

Book Reviews

Ragging It: Getting Ragtime into History (and Some History into Ragtime)

H. LORING WHITE

iUniverse, Lincoln, NE, 2005

419 pp.

The title of this book summarizes its intent—to draw a connection between ragtime and the historical events and cultural attitudes that prevailed during the period when ragtime dominated popular music. Commonly known as the “Progressive Era,” the years preceding World War I were characterized by reform movements, hopes for a better future, and a belief that social problems could be corrected through government action and legislative reform. A spirit of optimism permeated the culture, and ragtime music embodied that spirit. “What ragtime did was to interact with culture and the conditions of human life. It reinforced the outlook and attitudes of society, and it reflected them back into the culture” (2).

White begins by conjecturing as to why so little has been written about ragtime as it relates to its historical period, even though it clearly dominated the musical scene. “Vast numbers of folks heard it at home, on vaudeville stages, in cabarets, dance halls, amusement parks, and in places where sex was sold” (1). Yet, as White observes, even music histories tend to give short shrift to ragtime. “I get a little morose wondering why the purveyors of both high culture (chiefly things European) and entertainment (chiefly things American) have neglected ragtime” (1). By contrast, all jazz periods tend to be “remembered and cherished” by enthusiasts, with ragtime relegated to little more than a precursor to the development of jazz. White cites historic distance and primitive recording technology as possible but unconvincing reasons for the “veil of obscurity” that has hidden ragtime from view.

White might have pursued this issue further, for it seems to me that several factors conspired to push ragtime into the forgotten past. Because ragtime is not an improvised music, its tunes did not provide vehicles for future generations to reinterpret, modify, and record in new and creative ways and, since the music lacks words, singers had no use for the repertoire. As for earning a place in the classical repertoire, ragtime has never been able to get past its novelty status. “Occasionally, piano teachers let their pupils do a rag or two to conclude or encore a recital. Which is meager recognition!” (2). More importantly, ragtime was intended to be light, not serious music. “Rags and ragtime songs were peppy and syncopated, upbeat and inviting, music for enjoyment, for fun” (2).

Significantly, the very quality that kept ragtime out of the concert repertoire made it a splendid fit for the period with a “ragtime aura.” It was music for a time of change. Forsaking the oppressive mores and stuffy attitudes of the 19th century, Americans embraced a new spirit—one that sought fun, humor, and enjoyment without guilt. “Ragtime celebrated life’s pleasures,” and embodied the quest to improve the quality of life for the masses. “As dynamic reformers focused on a better future, progressively seeking changes real and beneficial, they partook of the ragtime spirit” (162).

Ragging It contains 35 chapters that help us to capture this ragtime spirit. Each presents an “independent narrative” and elucidates some aspect of the period. Under “Contents by Topic,” chapters are listed according to one or more of seven headings: “Music,” “Vaudeville and Entertainment,” “Politics,” “Ideas and Culture,” “African Americans,” “Prostitution and Disease,” and “Transportation and Technology.” Individual chapters cover an astonishingly broad array of topics—including prostitution, trains and trolleys, lynching in America, the Wright brothers, the building of the Panama Canal, and Peary’s Arctic explorations. The subjects of Teddy Roosevelt and Scott Joplin return regularly as central discussions (appropriately selected as the two individuals who best exemplify the spirit and the music of the period, respectively), but no topic continues from one chapter to the next. For the most part, White lets the narratives tell their own story and keeps analysis to a minimum.

White suggests that the chapters can be read in any order, and, indeed, discontinuity is an intentional feature of the book. Gradually, the reader begins to gain a feel for the cultural history of the period from a ragtime perspective. This model might seem unorthodox, and is unlikely to work for most periods, but it is very effective here. Ragtime was not just the popular music of one particular time period—it was the music associated with the first flowering of urban popular culture in America, and it was everywhere. A list of ten ragtime songs that have titles associated with Teddy Roosevelt is just one indication of the central role of ragtime in the collective mindset of the day. Times had changed abruptly and irrevocably and everybody was “Ragging It.”

White’s book was a joy to read. The array of topics that are touched upon is so broad that even experts on various aspects of this period are sure to come away with valuable new information. Intentionally long on narrative and short on analysis as it is, some readers might be hoping for some kind of summary or argument at the book’s end, but that never comes. Appropriately, the final pages discuss the last days of Scott Joplin, who died on 1 April 1917. Within a week, the United States had declared war with Germany, and the Progressive Era was over. By the 1920s the jazz age was here and the ragtime era was relegated to history.

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A Rock Reader

RICHARD KING (Ed.)

Kendall/Hunt Publishing, Dubuque, IA, 2003

158 pp.

Survey classes often benefit from the use of both a standard textbook and supplementary readings. General popular music and rock history courses are no exception to this; augmenting a quasi-positivistic, chronological narrative with issue-oriented literature by musicians, journalists, and scholars can significantly broaden the scope of a course while vivifying its subject matter. While there are relatively few popular music readers when compared to textbooks, there have been some notable additions to the former category in recent years, including Richard King's *A Rock Reader*. The reader contains sixteen articles (approximately one reading per week during a standard semester) that are drawn from a variety of authors and organized by subject matter (though one could easily arrange the order of reading chronologically). The six topics covered include history and style, the music industry, technology, drugs, censorship, and gender.

The first section of the book, "History and Style," presents five exemplary essays that primarily grapple with and attempt to define genres: 1950s' rock and roll, art rock, punk, and disco (Robert Christgau's "James Brown's Great Expectations" deals with a single artist, though Brown is such a central figure in popular music of the last half-century that it might not be entirely inappropriate to consider him a "genre"). What is particularly striking about these articles is that they define style in terms of both musical and social traits. For example, Nik Cohn's "Classic Rock" codifies rock and roll through "the noise it made, its drive, its aggression, its newness," providing very specific analyses of Little Richard and Chuck Berry, while also placing this music within southern teen culture. John Rockwell accomplishes something similar in "The Emergence of Art Rock," a polemical essay that carefully distinguishes between several approaches to the merging of art and popular music and provides interesting commentary about the overwhelming Britishness of the genre. The aforementioned James Brown article convincingly establishes Brown's pre-eminence among rock and pop singers. The final two essays, by Lester Bangs and Reebee Garofalo, deal with punk and are probably best read as a pair. In his inimitable prose, Bangs' stylistic analysis of punk focuses on its "simple, primitive, direct, [and] honest" essence; Bangs correctly relates punk to rock and roll, and his views about this genre are remarkably similar to those voiced earlier in the *Reader* by Cohn. Garofalo's piece, excerpted from his excellent text *Rockin' Out*, adds depth to the discussion of punk by comparing and contrasting it with the contemporaneous 1970s' genre disco. These five articles are particularly useful because they all strive toward a similar goal, elucidating salient features in a particular style, though they accomplish this through diverse means; Cohn's and Bangs' styles are identifiably those of rock journalists, while Rockwell, Christgau, and Garofalo tend toward a more scholarly tone without sacrificing the spontaneity and enthusiasm demanded by this subject matter.

“The Music Industry,” the book’s second section, contains three readings; two of these are excerpts from Simon Frith’s *Sound Effects* and Charles Hamm’s *Putting Popular Music in its Place*, both well-known pieces of popular music scholarship, while the third is singer/guitarist Courtney Love’s “Courtney Love Does the Math” from Salon.com. Taken as a whole, these essays present a wide range of perspectives on the music industry. Frith’s chapter, appropriately placed first, deals with larger issues for popular music scholars: defining pop music in terms of audience and marketing, addressing its transient nature and relationship with youth culture, and comparing British and American audiences and industries. Love’s article examines how traditional industry contracts typically fail to benefit artists financially, and posits that recent phenomena such as MP3s and online distribution create the potential for new modes of distribution and artist/fan interaction. Hamm takes a more historical approach that nicely demonstrates the musical and lyrical expansion of popular music from the mid-1950s through the early 1970s: in roughly 15 years, popular music changed from a homogeneous, white, middle-class product to a more varied music that was simultaneously more in tune with contemporary experience. Frith’s and Hamm’s chapters are also notable in that they discuss the emergence of popular music scholarship in both sociology and musicology; these sections will be particularly interesting to more advanced students attempting to understand the history and current state of this academic field.

The three sections that follow, “Technology,” “Drugs and Rock,” and “Censorship and Rock,” deal with more specific issues and, as a result, contain just one or two articles each. The two technology essays, an excerpt from George Martin’s *The Summer of Love* and Michael Hicks’ “The Fuzz,” address two important technological aspects of rock music: studio production and the electric guitar. Martin’s article provides a narrative description of the genesis of “A Day in the Life” that effectively describes the technology and working methods found in 1960s analog recording studios. This account is brought vividly to life by the inclusion of details such as the application of echo to John Lennon’s voice, Martin’s management of the four-track tape, and the creative utilization of orchestral musicians. “The Fuzz” focuses specifically on the electric guitar and distortion, and provides a basic history of both from the early blues guitarists through Jimi Hendrix. Robert Palmer’s “Eight Miles High” provides a broad and lucid portrait of psychedelic rock in the mid to late 1960s that focuses particularly on the music itself, and addresses both live and studio efforts in the United States, Britain, and continental Europe. Censorship is examined in an excerpt from Robert Walser’s *Running with the Devil* that critiques censorship-oriented “condemnations” of heavy metal. This smattering of topics is pedagogically useful in directing students toward other avenues of inquiry, as well as deepening their understanding of peripheral issues that were integral to rock at various times.

The final section of the *Reader* deals with gender, specifically “Women in Rock.” Despite the singular focus, these articles demonstrate the breadth present in feminist and gender scholarship. Donna Gaines’s “Girl Groups: A Ballad of Codependency” serves as an excellent introduction by using personal experiences to demonstrate the

relevance and range of late '50s/early '60s girl groups' music. Amy Raphael's introduction to *Grrls: Viva Rock Divas* takes a more historical approach, examining trends and prominent women in rock and pop music from the last 50 years. Susan McClary's essay on Madonna provides a nice counterpoint to the expansiveness of Raphael's by focusing on this single prominent artist and, significantly, her music. The reader finishes with Helen Kolawole's "Sisters Take the Rap...But Talk Back" which examines responses of black women to rap misogyny.

Overall, the readings are technically accessible to any general undergraduate population, but sophisticated enough conceptually to utilize as a point of departure in a graduate seminar. Each article is followed by a set of questions that are particularly useful in undergraduate settings for initiating discussion and summarizing major points; complementing this facet is an appendix containing a set of 21 essay questions that both relate to and transcend the topics covered in the reader. To reiterate a point made previously, the compelling feature of King's reader is the diversity of authors; juxtaposing Courtney Love, Lester Bangs, and Susan McClary provides remarkable breadth in perspective and writing style. Moreover, a great range of issues and music are addressed, particularly in an anthology that contains fewer than 200 pages. I highly recommend *A Rock Reader*, particularly for undergraduate rock or popular music surveys.

MIKE BOYD
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Virtual Music: How the Web Got Wired for Sound

WILLIAM DUCKWORTH
Routledge, New York, 2005
240 pp.

This is a timely book, considering the ethical questions concerning copyright, authorship, ownership, and new models of music composition that have been raised in part because of the interactive and collaborative nature of the Internet. One thing that sets the author apart is his credentials as a participant in interactive music (he is one of the creators of *Cathedral*, which he uses as one of the case studies in the book). This book takes a historical approach, examining the idea of interactive music as it relates to the current trends in online distribution and collaboration. As one may imagine, this is a rather daunting undertaking, and, even with the credentials of the author, this book comes up short in some regards.

First, the book does not entirely live up to its title. The first 44 pages of the book (about a quarter of the text) outline a history of interactive music and experimental music, bringing in such practitioners as John Cage, Erik Satie, and John Oswald. Although this is interesting and well written, the conflation of virtual and interactive

is an issue that haunts this book. Duckworth argues that these early practitioners of interactive music blurred the lines between performer and audience, artist and consumer, and troubled the conception of what it meant to perform or create. This is a novel way of examining virtual music—finding connections between the past and the current state of musical practice—which provides a sense of continuity through the book. The connections that Duckworth makes between past and present collaborative musical practices are insightful, but I found myself wondering what Moby’s practice of using copyright-cleared samples had to do with virtual music or “how the web got wired for sound.” Unfortunately, it was not until the last chapter that Duckworth explains that the term “virtual” encompasses many things.

Another shortcoming of this book is the seeming urge to explore the obscure. For example, in his chapter “Music on the Web in the Twentieth Century,” the author discusses IUMA (Internet Underground Music Archives) and some failed ventures such as Rocket Network and MusicWorld, yet he leaves out sites such as mp3.com. I was also surprised that the segment on plunderphonics ignored well-known practitioners such as Negativland. It almost seemed as if Duckworth had made a concerted effort to omit the more recognizable projects.

Even so, there are many things that work well in this book. The chapter “Art and Ethics Online” raises many important questions that even now evade answers concerning issues such as ownership and copyright (and copyleft), online file sharing, what it means to create a new work, and sampling. Duckworth wisely resists the urge to provide the reader with simple answers to these questions and demonstrates that these questions existed long before peer-to-peer file-sharing networks and other technologies appeared on the scene. His case study on DJ Danger Mouse’s *Grey Album* provides an excellent way to consider these issues and illustrates well the tension within the music industry between the corporate and the artistic.

From the subtitle “How the Web Got Wired for Sound,” it is easy to imagine a text that is heavy on technical details and light on narrative. One pleasant surprise in this text is the attention given to the human element of virtual music. That is not to say that technology is left out. Unfortunately, there are times when the prose becomes mired in the details of the technology that was used in particular performances. Although the attention to detail is admirable, it becomes tedious, especially when the technology in question no longer exists. Duckworth is at his best when he provides overviews of performances and situations. What make this book interesting are the stories from practitioners—the motivation and the imagination that made musicians push the envelope of what constitutes music, performance, composition, and audiences.

The accompanying compact disc was extremely useful for understanding the projects that Duckworth discusses, because most readers will likely be unfamiliar with them (I have been a practitioner of online music since 1998 and the only artist I recognized before reading the book was Scanner). It was interesting to hear the evolution of sound capability that was made evident through the different projects. This would have been clearer had the compilation been arranged in chronological order.

Overall, I found that this book tries a bit too hard to be all things to all people with its intermingling of interactive music and virtual music. However, it will be useful for those interested in tracing the idea of online interactive music, especially the less-explored aspects and projects. One could usefully view this book as a kind of alternative history of virtual music and as an excellent starting place for considering the historical antecedents that made virtual music both desirable and possible.

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**Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress
Coahoma County Study, 1941–1942**

JOHN W. WORK, LEWIS WADE JONES, and SAMUEL C. ADAMS, JR.; ROBERT GORDON and
BRUCE NEMEROV (Eds)

Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, TN, 2005

336 pp.

In 1941, a group of researchers went to Coahoma County, Mississippi, to study African-American folk songs, both sacred and secular, in their social context. This trip and another one the following year were pioneering for the field of ethnomusicology and are mostly remembered for Alan Lomax's "discovery" of the blues musicians Muddy Waters, Son House, and Honeyboy Edwards. Muddy Waters in particular would, after his move to Chicago, become one of the most successful blues musicians of all time. Alan Lomax, already an established folk song collector in 1941, reaped the musicological fame and fortune and described his experiences in his 1993 book *The Land Where the Blues Began*, for which he received the National Book Critics Circle Award.

This, however, is not the full story. As it turns out, Lomax's trip was a collaboration between the Library of Congress (for which Lomax worked) and Fisk University. Three African-American scholars from Fisk were much more involved than Lomax cared to remember. While researching his biography of Muddy Waters, *Can't Be Satisfied*, Robert Gordon (who also contributed the excellent documentary film *The Road to Memphis* to Martin Scorsese's otherwise abysmal *The Blues* series for PBS) came across three hitherto unpublished manuscripts by John W. Work (composer, educator, and director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers), sociologist Lewis Wade Jones, and graduate student Samuel C. Adams, Jr., manuscripts that are now finally seeing the light of day.

Jones's description of the community, Work's music transcriptions, and Adams's master's thesis on "Changing Negro Life in the Delta" serve as a much-needed

corrective to Lomax's heavily romanticized account of rural black culture that occasionally borders on being racist. While Lomax was explicitly hunting for spirituals and old-time blues, his African-American colleagues emphasize urbanization and social change. As Work points out, spirituals had largely been replaced by hymns and gospel songs. Blues was also modernized through sounds heard on juke joint jukeboxes (one of the most valuable data sets of the book is a list of records on jukeboxes in Clarksdale from 1941, which incidentally contains mostly jazz and very little country blues). While Lomax was primarily interested in uneducated and traditional artists as purveyors of "authentic" black culture, the studies of Work, Jones, and Adams offer a more diverse and realistic look at musical culture in the Mississippi Delta of the 1940s.

This book is especially valuable since folk song collecting and the study of blues cultures for a long time were (and to a certain extent still are) dominated by white scholars and aficionados. Major blues scholars like Samuel Charters, Paul Oliver, and Peter Guralnick, while attempting to establish the study of blues as a worthwhile endeavor, tended to present blues performers as angst-ridden loners and failed to connect blues effectively to other forms of Southern African-American culture. *Lost Delta Found*, on the other hand, features blues next to songs performed in the church, work songs, ballads, and children's game songs, thereby connecting the blues singers to the community they depended on for their survival.

Yet, two things are painfully missing from *Lost Delta Found*. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov did a great job in editing the book, but they do not provide a compelling larger analysis of its contents. Since the materials they gathered are from the early 1940s, they should have critically interrogated Work's, Jones's, and Adams's methods and approaches from a current scholarly perspective. Collecting materials is one thing, evaluating them is another. The other shortcoming of the book is that it does not have an accompanying CD with musical examples. The more than 100 pages of song transcriptions by John W. Work are impressive but cannot capture the music in the same way sound recordings can. Since the team of researchers recorded a lot of music (some of which is available on a CD that accompanies Alan Lomax's *The Land Where the Blues Began*), it is unfortunate that the reader has to take pains looking for it elsewhere.

Despite these shortcomings, *Lost Delta Found* offers a plethora of relatively unadulterated data from the Mississippi Delta of the 1940s, a region that has been mythologized to the point where fact and fiction have become almost indistinguishable (one needs only to think of the posthumous career of Robert Johnson in this context). The book is indispensable for historians and musicologists interested in pre-war rural black Southern culture but also for blues fans who are willing to question notions of authenticity erected by white scholars like Alan Lomax.

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Popular Music Genres

STUART BORTHWICK and RON MOY

Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004

240 pp.

Merriam-Webster (2003) defines “genre” as “a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content” (p. 522). The last five or six decades have seen the emergence of many such categories in the field of popular music, to the point where it can sometimes become quite confusing. Borthwick and Moy examine eleven broad genres of pop music in this enlightening book. Their approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on the thoughts and techniques of a variety of academic disciplines.

Borthwick and Moy also stress that their study is dialectical, critical, and discursive. It is dialectical for two reasons: “because it is rooted in the belief that the meaning of popular music is to be found in the interrelationship between text and context” (p. 2) and “because it addresses issues related to the reproduction of social relations” (p. 2). They do not merely study the musical texts themselves as might be the case for musicologists, but neither do they totally ignore the texts in favor of the social contexts of which they are or were part. Their study is critical “because it employs theoretical positions that enable the academic to move beyond the mere description of musical phenomena, towards an examination of how and why music means what it does” (p. 2). Therefore, this book will be useful to scholars in a variety of fields besides music. Finally, it is discursive because “of our belief that music is a language system where texts are ‘made to mean’ through the use of representational techniques that predate the production of individual texts” (p. 2). These three qualities seem to be closely related in that they all look beyond simple, one-dimensional analysis towards that which is integrated and multifaceted.

The eleven genres that Borthwick and Moy write about are soul, funk, psychedelia, progressive rock, punk rock, reggae, synthpop, heavy metal, rap, indie, and jungle. For each genre, they begin with an overview. They then discuss historical roots and antecedents, the social and political context of the genre, some representative “texts” (individual songs or albums) from the genre, the visual aesthetic of the performers and audiences, and finally “subsequent generic developments” or what has happened since the original emergence of the genre. For each of the eleven relatively broad genres, then, there are a number of more specific sub-genres. For example, “progressive rock” has sub-genres of “European prog,” “folk prog,” “psychedelic prog,” and “classical prog.” Under the rubric of “reggae” we find “roots reggae,” “dub,” “deejay talk-over,” “rockers,” “lovers rock,” and “the British style.”

Borthwick and Moy generally do a very good job of relating the various popular music genres to the social and political contexts in which they emerged and thrived. The chapter on reggae will be especially interesting to those who enjoy the music but perhaps have not done much reading on Rastafarianism and the other

Afro-Caribbean cultural phenomena in which reggae music was formed. In the chapters on punk, rap, and heavy metal, one gets a very clear understanding of the economic and other social factors that fueled the music and made people listen to it. Likewise, the chapter on psychedelia conveys quite well the blissful, peaceful feeling of the late 1960s scene before it unfortunately got overrun by people who had less innocent agendas. The chapters on soul and funk provide insightful links between the two genres, and this is also the case with other pairs of genres such as progressive and punk, or psychedelia and punk. The authors manage to state what is distinctive about each individual genre while also making clear the connections between genres, including those to which they do not devote entire chapters.

The final chapter, on so-called “jungle” music, begins with a much needed explanation of the term which could be considered by some to be offensive. At the back of the book is a glossary of key terms such as “bricolage,” “postmodernism,” “syncretic,” and, yes, “genre.” This is a very useful thing to include for readers who may not be familiar with such terms, which tend to be used mostly in academic settings.

All in all, this is a fine book that is good reading both for serious scholars and for music fans in the general public. One possible improvement would be additional chapters on other genres such as country and western and folk, or possibly more examples of works in some of the genres. Other than that, this is a high-quality work that will help the reader to understand much of the variety of popular music of the last several decades.

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Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Affects Musical Creativity

JOANNA DEMERS

University of Georgia Press, Athens and London, 2006

178 pp.

Among a recent spate of studies dealing with the ownership of artistic and intellectual culture—for example, Rosemary Coombe’s *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties* (1998), Kembrew McLeod’s *Owning Culture* (2001), and Lawrence Lessig’s *Free Culture* (2004)—Joanna Demers’s relatively thin volume, *Steal This Music*, has found a secure niche. Whereas Coombe, McLeod, and Lettig scrutinize intellectual property (IP) law in terms of categories ranging from music to preaching, sound collage to third-world indigenous knowledge, and celebrity image to commercials, Demers concentrates on popular music, showing a decided (but far from exclusive) interest in hip-hop and electronic dance music, two salient forms in which “transformative appropriation”—“the act of referring to or quoting old works in order to create a

new work”—has been challenged (at best) and forbidden (at worst) by content providers who have “seized upon IP law as a means of charging money for things that used to be freely available” (4). Demers’s revelations about IP law and its impact on popular music will sound both familiar and frightening to those of us who have been watching, with a mixture of anxiety, incredulity, and outrage, the ascendancy, in less than a generation, of corporations and copyright holders over musicians, performers, and consumers. In other words, implicit in Demers’s argument is urgency—the feeling that soon musical creativity will have been paralyzed by content providers committed to restricting (through their demand for high, even prohibitive, licensing fees) access to copyrighted materials. Yet the main title notwithstanding, Demers’s book is not a knee-jerk, polemical reaction to the encroachment of these content providers into the realm of free speech and fair use. Instead, her study hinges on the secondary thesis that the “excessive enforcement of IP laws is (despite itself) spurring many artists to rebel by finding innovative, subversive ways of communicating through transformative appropriation” (9).

To prove this claim Demers must lay considerable groundwork. An overview of the history of copyright and trademark protection is followed by the demystification of key terms informing current interpretation and enforcement of IP law. Essential, indeed, is her clarification of what constitutes piracy, plagiarism, allusion, and—since the digital ’90s—duplication in the battle for control over musical sounds, styles, and techniques. By putting these terms in the context of the Copyright Act of 1976, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, and other acts, while at the same time explaining the differences between and among music copyright, right of publicity, and trademark law, Demers is better able to track the efforts (largely successful) of “content providers and artists’ representatives...to close loopholes in music copyright by employing parallel IP law regimes” (25). After bringing the reader up to speed on history and terminology, Demers devotes chapter 2 to tackling the place of copyright law in musical arrangement and allusion (e.g., transcription, parody, and satire). Taste, not law, dominates her look at pop-classic crossover hits like Elvis Presley’s “It’s Now or Never,” Joshua Rifkin’s *The Baroque Beatles Book*, Walter Murphy’s “A Fifth of Beethoven,” and Walter Carlos’s *Switched-On Bach*; and ethics, not law, permeates discussion of cover music in the rock-and-roll era (Elvis comes in for more scrutiny). But once parody and satire enter the picture with 2 Live Crew’s use in 1989 of “Oh, Pretty Woman” (published by Acuff-Rose Music) in their track “Pretty Woman,” the law takes center stage.

As will happen time and time again in the rest of *Steal This Music*, Demers chronicles a lawsuit (fair use typically under fire) that often dwindles into an out-of-court settlement due to exhausted bank accounts. Demers has a knack for satisfying the pleasure readers take in courtroom drama. Several high-profile cases enthrall us on the visceral level while simultaneously testing our patience, even to the point of frustration. After all, disputes involving the finer points of fair use and the subtleties of copyright/trademark law are hard for both common-sense mortals and courts to figure out—which is why “content providers are counting on this confusion as a way

of shoring up control over their property” (70). Demers’s coverage of one particularly sticky type of ownership, performers’ rights, encapsulates this double-maneuver. Her account of lawsuits involving Nancy Sinatra (vs. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in 1970; she lost), Bette Midler (vs. Ford Motor Company in 1988; she won), and Tom Waits (vs. Frito-Lay in 1991; he won) is rife with suspense as well as lessons not only about how legal technicalities determine judicial outcomes in specific cases but, more generally, about how content providers have accrued more and more power during the past 30 years.

What Demers achieves in chapter 3’s analysis of duplication (mash-ups, collage, homage, etc.) is a masterful blend of musical and legal criticism. Dickie Goodman, John Cage, John Lennon, Pierre Schaeffer, Kool Herc, Dr. Dre, George Clinton, the Tom Tom Club, Ice Cube, Biz Markie, DJ Spooky and dozens more appear in Demers’s depiction of an era of proliferating lawsuits in step with the explosive growth of sampling and the expanding hegemony of content providers. At moments Demers herself sounds overwhelmed by it all, if we are to judge by the redundancies that infest some paragraphs: “Allusion and duplication are becoming indistinguishable” (109); “[d]istinguishing between an exact reproduction and a mere allusion is becoming increasingly difficult” (109); “[d]etermining (ontologically or legally) where a sample stops and a new composition begins has become nearly impossible” (110).

In chapter 4 Demers’s job is to elucidate the strategies artists have chosen to keep the creative light alive even as “The Shadow of the Law” (the chapter’s title) darkens all paths to transformative appropriation. There are four main options for artists who prefer not to be broken financially in court: (1) pay (if they can afford it) for the use of protected material; (2) transform the material (almost) beyond recognition; (3) choose obscure sources not monitored by the handful of dominant publishers, going so far underground or outside the mainstream that no one will care what you sample or duplicate; (4) stop sampling and borrowing altogether. Standout case studies include DJ Danger Mouse’s battle over the *Grey Album* and Negativland’s struggle with Island Records and Warner-Chappell. Curiously, it is in this most fascinating of the book’s four chapters that Demers may most disappoint readers looking for someone to lead the fight against content providers. She acknowledges the outrage that scholars, theorists, journalists, and others feel toward corporate greed and privilege; and she articulates the book’s prevailing irony that “excessive IP protections are harmful not only to creators, but ultimately to the entertainment industry as a whole” (112); but her response falls short of the revolutionary message explicit in her title. Granted, some fairly heated language is used—“If the music and film industries had their way, our artistic heritage would be a mausoleum in which sounds and images are frozen in time, impervious to appropriation” (145)—but much less than the title (an appropriation of Abbie Hoffman’s *Steal This Book*) would lead one to expect. The imperative is only titular. If this is a flaw, even a serious one, it is not enough to offset *Steal This Music*’s strengths: its clarity, its vivid anecdotes, its historical grasp, and its fair and balanced assessment of grim facts.

In a culture where lawyers and content providers—empowered by IP laws about which it can be said, without hyperbole or hysteria, that they are nothing less than censorious—have been able to commandeer the phrase “old fashioned” and the song “Happy Birthday to You,” and where, with the passage of the Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998, Congress extended copyright privileges for the Disney Corporation and other behemoths, it is no wonder that creators and consumers of popular music feel stifled, intimidated, and distraught. But books such as *Steal This Music*, while not advocating a revolution, prove that articulate observers like Joanna Demers are speaking on behalf of everyone who fears that fair use is slipping away for ever with each new triumph in court for a content provider over a musician, performer, or consumer who has often done much less than what Demers’s title seems to exhort all of us to do.

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Noisy Island: A Short History of Irish Popular Music

GERRY SMYTH

University of Cork Press, Cork, 2005

182 pp.

Beautiful Day: Forty Years of Irish Rock

SEAN CAMPBELL and GERRY SMYTH

Atrium, Cork, 2005

194 pp.

The first thing to be said here is that the publication of two books on the contribution of the island of Ireland to the world of popular music is very welcome. As a “small country” Ireland has arguably over-achieved in terms of the number of internationally successful acts it has produced. The reasons behind such achievements are obviously worthy of study by popular music academics (and others) in their own right. They also raise a series of questions which are becoming somewhat perennial within popular music studies, including the following: Is there such a thing as a national music? How does popular music inform notions of national identity? What processes of inclusion and exclusion are at play? What are the relationships between the local, national, and international? Such questions were at the forefront of my mind as I read these two books.

The subtitles of each appear to betray a certain ideological outlook with one talking of “popular music” and the other of “rock.” However, the actual content of each of the books is somewhat broader than first impressions might suggest.

To begin with Smyth's *Noisy Island*, the book's inside cover claims that it "establishes the field of Irish popular music as a legitimate and significant area of cultural debate." This is a bold claim and one which is, at best, only partially true. This reader assumed that the legitimacy and significance of the music in question was already established, although perhaps that appears to be less the case in its home country than it is elsewhere. Indeed, in their different ways both the works here appear to want to further the debate in Ireland itself. Once again this is welcome.

However, in the case of *Noisy Island* the result is an account which struggles to cover all bases and so ends up being rushed and, in places, superficial and generalized. The book begins by stating that "Contemporary Irish popular music represents a set of enormously successful cultural and economic practices" and so a celebratory tone is set for this "enormously diverse, critically acclaimed and economically successful" medium. We are also told that "second generation British musicians such as John Lydon, Kevin Rowland, Johnny Marr, Stephen Morrissey, Noel and Liam Gallagher have all *emphasized* an Irish heritage as a significant factor in their musical identity" (1, *emphasis added*). But this is at least contestable and no evidence is offered for the claim. Then, despite the book's title embracing popular music, we are told that the main search is for "'Irishness'...more specifically, of 'Irish rock music'" (1). So the book starts with celebration, exaggeration, and a narrowing of its scope.

It then falls into three parts, covering the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, punk and its legacies, and then the 1990s and 2000s. The first section, "The Roots of Irish Rock," examines the assimilation of Anglo-American forms and their fusion with domestic forms such as show bands and folk. In the case of the former there is a welcome attempt to reclaim the scene in the light of previous detractors. The bands, says Smyth, "played your favourite songs, they played them well and they played them on your doorstep" (15). They are also credited with broadening Ireland's musical horizons. The following section on beat and blues bands is well handled, especially in terms of the musicians' aesthetics. However, there is a lack of contemporary accounts of musicians' or audiences' recollections, so we have to rely on Smyth's own accounts and recollections.

The section on punk and its legacy is the biggest, but still amounts to only 45 pages, while the final section tries to capture everything from U2 in 1991 to the present day with somewhat tokenistic appraisals of acts such as Boyzone and Westlife along the way. Genuinely interesting topics such as the success of Ireland in Eurovision (itself an area of increased academic interest) and *Riverdance* are also mentioned in passing. Alas, in its attempt to establish "popular music as a legitimate and significant area of cultural debate," *Noisy Island* ends up dealing superficially with many acts which are effectively name-checked rather than analyzed. (Certainly musicology gets no look in.) Moreover, it is unclear whether or not Smyth feels there is anything intrinsically Irish about the acts he describes. His vision of Irishness is broad, but obviously has its limits. Thus Boyzone are described as being an Irish project rather than Irish music (113).

The main problem with *Noisy Island* is that it seems to want to serve too many audiences at once. Thus there are numerous cultural studies and sociological references (although few from within popular music studies) and Smyth says that Attalian theory underpins his approach (85). He freely quotes Bourdieu and Adorno, thus showing a welcome embrace of theory. But this sits uneasily alongside large slices of journalese. Thus he makes populist suggestions, such as that U2 are “as far as most people are concerned, *the sound of Irish rock*” (85, emphasis in original). I would suggest that “most people” do not have a view on what constitutes Irish rock. Similarly, what are we to make of the assertion that “Rock musicians have always considered themselves to be more subversive than their pop counterparts” (109)? All of them? A page later Smyth acknowledges that the truth is a bit more complex than this, but such generalizations do him no favors, especially when he goes on to say “we expect rock to be oppositional” (112). I’m not sure that “we” would think this if “we” were well versed in popular music studies.

All of this is a pity as it detracts from the many genuine insights Smyth has. For example, he notes that Sinead O’Connor rejects much about traditional Ireland, but not its music, which she reworks. Similarly, he astutely notes the impact on U2 of concentrating on the US rather than UK market. But too often this is lost among the sort of generalizations which sell the book and its author short.

Beautiful Day is a much simpler book in its conception than *Noisy Island*. It is unashamedly another list book. For each year between 1964 and 2004 a song is discussed as being in some way emblematic of the time or a musical movement. Implicitly, it seems that there was a veto on any artist appearing more than once, and there is a reasonable spread of artists, although a preference for slightly left-field rock is evident. But *Beautiful Day* is self-consciously more populist than *Noisy Island* and seemingly bound for the coffee tables of nostalgic popular music aficionados. Its justifications for being a list book stem from Q and *Mojo*, rather than Bourdieu or Adorno (although Attali is name-checked again). In other words, it seems to aim for a middle-brow audience. It challenges readers to think about what they think rock is, what they make of the lists and, importantly, why. In addition there is also a “further reading” list (as opposed to *Noisy Island*’s bibliography), but it borders on the bizarre and readers are given no indication of how it fits in with the rest of this book.

The introduction to the project is limited to seven pages. It begins, “They say the Irish are a musical race”—which made me wonder who “they” are. However, some clues are provided when we are told that the notion that there is a “natural” link between Irishness and musicality is an “essentially British notion” (1). Following the introduction each year is given a song and the context, within which it is subject to a limited discussion. In essence the only theme in the book is that of the role which popular music can play in giving insights into broader social trends.

The obvious question for the authors then becomes how much readers need to know about the artist and song, how much about the contemporaneous situation in Ireland, and what the balance between these should be. There are some good contextualization passages spread across the book, although the amount of space

which can be given to this was obviously constrained by an editorial decision involving devoting at least a page to a photograph of each artist—again raising issues of the book’s intended audience. (In comparison *Noisy Island* is notable for having no pictures and for featuring anonymous musicians on the cover. *Beautiful Day* features Bono.)

The brevity this results in can be annoying. For example, in a chapter on 1965 and Bluesville’s “You Turn Me On” we are told that “[t]he religious and civic leaders who complained about this new variation of ‘the devil’s music’ had every right to be concerned” (15). But we are given no examples of such concern. Elsewhere context is all. Thus for 1968 we are given six paragraphs on the origins and context of Three Little Dwarfs’ “Three Jolly Dwarfs,” but only two on the song itself. Nevertheless, at its best, the book does show how popular music reflects and shapes our experiences of particular times.

The authors have refrained from making too many obvious choices, which is welcome, and brought some previously unknown acts to the attention of this reader. In addition, an apology to a list of acts which were omitted (7) serves as a reminder of the diversity and quantity of acts which Ireland has produced. Each chapter also has a “best bit” section for each of the selections—presumably to spark debate not only on the list, but also this list within a list.

However, *Beautiful Day* exceeds *Noisy Island* in its chatty journalistic tone. Phil Lynott is repeatedly referred to as “Philo”; the Eurovision song contest is described as an “annual cheese fest” (18), and we are told that “generations of knicker flinging females can’t be wrong” (16). But apparently some women can be wrong. Although feminists “would have had issues” with the gender relations portrayed in “Philo’s” “The Boys Are Back in Town,” that is “somewhat beside the point,” for what “Philo” is apparently doing is portraying “one of the most resonant icons of post-war American popular culture, specifically the tough-but-sensitive character” (47).

Both books eschew definitions of “Irishness,” but their visions are generally inclusive. Certainly they include performers born outside the country of one Irish parent and those hailing from the disputed north of the island. The fact that at least some of these artists might feel uneasy about having Irishness assigned to them is not addressed.

Overall, reading these two books made me think about the role of the academic in the modern world. Both are written by academics and their institutional affiliations are included. But both aim at broader audiences. In the case of *Noisy Island* the result is a frustrating and, on occasion, an irritating mixture of insight and generalization; in that of *Beautiful Day* it is of a form of populism which means that the authors undersell themselves as serious analysts. The result is one book which sets its sights too high and another which sets them too low. The problem is perhaps most obvious in *Noisy Island* when Smyth abandons academic objectivity to describe “a veritable pop revolution” (114), a “genius composer” (92), and a record “produced to perfection” (89). I have not seen phrases such as “classic” bandied about so much within an academic text before and had assumed that the role of an academic was to

deconstruct such notions, not to add to them. Is this how we should encourage our students to write about popular music? I don't think so. Ultimately, then, these two books do some service to the history of Irish popular music, but regrettably this comes at the expense of some *disservice* to popular music studies.

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