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Book Reviews

Policing Pop
MARTIN CLOONAN & REEBEE GAROFALO (Eds)
Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2003
241 pp.

Discussion of the moral degeneracy precipitated by pop music has taken the form of polemics more than dispassionate analysis. Free speech advocates from Diogenes the Cynic to Frank Zappa have urged libertarian openness, arguing that unfettered expression is both the right and the duty of free people. They got ample assistance from the likes of John Milton and John Stuart Mill. Like Voltaire, they were willing to lay down their lives for the First Amendment rights of artists and others. Alternatively, in the tradition of the disk jockeys who smashed Elvis Presley records in a futile attempt to prevent cultural miscegenation (the mongrelization of memes), advocates of restraint from Plato to Tipper Gore and the Parents Music Resource Center continued to fret that liberty quickly descends into license, especially when accompanied by a lyre or an electric guitar. Such cultural chaperones have been ably aided by the sanctimonious Senator Joseph Lieberman, who still worries about pop music "hiding behind the First Amendment" while insisting that he is "not talking censorship here, but citizenship."

The lines are inflexibly drawn. The opinions, like concrete, are firmly set. The arguments are too familiar: "It's all been said before. It's all been written in the book."

We are fortunate, therefore, to have available a book that has recently come off the presses of Temple University in Philadelphia. It offers an opportunity to reorient the somewhat tiresome dispute about how much freedom is too much freedom.

Cloonan and Garofalo's text opens with what, for some, may seem an exercise in pedantry. Martin Cloonan's introductory essay asks us to consider seriously the question of definition. At the outset, at least, he is less interested in advancing an opinion than in sorting out the semantics of free speech. He wants us to be precise and to know, quite literally, what we are talking about. In an age when tempers are short and attitudes strong, this can be an exhausting, but ultimately salutary effort.

Once disabused of easy assumptions and semantic shields (on all sides), and consequently deprived of excessive cant, we are invited by co-editor Reebee Garofalo to take a hard look at the realities of communications technology as they set the material context in which fractious ideas conflict. Here, too, the demand for clarity compels us to rethink what conventionally passes for wisdom.

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We reap a considerable reward for this double-tasking, for unburdening ourselves of light-switch ethics (''you're either with us or you're with the…other guys''), and for carefully reflecting on what is at stake when people squabble about what music we should be permitted to hear. We learn that the restrictions and occasional outright censorship of pop music are less a question of politics than of economics. While outbursts of outrage at outrageous outbursts of violence, misogyny, racism, poxy personalities, and simple bad manners gain the attention of cultural critics and commentators, it turns out that, in Western Europe and North America, the principal threats to free expression are not addled adults who grooved on Jimi Hendrix but are rendered apoplectic by rap, nor are they fundamentalist preachers, opportunistic politicians, or vice squad sergeants. Formal governmental censorship is rare and moral majoritarians have been relatively ineffective in the effort to criminalize rock concerts through the instrumentality of the courts. The most significant restrictions and repressions, it seems, are applied by the manufacturers and distributors of the ''product'' itself.

Understood as commercial commodities, musical recordings are shaped and shipped out with the same artistic and cultural concern as any other product on a Wal-mart shelf. Any sense of offense at the curtailment of musical ''product'' is articulated not by teenagers who may have cause to fear that they will be deprived of their tribal art but by old poops like Elton John, who has raged against the soulless machine that the music ''industry'' has become.

The corporate dimension is a major theme in this thoughtful book that presents definitional questions (what, in essence, is censorship?), legal questions (what is the relationship among copyright, artistic protection and corporate cupidity?), issues of constitutional government and principles of due process (the absurd but far from funny trial of the Canadian band Dayglo Abortions being iconic), and the perceptive treatment of the recording, broadcast, and downloading technology as it affects the content and control of the pop music scene. Pop fans who can handle the truth will learn to their embarrassment how fully manipulated they are as a consequence of their submission to consumerism and their abject willingness to remain attached to the entities (not parents, school principals, and police officers, but marketing consultants) who restrict their choices and construct their sensibilities.

Were that not enough, *Policing Pop* also moves from an analysis of the insular shopping malls of suburbia to the multinational context in all its raw complexity. Pop music, after all, may have originated in the cultural crucibles of blues, country, jazz, and rock in New Orleans, Memphis, Chicago, and Detroit, but it has definitely gone global. There are chapters in this anthology on provocation and policing in countries as diverse as China and South Africa, Slovenia and Brazil. The Slovenian case study is particularly distressing. Arguably the most liberal and ''Westernized'' portion of what is now fashionably called ''the former Yugoslavia,'' it appeared to have been uniquely spared the worst of the religious intolerance and ''ethnic cleansing'' that burdened the other republics. Still, the Catholic Church and the Christian Democratic Party have recently moved lock-step toward the spiritual, cultural, and political

domination of Slovenes. So, when the radical rock group Strelnikoff released its album *Bitchcraft* with a cover portraying the Virgin Mary cuddling a rat, reaction was swift and forceful. Indicted but not yet prosecuted at the time of writing, contributor David Parvo says that the Strelnikoff case is crucial to the question of whether Slovenia will continue on the road to liberal democracy or regress toward "a repressive democratic theocracy" in which "freedom of expression would be threatened to a greater degree that it ever was under the communist regime of Tito." Americans from Jerry Falwell to the op-ed columnists of the *New York Times* would do well to reflect on this issue as they urge US politicians to play "the God card" in their election campaigns.

After working its way through equally effective analyses of British Marxist and German Nazi bands, the book ends with a recapitulation of the state of disunion in the United States, where anguished moralists lurk in gate-guarded communities and listen to reactionary talk radio, while their youngsters feed on the revolutionary placebos and choreographed displays of dandified rebellion that continue to pollute American pop charts, music videos, and the pages of *People* magazine. All in all, *Policing Pop* takes the reader on quite a ride. Its contributing authors include, among others, musicologists, sociologists, and law professors who offer intellectually rewarding insights and eloquent arguments for the political and cultural importance of popular music, something with which even young people would agree, if they could be enticed to read them.

HOWARD A. DOUGHTY
Seneca College, Toronto, ON

Critical Studies, Vol. 19, Music, Popular Culture, Identities
RICHARD YOUNG (Ed.)
Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2002
360 pp.

Recent years have witnessed questions of identity becoming increasingly central within popular music studies. This volume collects together 16 essays (plus an editorial) on the topic with contributors from across the globe. Essays travel across time (from the nineteenth century to the present) and space (Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa are all featured here). Such a wide range gives some idea of the ways in which the relationship between popular music and group identity is being played out across the globe. As the local and global interact, popular music has become one of the key sites where resultant identities compete and combine and this collection is a welcome addition to the literature of a field which is likely to continue to be extensively ploughed in future years.

Most of the chapters here examine, in various ways, the relationship between the local and the global and how this is played out in popular music. The sheer diversity of musics and identities on display here is itself illustrative of the fact that, if we are to understand the impact of new processes of capital accumulation of the sort generally referred to as globalization, then we need to examine the various ways that these are played out in different locations.

Inevitably an edited collection presents the reader with an array of dishes, within which some will be more to their taste than others. Even more than with a single-authored text, there is a tendency for readers of such a collection to have to pick and choose when reviewing such a tome. This book has issues which link it, rather than a central thesis with which to take issue. However, such is the diversity of contributions on display here that only a critic who denied the importance of identity in music could gain nothing from this collection. While I am not such a critic, I do wonder whether in their attempts to map new identities (and to distance themselves from old) some of the authors here overstate their case. Perhaps the most glaring example of this is George Lang, who claims in his chapter on Bossa Nova that "class [is] no longer an operative criterion of analysis" (200–01). It seems to me that anyone who would make such a claim is really not paying attention to a lot of things including, in all likelihood, the composition of their own student body. In a world where some live lives of luxury and others starve, it is unclear to me how individuals' fates could possibly be unrelated to their economic status.

Thankfully most of the contributors are above such trite observations and the majority of the chapters here provide new insights into the relationship between popular music and identity. While there is no common argument, one common strand is that most of the papers come from outside the mainstream of popular music and popular music studies. Indeed it is explicitly stated in Richard Young's introduction that there is nothing from "mainstream musical expressions of the US" (p.11), although it is also noted that that such music also permeates much of what is discussed in the book. I recognize here that the notion of the "mainstream" is itself contested, but beg readers' indulgence. Certainly I know that most of my own undergraduate students of popular music will not routinely expect to find themselves confronted with discussions of the Israeli extreme metal scene or Iranian exile videos or Flamenco. But all these subjects and many more besides are on display here. While superficially some of the themes addressed may appear esoteric, in fact they represent a welcome addition to the democratization and decentering of popular music studies.

The book will inevitably be read in a selective way with readers opting to examine those chapters which most relate to their interests. I was particularly struck by Keith Kahb-Harris's chapter on Israeli extreme metal and Claire Levy's on chalga in the Balkans as they showed how forms of popular music may be marginalized in a way which borders on censorship. But the question all the chapters raise is whether it is better to be in or out of the mainstream. This in turn raises questions about not only where the mainstream is located, but also where popular music scholars should

devote their attention. The emphasis here is on identity and overall the collection serves its purpose in illuminating a key area of interest to contemporary popular music scholars.

MARTIN CLOONAN
University of Glasgow, Scotland

This Is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project
ERIC WEISBARD (Ed.)
Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2004
400 pp.

The term "pop" carries considerable baggage. One aim of this volume is to explore some of the fundamental assumptions of popular music. Rather than taking popular music head on, the writers seem to dance around the subject, looking at it from different angles from the periphery. One benefit of this approach is that it provides discussion of often neglected aspects of popular music. On the other hand, I often found myself wondering when the writers would begin to discuss what the world outside academia considered to be pop music.

This book came out of the Experience Music Project 2002 Pop Conference. Like most conference volumes, this book covers a wide range of topics. Twenty-six articles span everything from obsessive record collecting to heavy metal fan websites to the birth of the blues to the death (and continual rebirth) of jazz. This eclecticism is intentional—one of the stated aims of this conference was to blur the boundaries between disciplines, bridging the gaps between scholars, music critics, and musicians, placing each in dialog with the other.

The book is divided into three sections: narratives, authorship, and values. In the interest of space, I will briefly touch on some of the articles that I see as representative of each section. Simon Frith and Robert Christgau open the narratives section with a discussion of the state of the pop industry. The section then turns to historical accounts of pop music as well as a discussion of pop criticism. Gary Giddins provides a history of jazz, explaining its peculiar tenacity as it continues to evolve. Luc Sante does similar work with the blues, demonstrating the difficulty of providing an authoritative account of its origin.

The authorship segment grapples with issues such as authenticity and production. Deena Weinstein explores the internal dynamics of bands and how these dynamics shape the music. David Sanjek and Sarah Dougher each tackle the issue of authenticity in music, but Dougher's piece is written from her point of view as a female working musician, and discusses issues of institutionalized sexism. Douglas Wolk explores the role of compression in shaping the sound of modern popular

music, arguing forcefully for a sort of deterministic role of technology in the shaping of the modern pop sound. Moreover, he does this in such a way that even those with little technical knowledge of compression can easily understand.

The values segment is perhaps the most rewarding portion of this book. Julian Dibbell and Simon Reynolds each take on the issue of record collecting in the digital era. Dibbell takes an interesting approach to this, exploring the erotic aspect of collection and drawing parallels with the zero-day warez scene. Ann Powers and Joshua Clover each make compelling arguments in defense of the banality of popular music. While Powers argues for the comforting nature of sameness, Clover argues that sameness is a consequence of the mode of mass production.

This volume attempts to negotiate an uneasy tension between the history of pop and the present-day incarnation of pop, although the book errs on the side of history during the first half. Even so, this book is more than a history volume; the writers all agree that pop music still matters, as it always has, even in all of its banality and triteness. The essays in this volume all have one overarching theme: pop is important not only because of what it does for us, but because of what it does *to us*.

As stated before, the purpose of this conference was to allow a space in which scholars, music critics, and musicians could discuss popular music from their particular vantage point. As such, this book is a compromise of sorts—not quite scholarly, yet not quite accessible to the layperson. Scholars may find themselves annoyed by the lack of evidence and citations provided for the arguments and assertions in some of the essays. Likewise, lay readers may find that the author assumes a shared vocabulary and background that the reader does not possess. Another limitation of this volume is the often heavy focus on the past. Many of the essays said little about today's pop music. The heavy emphasis on the history of pop music at the expense of present-day pop music led me at times to think that the title of the volume could have been "*This Was Pop*." While it is obvious that writers can use the past to inform the present, several essays could have been more explicit in explaining exactly how the past has shaped modern-day pop rather than expecting the reader to make the inferential leap.

Even with these limitations, there is much to be recommended in this volume. Essays by musicians discussing their trade, such as Carrie Brownstein of Sleater-Kinney discussing her relationship with the audience during live performance and Tim Quirk of Too Much Joy drawing parallels between the ritualization of abandon/spontaneity in live music performance and the "new economy" of the dot-com industry, are points of view that are often difficult to come by in a university press book. The breadth of information covered in this book is its main strength. This book will be useful for anyone seeking a greater understanding of the *essence* of pop more than simply a discussion of popular music.

BRETT LUNCEFORD
The Pennsylvania State University

Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the Transformation of U.S. Culture

PRESTON WHALEY, JR.

Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2004

250 pp.

Preston Whaley uses Beat literature and jazz to explore the intersection of literature, music, and style in the years after 1945 to show that "the art of Coltrane, Ginsberg, Kaufman, Kerouac, and Weiss sought to open up consciousness to a greater awareness of self, others, and things—life" (198). The major focus is on how the Beats appropriated jazz style by both resisting the constraining power of the culture industries and conforming to the consumptive demands of the marketplace. While many of the beat writers refused to conform to the more obvious manifestations of the dominant society, at the same time they wanted to influence the era's culture and thus challenged the discourse concerning art, society, and the marketplace.

Blows Like a Horn looks at the oral and performance side of both Beat literature and jazz and details how the intersection of capital and marketing was essential for both to maintain their oppositional status. He begins by detailing how the Gallery 6 readings and the obscenity trail for Ginsberg's "Howl" identified this duality. Little mention was made in 1955 of the readings, which later came to signal the beginning of the San Francisco literary renaissance, and only after the publicity about Ginsberg's poem became part of the public discourse did the event take on larger meaning. Whaley details the various methods employed by Ginsberg to use the obscenity trail to boost exposure of "Howl," thereby increasing its sales and making himself and the poem part of the collective memory of the 1950s. He ties this to similar situations that occurred in Harlem during the "birth" of bebop in the early part of the 1940s, stressing that "social and cultural marginalization and inequality could be made into new forms of expression, identity, and community" (49).

Turning alienation into acceptance is at the center of Whaley's study, as he moves between jazz style and beat literature to detail the intersection of content and style that informed both expressions. In examining *The Subterraneans*, the rarely viewed 1958 film based on Jack Kerouac's novel, he shows how Hollywood tried to convey the style of the Beats, while at the same time sacrificing the meaning. And, while Kerouac thought selling the book to the movies "shameful" (115), for Whaley this act was exactly the nature of the transformation of culture that serves as an underlying theme in the book. He does the same with the chapters on Kerouac's improvisational style evident in *Visions of Cody* and in a chapter connecting "Howl" with the emerging jazz style of John Coltrane. Style, Whaley argues, allowed for the overt radical nature of beat and jazz to become accepted. He uses the evolution of Coltrane's jazz style between 1955 and 1964, culminating in *A Love Supreme*, to document the development of Ginsberg's style and the close connection between the two. "Both works," Whaley writes, "derive from improvisational practices and

require the ceremony of sustained aural attention'' (179), which encourages different readings, hearings, and levels of participation.

Blows Like a Horn is an interesting read. Whaley has an excellent command of the language and his writing style is inviting. The chapter on Ruth Weiss and Bob Kaufman is very interesting, but seemed not to fit into the rest of the work as these two Bay area artists remained obscure. The suggestion that the Beats used jazz style and images is not novel, for the Beats themselves said that jazz played a central role in the formation of their literary and personal identity. What I had hoped for in *Blows Like a Horn* was some discussion of how jazz might have absorbed Beat style. Whaley comes closest with the discussion on Coltrane, but the connective tissue is not strong enough to suggest there was any sort of give and take between the two artistic expressions. In the end, the story remains the same, as white artists appropriated black style and used it to challenge the dominant society. For those interested in the post-war period, Whaley's book will remind you of the intersection of art, politics, and culture that took place and how oppositional style became an acceptable part of the American dialogue.

KENNETH J. BINDAS
Kent State University, OH