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From John Farnham to Lordi: The Noise of Music

Bruce Johnson

In the field of music scholarship in general, it is popular music studies that have engendered the most innovative developments over the last several decades. As an academic formally based in literature and cognate theoretical fields, I would go further and offer the personal opinion that they have made some of the most interesting contributions to the methodologies of cultural studies over that period, fed by prior traditions of ethnomusicology and ethnography. One of the main reasons has a bearing on this article: it is impossible to write effectively about popular music, which is so predominantly independent of the printed score, without at least implicitly questioning the scopic orientations of cultural analysis and theory which dominate other fields (and indeed, sometimes music studies themselves). We can find an unfolding summary of the developments in popular music studies through what I suggest are the three most important academic journals in the field, which are, in order of seniority, *Popular Music and Society* (founded in the USA in 1971), *Popular Music* (UK, 1981) and *Perfect Beat: the Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture* (Australia, 1992). In its continuing series, *Perfect Beat* provides a comprehensive and focused exemplification of approaches to the critical analysis of the musics usually designated as 'popular' in the Oceanic region. In short, if we want to know what's going on in Australian popular music studies, this journal is a good place to start.

In *Perfect Beat* a decade ago I identified three categories of then current approaches to popular music studies:

- (1) empirical studies – the gathering of data relating to the actual sites and conditions of musical activity – Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: music-making in an English town* (Cambridge, 1989); Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making* (Oxford, 1991)
- (2) theoretical studies – the elaboration of models from which appropriate discursive structures can be developed - Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes/Philadelphia, 1990); Horn, ed., *Popular Music Perspectives 2* (Gothenberg, Exeter, Ottawa, Reggio Emilia, 1985)
- (3) the attempt to establish connections between the formal properties of music and their social meanings - Tagg, 'Analysing popular music: theory, method and practice', *Popular Music 2* (1982) 37-67; Shepherd, *Music as Social Text* (Cambridge, 1991).¹

Since then there have been some fifteen regular issues of the journal, and the intellectual trajectories they describe parallel those of international popular music studies, as disclosed in the US and UK equivalents, and summarised in the monumental *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, currently appearing in successive volumes.² While self-quotation, like self praise, is a

negligible validation, as points of reference I find relevance here in two other passages from that overview of a decade ago. It was based on a review of a collection of essays by Charles Kiel and Steven Feld, called *Music Grooves*, of which I wrote:

Music is one of the most powerful bearers of community identity, from an a *capella* soccer crowd to a national anthem, and all points in between. Keil sounds warnings about the dangers of the nation-state seizing the participatory energy generated by music, and visualises micro-communities as the check. But micro-communities go on fascist rampages too, fuelled by the pentecostal energy of music's "participatory discrepancies": "Whadda we want? When do we want it?" Lynch mobs also have chants, and hymn-singers can be fascists. This is one of the pivotal questions in music analysis, the point of contact between the energy unlocked by music and its devices, and how it is deployed socially (103).

As I return to Feld's comment a decade later, I find I have moved closer to his prescient position, one that has been broadly shared in popular music studies over that time: that the musical energies of marginalised or disenfranchised communities are, after all, one of the most important checks on a totalitarian drift. The size, heterogeneity and intensity of local and tribal music communities contest the 'master narrative' of globalisation and its supposed march towards cultural homogenisation. Such musics reflect the local conditions they articulate structurally as well as semiotically, providing alternative models of social organisation beyond the dominant managerial imagination. Looking through *Perfect Beat* since its inception confirms that if there is a single preoccupation that gathers the strands of popular music studies together, it remains this connection between music and the construction and articulation of identity. I want to suggest through this article that if that is the bright side of popular music, it also generates its dark side.

We use music to verify ourselves and the world we inhabit, at the same time implicitly or explicitly setting up confrontations between contending groups in society.³ This is especially true of popular music because it represents a much more immediate and flexible response to the here-and-now than an art music repertoire that continues to be dominated by canonical works written in other times and places. Scored music does not adapt to and reflect changing local conditions in the way improvised and non-scored musics do. Of course, US models currently enjoy a position of dominance in global popular music, but imported popular genres have demonstrated great amenability to being 'made over' as vehicles for the expression of local identities and power relations since the colonial period. Part of every music performance, from concerto to karaoke, involves the proclamation of identity as constructed at that moment, and in many cases it is the primary function of performance, including the singing of national

anthems, church hymns, supporters' songs in sports arenas, political chants and homeland songs in ethnic clubs. Apart from the lyrics, particular forms of instrumentation, repertoires of licks, timbres, performance/audience deportment, demeanour and costume, and genre itself, all become deeply encoded with signs of membership of groups defined along every possible axis including age, gender, place, ethnicity and socio-economic status. At a micro-level, music may be used to stake out individual territory, as in the motorist with his windows down and the boom-box at full volume. At the macro-level, music performance proclaims nation, as in the playing of national anthems at the conclusion of each Olympic event.

At the same time, however, in a more complex dynamic, music functions to disclose divisions in the concept of national identity and authenticity. In February 2005 veteran Australian pop singer John Farnham offered to perform *gratis* at Anzac Cove for the ninetieth anniversary of the Australian and New Zealand landings at Gallipoli. It was reported that the programme would include 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. The virulence of the ensuing debate was an instructive case study in the power which popular music performance can bring to the construction (or, as many believed, the destruction) of the idea of nation. Farnham's offer entailed a convergence of pop performance with a seminal episode commemorated as Anzac Day, in the formation of the national identities of two countries. The leaders of both vetoed the idea, to both public gratification and outrage, though there was also something of a division along national lines, with indignation from Australian fans at what they saw as a veto by the New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clarke, exacerbated by the revelation that she had never heard of Farnham. The justification of the veto included the assertion that music was inappropriate at such an occasion. As a generalisation, this could be regarded as unconvincing, given that 'The Last Post' is regularly performed by a military bugler at the Anzac Cove ceremony. Closer inspection of the debate suggests that the problem was less with music, than with the performer, his genre and its associations. Public comments included the following:

Opposing the idea:

'You don't go there to hear rock music'⁴

'It is catering to the young generation' (22).

'It is one thing to endure the Americanised caterwauling of the national anthem at the beginning of a rugby test. It is quite another to tolerate the infliction of pop music upon people who have crossed the world to attend the dawn service' (22).

Defending it:

'It's not like he was going to play rock and roll. He would play something mellow' (4).

'With typical stupidity, the aged brigade wants to ban modern music at the 90th anniversary of Anzac Day (22).

The leader of the New Zealand National Party accused Clark of elitism (3), and one correspondent wondered if the same objection would have applied to New Zealand opera singer Kiri Te Kanawa.⁵ The complex tangle of issues underpinning the divergent uses and functions of music emerged in the complaint in *TNZH* Editorial that ‘“You’ll Never Walk Alone” was a ditty whose only relevance to this day and age is to the Liverpool Football Club’.⁶

As we try to untangle the threads of this debate, it is clear that what is at issue here is not simply the status of music as an art form. The fault lines opened up by the debate disclose confrontations over genre, the high/low culture division, cultural imperialism (from both English and US centres), and most fundamentally the role of music in the authentication of identity (in this case, national identity). Farnham’s generous, but obviously ill-judged offer disclosed just how deeply even a well-loved and politically unchallenging singer can be locked into a musical context charged with political tensions of which people (obviously including Farnham himself) would otherwise be unaware. Popular music and its various rhetorics are about how communities define themselves. It is vital in constructing social realities by providing a focus for energies that might otherwise appear unconnected and dispersed. It brings these forces together to form a ‘context’ of communities that then feed back into the musical text; indeed, the idea of a self-amplifying feedback loop is a more useful model of this relationship than a simplistic model of passive reflection.

In these examples of public debate the idea of the ‘popular’ occupies a contested position, and it continues, justifiably, to be a central debating point in academic discourse. In a recent issue of *Popular Music*, the journal’s International Advisory Editors engaged in a forum about the meaning of ‘popular’ in popular music studies.⁷ Their positions overlapped, but not, by any interpretation, to the point of unanimity. Some things at least were clear. The word cannot be defined simply as a description of musical texts, nor necessarily as a synonym for mass appeal, although it seems to be used most often in connection with music that is mass mediated. But where does this media-centred use of the word leave a host of other musics that aren’t really art music either? What kind of music is sports-stadium and locker room singing, street busking, shower singing and other domestic music-making, political march chanting, low-church hymn singing? Like the definition of man as a featherless biped, every definition of popular music invites the equivalent of a plucked chicken. It could be said, in fact, that one of the projects of popular music studies is this debate itself.

I want, however, to turn to the other term in ‘popular music’. ‘Music’ seems to be taken as a given. Its meaning was never debated in the online forum I have just mentioned, and while it wasn’t explicitly part of the discussion, I found it interesting that none of us referred to it. Music is a secure mooring around which the term popular swings with changes in the tide. Music is firmly anchored, fore and aft, in the cultural and the aesthetic. Or, to now abandon that metaphorical

ship, compared to the term 'popular', 'music' enjoys a relatively stable taxonomic location in the debates on popular music and identity.

The following review draws on work for a forthcoming book on music and violence on which I am working with Martin Cloonan of Glasgow University. The research constantly throws up reminders that the history of music has been characterised by the most radical and virulent disagreements about its nature and categorisation. Recalling familiar characterisations of modern pop musics from emergent rock through to rap, hip hop, techno and their permutations, one of the correspondents quoted above described Farnham's MOR singing not as music, but as 'caterwauling'. In denying forms of popular music the status of music, he is in respectable and venerable company. For William Wordsworth the popular music of London streets was part of the 'uproar of the rabblement', and later for Charles Dickens it was an aggregation of 'frightful noises'.⁸ Every subsequent development in popular music was subjected to the same taxonomic violence. The popular turn-of-the-century craze, ragtime, was '... merely a raucous and inarticulate shouting of hoarse-throated instruments ... a fantastic cacophony'.⁹ Its successor, jazz, descended to 'an unforgivable orgy of noise, a riot of discord' (144), an 'irritation of the nerves of hearing',¹⁰ 'a Negro expression for noise ... noise that passes for music.'¹¹ For modernist literary eminence Wyndham Lewis, jazz was an 'idiot mass sound', and Australian poet Kenneth Slessor, reflecting on popular music circa 1930, lamented that 'dancers insist on a din'.¹²

The attacks that these exemplify do not come from culturally impoverished or negligible quarters. They are from opinion-making authors, clerics and other powerful moral lobbies, influential businessmen, academics, musicians and media representatives. They come from politicians and arts administrators who disburse massive amounts of funding according to criteria tied to such assumptions. Put simply: how likely is it that they will give support and funding to music which they declare to be noise? It is hard to imagine a more radical displacement than of sound from music to noise, and this decategorisation of music is conducted by the spokespersons of authorised culture. And almost without exception, what they have initially characterised as noise, is what popular music scholars take for granted as music. This is a powerful discursive and political lobby to be so often blissfully ignoring or dismissing.

The relationship between music and noise has attracted attention from a variety of perspectives ranging from the obvious examples of sound engineers interested in acoustically 'decontaminating' music performance, to the reverse project of incorporating 'noise' into music. Acoustic ecology and soundscape studies have provided increasingly influential points of focus for cultural and physiological studies in which the relationship between musical and non-musical sounds is explored.¹³ My interest here is in the aggressively and ideologically articulated opposition between music and noise. Noise, and similar words like pandemonium, din, hubbub, uproar are, precisely, the antithesis of what we

understand by music. They characterise sound as non-meaningful and ugly, neither culturally nor aesthetically intelligible. While we address music exclusively as securely contained within the spaces of culture and aesthetics, the claims that it is merely noise, and their implications, remain outside our field of inspection. But of course, noise is the weed in the sound garden. It is acoustic plants in places where they are not wanted. Sound is the acoustic field, having objective status, but 'noise' is a conferred rather than an inherent characteristic. The words music and noise simply represent differing opinions about sounds. These perennial and profound differences of opinion are explored in studies of music, but why so rarely and *ad hoc*? My answer is speculative: the unquestioned separation of music from noise helps to valorise the former as a positive force. And wherever we are on the spectrum of music research, to accept without question that what we study is 'music', is to validate our own activity as in some way civilised and artistically significant. To relocate the object of our study to the realm of sound (overtone of vulgar utilitarian sciences), is to place at hazard its purchase, and ours, in the more nobly rarefied discourses of art, if not intelligible culture in general. It is to risk seeing the dissolution of music into meaninglessness.

But the separation of music from noise is also a deracination from the larger sonic field that profoundly falsifies the musical experience, and especially in the (post)modern era, because the overwhelming majority of that experience is in conjunction with other sounds that would be regarded as noise. The rise of the personal stereo, and in particular the iPod, has of course altered that dynamic to an extent, creating personal acoustic cells quarantined from the larger soundscape. However, available evidence suggests that it is easy to overstate the global impact of this technology. Since the introduction of the iPod in 2001, for example, market leader Apple has shipped in excess of thirty million units. The figure is impressive, until it is remembered that this represents only one in ten of the population of the US, and only one in 220 – less than .5 % - of the world's population.¹⁴ Even allowing for other MP3 brands supplementing these figures, and assuming that each iPod sale represents a different customer, rather than those who update through successive 'must have' models, this is actually an infinitesimal number in the global scale. Increasing numbers of westernised youth are accessing their music for much of the day through the iPod (but they also watch movies, television, attend music venues and maintain necessary acoustic alertness in workplaces). To infer that the majority of the world's musical experience is through acoustically insulated personal stereos would be arrogant first-world solipsism. It remains a robust assertion that the majority of the world's musical experience is outside dedicated music performance spaces, and part of the dense contemporary soundscape.

In an academic milieu which conceptualises knowledge scopically – vision, perspective, point of view, observation, theory (from the Greek word for spectacle) – it is often overlooked (there we go again!), that the phenomenology of hearing is distinct from that of seeing, to the point where the two are barely

comparable as the cognitive foundations of experience. It is possible to focus on a painting to the exclusion of other visual stimuli in a way that is not the case with a piece of music. The train that roars by the busker, the clock that chimes while Segovia is performing in the town hall, the person coughing in the opera house, are part of the sonic experience, in a way that the Exit sign in a gallery is not part of the experience of an adjacent painting. You can't even describe two simultaneous sounds as 'adjacent'. There is nothing new in this comment about the sensorium and cognition: in his 1749 'Letter on the Blind', Diderot wrote 'The state of our organs and of our senses has a great influence on our metaphysics and our ethics, and our most purely intellectual ideas, if I may express it thus, are very much dependent on the structure of our body'.¹⁵

Most of the music we hear today is part of a larger soundscape, and to ignore those extraneous noises in our attempts to understand music experience, is to falsify it. Here is the second quotation from that 1996 essay in *Perfect Beat* that I threatened the reader with earlier:

Before music means something, it is a sound in the ear, a component in a soundscape. Most of our experience of music is as part of a larger array of sounds. It is accompanied by traffic noise, social conversation, poker machines, the ringing of telephones, aircraft, the tinkling of glasses and crockery. However distasteful this may be to a musicologist, the overwhelming majority of our experience of music is as part of the soundscape of the everyday. As long as we try to analyse music as lived experience by pretending otherwise, it will remain perversely unintelligible.¹⁶

I had talked of this elsewhere, taking up a line of enquiry for whom the initial inspiration was, as far as I am concerned, R. Murray Schafer in his seminal *The Tuning of the World*.¹⁷ It is part of a discussion that is actively taking place in soundscape studies, which has gained recent attention as, loosely speaking, acoustic ecology. It is a discussion that is, however, not very audible in music studies relative to its other conversations. Yet we will gain a very limited understanding of the potential social function of music while we smile condescendingly at the splenetic attacks of what we suppose to be its negligibly quaint and unhip critics. It will be instructive to locate music as part of the modern soundscape rather than exclusively of an artscape or an internally coherent semiotic order.

What might we learn about music when it is resituated in the larger sonic environment? Two studies cited in this essay, those of Bruce Smith and John M. Picker, are stimulating examples. Here, I want to suggest and illustrate the proposition that the conflicts that generated modernity may themselves be studied in terms of the increasing level and density of sound and the right to deploy it. As one of the most complex of all constructed sounds, music is a major

presence in the noise of modernity. When we move it from the aesthetic field to the sonic – which, as I have suggested, is what is done every time music is called noise – it is no longer a redemptively benevolent artistic presence, but is a site of confrontation and violence.

Not only is music heard as part of the noise of our lives. For all of us, at some time, music *is* part of that noise. Apart from high-art musicologists demonising pop, who among even the most ardent of popular music researchers has not at some time wished someone else would ‘turn that damn noise down’? Bertolt Brecht’s insight that the censor of artworks understands something about their power that might escape their proponents, is relevant here. The angry or dismissive description of music as ‘noise’ – something to be weeded out – is incipient censorship, and a way of recognizing the darker powers of all music that music scholars tend to avoid. I am not just talking about those forms of music which might apparently incite violence, from ancient war-chants to contemporary gangsta rap, neo-Nazi rock and homophobic reggae. As a sonic phenomenon, all music may become that subjectively conferred category ‘noise’, no matter how innocuous and anxiolytic it may be intended to be, or even presumed to be on the basis of its formal character.¹⁸

At risk of labouring the obvious, let me give a range of illustrations of the axiom that one person’s music is another person’s noise, and that your noise may well be ‘music to my ears’. As I am drafting this, I read in the press that the lives of the inhabitants of a hamlet called Bottomley in Yorkshire were made unbearable by one Jeanne Wilding, who was finally restrained by one of the toughest Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) ever issued. Among the actions that drove some of her neighbours to breakdown and depression was ‘blasting out choral works’ in the middle of the night.¹⁹ Nuisance music does not have to depict violence such as (in the case of her choral works) ‘rape and murder’, to constitute violence. I repeat: *all* music is potentially offensive and an instrument of extreme torment. In 2005 it was reported that a UK motorist was issued an infringement notice – he refused to pay the fine - for playing a Riverdance CD too loudly on his car stereo.²⁰ In a number of cities in Australia and the UK, local councils have used so-called ‘classical’ music to drive away youth gangs from malls and railway stations, giving new meaning to the term ‘Mozart Effect’.²¹ Such anecdotes are more likely to amuse than provoke. Less so, however such cases as the report on BBC 1 television, 3 February 2005, of detainees in a British Immigration Centre subjected to torment and humiliation by being awakened in the morning with loud children’s music played by guards employed by the private security company GFL. And notwithstanding the jocular tone of some of the media reports, the US military found an effective way to ‘break the resistance’ of Iraqi prisoners through subjecting them to extended exposure to ‘I love you’, from the Barney and the Purple Dinosaur Show, and songs from Sesame Street and the Teletubbies.²²

For as long as people have left records of their discussions of sound and music, one of the keys to what they understand by the latter is the way they deploy one of its notional antonyms, noise. It is of interest to me, however, that the argument appears to become more voluble in the modern era. In the sixteenth century we begin to find reports of hostility to the intrusiveness of travelling minstrelsy in the streets of one of Europe's most rapidly developing cities, London, and in particular, complaints about repetitiveness: 'the too speedy return of one manner of tune, doth too much annoy'.²³ The complaint anticipates a 2005 poll that reported complaints by shop assistants at having to listen to the same songs on piped rotation in the stores, with Kylie Minogue and Britney Spears among the most irritating.²⁴ There is a further link between these sonic moments, other than protest. They both emanate from one of the first great cities of the modern era. The pattern of increasing noise, of which certain kinds of music are a component, is one of the defining features of, and therefore a way of understanding, the emergence of urban modernity.²⁵

In my own research, there is enough evidence to at least propose the hypothesis that the debate over the difference between noise and music and who has the right to make the determination, intensifies and proliferates with the rise of modernity. That is because noise itself became an increasing presence in the modern world. I have said, however, that noise is not 'out there', but is a value judgement imposed upon sound that *is*. Notwithstanding the scopic fixations of cultural theory, we live in a world increasingly inundated with sonic information: higher levels of volume, increased physical and semiotic acoustic complexity, and a greater variety and density of human-created sound. The loudest sounds of human origin of half a millennium ago would have been church bells, the smithy's forge and military ordinance. For the bellicose Benvenuto Cellini, the 'music of the guns' could displace all other pleasures.²⁶ But one of the most oppressively mind-destroying experiences for entrenched troops of the First World War was the sound of artillery bombardment.²⁷ Since the late nineteenth century there has been a steady rise in the volume, intensity and duration of everyday public and industrial noise, including motor vehicles and trains, construction equipment, aircraft, sirens, alarms. Sound technologies have played the most important role in the flooding of everyday space with noise. And of those noises, contemporary popular music, electronically mediated and amplified, is one of the most ubiquitous. Its effect is summarised in the description of rock music as a 'sensory blitzkrieg: I am bombarded, therefore I am'.²⁸

That imagery of weaponry helps to consolidate the connections I am arguing here between music, noise and violence, connections which are usually buried under the celebrative spirit that most typifies studies of popular music *qua* music. Sound has always been a weapon, but developments in sound technology have produced a very different environment for sounding and hearing than that which prevailed prior to the 1870s. Given that music is such a ubiquitous way of defining identity and territory, and exercising violence, and given the radical

changes in the 'range' of that weaponry, there are implications for the freedoms and responsibilities which are associated with the use of music/noise. In 2002 the New South Wales government reported that about 14% of complaints to the Environmental Protection Agency were about noise.²⁹ A piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2004 cited the health hazards of pub recreation with live bands reaching up to 120 decibels.³⁰ At the turn of the century the Commission of the European Communities reported economic estimates of annual damage in the EU as a consequence of environmental noise at between 13 and 38 billion Euros.³¹

Much is made by the US gun lobby of the constitutionally enshrined right to bear arms, and, in an alarming generalisation of the American citizen, attempts to regulate gun ownership and use are therefore interpreted as an assault on universal human rights. But the right for the individual to bear arms, granted in a frontier wilderness and where the 'arms' are a knife, sword and single shot firearms, is simply not the same as in a massive modern conurbation dense with personal frictions, and where 'arms' that may be carried include Uzzi machine guns, anti-tank weapons and lightweight missile launchers capable of downing an aircraft. Those personal frictions may be increased by a casual flick of a switch or turning of a volume control to produce music which is literally deafening, which may be deployed as psychological and physical weaponry. The analogy between music and weaponry has further explanatory power in the parallel rise of anti-gun and anti-noise lobbies. Both are responses to the technologically enlarged radius of identity projection, the aggressive definition of personal space. In the absence of other adequate forms of regulation, we find proliferating anti-noise organisations, particularly in the largest and most densely populated modern cities like New York.³² In the United Kingdom, formally constituted groups like Pipe Down and rail-users' organisations have lobbied for bans on mobile phones and personal stereos on trains.³³

This discussion is not simply a conservative jeremiad against contemporary music or 'the youth of today'. It is a continuous issue in contemporary public and private space, traversing debates about state versus citizens' rights, which throw up terms like 'censorship', 'nanny state', 'human rights violations', mantras of the, literally, 'self-righteous'. But we live at a time when the slightest, easiest personal gesture has a radius of potential damage infinitely greater than at the time of the Enlightenment which gave birth to what continue to be contemporary notions of 'rights' of free expression. The appeal to the (nanny) state for regulation, however, is not self-evidently a guarantee of a humane civilised outcome. The capacity of music-as-noise to inflict pain makes it an instrument of state regulation, often to the point of violence, in the modern world. At the G8 Summit in Genoa, 21 July 2001, police shot one protester dead and injured about 200. Some of those detained were forced to shout pro-Mussolini slogans and to sing a pro-Pinochet, anti-Semitic song.³⁴ State sanctioned acoustic torture is by no means new, however. Documents released in 2005 provided the information that 'deep interrogation' in Northern Ireland included five techniques found by the

Compton inquiry to constitute 'physical ill-treatment': 'hooding, wall standing, subjecting to noise, deprivation of food and sleep'.³⁵ An Irish prisoner of the British in 1971, recalled 'I couldn't concentrate, this noise was in the centre of my head. I had shit myself and pissed myself a couple of times at this stage' (5).

Noise is one of the most effective instruments of torture currently in use by the US in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay according to a range of reports, including prisoners stripped to underpants, shackled to a chair under strobe lights and forced to listen to rock and rap. 'It fried them'. 'They were very wobbly ... just completely out of it.'³⁶ A similar account describes a Guantanamo Bay prisoner sitting on the floor draped in an Israeli flag, immersed in loud music and strobe light.³⁷ The claim that such treatment is the unendorsed initiative of a few rogue service personnel is rather undermined by what appears to be the US military's ample funding of r & d into the possibilities of acoustic violence, including a number of acoustic weapons that can produce 'internal organ damage or death', and the interest of both police and military in developing the possibilities of the projection of painfully focused soundscapes, known as hypersonic sound.³⁸

Music in contemporary society is to a greater degree than ever before an instrument of power, a potential weapon, a deadly noise. As such its importance cannot be comprehended exclusively under the rubric 'music' in its usual senses. As the foregoing cases exemplify, all music is potentially offensive noise. We don't have to go to Death Metal to find potential for violence, and in fact the element of theatrical role play in such music suggests that it might be the least of our worries. While some forms of Metal are literally deadly serious, there is also a strong element of playful theatricality running through the music, as I have had confirmed in interview with Kimi Kärki, of the satanic Finnish Doom Metal band The Reverend Bizarre ('The Slave of Satan').³⁹ On winning the Eurovision Song Contest in May 2006, the eponymous bandleader of Lordi declared, 'We are not devil-worshippers. This is entertainment'.⁴⁰ During the voting, shots of the band backstage showed the monstrously dressed members holding up signs in Finnish incongruously saying hello to family members at home. The oft-demonised yet self-affirmed Christian Alice Cooper has emphasised the element of play in his act.⁴¹ All forms of music ranging from Mozart to Riverdance, are deployed by all sectors, all generations, ethnic groups, gendered positions, classes, by public and private corporate interests, in ways that create conflict or attempt to control behaviour. In so doing, they are also drawing boundaries around various conceptions of identity and community. These activities, in an era of portable and amplifiable music, have destabilised the relationship between public and private space, upon which all conduct relies for the parameters of civilisation. From the local to the global, they therefore raise urgent questions regarding cultural policy and regulation, including citizens' rights, urban planning and education. In particular how is it possible to reconcile the need for regulation with the fertilisation of musical diversity and richness? More generally, where in this debate do we place the mantra of 'human rights', with its implications of universality, yet in a global music market characterised by profoundly unbalanced

power relations? These are questions that, as Martin Cloonan commented to me, are perhaps 'too important to be left to musicology'.

Bio note

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¹ 'Directions in Popular Music Studies'. *Perfect Beat - The Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture* 2.4 (January 1996): 98-105. See 98.

² *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*. Eds. John Shepherd, with David Horn, Dave Laing, Paul Oliver, Peter Wicke. Continuum: London and New York: currently from Volume I, 2003, to Volume VII, 2005.

³ The following account of the John Farnham episode is adapted from a section of an essay originally to have been published in a collection of essays edited by Shane Homan and Tony Mitchell; my thanks for permission to use the material here.

⁴ *The New Zealand Herald*, 19 February 2005: 4.

⁵ *The New Zealand Herald*, 18 February 2005: np.

⁶ *The New Zealand Herald*, 19 February 2005: 22.

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⁷ 'Can we get rid of the "Popular" in Popular Music? A Virtual Symposium with Contributions from the International Advisory Editors of *Popular Music*'. *Popular Music* 24.1 (2005): 133-145.

⁸ On Wordsworth, see Bruce Johnson. 'Unsound Insights'. *Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Popular Music Studies 20 Years Later. Proceedings of the Eleventh Biannual IASPM Conference, July 6-10, 2001*, Turku, Finland. Eds Kimi Kärki, Rebecca Leydon, and Henri Terho. IASPM-Norden: Turku, 2002: 710; on Dickens, see John M. Picker *Victorian Soundscapes*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003. 61.

⁹ Gray, Herman. 'Popular Music as a Social Problem: a Social History of Claims Against Popular Music'. *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems*. Ed Joel Best. Aldine De Gruyter: New York, 1989. 146.

¹⁰ Johnson, Bruce. 'The Jazz Diaspora'. *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*. Eds Mervyn Cooke and David Horn. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2002. 42.

¹¹ *Australian Variety and Show World*. (July 1918).

¹² On Lewis, see John Carey. *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939*. Faber and Faber: London and Boston, 1992. 194; on Slessor, see Kenneth Slessor. *Darlinghurst Nights*. Angus & Robertson: London, 1981. 38 (First published in 1933, as a collection of poems written over the preceding years).

¹³ Since such seminal studies as R. Murray Schafer's *The Tuning of the World* (McLelland and Stewart: Toronto, 1977) there has been a burgeoning of the study of acoustic cultures and the way in which such terms as music and noise are located within them, to the point at which 'readers' in the field are proliferating, including – apart from other works cited here – such recent collections as *Soundscape Studies and Methods*. Eds Helmi Järviuoma and Greg Wagstaff. Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology: Helsinki, 2002; *The Auditory Reader*. Eds. Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg: Oxford and New York, 2003; *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*. Ed. Veit Erlmann. Berg: Oxford and New York, 2004.

¹⁴ On iPod sales, see Tony Smith. 'Apple iPod sales pass 30m', *The Register*, 21 November 2005, http://www.theregister.co.uk/2005/11/21/apple_30m_ipods/.

The population figures are from the US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/main/www/popcock.html>

¹⁵ Cited in Alvin Kernan. *Samuel Johnson and the Impact of Print*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1989. 140. (Originally published as *Printing Technology, Letters, and Samuel Johnson*, 1987, same publisher.)

¹⁶ Johnson, 'Directions', 103.

¹⁷ Johnson, Bruce. 'Klactovesedstene: Music, Soundscape and Me'. *Soundscape Studies: Essays on Vroom and Moo*. Ed. H. Järviuoma, trans. ed. B. Johnson. Department of Folk Tradition/Institute of Rhythm Music: Finland, 1994: 39-47; Schaffer 1977.

¹⁸ 'Anxiolytic' is a term clinically applied to musics that tend to lower stress levels. An instructive study of the relationship between music and pain thresholds, including anxiolytic music, is to be found in Laura Anne Mitchell. 'An Experimental Investigation of the Effects of Music Listening on Pain'. Unpub Doctoral Thesis, Department of Psychology, School of Life Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2004.

¹⁹ Wainwright, Martin. 'Rural peace and tranquility. Then, enter an expert in the art of mental torture', *The Guardian* online, May 19 2006. The same press item reports that a Birmingham woman 'has been banned from owning a TV, radio or stereo after playing Eminem and Dido at the decibel levels of a passing train'.

²⁰ Morris, Steven. 'Motorist in standoff over Riverdance', *The Guardian*, January 26 2005: 5.

²¹ Clark, Andrew. 'Music to drive away tube louts', *The Guardian*, January 13 2005: 6; for the Australian case, see Martin Cloonan and Bruce Johnson. 'Killing

Me Softly With His Song: an Initial investigation Into the Use of Popular Music as a Tool of Oppression'. *Popular Music* 12.1 (2002): 27-39.

²² Ronson, Jon. *The Men Who Stare at Goats*. Picador: London, 2004. 136. See further examples throughout Cloonan and Johnson, 'Killing'.

²³ Wooldridge, H.E. *Old English Popular Music*. Jack Brussel: New York, 1961. 58; see further on the soundscape of sixteenth century London, Peter Ackroyd. *London: The Biography*. Chatto & Windus: London, 2000. 71-88; Smith, Bruce. *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1999. 49-95.

²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September 2005: 20, and news.com.au, 23 September 2005.

²⁵ See Johnson, Bruce. 'Divided Loyalties: Literary Responses to the Rise of Oral Authority in the Modern Era', forthcoming in *Textus*.

²⁶ Cellini, Benvenuto. *Autobiography*, trans. George Bull. Penguin: Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1979. 76. Written 1558-1566; this edition copyright 1956.

²⁷ This is such a pervasive theme in recollections of the conflict that I simply refer to such reminiscence-based accounts as Richard Holmes. *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918*. Harper Perennial: London, 2004; and Lyn Macdonald. *They Called it Passchendaele: The Story of the Third Battle of Ypres and of the Men who Fought in it*. Penguin: London, 1993, first published 1978.

²⁸ The words were those of George F. Will of the Washington Post Writers Group, cited in an essay entitled 'Christian Rock – A Contradiction of [sic] Terms' attributed to Deaconess Irene Campbell of the Trinity Lutheran Church, Exeter CA, 1990, and circulated online in 1996 by Rebecca Sullivan from McGill University, Canada. While the attribution is indirect, the imagery of assault is familiar, as incorporated also in the term 'Headbanging music'.

²⁹ Glendinning, Lee and Lisa Pryor. 'The beat of the drums, the whine of the leaf blower'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 December 2002: 1; see also www.epa.nsw.gov.au/noise

³⁰ Chifley, Ephraem. 'A word in your ear ... a night at the pub could be deafening'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 November 2004: 15.

³¹ Robert MacNevin. 'Editorial'. *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 1.2 (Winter 2000): 4.

³² Kearney, Christine. 'Keep quiet out there; this is New York'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 June 2004: 14.

³³ Hamilton, Alan. 'Sit-down protest over TVs for trains foiled by broken toilets'. *The Times*, 9 February 2005: 15; Cloonan and Johnson. 'Killing'.

³⁴ Shabi, Rachel, and John Hooper. 'Now, the Reckoning', *The Guardian Weekend*, 22 January 2005: 22-29.

³⁵ Boycott, Owen. 'Army tortured Mau Mau rebels in 1950s', *The Guardian*, 5 February 2005: 8.

³⁶ A. Lewis, Neil A. 'Frequent prisoner coercion alleged'. *New York Times*, 17 October 2004: np.

³⁷ Meek, James. 'Nobody is talking'. *The Guardian G2*, 18 February 2005: 2-5

³⁸ Ronson. *Goats*: 55, and Marshall Sella. 'The sound of things to come', *New York Times*, 23 March 2003,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/23/magazine/23SOUND.html>

³⁹ Taped interview with author, 10 May 2005.

⁴⁰ Lawless, Jill. 'Eurovision winners prove one hell of an act to follow'. *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 22 May 2006. Whether or not Lordi is to be seen as an 'authentic' Metal group is debatable. But even regarded as a hard rock act with aspects of Metal rhetoric, the leader felt that he had to address charges of Satanism.

⁴¹ Zuel, Bernard. 'Lock up your chickens'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Metro (June 3-9 2005): 4-5.