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Sheila, Take a Bow

Chapeau bas, Sheila

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L'auteur & les Éd. Mélanie Seteun



Sheila, Take a Bow

Professor Sheila Whiteley passed away on 6th of June, 2015. Sheila's ground-breaking achievements in popular culture and gender studies, alongside her bright personal triumphs are celebrated by numerous obituaries from national and international media. Here, we present the tributes of Sheila's students, colleagues and friends.

Derek B. Scott

This is a sad and trying occasion for us all. I am here to pay tribute to Sheila, but she was not someone any of us can talk about merely in terms of admiration and respect—she was a person we loved. What I would like to do is to give an idea of the impact Sheila's life had on others. In speaking of such a full and active life, I have no option but to be selective.

First, I must mention her work as a teacher at the University of Salford. She was one of a group of lecturers who set up the UK's very first degree in popular music at in the early 1990s. At the time, many saw it as an outrageous development, but Sheila was never afraid of outrage. This degree set

the standards for the academic study of popular music at undergraduate level and was soon being imitated elsewhere in higher education. Sheila was, herself, an inspirational teacher, as any student who attended her lectures on style and genre will confirm. At postgraduate level, she showed exceptional generosity in the time she devoted to supervision and mentoring.

Sheila was not only a dedicated teacher, but she also had a social conscience and a keen sense of social commitment. She played a key part in setting up and ensuring the success of Freeflow, a project designed to showcase the talents of young musicians. She worked on two major projects funded by the European Social Fund, examining conditions and job opportunities for women working, or seeking to work, in the creative indus-

tries. She reached out to involve industry bosses and leading politicians, and brought each project to a successful conclusion.

Sheila published prolifically as an academic, so I am forced to be even more selective in my comments on this aspect of her career. Her first book, The Space Between the Notes (1992), was the first attempt to provide an analysis of the representation of drug-induced hallucinogenic experience in the rock music of the counterculture. The originality of the book is that, unlike much sociological works on this topic, it focused on the music and on what particular musical devices signified in the context of psychedelia. For her next book, Sexing the Groove (1997), she put together a collection of essays in which she and other scholars demonstrated the links between music and sexuality. This was a topic that she continued to investigate throughout her academic career.

Another work I will single out is her book on child stars, *Too Much, Too Young* (2005), which led her into so many copyright problems that she became a leading campaigner for the "fair use" of quotation in criticism and review. There was always a provision in law for this, but many publishers were worried about being prosecuted by wealthy rights owners. Sheila was instrumental in persuading publishers that they should use the opportunity allowed by law. If they did not, it would mean that scholars could not publish critical work on any music that was in copyright.

I will mention just two more publications. One is her essay on Jimi Hendrix's performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock. In a

detailed comparison of the lyrics of the anthem and the techniques used by Hendrix she once again enlightens us concerning the workings of representative devices in music. This essay is, to my mind, the single most informative account of Hendrix's legendary performance. And so, lastly, I turn to *Women in Popular Music* (2002), which enjoys what might be called "classic status" among Sheila's books. It appears on just about every college and university reading list for courses that deal with music and gender issues. This book alone will ensure that Sheila is remembered in the world of academia.

There are, however, unwritten memories I have of Sheila that will never die. So, let me end with some recollections of Sheila at academic conferences. Like Sheila, I am someone who doesn't fully waken until later in the morning. For this reason, it was always pleasant when we met at breakfast, because neither of us felt any need to make an effort to be sociable. Unfortunately, at a conference in London, an enthusiastic delegate joined us at our table and began speaking excitedly about the day's forthcoming events. Sheila cast a bleary eye in his direction and said, "I don't mean to be rude, but Derek and I don't speak at breakfast."

I remember Sheila causing me pain on two separate occasions at a conference in Jyväskylä, Finland. First, she hit me hard on the neck, claiming to have killed a mosquito. I was unable to thank her—in fact, I was unable to talk at all for some time. The second incident involved an intoxicated philanderer in a bar. Sheila was a beautiful woman, whose charms frequently attracted the

attentions of the "wrong kind of man." The first I knew of it on this occasion was when I felt a kick to my shin. I chose not to make a fuss. Then I felt an even sharper kick, and looking at Sheila I saw that she was trying to remove a man's arm from her shoulder. At this point, I responded with some rather overdue chivalry and extricated her from his grasp.

Finally, I will never forget Sheila's paper on vinyl albums, given at a conference in Birmingham. She played a Dusty Springfield song from an LP she had bought at a Manchester market. Some of the younger delegates had never heard such loud and intrusive vinyl crackle, and they must have been wondering why she didn't play a digital recording instead. Sheila then went on to explain that only a vinyl album provided evidence of the songs someone really loved. She had found a novel way of establishing which songs meant most to young women in the 1960s and 1970s by examining the worn-out tracks on the albums they owned. It was this kind of originality that made Sheila Whiteley into that rare mixture of warm, sensitive human being and insightful academic. Like those of you who have gathered here today, and many who could not attend this service, I will never stop missing her.



Postscript: I presented this tribute with the aid of very brief notes. I knew that it would be easier to control my emotion if I forced myself to think about what I was going to say, and not simply to read a pre-prepared text. One thing I regret not saying was that most scholars of popular music

(myself included) find that they begin to have less grasp on more recent popular developments as they get older. That was never the case with Sheila. Her body may have aged, but in her mind she never became old.

Dr D. Ferrett

The first time I met Professor Sheila Whiteley in person was the first time I met Professor Derek B. Scott in person. The two of them were sitting behind Derek's desk in his office where I rather trepidatiously entered for my PhD Viva examination. What struck me, as well it might, was how surprisingly friendly they both were. They were incredibly lively, animated, vibrant, jovial-which, for whatever reason, I hadn't expected. In a word they were bright. Academia needs brightness, and Sheila was certainly shining. To my dismay, I also noticed that Sheila had, what looked to be an extremely well read copy of my PhD thesis, complete with as many post-it notes as I had, as well as a long list of written points she wished to discuss. Nothing quite prepares a PhD candidate for the moment they are face-to-face with the scholar whose words have had such a radical influence on them and yet, despite my initial fears, Sheila proceeded to conduct an encounter with my thesis that was thorough, attentive, generous, challenging and funny. Since then, I have drunk with Sheila and conversed about many peculiarities and wonders including performing "as a woman" on stage, fairy tales, witchcraft, Morrissey and the gentleness of male metal fans (a resounding memory). Once

you've spent time with her, you want to spend more time with her. Sheila exuded the radiance of someone who loved music, who'd accomplished a smooth flow of generous being and whose words beat with a dedicated social consciousness. Her talk given in 2011 on Morrissey was so wrapped up in love, sexuality and pop that I felt as though I was witnessing a very moving and musical performance: she had the ability to touch on that "ineffable" stuff.

At conferences, I watched the woman who'd opened the door and let herself in, proceed to invite everyone she thought was missing to the conversation. Sheila's words, her academic presence, her legacy, is a particular kind of generosity that will continue to shine on.

Ian Inglis

I first met Sheila Whiteley at, I think, a conference in Birmingham. I'd been using her books for some years on my Popular Music Studies option at the University of Northumbria, and I was glad of the opportunity to tell her how useful they'd been to me and how popular they were with the students.

We moved on to other subjects, and I was flattered to learn that she'd recently read one of my articles about the music of the Beatles. Within a few minutes, we were enthusiastically debating the constraints and opportunities of writing about the group and its songs, the Beatles' place in popular music history, the work of other scholars in the field, and a variety of loosely related topics—

the 1960s, fashion, literature, film, travel, and so on. She told me of a forthcoming conference in Finland where she was speaking, and suggested I should apply to give a paper there.

At that conference, and at many subsequent others, we continued to exchange ideas and information, and her questions often clarified and always improved the validity of my own research. Although best known for her pioneering work on gender and sexuality, Sheila had a huge range of interests within popular music: the chapters she contributed to two of my edited books considered the performative style of Patti Smith, and the musical soundtrack of Dad's Army! And she would indignantly defend the Rolling Stones from any criticisms I dared to make of them!

I was always delighted to be in her company. She possessed none of the pomposity or pretentiousness that sometimes accompanies international reputations. Regardless of who she was with, she was relaxed, inquisitive, encouraging, and charming. Earlier this year, I read her novel *Mindgames* (published in 2006) and several short stories based on episodes in her early life. Like Sheila herself, they were honest and compelling, brimming with ideas and insights.

In the months before her death, she refused to allow her illness to restrict her academic work and was co-editing a forthcoming volume on music and virtuality. I'd co-written one of the chapters and was, as always, hugely impressed by the extent of her knowledge, and very grateful for her comments. As part of a separate research pro-

the 1990s and 2000s. Her research and teaching were indelibly linked; Sheila's books served as key texts on the modules she delivered, and the resulting seminar discussions provoked new avenues for investigation (Sheila continually acknowledged how much she learnt from her students, in particular their introduction to new artists and musical scenes).

Her love and knowledge of the visual arts was apparent in her cultural studies classes. Students were encouraged to explore the symbolism of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the ideologies of roman-

texts had a significant and enduring impact on the development of popular musicology during

ject, I'd hoped that she might be able to attend a planned event in Paris. While her absence will diminish that event, my continued appreciation of the contribution she made to many careers, to the growth of IASPM, and to the development of Popular Music Studies generally, will be as evident as ever.

Her love and knowledge of the visual arts was apparent in her cultural studies classes. Students were encouraged to explore the symbolism of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the ideologies of romantic love, Christmas and the family. I later discovered much of this was inspired by her time as a tutor for the Open University's Popular Culture summer school, and Sheila's continued interest in such topics informed her later works Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture (2008) and "Dad's Army. Musical Representation of a Nation at War" (2010).

Dr Nicola Spelman (Senior Lecturer, University of Salford)

Sheila was an inspirational teacher and mentor.

I benefitted from her expert tuition on the

renowned Popular Music & Recording degree at

Salford University, and had the subsequent pleas-

ure of working alongside her as a fellow lecturer

there from 1995 until her retirement in 2008.

Sheila's frank and detailed analysis of popular music's relationship to gender and sexuality meant her undergraduate classes were always extremely popular. She relished the opportunity to uncover and explore the musical details that inform our interpretations of particular songs, and in so doing inspired countless innovative dissertations from her final year students ("This Love is Different Because It's Us: Morrissey and his Fans Hand in Glove" and "Trent Reznor, DJ superstars and

For the majority of Sheila's students, her classes provided the first opportunity to engage in critical discussions of popular music. I have fond memories of team teaching Popular Music Style & Genre classes with Sheila in which the identification of stylistic characteristics was highlighted by comparing original and cover versions in contrasting styles: Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground" covered by the Red Hot Chili Peppers; Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" covered by Jimi Hendrix, and so on. We encouraged students to engage with the musical text—its structures,

Sheila's impeccable attention to the historical, cultural and social context of popular music

Coldplay's reputation: What role does spurious

credit play in the popular music industry?" to

name just two of the many hundred she super-

vised).

styles, performance—and to use transcribed examples alongside recorded extracts to illuminate their observations about the significant rhythmic, melodic and harmonic features (not to discuss lyrics in isolation!). Of course, there were occasional instances where a student's efforts to transcribe would prove counter-productive (the opening vocal melody of Elvis's "Heartbreak Hotel" written as straight quavers on a single pitch in 4/4 time) but, on the whole, this method of teaching proved effective since it focused attention on the recording as the primary text and prompted students to identify elements of artistic influence and innovation.

Sheila loved to play her own vinyl records in lectures (the Stones, Joni Mitchell, the Doors, Pink Floyd) and her enthusiasm and passion for the music was abundantly clear since she would often sway and nod her head appreciatively when playing excerpts to students. While the music itself was always at the forefront of class discussion, she couldn't resist the occasional aside: "Ah, the beautiful David" following a blast of Bowie's "Moonage Daydream" or "Life on Mars," and those present found this quality endearing; testament to her genuine enthusiasm for the subject.

Sheila's strong desire to help students achieve their academic potential, to make informed critical and analytical observations, was evident in the vast amounts of written and verbal feedback she provided when assessing their work. Her comments were incredibly detailed and facilitated on-going learning with numerous suggestions for future improvements, further reading

and listening. Students could see that she took their work seriously, and this in turn spurred them on to submit essays worthy of such meticulous attention. Sheila instilled the benefits of this thorough approach in the numerous staff she mentored, and this aspect of her work was always highly commended by senior colleagues and external examiners.

Sheila's many illustrious publications will continue to educate and inspire all those with an interest in popular music discourse. Her influence, support and friendship were integral to my own academic development, and I know there are many others who feel similarly grateful and privileged for having known and worked alongside her. Between us we will endeavour to sustain the philosophy and approach to the study of popular music that Sheila so successfully pioneered.

Christian Lloyd

Professor Sheila Whiteley was a strange combination of erudition, kindness, and mischief. When we appointed her as a visiting scholar at my institution, I well knew the impact she would have on our students. Whether Sheila spoke to them in groups or individually, I could sense their amazement at her up-to-date knowledge of all types of music, and her subtle satirising of academic pomposity. Sheila could be deadly serious and forthright when the discussion warranted it, or funny and ironic by turn. She changed my academic life (and so my life more broadly), and I suspect she did the same for many others. I

can never write anything again without mentally running it by her to see if it is up to scratch. I miss her very much.

Dr Deborah Finding

Ten years ago, I was a relatively new PhD student at LSE's Gender Institute, just getting stuck into my project on sexual violence narratives in popular music. In examining the existing literature, it didn't take long before I discovered Sheila's edited collection "Sexing The Groove," and then her other work on gender, sexuality and popular music. I'd found my people, and it was clear that Sheila—the UK's first professor of pop (and a grandmother!)—was Queen.

I was attending a conference in Salford, where Sheila was working at the time, so I emailed her, hesitantly outlining my work, and asking if there was any chance that she could spare half an hour for a coffee with me. She responded that it all sounded very interesting, and asked if I'd like to come to her house instead. I couldn't wait to meet her.

I was enthusiastically hugged on arrival, and ushered into a low-lit, hazy, velvety room where both the music playing in one corner and the live-in lover sitting in another were introduced with equal warm insouciance. The overall effect was surprisingly sexy, and images of my own tea, telly and Dairy Milk-loving granny were speedily banished as I realised that Sheila was much, much cooler than I was.

We talked and talked, and I was quickly convinced of two things: firstly, that Sheila was very obviously a kindred spirit, and secondly, that she was the perfect person to be my PhD external examiner. Because of this, we didn't talk too much while I was writing my thesis, but once I had passed my viva (with my six week old daughter in tow) we were in much closer contact. In those early-baby days, time away was precious and rare, but one of the first things I did was come down to Brighton to visit Sheila. We ate Italian food and walked along the beach as I slowly remembered, with her quick brain challenging my recently sluggish one to keep up as we threw ideas around, what it felt like to be myself again.

When my daughter was six months old, and I was desperate to do some work so that life didn't just consist of sleep deprivation, I wrote to Sheila with an idea for an edited collection on fairy tales I'd been mulling for some time. I asked her about the process itself, and of course, whether she'd be interested in contributing. Her response was speedy and very typically Sheila, "Hi Deb. Great to hear from you. Sounds like your brain is challenging your tiredness! Sod the laundry. Sometimes you have to follow your instincts." She took my tentative suggestions and gave them enthusiasm and momentum, saying the idea had given her "that familiar excited feel. Yummeeeee!!!" Of course she'd contribute, she said, and she'd already talked to an ex-Salford colleague, who was also interested. Five years later, at Sheila's funeral I finally met that colleague. It was Nicola Spelman, who Sheila had accurately described in the email as "great—good sense of humour, very articulate and musically literate". She had a wonderful knack for knowing when people would click, or work well together. Sadly, that project never got off the ground—I'd underestimated the extent to which new family life is simply all-consuming—but I never forgot how kind, helpful and enthusiastic she'd been, not just in this, but in everything we'd ever talked about.

I loved talking with Sheila. We had passionate, excitable conversations in which our brains would spin off into tangents and weave magnificent future projects. I always came away feeling that the world was more alive and full of possibilities than I had done before seeing her. There was no doubt in her mind that we could carry out these grand plans too. She was undoubtedly the real deal, and her confidence in me and my abilities was a great gift.

I regret that I let the day to day minutiae of life get in the way of following through on some of those big ideas, and I feel very sad that I did not make more time to spend with Sheila in the last five years. I fully expected us to collaborate on something amazing "in the future," and never considered that opportunity to be limited. But as one of her favourite quotes, from Kierkegaard, reminds me, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards."

Of course Sheila meant a great deal to my work, and to my academic personal development, but I'm even more grateful to her for something much bigger: for demonstrating a life lived with true verve. That, and the advice to sod the laundry. Thanks, Sheila.

Simon Warner

Sheila Whiteley was not only the first professor of popular music in the UK, when she was appointed to that chair at Salford University, but she was also an ever lively, always friendly, colleague at the many conferences she attended and at which she spoke at home and abroad. Beyond her intellectual commitment to an impressive range of popular music areas—the Sixties counterculture and psychedelia, scenes, and, most particularly, the complex place of women in this field of study—lay a huge enthusiasm for the topics she was pursuing or discussing.

For her, the notion that we had finally been given the green light to explore these fascinating, but until so recently disallowed, themes, and at a serious intellectual level, was a source of tremendous pleasure to her and she encouraged and motivated several waves of younger scholars who had so often been brought to this world by her writing, pedagogy and collegiality. In fact, there will be few in the British Popular Music Studies community who did not benefit from her input and support at some stage.

I remember her giving the keynote at a Beatles conference I organised in Leeds in 2007, "A Day in the Life: Sgt Pepper at 40," and she delivered a typically engaging, insightful and witty account.

Shara Rambarran

an old photo of her carrying her baby, Bryony. The picture of a mother's love for her daughter was very captivating, and I was trying so hard to hold back my tears. She concluded her talk with a fitting track and said, "listen to the amount of vinyl crackle on this track; it tells you how often this song was played by the person who owned the album, and how much it meant to them" (my thanks goes to Derek Scott for remembering these exact words), and it was a song by Dusty Springfield. I failed to hold back my tears, and I cried. I gave her a hug and she said to me "I wrote that with you in mind." I will never forget those words.

Joni Mitchell made me emotional, because as

a woman, I could relate to her talk. Sheila also

talked about her life as a mother, and showed

She encouraged my own work by suggesting I submitted articles to publications she was steering, and also provided constructive critical advice on areas I was exploring.

Further, she was willing to give support to undergraduate enquirers, particularly those considering matters of feminism and its relationship to popular music practices, an area of investigation which owes a huge debt to her innovative energies. I encountered perhaps her final piece of published work as I was recently reviewing *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music* (2014) for the journal *Popular Music*. The volume emerged from a 2011 conference in Newcastle, where she offered one of the keynotes. Her coda to the book, now issued by Ashgate, is quite brief but it displays that same curiosity and vitality that was so evident in this individual when you met her face to face.

Sheila Whiteley was my PhD co-supervisor at the University of Salford, and she delightedly welcomed me when I met her for the first time. I did not have the pleasure of listening to her lectures as an undergraduate student, but as a postgraduate, I experienced the true sincerity of her talks. One talk that I will always hold close to my heart was Sheila's keynote at IASPM (Birmingham, 2006). Her talk, "Goodbye to all that," was about how women struggled and survived in hardship, battles, and trials in life. The way she presented her words and the music of Tracy Chapman and

Sheila was committed and passionate with music and work. After she retired, I still had the opportunity to learn from her, such as listening to her work advice and guest lectures. In 2012, we began working on *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, and I was still learning from her. I am sad that she will not see the book published, and I feel that I still need to learn more from her. Since her passing, I have met her acquaintances and they have shared their stories with me. I am comforted that through them, I am, still learning from her. I am proud to call her my academic mother. Her legacy will live on as Dusty Springfield once sang, "quiet please, there's a woman on stage...she's been honest through her songs... doesn't that deserve a little praise?"

Tom Attah (Lecturer in Music, University of Salford)

When the news of Sheila's passing came, I was in the middle of giving feedback on several hundred *Cultural Perspectives* essays from second-year pop music undergraduates. As I began to miss my friend and mentor, I noticed that my students had already found her. There she was in front of me, sparkling in the minds of the young, twinkling in their pages, informing and encouraging their thinking. She appeared, finally and completely transformed into something that can be shared and show the way, something that can give and that can grow, and that may travel forever without growing tired. Sheila, our wonderful teacher—is a way of seeing, a way of doing, a way of being—and that most precious of things—a way of thinking.

Gérôme Guibert, au nom du comité de rédaction de Volume!

Sheila Whiteley, ou l'esprit de la contre-culture

Au moment où j'ai appris avec tristesse la disparition de Sheila Whiteley, via la communauté IASPM, j'ai immédiatement pensé au bout de chemin que nous avions parcouru ensemble elle et nous, l'équipe de *Volume!*, autour de la thématique des contre-cultures dans les musiques populaires il y a quelques années. Impliquée dans la recherche en sciences humaines et sociales sur la musique, Sheila, nous en avions évidemment entendu parler avant même de la rencontrer, pour

ses travaux sur les femmes dans les musiques populaires ou encore ses publications sur le mouvement hippie et la fin des années 1960. Plus largement, elle nous apparaissait comme un moteur des dynamiques pluridisciplinaires de recherche autour des cultures musicales populaires. Certains d'entre nous l'avaient déjà vue en conférence ou avaient lu sa production scientifique. Travaillant sur les scènes, je lisais pour ma part l'ouvrage Music, space and place qu'elle avait co-dirigé avec Andy Bennett au moment même où, au nom de Volume!, nous lui donnions rendez-vous pour la première fois, Emmanuel Parent, Matthieu Saladin, Jedediah Sklower et moi-même, le soir du 21 septembre 2011 en terrasse d'un café place de la Sorbonne. Elle était alors à Paris car elle venait d'intervenir au colloque de Sociologie de l'Art, « Le genre à l'œuvre » dans le cadre d'une conférence plénière intitulée « The Vision of Possibility: Popular Music and Feminity ». L'ambiance était électrique. Elle comme nous avions l'intuition que, de notre collaboration pourraient découler des résultats conséquents et des échanges prolifiques. Même si elle n'était pas francophone, on savait Sheila Whiteley francophile. Elle était d'ailleurs intervenue quelques mois auparavant au séminaire JCMP1, porté par nos collègues de Paris-IV Sorbonne. Elle était également attentive aux nombreuses initiatives émanant des nouvelles générations de chercheurs sur les musiques populaires qui œuvraient pour la reconnaissance du champ, surtout celles d'origine spontanées, qui étaient en provenance directe du terrain. Un ensemble de choses qui l'avait amenée à développer une curiosité et une excitation envers Volume! et la petite équipe qui l'animait. Cette entrevue, autour d'un verre, allait permettre de finaliser l'idée d'un appel à contribution, en français et en anglais, sur la question des musiques populaires et des contre-cultures pour la revue *Volume!* Quel honneur pour nous, connaissant son travail et la connaissance compréhensive qu'elle détenait de la période (elle avait même connu personnellement Jimi Hendrix). Un appel à contribution qui allait nous amener à battre notre record de réception de proposition d'articles (près de 80). Le rôle de notre collègue Jedediah Sklower, franco-américain, bilingue et leader de ce projet fut décisif.

À travers sa médiation avec Sheila, c'est lui qui rendit possible cette fructueuse collaboration, qui outre deux numéros de *Volume!*² donna lieu à la publication d'un livre important sur « Contreculture et musiques populaires » chez Asghate. Sheila fut très heureuse de cette contribution et proposa, suite à la coordination des deux dossiers contre culture, deux autres textes pour *Volume!* Pour ce qu'elle était, pour son savoir scientifique mais aussi pour son enthousiasme, sa sympathie et son accessibilité, je voudrais à nouveau, au nom de l'équipe de *Volume!*, rendre hommage à Sheila.

Notes

- 1. Pour une présentation du JCMP, https://volume.revues. org/2766
- 2. https://www.cairn.info/revue-volume-2012-1.htm et http://www.cairn.info/revue-volume-2012-2.htm