, and cultural intermediaries. He is currently researching 'Digitisation and the Politics of Copying in Popular Music Culture' with John Street and Adam Behr. He is also working with Pete Astor, researching and writing about songwriting.

**Jon Savage** is an author and broadcaster. His books include *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (1991) and *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875–1945* (2008). He has written several films, including *The Brian Epstein Story* (1998), *Joy Division* (2007) and *Teenage* (2014).

**John Street** is a professor of politics at the University of East Anglia. Among his most recent publications are *Music and Politics* (2012) and (with Sanna Inthorn and Martin Scott) *From Entertainment to Citizenship: Politics and Popular Culture* (2013). He is a member of the editorial group of *Popular Music*.

**Philip Tagg** is an ex-composer and musician turned musicologist in both the euroclassical and popular fields. Between 1971 and 2009 he taught full-time at universities in Sweden, Canada and the UK. In 1981 he co-founded IASPM and in 1991 he initiated work on EPMOW. Now retired, he continues to write and to produce his 'edutainment' videos.

**Sarah Thornton** is the author of *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1995), *Seven Days in the Art World* (2008) and *33 Artists in 3 Acts* (2014). A lapsed academic, Thornton was the chief writer on contemporary art for *The Economist* and now writes for a range of publications.

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# Preface: An Essay on Journalism

Robert Christgau

In his contribution to my own festschrift a decade ago, my friend Simon Frith, suspecting that some part of me still pined for the academic path I'd forsworn, wondered whether the 'epic energy' I expended on album reviewing was altogether well-spent. Fondly and kindly, to be sure, he compared my journalism to the outpourings of a soapbox preacher in Hyde Park: 'I sometimes wonder whether the people steadfastly ignoring the promise of revelation are really worth the faith that's being placed in them.' That 'sometimes' is crucial, transforming a gibe that might otherwise seem kinda snobby from the socialist who invented the Mercury Prize into the reasonable doubt any informed democrat feels when the citizenry fails to pursue its best interests. And of course, as Simon must understand, my 'faith' is strictly theoretical. Any professional writer who hopes to write well imagines a best reader at whom to aim his or her words and hopes this figment proves credible enough to convince a few publishers. Find enough of those readers out in the world and it's easy enough to ignore the louts any honest critic is sure to piss off, often at the imagined behest of said readers.

Simon is my old friend but no longer my close friend – for geographical reasons exacerbated by the late parenthood we share, I've only seen him two or three times in the past few decades. So when I imagine his best reader, I'm recalling the guy I spent time with in the 1970s and '80s, when the Frith who Wikipedia refers to as a 'former rock critic' balanced journalism and academia like no music specialist except maybe Jim/James Miller in the States. Back then he published two books. One was *The Sociology of Rock*, which I know in a substantially revised US version from Random House's Pantheon imprint as *Sound Effects*. Ideal reader-wise, this is where the academic tries, as I wrote in my not-quite-rave for *The Village Voice*, 'to amaze intellectuals who know virtually nothing about rock and roll' yet also 'show some new steps to rock aficionados who know very little about anything else'. The readers who mixed and matched these contrasting possibilities could be aggregated, theoretically once again, into what I designated 'the American semipopular audience'. Published in 1981, *Sound Effects* quickly became a standard text in a field that hadn't yet generated much coursework. Sadly, it is no longer in print.

For a few examples of why it damn well should be, let me call attention to both the thought and the prose in a section devoted to words – that is, lyrics, about which Frith was smarter earlier than just about anyone in rock criticism.

A song is always a performance and song words are always spoken out—vehicles for the voice. The voice can also use nonverbal devices to make

its points—accents, sighs, emphases, hesitations, changes of tone. Song words, in short, work as *speech*, as structures of sound that are *direct* signs of emotion and marks of character; songs are more like plays than poems.

And then, later and even bigger:

Pop lyricists work on the ordinariness of language. They make our most commonplace words and phrases suddenly seem full of sly jokes and references. ... Their songs are about words: they give us new ways to mouth the commonplaces of daily discourse.

I hedged my rave for reasons of style. ‘Except when the ideas are extraordinary’, I carped, Frith ‘settles for language worn dull by overuse’, causing ‘a barely perceptible fatigue’. In a random graph on page 97, for instance, I find as I read today ‘important effect’, ‘spread rock appeal’, ‘emergence of a youth market’, and so on. But in the passage I just quoted, where the ideas are extraordinary, note how the brief declaratives, the dash clauses, and such non-Latinates as ‘sighs’, ‘jokes’ and ‘mouth’ resist social science boilerplate. And note too that just as Derridean etc. jargon is beginning to inundate what the academy calls critical theory, Frith sticks to an obdurately English plainstyle that even by academic standards, as I observed, ‘always achieves lucidity and a serviceable grace’.

Frith’s stylistic principles in the 1980s are there for the parsing in 1988’s *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop*. Published by Routledge, a go-to trade house for left-leaning professors who imagine readers outside the university, it got less ink than *Sound Effects*, and is now further out of print. Formally, it’s highly unusual: a collection that mixes seven properly footnoted scholarly essays, four of which run over 20 closely printed pages, with 27 journalistic pieces, most of them two or three pages and none more than five. This is not *Sound Effects*, where Frith wrote for semipopular intellectuals broadly conceived and blended his tone accordingly. Here the scholarly essays are designed for scholars, for whom essays are jobs to be buckled down to – not, to coin a phrase, reading for pleasure. But this is hardly to suggest that the journalism is all light entertainment, or even succinctly described, sharp-witted, thought-provoking concert and record reviews.

That’s mostly because ‘journalism’ can rope in so many different audiences. Not only is *Marxism Today* not the *Sunday Times*, but the punk-intellectual *New York Rocker* isn’t the world-music-plus *Collusion*, where the five-page essays on Gracie Fields and Ennio Morricone first appeared. Nor is *New Society*, aesthetically alert but soberly centre-left, *The Village Voice*, where the arts-covering back of the book was more radical than the politics-covering front of the book and the radicals made such a principle of hedonism that no one up front took them seriously. Talk about music for pleasure – the *Voice*’s arts coverage, especially its music coverage, was all about the four clarion words that end *Sound Effects*, in my opinion the most important Frith ever wrote: ‘the struggle for fun’.

As the *Voice's* music editor, I conceived a monthly column called Britbeat for Simon in 1984, but having moved on to late parenthood in 1985, I oversaw only one of the seven Britbeats that appear in *Music for Pleasure*. (I resumed editing him later, after the collection was assembled.) So I've got half a right to read them consecutively and conclude that he's never written better. These are two-pagers, exemplifying what the great American book reviewer John Leonard once called 'the 800-word mind'. But they range further than Leonard's dense, well-informed little pieces.

It helps that Frith, whose Anglocentrism is taken for granted in the UK, feels obliged to explicate context to English speakers with scant knowledge of British culture, occasioning deft lead generalisations like 'In Britain 1984 turned out to be the year of the miners' strike and Frankie Goes to Hollywood' and 'The central myth of British pop is style'. But as these sentences suggest, what's really happening here is that Frith is seldom just a reviewer – he writes criticism as an academically trained sociologist. He's far more sophisticated, responsive and fond of art than most sociologists. But he evokes musical details primarily to illustrate larger points and shows little interest in limning public or private canons – his introduction reports that having celebrated some of the records he described, and with palpable pleasure too, he never played them again.

As I've said, the other thing that distinguishes Frith from the vast preponderance of sociologists, even those who specialise in fieldwork, is the plainness of his style. And by journalistic standards – especially those of rock criticism, with its slang, its wisecracks, its look-ma-no-manners panache – his writing is quiet and unshowy, attracting attention with dry wit and the subtle crackle of ideas that come faster than his tone and syntax prepare you for. Yet though a sociologist's vision plus an Orwellian assumed modesty are a recipe for great journalism, that was not Simon's choice. Just as I was always going to be a journalist, he was always going to be an academic. Without discussing the matter with him, I always assumed this was in part an economic decision. Where his American counterpart Miller eventually opted for academia from a prestige gig at *Newsweek*, Simon plied a profession he loved and had a knack for as he published far more journalism than *Music for Pleasure* could hold as a freelancer, which was a crap job even then. Journalism may have added an exotic touch to his academic profile, and extra income is always nice, but though we never discussed that either, I always assumed he did it for love – not love for the sound of his own voice, but love for the best reader in his head.

Because journalism ropes in so many different audiences, generalising Frith's best reader is tough. At *Marxism Today*, *Collusion*, the *Voice* and even *New Society*, he could wave his leftism high if need be. But submitting the feminist 'Breaking the Mould' and especially the anti-militarist 'And Now, the Message' to the *Sunday Times* typified the moral commitment of a writer who expects his readers to consider his political ideas whether they end up agreeing or not. Similarly, his *Voice* and *New York Rocker* pieces, while indulging Yank ignorance, make no tonal concession to the venues' hubba-hubba. They're calm,

swift and idea-filled, although hardly impersonal, showcasing Frith's skill at humanising his pronouncements with diffident first-person observation, reflection and reminiscence. Like most of those who want to write well, Frith imagines an intelligent reader who cares deeply about his chosen subject. But unlike the average rock fan, this reader has an active interest in rock's social and political ramifications, and in some cases those ramifications, rather than any fandom, are the main reason he or she is reading. And although Frith is considerate about cognitive dissonance – readier than many writers to explain himself fully – he feels little obligation to entertain. He certainly wants his language to have some life to it. But he leaves the new ways of mouthing the commonplaces of daily discourse to the songwriters he admires.

Read today, *Music for Pleasure* has a leave-taking air. The introduction avers: 'I was surprised in making this selection to find that on the whole I was more intrigued by the old journalism than by the "lasting" scholarship.' Yet it also makes clear that Simon has lost his enthusiasm for his whole conception of 'rock' as the masculinism of its 'authenticity' muscled up and its pretence to political effectiveness wheezed on as if Margaret Thatcher didn't hold the winning hand. In the anti-'rockist' battle that began in the 1980s, Frith's sympathies are with pop, which is one reason he's delighted to reprint pieces about records no one remembers if they noticed them in the first place. And soon afterward he will abandon journalism to devote himself full-time to scholarly enterprises that empower him to effect major changes within the academy. He also achieves a cultural stature, including his continuing prominence in the Mercury Prize setup, unavailable to all but very few journalists – none of them rock critics unless you count our mutual friend Greil Marcus his coequal.

Just as Simon wonders about my path, I wonder about his. Not that either of us believes the other made a mistake. But our ideas do, inevitably, differ. More influenced by the pop artists than by folk music or SDS, I'd never fully bought the myth of rock 'authenticity'. So I didn't get so disillusioned in the 1980s and found it easy to ignore the silly rockism debate – especially with America's rock underground far more vital than its British counterpart and hip-hop right there to absorb the frustrated energy of any rockist with a free mind and an ass that would follow. And if the Warholian in me was sceptical as well about 'lasting value' and for that matter 'rock poetry', in those matters experience – life experience, and also professional experience – taught me different. More than Simon, I became convinced that old records retain and often gain aesthetic vitality, sometimes because they aimed to, sometimes as a direct result of their single-minded frivolity. And although I still go along with Simon's post-verbal vision of lyrics, the way lyricists tweak 'the ordinariness of language' has seeped into the way I prepare words for the page. Whatever rock criticism's limitations as a way to write and to make a living, which have become all too vivid in the digital era, it remains an excellent place for writers who hope to write well to honour and exploit the vernacular. Simon deserves all the recognition he's enjoyed and more. But I'm still kind of sorry his best reader now resides solely in the academy.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Dave Laing and Lee Marshall

Any attempt to count the number of references to individual authors in the burgeoning field of popular music studies would be certain to find that Simon Frith is the scholar with the greatest number of citations. While in itself such a statistic is no more of a definitive guide to influence than positions in the pop charts, few would deny Frith's centrality to the field. His career as a writer and teacher has been coterminous with its birth and growth, and the announcement of his intention to retire as Tovey Professor of Music at Edinburgh University – though not, we are sure, as an author and commentator – seemed an ideal moment to pay tribute to, and take stock of, his contribution to our understanding of popular music, its industry, its audiences and the plethora of discourses around it.

Born in 1946 into a comfortable middle-class family, his younger brother Fred, the guitarist, has described him as from an early age 'a total pop fanatic ... so I could hear Johnny Ray and whatever was going on in the pop world'. Simon Frith attended The Leys, a boarding school in Cambridge where he shared a room with 'a boy who played Jerry Lee Lewis non-stop' – this was not the musicologist Philip Tagg, who was a contemporary at The Leys. At school Simon also discovered the world of social science, through the weekly magazine *New Society*.

Between 1964 and 1967, Simon studied at Oxford University, gaining a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Although he left his records at home on starting at Oxford, he rekindled his interest in pop by contributing several articles to the student magazine *Isis*, notably an interview with Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. This was followed by a two-year stint in the sociology department at the University of California at Berkeley, where he registered as a doctoral student. Back in England, he taught at a teachers' training college in Yorkshire before gaining his first university post, as a lecturer in sociology at the University of Warwick, where he was to remain until 1990. While working as a full-time academic at Warwick, Frith also maintained a career as an influential and highly respected rock journalist, writing for a range of music publications as well as more generalist newspapers and magazines. Further details of this 'double life' are outlined in Dave Laing's contribution to this volume.

Frith departed Warwick in 1990, when he was appointed to a professorship in literature at the John Logie Baird Centre, a research unit jointly managed by the universities of Strathclyde and Glasgow. From here, Frith moved to a professorship in media studies at another Scottish university, Stirling. Finally, he became the Tovey Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh from 2006 until his retirement

from full time academia in 2013. This peripatetic academic career is not especially unusual. What is notable, though, is the range of disciplines to which his various job titles refer. He has moved from a post as a sociologist, to a professorship in literature, another in media studies and finally, coming home perhaps, to a job in music.

This varied nomenclature tells us something about the nature of the field to which Frith is so central. While ‘popular music studies’ has certainly consolidated over the last decade or so, it remains a fairly fragmented area of study. Intellectually, it retains something of a magpie nature, borrowing from many different disciplines and acting as a meeting place for scholars – and practitioners – of varied backgrounds. In a recent contribution to an (as yet) unpublished symposium involving board members of the journal *Popular Music*, Simon offered his view on whether popular music studies should be considered an academic discipline:

(a) popular music studies is not a discipline. (b) a discipline is an academic subject with an agreed conceptual framework and a methodology. (c) popular music is studied by people with a variety of disciplinary approaches, that is a variety of concepts and methodologies. (d) popular music studies is thus by its nature multi-disciplinary; it involves conversations between people from a variety of disciplines.

To illustrate this, he pointed out that ‘for *Performing Rites* ... I read philosophers, musicologists, literary critics, sociologists, historians, linguists, political scientists, anthropologists and more’. To this list one must add music industry professionals, institutions, and music journalists for Frith has always valued the insights offered by those working in less rarefied areas of popular music commentary. This reflects not only his earlier career as a music journalist but also that he is a sociologist by trade, a fact that he has reiterated from time to time, by doing so distinguishing himself both from the musicological and cultural studies approaches to the study of popular music.

Institutionally, too, popular music retains something of a fugitive or nomadic status as an object of study in academia (and especially in Britain). It is only in the past decade or so that this area of study has become widely integrated into university curricula, most often in departments of music that had previously focused almost exclusively on the Western classical repertoire. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the opportunity to study popular music in higher education, again especially in Britain, was very much dependent on the enthusiasm or tenacity of individual teachers who fought for the inclusion of music in undergraduate degree courses, sometimes in music, or social science, or media and communications, and occasionally in American studies or literature departments. Simon Frith has been a key figure in this process. The contributions to this book pay tribute, directly or indirectly, to the wide range of influential and inspirational work that Frith has produced since the early 1970s, but here we would like to recognise Simon’s institutional/organisational efforts in the development of popular music studies.

He was an early member of IASPM (the International Association for the Study of Popular Music), playing a leading role in establishing and organising the

UK and Ireland branch. Frith was also a long-standing member of the editorial group of the journal *Popular Music*. From the 1990s, he led wide-ranging research programmes in media and in the analysis of the live music business. In a wider public arena, he has been the chair of the judges for the Mercury Music Prize since its inception in 1992. Less formally, Simon has provided advice and support for new university degree courses in or involving popular music, as well as supervising numerous doctoral theses and examining them in even greater numbers. Even in retirement, he continues to take a leading role at the interface of academic research with the music industry, at a time when British funding agencies regard the 'impact' of research findings as paramount.

### **The Structure of the Book**

Selecting which authors to invite to contribute to this collection was much like the pleasurable agony of making a compilation tape. Initially, our list of possibilities continually expanded as we thought of people who would be good or who we couldn't possibly leave out. In the end, our first list had an almost unlimited number of names, all of whom, we felt, fitted into that 'you gotta hear this' category with which any music fan will be familiar. Then came the difficult task of whittling this list of indispensables down to something more manageable. Our goal from the outset was to emphasise writers who had a personal and/or professional connection to Simon, and/or those who addressed significant themes in Simon's writings. This was not particularly helpful in the process of whittling.

Eventually, we reduced our list to a manageable number of potential contributors, and it is a measure of the respect that Simon has that, despite the unreasonable timescale we offered our contributors, everyone we asked was keen to be involved. While authors were welcome to engage explicitly with particular aspects of Frith's work, we specifically instructed that they did not have to write a chapter 'about Frith'. We did not intend to produce a collection of critical analyses of Frith's work, partly in order to avoid repetition but mainly because this seemed an inappropriate way to address the nature of that work which, more often than not, gently probes and coaxes rather than outlining models or systematic theories. We were confident that Frith's work is so wide-ranging and that the selected authors engaged with that work sufficiently that, whatever they wrote, it would be suitable for this collection. We remain confident that this has turned out to be the case: while there are chapters that provide an overview of aspects of Frith's career, or that explicitly engage with one of Frith's publications, there are also chapters that do not explicitly refer to Frith yet are quite Frithian in nature or easy to relate to Frith's key ideas.

Where we did offer guidance and what, ultimately, shaped our decisions over who to invite, was with regard to areas that should be covered. From the outset we envisaged including material that reflected the different dimensions of Frith's career – obviously as a critic as well as an academic, but also as an academic

whose role has extended beyond the academy, engaging with the formation of music industry policy in Scotland and perennial chair of the Mercury Music Prize – as well as the trajectory of Frith’s intellectual journey, which we have broadly – and crudely – characterised as beginning in the more conventional sociological territory of institutional and ideological analysis of rock before moving on to more focused consideration of issues concerning aesthetics, taste and value. In the end, we used these guiding principles to structure the book, which contains three parts: ‘Sociology and Industry’, ‘Frith and His Career’ and ‘Aesthetics and Values’. The allocation of chapters could be considered arbitrary, however, as most of them could easily have been included in at least one other part. The fragility of these categorisations is as good a reflection of Frith’s career as anything else in the book but we will now try to explain our running order.

While even in his later career Frith has reiterated the importance of Marxism to his overall approach, his work had more of an explicit recognition of class early in his career, both his PhD research on working-class education in the North of England, his empirical research for *The Sociology of Rock* and his early publications on the middle-class nature of ideas about the ‘rock community’. This collection thus begins, in Part I, with a contribution by Barbara Bradby considering the relationship between popular music and class today. Specifically, Bradby argues that popular music is one of the few public arenas in which working class-ness continues to be valued and to contribute to discourses of value and authenticity. This is supported by an analysis of how middle-class musicians are reported in the British and Irish press and also by a discussion of how class is represented in UK reality TV music shows.

The next two chapters, in differing ways, focus on a cornerstone of Frith’s work, the music industry. Sarah Baker’s chapter, providing the kind of empirical sociology Frith has always championed, discusses the conditions of working musicians in Iceland. Based on interviews with 36 musicians and music industry workers, Baker describes how, for the majority of Icelandic musicians, the idea of making money from music is an impossible dream. While some of the circumstances described are affected by specific issues caused by the geographic remoteness of Iceland, and by its central role in the financial crisis of 2008, the experiences described also reflect the changing nature of the music industry over the last two decades or so. The nature of these changes is discussed in Mike Jones’ contribution to this volume, although he suggests that, particularly as far as musicians are concerned, the changes may not be as radical as is often imagined. Taking as his starting point Frith’s 2000 essay, ‘Music Industry Research: Where Now? Where Next?’, Jones’ characterisation of the contemporary music industry offers an important antidote to technologically-determinist and utopian claims that the balance of power in the recording industry has radically altered because of the internet.

The final chapter in the part ‘Sociology and Industry’, by Lee Marshall, also considers the impact of recent technological changes, though this time in relation to music consumption. Marshall considers how the emergence of cloud-based

streaming services such as Spotify and Deezer may affect the nature of record collecting. While Frith has not written on record collecting directly, preferring to focus on more mainstream forms of consumption, Marshall's chapter touches a well-worn theme in Frith's writing – the way that technological changes affect music consumption and production – and questions how, in the future, we will make personal sense of music that we will access but not own.

Part II more explicitly focuses on Frith's work and his career. It begins with a chapter by Dave Laing offering an overview of the several dimensions of Frith's career, drawing on some of his lesser-known writings and activities. The chapter also provides an outline of what Laing calls the 'Ideology and Polemic' that he argues have marked Frith's work, including his fondness for the idea of 'low theory'. The following two chapters, by Martin Cloonan and Peter Martin, more explicitly focus on the nature of Frith's intellectual approach. In his introduction to his 'career retrospective', *Taking Popular Music Seriously*, Frith writes that his 'approach to music was influenced in equal part by Marxism and symbolic interactionism'. Here we have a chapter on each. Firstly, Cloonan offers an analysis of the political dimensions of Frith's work, focusing not only on Frith's Marxist heritage but also on the inherently political nature of popular music studies – as a challenge to established cultural hierarchies – and the explicitly political nature of the later part of Frith's career, in which he has been involved in the creation of music policy in Scotland. Martin's chapter, meanwhile, discusses Frith's debt to symbolic interactionism, explaining why this approach is valuable to those studying music and countering some common criticisms of it.

Cloonan's discussion of Frith's engagement with music policy highlights one of the ways in which, throughout his career, Frith has not remained bound to any ivory tower. While issues of 'impact' and 'public engagement' are contemporary – and politically loaded – *bon mots* within British academia, Frith has always been as active outside the academy as inside. Most obvious, of course, was the continuation of his career as a critic once he moved into academia. The final chapter in this part, by Ulf Lindberg, Gestur Gudmundsson, Morten Michelsen and Hans Weisethaunet, provides a detailed analysis of Frith's criticism and his career as a critic.

As well as inviting conventional full-length chapters featuring academic analysis of various topics, we were also keen to cover lesser-known (more specifically, lesser-covered) aspects of Simon's career. We thus invited a small number of shorter, more personal pieces covering Simon's career as a critic (from fellow critic, Jon Savage), his role as an editor of influential film and television journal *Screen* (from Karen Lury), his role as the chair of the Mercury Music Prize (from the director of the prize, Kevin Milburn) and his role as a PhD supervisor (from a former student, Sarah Thornton). These 'short take' pieces are also included in Part II. Two further short pieces that, in different ways, combine an appreciation of Simon Frith's intellectual contribution and his personal qualities bookend the chapters in this collection: a preface by the eminent American critic Robert Christgau and an afterword by Andrew Goodwin, co-editor of two of Simon's edited volumes.

Part III of the book is titled 'Aesthetics and Values'. The emergence of a nascent popular music studies in the 1980s has sometimes been characterised as part of a broader shift to postmodernist-influenced cultural studies that rejected ideas of good and bad in favour of populist discourses of value. Frith explicitly criticised this approach in a 1986 article, 'The Good, the Bad and the Indifferent', in which he argues that popular music listeners routinely make distinctions between good and bad music and, as such, scholars of popular music need to consider these discourses of value. Doing so, however, requires an engagement with the thing that listeners are discussing – 'the music itself'. As a long-established rock critic, Frith was at an advantage in being able to write about music, but the formation of IASPM and the publication of the journal *Popular Music* were in part attempts to create dialogue between those scholars who had traditionally focused on musical texts – the musicologists – and those who had traditionally focused on musical contexts – the sociologists. The first chapter in this part, by perhaps the musicologist whose career most clearly parallels Frith's, Philip Tagg, discusses the challenge of writing about music, providing a historical explanation for the centrality of the printed score to Western music culture and its limitations for helping us to understand how people make sense of popular music. The second chapter in this part, from a very different approach but asking a similar question about 'what is music?', is written by Antoine Hennion and discusses how ideas of performativity in the sociology of music can be used both to critique the sociology of art's tendency to treat the work of art as a fixed object and to temper discourses that exaggerate the radical dimensions of digital culture's participatory nature.

The ideas outlined in 'The Good, the Bad and the Indifferent' would eventually come to fruition in Frith's 1996 book, *Performing Rites*. Roughly midway between these two points, Frith became chair of the Mercury Music Prize, the annual music prize awarded to the best British album. John Street's contribution to this volume discusses the prize, not only in connection to *Performing Rites* but also in relation to how prizes such as the Mercury construct discourses of value and how they may differ from commercial success or more commercially-oriented prizes. Street concludes that while all arts prizes are in some sense political, the fact that the jurists of the Mercury Prize deliberate rather than vote makes the political processes involved even more significant.

The final two chapters in the book are written by two sociologists who have successfully incorporated 'writing about music' into their sociological projects. The first is a piece co-written by Keith Negus and songwriter and musician Pete Astor. Using as a springboard one of Frith's most widely cited articles, 'Why Do Songs Have Words?', Negus and Astor argue that, in popular music analysis, more attention needs to be paid to the process of songwriting and the intentions of songwriters. Their chapter thus considers some of the ways in which songwriters have discussed the importance of lyrics in the process of songwriting. Jason Toynbee, meanwhile, offers a somewhat pessimistic dissection of popular music, arguing that it has become 'moribund and self-referential'. Toynbee's analysis ties aesthetic form to social and historical transformation, returning us to Frith's

roots in Marxism. This chapter thus reiterates the porous nature of the boundaries between sociology and aesthetics; it could uncontroversially have featured in either Part I or Part III. We positioned it here because of its conclusion: while we are not convinced that Simon would necessarily agree with Toynbee's portrayal of artistic decline, we are sure that he would approve of using James Brown as a call to arms.

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PART I  
Sociology and Industry