

## Panel 1

Chair: Murray Forman, Northeastern University

Jack Hamilton, "Across the Great Divide: Popular Music Studies and the Public"

In a moment when the vague and capacious category of “public engagement” is more prized among scholars and their academic institutions than perhaps ever before, popular music studies finds itself uniquely well-positioned to take a leading role in bridging the divide between the academy and the broader public. This talk explores the many potential rewards and attendant possible pitfalls of popular music studies embracing its identity as a “crossover” field in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with a focus on both the historical origins of popular music studies as an (inter)discipline largely residing outside of the traditional academy, as well as a current context of unprecedented opportunities for engagement and interconnection in age of online media and digital and streaming music. As scholars of popular music, we work in a field in which there is consistently energetic and dependable public interest. Furthermore, recent intellectual and critical turns in mainstream music journalism have made the historicized and theoretically contextualized models long embraced by academic popular music studies more relevant and appealing to public venues than ever before. In a time of well-documented precarity in both higher education and media industries, it is more important than ever that scholars and journalists form bonds of collaboration rather than falling back on a cultivated and self-defeating mutual disinterest.

Corrigan Blanchfield, "Who is allowed to remember? Finding and preserving historical records in YouTube's comment sections"

The primary outcome of the late 20th century's rapid advancements in musical technology was the demolition of barriers to entry - given an alternative to traditional label, studio, and media infrastructures, entire genres (hip-hop and electronic music especially) emerged and thrived in the underground. From home studio to quasi-legal club and back again, these cultures lived on the margins of the mainstream, unable to capture the widespread recognition and documentation that might later provide a firm historical record of the era. Instead, the minutiae of something like Chicago's late '80s club scene exist as what the Irish historian Oona Frawley calls "cruxes" - historical moments around which robust cultural memories form, supplemented by formal memorialization but primarily drawn from the natural interactions of a given community's participants. Because of the lack of traditional primary sources detailing the era, firsthand accounts are informal and fragile, scattered across dormant blogs or as comments on YouTube videos, entirely de-centralized and subject to deletion at the whim of the third parties that host them. In this presentation, I'll call for a broadening of traditional musicological sources, emphasizing the ephemerality of these accounts and the importance of preserving and re-platforming them even without an immediate research interest.

Further, I'll give an account of my own experience organizing an effort to extract YouTube comments which contain concrete information about forgotten clubs, raves, and record stores from the Google ecosystem and re-host them on a site solely, rather than incidentally, concerned with their preservation.

Eric Hung, "Canon-Adjacent Strategies for Greater Inclusion in Public Popular Musicology"

For people who promote the musics of marginalized groups, the critiquing of the idea of canon is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, traditional musical canons enforce existing hierarchies, and work to devalue the contributions of the marginalized. On the other hand, advocates can effectively use canonic strategies to disseminate works in neglected musical traditions. Specifically, they can create new canons, or work to incorporate works by marginalized musicians into existing canons.

This presentation discusses two "canon-adjacent" methods I am using to promote Asian American music. The first is a podcast series that explores key moments in Asian American history through popular music created by Asian Americans. The works we examine are chosen not because they are particularly "canonic"—that is, "important" or "representative" of Asian American musical history—but rather because they help to illuminate particular questions about the Asian American experience. In the presentation, I will discuss a podcast about the arrival of Southeast Asian refugees in the 1970s.

The second method is a series of Spotify playlists that are based on major historical themes, such as assimilation, family and trauma. Containing around twelve tracks, each playlist aims to introduce listeners to a wide variety of Asian American musical practices, and to lead them to "liner notes" on our website. The "liner notes" include an introductory essay about the importance of the chosen theme in Asian American history, as well as information about each track. I will discuss the "Music and Labor" playlist in my presentation.

## **Panel 2**

Chair: Stephan Pennington, Tufts University

Shana L. Redmond, "Unsubscribe: The Stakes of Not Listening"

Listening is a determining act, leading the subject to new emotions or movement(s). It's a direct line to our deepest thoughts and most surface desires—a shorthand for our best or, perhaps, most notorious representations. While literatures of music's role in identity formation are ample, what is lesser considered is the action that stems from that which we've chosen to ignore or abandon. The absence of this sound leaves a trace that, acknowledged or not, provokes consideration and confrontation well into the future. In this preliminary effort, I'll speculate on the politics developed when we stop listening, both in the present moment of silence and over time, and the cultures that depend upon it. The loud infrastructures of public boycotts and

"cancel culture" are built with the quiet but textured choice to stop listening: a practice with effects that connect the song to the record and the individual to the whole.

Christa Bentley, "Reassessing Women's Voices in the Era of #MeToo"

When Lori Lieberman recorded the song "Killing Me Softly" in 1971, she was not credited as a songwriter despite participating in the creative process. Without this credit, Lieberman did not earn songwriting royalties from other successful covers of the song recorded by Roberta Flack (1973) and the Fugees (1996). Beyond the issue of compensation, the disparity undermines Lieberman's voice and artistic agency, and as Lieberman has made claims to the song's inspiration, songwriters Charles Fox and Norman Gimbel have repeatedly refuted her account. Nearly fifty years later, Lieberman's story resonates in multiple ways in the era of #MeToo and the Times Up movement, raising a pressing question for popular music studies: do we listen to women? Do we believe them?

My research responds to this issue, presenting a model for listening to women based in the music of the 1970s singer-songwriter movement and the social practice of consciousness-raising. While popular culture writers have recently contemplated how to study the work of men accused of abuse, I reassess how our work interacts with women's voices, drawing on stories from the 1970s, including Lieberman's. I also extend this framework to the music of contemporary songwriters, such as Rhiannon Giddens, H.E.R., and Phoebe Bridgers, whose stories give voice to women ignored in the past, create solidarity among women, and reclaim agency within narratives of abuse. Their songs show the stakes of listening to—and believing—women both in history and today.

Daphne Carr, "Can you feel the beat?: Resounding anti-black police brutality in black popular musics"

In November 1949, Langston Hughes provided a critical race theory-informed bit of historical musicology through the dialog comedy of his *Jess B. Simple* series in *The Chicago Defender*, writing: "You must not know where Bop comes from...Every time a cop hits a Negro with his billy club, that old club said, 'BOP! BOP!'"

The beat of bop, he argues, comes from the violent conditions of black social life, and just as this embodied knowledge shapes sonic performance, so it does one's listening. This paper historicizes the sounding violence of the police's beat and its critical resounding through black American sonic arts including poetry, jazz, and popular song as a case study in the political stakes of listening. In the archive of black American expressive arts, the police beat sound-violence continuum is audible as an ever-present interlocutor, one that Hughes' satirically theorizes as the condition of possibility for modern jazz and its "nonsense syllables." Hardly nonsense, Hughes and other black radical sound intellectuals, such as Fred Moten, Alexander Weheliye, and Daphne Brooks, have argued for black popular music listening as an explicitly embodied performance, one that needs a listening ear that has felt suffering to feel the beat and

from which to express the urgency for justice. This paper will argue that such grounded, anti-racist writing constitutes a renewed radical politics of culture that can (and should) give shape to broader popular music studies in the United States, especially in a time of rising anti-blackness and widespread conservative backlash against cultural studies-informed approaches to scholarship.

### **Panel 3**

Chair: Robin James, UNC Charlotte / Northeastern University

Francesca Royster, "Cruising Musical Futures: Queer Worldmaking and Popular Music in Everyday Life, 2009-2019 and Beyond"

It's now been a decade since the late queer cultural critic Jose Esteban Munoz wrote in his book *\*Cruising Utopia\**, "Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that the world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed by queerness in the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward looking future." In those ten years, we have lost many lives to police violence, homophobic and racial hate, to guns and to suicide. We can turn to music to help us mourn those losses, and we can also turn to music to make the future we want. In this talk, I'll think about the past ten years in popular music in the everyday lives of queers and other people of color, reaching beyond fandom to consider ways that music helps us grieve, feel and identify absence, make community, and dream up future worlds. From Shamir to David Bowie to Frank Ocean to Janelle Monae, I'll also propose that we queer ourselves in our listening and writing about music, by "listening in detail" to the layered and sometimes outlawed histories that produce the music (as Alexandra T. Vasquez reminds us), by taking in music as a fully embodied experience, and by taking it personally, letting ourselves be moved and changed.

Anthony Kwame Harrison, "'To The East, My Brother, To the East': Checking the Bold Blackness of X-Clan's *Fire & Earth*"

The evolution of American popular music can be understood through the phenomenon of predominantly white, mainstream markets embracing Black musical aesthetics and sounds. Whereas artists, critics, scholars, and fans have debated the terms of this musical migration across racial lines (i.e. is it unjust appropriation or evidence of music's ability to bridge social divides?), in this presentation, I consider instances of Black popular musical performance that resist or even repel white audiences' affections. During the late-1980s/early-1990s hip hop became one of the most commercially viable forms of popular music. Whereas a significant branch of this featured slickly-packaged "pop rap" acts, an equally important element of hip hop's crossover involved artists expressing various articulations of robust Blackness. Both gangsta rap

(e.g. N.W.A.) and political Afrocentric rap (e.g. Public Enemy) achieved astounding white followings due, in part, to their presentation of an *off-limits-ness*, which defiant white youth found too tantalizing to ignore. Amidst these developments, the Brooklyn-based collective, X-Clan, released a pair of critically heralded albums that, although universally recognized for their funkiness, were by-and-large unpalatable to white rap fans. Focusing on the group's critical highpoint—the release of their second album with its lead-single "Fire & Earth"—this presentation *check's out* (i.e. examines) X-Clan's articulation of bold Blackness, exploring how the song's sonic-visual symbolisms and implied commitments worked to unsettling practices of white listening. Through presenting this instance of bold Blackness, I reflect on the future possibilities for Black music to serve as a political force and resist cooptation.

Victor Szabo, "Why Is Ambient So White? Tackling Homogeneous Genre Cultures"

In a 2014 *Quietus* feature, journalist Patric Fallon marvels at the "apparently limitless possibilities" of ambient music. Interviewee Matt Carlson claims that ambient "can be almost anything," while producer Christopher Willits muses that ambient music is "so dynamic that we can't even define what it is." Likewise, in a 2014 *FACT* article, author Joe Muggs suggests that ambient "can be pretty much anything you want." And yet, if the ambient sound is indeed "limitless," one might wonder why the genre culture it represents is so homogenous: of the 12 individuals Fallon interviewed, and the 13 featured in Muggs's piece, 100% are white men. (Of the additional 18 artists mentioned in Fallon's article, only 2 are women.) Even a revisionist retrospective such as *Pitchfork's* 2016 "The 50 Best Ambient Albums of All Time" only includes 8 women and 2 people of color, despite the rhetorical flourish in the introduction asking, "What music isn't ambient in the 21st century?"

This presentation considers the case of ambient music to address how scholars might approach homogeneous genre cultures in a way that neither reinforces nor misrepresents their lack of sociocultural diversity. After briefly considering the "border cases" of African-American ambient musicians Laraaji and Alice Coltrane, I will argue that an effective strategy for inclusive genre scholarship is 1) to examine the ways "genre rules" (e.g. amorphousness and anti-conventionality) pattern sociocultural (e.g. light-skinned and male) identification, and 2) to foreground the contributions of a genre's excluded-but-overlapping musical "others" (here, new age and atmospheric jazz).

#### **Panel 4**

Chair: Wayne Marshall

Loren Kajikawa, "Musicology, Hip Hop Studies, and the Challenge of Significant Difference"

The growth of popular music studies has enabled music departments to diversify their offerings, adding numerous courses on previously marginalized musical forms and communities.

In particular, the last two decades have witnessed a dramatic rise in dissertations, theses, articles, and books exploring rap music, while courses on the history of hip hop have become commonplace. Although positive in many respects, this growing prominence of black popular music has not led to a corresponding and proportional growth in the number of black students or faculty members. Nor have these changes stimulated a widespread reevaluation of institutional priorities and commitments. In fact, under financial pressure to pay for the small class sizes and one-on-one instruction demanded by conservatory-style instruction, many schools have turned to large general education classes on rock and roll, hip hop, and other popular genres to subsidize intimate studio lessons in classical music performance. Although certainly ironic, these developments are not surprising, reflecting a widespread "possessive investment" in classical music that seeks to maintain the status quo. In this talk, I explore both the limits and transformative potential of popular music studies by engaging a number of questions: In what ways do we continue to ignore and perpetuate racial inequality even as we incorporate and include racialized forms music? How do our disciplinary practices reproduce their own appeal by limiting the means by which countervailing information is legitimately produced? And, lastly, what would it mean for popular music studies to introduce forms of *significant difference* that would challenge accepted norms and patterns of exclusion?

Philip Ewell, "The Myth of the Beatles: A Critical-Race Analysis of Popular Music Studies in Music Theory"

Popular Music Studies is a significant subfield of music theory. Virtually all textbooks feature popular music excerpts, and instructors frequently supplement lessons with such excerpts. Yet for all the benefits that popular music offers, one thing remains taboo: conversations about race. In my talk, a critical-race analysis of popular music studies in music theory, I examine popular music's racialized structures that persistently "benefit members of the dominant [white] race" (Bonilla-Silva 2003), structures that constitute a "white racial frame" that "was generated to rationalize and insure white privilege and dominance over Americans of color" (Feagin 2009). For instance, the Beatles have been mythologized and canonized, without ever considering the simple fact that this is mainly so because they are white (and male, and good artists, in that order). In examining this racial element, I expose the racial hierarchy of popular music studies (full disclosure: I myself am firmly, and regrettably, part of this unseemly racial hierarchy, which I will discuss). In a process of cooptation and legitimization, popular music studies use analytical techniques—such as form studies or the theories of Schenker and Riemann—from the white racial frame to introduce music, usually by whites but sometimes by nonwhites, to the field of music theory. Ultimately, I offer suggestions regarding how we can begin to deframe and reframe the white racial frame of popular music studies in music theory in hopes of making popular music studies more inclusive and accessible and of engaging audiences and voices from outside of academia.

K.E. Goldschmitt, "Centering Latin America in Pop Music Curricula and Scholarship"

In recent years, some of the most profitable songs in the United States have been sung in Spanish, and Latin music is once again one of the most popular genres. Yet, one would never guess that fact from surveying undergraduate popular music curricula, or scholarly publications geared to music majors. While studies of Latin American music abound and many scholars widely cite the influence of Latin music on the history of "American music" (e.g., Garrett, Kun, Lipsitz, Wald, Weisbard), Latin musical repertoire is regularly walled off from the core of undergraduate popular music courses.

This presentation argues that popular music scholars are making political choices when they design curricula. I make the case for fearlessly incorporating material that reflects the vast popularity and influence of Latin American music. I further argue for new strategies to help pop music studies of Latin American music move into the mainstream of our teaching and scholarship, rather than occupying the outskirts of area studies, ethnic studies, and foreign language pedagogy. My findings are grounded in my experience writing a book-length history of music from one Latin American country in Anglophone markets, and regularly surveying pop music criticism for inclusion in my undergraduate courses. At this political juncture, the continued exclusion of Latin music in mainstream pop music histories perpetuates a narrow and inaccurate view of popular music in the U.S. Pop music studies can only fulfill its promise by pushing past language barriers to better account for the music that moves us.