

## Alco-pop? The use of popular music in Glasgow pubs

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**Alco-pop?:**

**The use of Popular Music in Glasgow Pubs**

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## **Alco-pop?: The use of popular music in Glasgow pubs**

### **Abstract**

In recent years Popular Music Studies has witnessed a turn towards concentrating on music at a local level (Cloonan) and its use in what DeNora ("Music") calls everyday life. In a separate, but overlapping, development there has been a growing interest in the Night Time Economy. At an academic level this has included some interest in the role popular music plays in that economy (c/f Bennett, Björnberg and Stockfelt) and at UK governmental level it has included responses to 'binge drinking' (Home Affairs Select Committee, Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Scottish Executive) and to licensing.<sup>1</sup> But there has been less attention paid to the role that music plays within a key part of that economy - pubs. In this article we examine the use of music in city centre pubs in Glasgow, Scotland. We include the role of music in attracting customers to pubs, the different types of clientele attracted, the relationship between music and alcohol sales and the ways in which music can act as both a trigger for disorder and a means of preventing it. We develop a typology of uses of music and explore the implications for Popular Music Studies.

### **Introduction**

In 2004 we were commissioned by the Greater Glasgow National Health Service Board to undertake a survey on factors which influence alcohol-related problems (including disorderly behaviour) in Glasgow's licensed premises. We were tasked

with developing recommendations to assist licensing, policing and city centre management. Our work focussed on staff and client interaction and was designed to lead to recommendations which would encourage responsible drinking and behaviour on behalf of the customers combined with responsible serving policies of behalf of pub owners. The report has now been published (Forsyth *et al*) and we hope that it will have an impact on Glasgow's Night Time Economy.

We were able to report a number of findings centring on risk of violence, policy on drinks promotions and encouragement of moderate drinking (e.g. via the provision of food), policy on staff interventions in disturbances, crowding, clientele demographics and miscellaneous other factors (*ibid*). However, our work also showed that popular music played a key role in framing the drinking experience as it was used by staff and clients alike to mark out territory and signal that certain patterns of behaviour were (or were not) acceptable. One of our major findings was that music and related entertainments seemed to encourage drinking and could even act as catalysts for disorder. This included disputes over karaoke and certain types of music, but in particular 'sexy' dancing. This finding contrasts with conventional wisdom about the relationship between entertainments - especially music - and disorder held by academics (Graham and Homel), politicians (c/f Arendt) and providers of pub training programs (c/f Alcohol Focus Scotland "The Servewise"), which has suggested that music and other entertainment deters bad behaviour. For example Homel and Tomsen ("Hot Spots" 59) explain that:

Entertained crowds are less hostile, drink more slowly, and seem to be less bothered by uncomfortable surroundings... Of the many aspects of entertainment and boredom, bands and music are perhaps of greatest importance. While violent and non-violent occasions do not follow a simple bands/no bands dichotomy, quality bands that entertain an audience generate a positive social atmosphere that has been observed to counteract other negative variables. A smaller crowd with a bad band seems more likely to present trouble than a large crowd entertained by quality musicians

Our findings did not chime with this. For example one of the most detailed violent incidents recorded centred on karaoke (Forsyth *et al* Appendix, pp-59-59) and inappropriate behaviour on a pub dance floor (ibid: 65 and 68-69). We were thus left intrigued by the roles which popular music plays in such incidents. In particular we are interested in the ways in which it is used to attract clients to pubs, retain them, mould their behaviour and finally to ensure that they leave when required to. The rest of this article examines this within a broader context. We begin by briefly examining the literature on the role of music in everyday life at a local level before going on to examine the growing importance of the Night Time Economy. We then describe our research methodology and the use of popular music in the Glasgow pubs. Finally we examine the implications of our findings for Popular Music Studies.

## **Music in Everyday Life: Is that your local?**

Popular Music Studies can be characterized as having moved in recent years away from concentration on big artists such as the Beatles (c/f Mellers "Twilight") and Bob Dylan (c/f Mellers "A Darker") to looking at the work of the vast majority of musicians who never make the big time but are vital components of popular music at a local level. There have been a number of ways of approaching this. First there has been ethnographic work which has, amongst other things, examined the ways in which notions of local sound and gender relations are played out in popular music made and performed at a local level. Sara Cohen's ground breaking *Rock Culture Music in Liverpool* and her follow up work ("Popular music", "Identity"), along with that of Ruth Finnegan ("The Hidden") are key texts here. Secondly there have been attempts to describe and elucidate the importance of local 'scenes' in popular music, where tensions between the local and global are played out. Of particular importance here is the work of Will Straw ("Systems", "Communities"). Thirdly has been accounts of local music policies, especially in Great Britain where various local authorities have sought to use music in economic and cultural policy. John Street ("Local", "Politics") has been a pioneer of such studies and there have been a number of follow ups.

While most of these studies have come from a broadly sociological perspective, there is also a growing literature looking at the impact of music on individuals from a more psychological perspective. The impact of background music on behavioural patterns of consumers is perhaps the most well-known of these approaches. Thus, for example, it has been found that playing French or German

music in supermarkets led to the increased sale of wine from the chosen country (North and Hargreaves). The use of music in working environments has also been much commented on (c/f De Nora and Belche, Petridis). Perhaps the most extreme of such accounts are those which come from fundamentalist Christian accounts of popular music which chart its power to influence the behaviour of young people without them being aware of it (c/f Godwin, Hart ).

Another important development in recent years has been that of soundscape studies as pioneered by Murray Schaffer (“The Tuning”) and developed more recently by Helim Järvilouma (“Soundscapes”). Importantly such studies show that the sound of music in particular places cannot be divorced from the wider acoustic environment. The implication here is that any study of music in pubs had to relate to problems concerns about not only the Night Time Economy, but also the desire to control the acoustic environment. Within Popular Music Studies some efforts have already been made to investigate this (c/f Cloonan and Johnson) and the present study has the potential to shed further light.

Perhaps the most influential account thus far of the use of music in daily life has been one which mixes sociology and musicology, but is also informed by thinking in psychology. This is Tia De Nora’s *Music In Everyday Life* which examined the effect of music on society, on the everyday lives of citizens. De Nora believes that ‘Music can be used... as a resource for making sense of situations’ (“Everyday” 13) and cites the examples of music played at airports or as in flight entertainment where, perhaps not surprisingly, passengers rarely want the latter to include such things as “Stormy Weather” (ibid 14). Of particular relevance to

the current study is the fact that De Nora is interested in how music affects consumer behaviour. In another article (De Nora and Belcher), she reviews the use of music in clothes shops. This empirical research found that chains varied in the amount of autonomy managers had in deciding what music was played. Some chains dictated the policy as part of a shop's corporate image so that customers across the world had the same shopping experience, others allowed managers to choose from a list. In some independents managers chose the music which they tailored to what they knew of regular customers. The key point is that music was chosen to both reflect a certain image and encourage certain patterns of behaviour. This resonated with our own work.

DeNora's work highlights the importance of music in daily lives and raises questions about the impact of music on consumer behaviour. However, while her empirical research deals with consumer behaviour in the *daytime* economy, ours deals with the Night Time Economy. In the UK this economy is one in which music (in tandem with illegal drugs) was initially recognized as playing a central role (Lyttle and Montague, Collin, Riley *et al*). However with the demise of the rave scene and the rise of 'binge drinking' (Measham, McCambridge *et al*) this facet of the Night Time Economy has become increasingly ignored in recent years. However, it became a key part of our research.

### **Glasgow: pop and pubs**

Located on Scotland's west coast and with a heritage of heavy industry, Glasgow is currently heavily reliant on the service sector. It has a population of just under



600,000 and is also home to some of the poorest boroughs in the UK. The city has long had the reputation of being both a 'going out' place and one where music is particularly important. In April 2003 it was estimated that there were 295 pubs and clubs within a half square mile of Glasgow city centre with around 70,000 people attracted into this area per night during the weekend (Smith and Robertson).

Our research took place in the summer of 2004 against a backdrop of growing national and international media recognition of the popular music scene in Glasgow as local bands such as Franz Ferdinand, Snow Patrol and Belle and Sebastian enjoyed high sales and/or critical acclaim. For example, all three were nominated for the prestigious Mercury award for best British album of the year in 2004 (Franz Ferdinand won it) and a hyperbolic account in *Time* magazine (Porter) compared Glasgow's contemporary music scene to that of Liverpool at the time of The Beatles, Detroit during Motown and Seattle during grunge. Certainly Glasgow is blessed with an array of popular music venues and live music is immensely popular (Williamson *et al*). Thus Glasgow's reputation as something of a 'party town' is related to a Night Time Economy in which popular music plays a key role.

The wider socio-political context of the report was one in which the previous decade had seen a change in the retailing of on-trade alcohol in city centres throughout the UK, including Glasgow. This had several aspects: the advent of the Night Time Economy which has lengthened licensing hours; the rise of larger 'super-pubs'; branded chains of license premises (dubbed by Muspratt as the

'McDonalds-isation' of pubs); increased alcohol consumption by some groups (e.g. young women); the introduction of new drinks (such as fruit flavoured 'alcopops'); and increasingly inventive marketing. These changes in the pattern of alcohol consumption are thought to have led to an increase in 'binge drinking' which has been linked to rising levels of disorder and violent crime within city centres, including Glasgow, during the weekend evenings. Our report focused upon ways in which disorder risk can be reduced within drinking environments (pubs) and within that context the role of music took on some unexpected roles.

The importance of pubs as venues for popular music has been noted in various academic studies (Bennett, Björnberg and Stockfelt, Finnegan, Laing). However, most of this has involved a concentration of live music (which was largely ruled out in our survey due to the funders' need to analyze particular sorts of pubs). In the Glasgow pubs we researched, the emphasis was on recorded music which was used in three ways: background music (often supplied centrally from 'super-pub' owners), music played by DJs and karaoke. Here popular music was being used as part of a wider marketing strategy, rather than as a focus in and of itself. In essence it was being used primarily for its ability to attract thirsty customers and structure their behaviour, whilst simultaneously deterring other potential clients.

While this can be seen as music playing a key role in alcohol consumption at a micro level, there is also a long history of music being used as vehicle to advertise alcohol, and thus promote consumption, at a macro level. A pertinent recent example is the use of Franz Ferdinand to advertise Tennants, Scotland's

top selling lager (Burrell), which is produced by the company which also sponsors Scotland's largest music festival - T in the Park -, the Triptych music festival in three cities and the important Glasgow venue King Tuts Wah Wah Hut as well as other music promotions (<http://www.redt.co.uk/>). Although music has always been a feature of drinks advertising, following the threat to sales presented by dance (rave) culture in the late 1980s/early 1990s, drinks industry marketing has been particularly active at all levels within in the Night Time Economy (Collin, Forsyth). This has included the transformation of many pubs into club-like environments complete with high tech music/lighting systems, purpose built dance floors, karaoke and where DJs - figures once regarded as the nemesis of the pub industry - have been transformed into another drinks marketing tool.

### **Alcohol, Disorder and the Night-Time Economy**

Excessive consumption of alcohol and the problems associated with such behaviour have long been a cause for concern in Scotland, as the country has relatively high levels of these problems (c/f Brown *et al*, MacLeod, Martin). These concerns have become particularly salient over the past decade with a sharp rise in alcohol-related problems being recorded across the UK (Alcohol Information Scotland, Academy of Medical Sciences, Engineer *et al*, English). This increase in recorded alcohol-related harms has been contemporaneous with a perceived change in drinking culture which has itself been associated with the rise of the Night Time Economy and the subsequent lengthening of the time in which alcohol consumption can legitimately take place in city centres (Hobbs).

There is an important link with popular music here as these changes are often linked to a combination of the aforementioned rave scene creating a demand for licensed entertainment venues to be made available during the night (in preference to illegal – i.e. unlicensed - venues where the illicit drug ecstasy rather than alcohol was consumed) (Collin, Jenkins, Measham) and the increased availability of vacant property providing space for such (large) premises in city centres as a result of shops, cinemas and financial businesses ‘drifting’ to out-of-town locations (Chatterton and Hollands, Hadfield, Hobbs). This vacuum has, in part, been filled by the rise of the so-called ‘super-pubs’, which may be up to twenty times the size of traditional bars (Hobbs). In less than a decade these pubs have become a prominent feature of city centres and town high streets across the UK. They have been viewed both as an important component of urban regeneration and also as the source of the current ‘binge drinking’ problem (Carter, Hobbs, Purves). Their size, popularity with younger drinkers, promotions and economies of scale are clearly likely to have a far-reaching impact upon the Night Time Economy. Moreover, the use of popular music is often a key part of the marketing strategies of such pubs.

The advent of these new drinking venues has also been associated with increasing concern about how alcohol is promoted, in what is perhaps becoming a saturated market (Stevenson). A variety of ‘above-the-line’ (i.e. advertised) alcohol marketing techniques, including ads for ‘happy hours’, two-for-one offers and potentially ‘code’ breaking imagery (c/f Portman Group)<sup>2</sup> have been dubbed as irresponsible by some commentators (Brown, Carter, Hetherington). This has resulted in both blanket bans by local council licensing boards (Glasgow banned

such 'happy hours' on September 25, 2003) and some pub operators cutting back on cheap offers (Bowers). However, such overt above-the-line alcohol promotion is only one marketing technique available to both the individual pub operator and the drinks industry more generally. Subtle 'below-the-line' techniques, such as the employment of music as a promotional tool, can also be effective (for example by forming strong brand consumer relationships) and are more difficult for the relevant authorities to control or monitor.

In summary the past decade has seen an increase in availability of alcoholic drinks in the Night Time Economy, often being purchased in venues larger than traditional pubs, many of which make extensive use of music as promotional tool. These developments have been coupled with increased concerns about the disorderly behaviour of the participants.

## **Methodology**

The research, which took place in the summer months of 2004, had three parts:

- A postal questionnaire survey of 100 city centre pubs (yielding quantitative data)
- Observations in a sub-sample of pubs via mixed couples who observed in eight city centre pubs on twenty eight occasions between 9 and 12 pm during weekends over the summer of 2004 (both quantitative and qualitative data)
- Face-to-face in-depth interviews with a member of the bar staff at each of the chosen pubs (qualitative data)

The postal questionnaire was primarily conducted to identify a cross-section of premises holding a public house licence from which a representative sub-sample of eight pubs could be selected for more intensive study. This survey asked about staff training and the make up of the pub's clientele, mainly in terms of demographics (e.g. gender) but also including a question enquiring what proportion were music or sports fans. Both the second and third parts of the study directly addressed music issues.

The observational stage involved the recruitment of observers from the post-graduate student population in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Glasgow. They were divided into two teams, each with one male and one female observer, age range 25 to 37. Three were chosen as they had experience working as bar staff, a fourth because he worked as a pub DJ (playing Gothic rock). To ensure their anonymity and assist in their objectivity all premises in which they had ever worked as well as those which they frequented socially were excluded from being observed. All observers visited each of the final eight pubs selected on an equal number of occasions. Each team visited each pub twice, alternating between Friday and Saturday evenings. Prior to this observers were provided with an internationally validated training manual (Graham "Safer Bars: Training") and a pilot night was conducted in another city centre pub involving all four observers and one of the authors (AF).

Observers were asked to complete a detailed checklist concerning the physical features, clientele characteristics and the drinking in environment on each

occasion they visited. These included a 'tick list' of all the types of entertainment that evening, comprising: 'live music', 'DJ', 'pre-recorded', 'music video', 'TV/DVD', 'other music (specify)', 'other entertainment' and 'none'. They were also asked to complete a similar list for the types of music being played, comprising: 'metal/goth/mosh' (rock), 'inde/alternative' (rock), 'dance/rave', 'rap/hip-hop', 'pop/chart', 'chill-out/ambient', 'urban/R and B', 'oldies/50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s theme', 'cheesy background muzak/covers'<sup>3</sup> and 'other type (specify)'. For each option observers were prompted to provide examples of the genre as they saw it if they had recognized any acts or titles. Finally the observers were asked whether they felt that any music played in the pub contained lyrics or imagery (if video) that could be viewed as 'violent or aggressive', 'explicit or offensive', 'sexual or sexist' or 'intoxication'. This checklist was an adaptation of a pre-existing Canadian instrument which has been designed to create safer bars (Graham "Safer Bars: Assessing"). As will be seen, the observational stage revealed some subjectivity on behalf of the observers and, on occasion, somewhat patronizing attitudes towards the clientele. This seems likely to be a function of the pubs selected tending to be types of premises which they would previously have been unfamiliar with or which they would not normally frequent (e.g. only one pub was 'student-friendly'). Nevertheless they showed how certain patterns of drinkers' behaviour were shaped by interaction with popular music. Thus below we include direct quotes from the observers' field notes which they wrote following visits to the selected pubs.

The third phase of the research, involved one author (AF) conducting taped interviews with pub employees, one from each of the observed premises. These

eight interviewees comprised two licensees (Crown and Swan) one deputy manager (Red Lion), one staff trainer / trainee manager (White Horse), one bar supervisor (Royal Oak), one cocktail waiter (Railway), one floor worker (White Hart) and one bar / kitchen hand (Plough). This range of bar staff was specifically asked about the role of music policy in their pub. These interviews were semi-structured and although the prompts for music and other entertainments were contained in a section on market targeting, it soon became clear that music was used in many other ways by the pubs' staff - ranging from day-to-day crowd control to the establishment of a pub's identity. We use representative quotations from employees below.

### **The Venues**

The eight pubs were selected on their known levels of disorder (as recorded by local police) and levels of server-training. Four of these had recorded violent incidents on their premises on either a Friday or a Saturday evening during the three months prior to the commencement of fieldwork. Two of these apparently disorderly pubs were also known to the police as crime 'hot-spots' and had, in fact, recorded the largest number of violent incidents of all pubs in the city centre during the previous year. The other four pubs had no police call outs over the previous three months. Four employed staff who had been externally trained in socially responsible techniques for dealing with disorder, four did not. Four were part of branded chains (i.e. super-pubs). Three of these were 'club-like', the other was 'mock traditional' in appearance. Two pubs were 'traditional' and 'tied' to a 'pubco' (brewery). The final two were independently owned 'style bars'. In sum a cross-section of pubs in terms of levels of disorder, staff training profiles, age,



décor, theme, clientele, ownership and (as we were to find) music policy were represented amongst the eight selected. The pubs were anonymized in the research and a brief description/typology of each pub style is now provided:

- **'The Plough'** – A 'traditional' Glasgow pub, over 100 years old and tied to a 'pubco' (brewery). It had a clear gender split between a predominantly male bar and a predominantly female lounge. Entertainment included televised sports (in the bar) and karaoke (in the lounge). The clientele of this pub was older than the others (mainly over 30 years of age) and it seemed to attract regulars. The pub had a high known crime rate (police hotspot) and did not have externally trained staff.
- **'The Red Lion'** – A budget/economy branded chain pub, with a mock traditional appearance, opened in the late 1990s and sited near many transit nodes. Compared to the others it had a varied and transient clientele, including many less affluent drinkers. It had a high known crime rate (police hotspot) and no externally trained staff. It provided no entertainment, other than terrestrial TV and (barely audible) piped music controlled from head office. Its policies included many cut-price drinks offers and promotions.
- **'The Railway'** – A candlelit 'style bar' (bar-restaurant) opened in the mid 1990s and still independently owned. Compared to the other pubs there was more food provision here, but drinks were expensive. The clientele included many affluent drinkers. Despite being selected as a known crime

pub it was assessed by our observers as being at low risk for disorder. It made use of external server training providers. It only employed a DJ on Saturdays with ambient background music at other times.

- **'The White Horse'** – A club-like branded chain pub which is part of the same chain as the White Hart (below). Opened in the late 1990s although re-branded since then. There was heavy consumption of new drinks (e.g. alcopops) and bottled lager. Many stag/hen nights were thought to come here prior to moving on to nightclubs. Both 'White's' pubs had a hi-tech sound system and DJs. This pub was known for crime and the chain did not use external server trainers.
- **'The White Hart'** – As above, a club-like branded chain pub opened in the 2000s. It also had a heavy consumption of new drinks (e.g. alcopops and in this case also shots) and bottled lager. It also had more young drinkers (under 21) compared to the other pubs. Despite being selected as a pub not known for crime, the observers felt that it was the most at risk for disorder in the sample. The pub was adjacent to a nightclub which it seemed to have forged a relationship with.
- **'The Royal Oak'** – Another club-like branded chain pub, opened in the 2000s. It too had a heavy consumption of new drinks (e.g. alcopops) and bottled lager. This was the only pub with a mostly female clientele. It was not known for disorder and was the only branded pub to make use of external server training providers. As with the other club-like pubs it

utilized a hi-tech sound system (lights, purpose built dance floor etc.) and DJs.

- **'The Swan'** – A student pub, tied to a 'pubco' opened in the early 1990s (on the site of two earlier such establishments). It had the most predominantly male clientele of the sample. This pub was not known for crime and made use of external server training providers. Uniquely in our sample, this pub sometimes provided live music part of a music policy which also included MTV and DJs.
- **'The Crown'** – Another 'style bar' (café-bar) opened at the beginning of the 1990s and still independently owned. This was the pub that made the most use of external server training providers and had the lowest levels of both known crime and observer assessed disorder risk. This pub had the most varied clientele, with many after-work drinkers (young professionals) on Fridays and many pre-clubbers (rave style nightclubs) on Saturdays. The DJ was a prominent feature of the pub, which sold nightclub tickets at the bar.

### **Rhythm and Booze**

Our observers noted that a pub's music policy could vary in several ways, including the sound source, volume levels, the presence or absence of related entertainments (lights, dance floors, stages, plasma screens etc.) and the music style, artists and genres. The music policy was very much in keeping with - or in

setting - the pubs' overall image/style and clientele. While only one pub in our sample put on any live music, all used music and especially recorded music. In common with research findings in Toronto (Purcell and Graham "A typology" 7), some Glasgow city centre pubs could be characterized by their musical policy. But there were four common elements to the ways in which *all* of them used music: attracting customers, retaining them, moulding their behaviour and, finally, getting rid of them (and/or deterring them from attending in the first place).

### **Attracting Customers**

Here it should be noted that a pub's music policy is essentially part of a broader promotional strategy which might include cheap drink offers, food offers, charity nights and so on. In one instance - 'the Plough' - pop memorabilia was used as an inducement to attract customers as gold discs achieved by a local band were on display apparently to attract customers. The same pub also used karaoke to attract customers to its lounge every day of the week. According to our staff interviewee from that pub it also boosted sales: 'I think people drink more when they are upstairs, because the music is on and they are having a good time' (bar and kitchen hand).

Another pub, the 'Swan' (which was student-orientated in the evenings but attracted a more diverse population in the day), reported using various forms of entertainment throughout the week. Here it was clear that the provision of music-based entertainment was a key part of the pub's (self)image: 'Monday night is kind of an open night, acoustic night, Tuesday is a DJ, Wednesday is a karaoke,

Thursday we have a kind of blues jam' (licensee). This tactic was also tried in another pub, the 'Royal Oak', where the interviewee said that: 'We have different nights. Tuesday night we have a sort of 80's night to try and attract a different crowd. A Friday we have a sort of cheesy DJ on and Saturday we have a different guy who does more dance music. So we're trying to differentiate the night... we're trying to differentiate different nights of the week with different clientele and different music'. Thus an 80s' night was '... just to try to attract a slightly different clientele into their bar to try and get as many different people in as we possibly can' (bar supervisor). Thus music policy was aimed at creating a diversity of client base.

### **Retaining customers**

In common with other pubs, 'The Plough' also used a mixture of DJs, video, TV and pre-recorded music. In the case of the two pubs which were part of the same chain, the 'White Hart' and 'White Horse', observers noted that the same sequence of music videos was played in each. In the case of the branded chain super-pubs this music/videos was generally supplied from head office and was either piped (leaving little control over content other than volume level) or comprised of a computerized system with pre-set play list depending on clientele, time of day, etc. In the budget priced 'Red Lion', where music was only supplied by the head office, the interviewee noted that: 'We're on an MP3 system that gets downloaded from the head office so we've not got a choice' (deputy manager). In this pub observers could seldom identify any of the music being played owing to its low volume. This pub was located near many transport nodes and the

potential to attract a transient clientele appeared to be reflected in the music policy here, as is indicated by this field-note made during observations:

(Red Lion) Lighting is very bright and music very low resulting in an atmosphere similar to a train station waiting room. This may be intentional given the proximity of [a large variety of major transport nodes] (Male Observer, emphasis his)

The other seven pubs employed a DJ on at least some of the occasions that the observers visited. The role of these DJs could vary. In one pub, the 'Plough', he doubled as a karaoke compere. This pub was also unusual in that the music played in this (female-dominated) karaoke lounge was very different from that played in the (male-dominated) bar, where there was no DJ.

(Plough) I would describe this as a working man's pub (emphasis on gender and not class). The theme was one of 'traditional simplicity' – that may be otherwise referred to a 'spit and sawdust'. The environment was tailored for men: lots of draught beers/lagers, posters for Guinness on wall, army recruitment in toilets, sport on TV and laddish 'cock-rock' music (AC/DC, Stones etc.) ... [the lounge] is dominated by women and their activities. They are most obvious as they tend to be leading the singing / doing the stage song / dancing (Male Observer).

One pub, the 'Railway', employed a DJ on Saturday, but not Friday nights (the remaining six pubs had DJs both nights). On Fridays this pub tended to play low

key ambient music whereas on Saturday the music policy was more pre-club orientated.

(Railway, Friday) The music has NO lyrics and is purely background music pitched at a level you don't really notice it until you stop talking (it is actually (low) enough to converse) (Male Observer, emphasis his)

(Railway, Friday) House music - very low volume / non-descript (nobody tapping foot or nodding head) no lyrics (Female Observer)

(Railway, Saturday) 10-11PM: Just quieter groups in bar. 11-12PM: People going clubbing entered – music got louder and a bit more intense (Female Observer)

Music was also used to frame the drinking experience. In other words, it was used as a means of retaining customers. While drinkers were motivated to go to a particular pub by a variety of factors (primarily drinking in company and/or in order to pick up sexual partners), music played an important role in the socialisation process. Once the music was taken into account it was clear that drinking activities could have been both qualitatively and quantitatively different. In particular the style of music and the role it played in retention was mediated by the time of day. Thus one interview had the following exchange:

Interviewer: Is there any particular type of music that you play?

Interviewee (Floor worker): During the day it's kind of mellow, kind of chill out stuff. At night it's pretty much dancy, R and B kinda thing

Interviewer: Why is that? Because a young group likes dancing?

Interviewee: Yeah, 'cos the age group we're trying to attract is kinda – it's the thing they would listen to.

In another example, a publican explained how the music policy varied according to time of day and the type of clientele he was trying to attract at a given time:

It varies throughout the day actually. If there is a Rangers or Celtic<sup>4</sup> game on then my market is on... they'll all come in for something to drink and a bit of a song. At the weekends we market and try and pressure the young ones to come in. (On) a Sunday night we turn the music down a wee bit. During the day again it will be shoppers so we try and time shop which is quite good for the shopper (Deputy Manager)

In another case this involved careful selection of music by in-house DJs who knew that they were catering for a pre-club audience in a pub with a 650 capacity. Thus the respondent here commented on this use of music:

It creates an atmosphere where (if) people are going out (to a club later), then they like to be hear their favourite songs before they go out and it puts them in a better mood and then obviously the better mood people are in then the more they spend on drink and it all works back as a business point of view and its all logical (Staff Trainer / Trainee Manager)



There is an interesting contrast here between what people in the Glasgow super-pubs came to hear and the use of live music in Hull recorded by Bennett (101) where he notes of regular audience members that ‘the music they heard each week in the pub was not necessarily the music they listened to at home. Indeed, some members of the audience had no idea who had originally recorded the songs that were performed in the pub, nor did this seem to matter to them’. But the music policy in Glasgow was based on customers hearing familiar music and it appeared to be successful as a retention strategy as one observer noted late in the evening the ‘Crown’ that: “Some people clearly still there from after-work drink and dishevelled’ (Female Observer).

### **Moulding Behaviour**

Once attracted into the pub and having been detained for at least one drink, clients’ behaviour was also likely to be mediated via music. The role of DJs was particularly important here. For example, the DJ at the ‘Railway’ was described as “a real DJ” by one observer, implying that he was mixing rather than simply playing records or acting as a compere. The only other pub where this tended to be the case was the ‘Crown’, which was described as a ‘Funky bar with DJ playing pre-club tunes’ (Male Observer).

The DJ-ing in the three club-like branded chain super-pubs in the sample was very different both in term of style and function. Unlike the ‘Railway’ and ‘Crown’, DJing on these premises involved playing well known songs, often requests, sometimes interspersed with verbal announcements such as ‘DJ giving loads of

'chat' e.g. "big hellos to the hen night from Penilee" (Female Observer). These DJs were however able to vary their play-list in accordance with to the type of clientele in the pub.

(White Hart) Everyone out on pull<sup>5</sup>... Overall – people enjoying themselves. Lots of large groups of males, generally older than groups of women. Music popular choice with patrons. People drinking to get drunk ... Women dancing suggestively like women on videos (Female Observer)

(White Horse) [compared with White Hart] older groups of women and not as many out on the pull = bigger friendship groups. DJ responded with more cheesy classics– e.g. Dirty Dancing – with many patrons engaged in faux dirty dancing – people seem to believe that they're as glamorous as people portrayed on music videos and adopt similar characteristics (Female Observer)

(Royal Oak) DJs seemed genuinely enthused by music... Younger women doing a lot of sexy dancing, surrounded by men of all ages making futile attempts at chatting them up. Some open snogging and caressing in corners and in front of bar. Only purposes of going to bar = drinking, chatting up and dancing. ... leering men and cheesy tunes with dance routines (Female Observer)

The above quotes illustrate one apparent function of the DJs in these club-like super-pubs, to create/market a drinks party atmosphere, characterized by 'sexy'

dancing to mainstream or middle of the road music and 'pulling' (or at least the illusion that pulling is a possibility). To this end the music was augmented by high-tech lighting/sound systems and video/plasma screens which could alternate between showing music videos and promotional material (often of a kind that would fall foul of broadcast advertising - Portman Group). The general atmosphere is also reflective of the move, noted earlier, away from traditional pubs to the 'super-pubs' in which music policy played a vital role in the creation of an image.

(White Hart) Loud, hot, busy with video screens everywhere showing footage of people in 'White's Pubs' downing shooters and dancing in a very sexual manner, girls flashing their breasts, guys being loud alpha males. Repetition of "WHITE HART", "FUN" flashing on the screen every five minutes. Very high tech lights all over the bar. An environment controlled to deliver the message that drinking in 'White's Pubs' is fun, sex, happiness and success that felt like an Orwellian nightmare! (Male Observer)

(Royal Oak) It is a good night out for those people who like mainstream music repeated each night and who are on the pull... visible meat market.<sup>(5)</sup> Guys dancing up to girls and getting knocked back (Male Observer)

(White Horse) ...theme is 'manufactured party' instant party atmosphere from the moment you walk in. Flashing lights very loud music, TVs

displaying raunchy videos, females in bar dancing together, obvious power drinking (very fast) all contribute towards this atmosphere upon arrival. You feel obliged to participate and by not participating in getting drunk you feel 'out of place'. Everyone there is intending to get drunk as quickly as possible... It is a marketing fantasy come true, and the punters love it!! (Male Observer, emphasis his)

The observers also commented that the atmosphere in these pubs was dependent on this barrage of entertainment:

(Royal Oak) Bar – potentially quite smart, but no atmosphere, without lighting or loud music, resembled social/rugby club (Female Observer)

(Swan) Had there been no DJ there would have been no atmosphere at all here (Female Observer)

The upshot of this manufactured drinks party atmosphere appeared to be good business and happy customers. However the downside of this was that it all came to a sudden end at midnight – closing time. This was when most violence was observed, something which concurred with contemporaneous police data (Forsyth *et al*).

(White Horse) Everyone dancing when music/lights on. At closing time – apparent that everyone is drunk (Female Observer)

(White Horse) The in-house video perpetuates the theme of the bar. It seems to promote the message - "this is what it is like to be pissed in our pub, come on join the party". The same video shows punter after punter downing test tubes (a drink) in one gulp – presumably to promote the concept of style / drink etc... Another point: once the music stopped / lights came on - it suddenly became a less friendly place to be!! No violence but an air of expectancy (Male Observer)

In this context the entertainment could act as lid on potential trouble during drinking, but appeared to amplify levels of aggravation when the music had stopped and drinkers were asked to leave as the party was over.

### **Getting rid of the punters...**

One interviewee commented that they could also use music to get rid of unwanted customers, such as stag parties who had come in during the day when shoppers were in:

'... there's ways, you can (get rid of clients), if they get out of hand, if they are getting a bit rowdy, because obviously families come in at weekends... there's ways you can do it, like our music system is computer controlled and then we can change the tempo of songs, so instead of having dancy upbeat stuff on, you change it to really mind numbing boring songs and they'll no stay... I can guarantee nine times out of ten this technique works'  
(Staff Trainer / Trainee Manager)

Thus the other side of the use of music was that music policy might be used to deliberately deter some potential customers. One issue for pubs in city centres was so-called “wolf-packs” – gangs of male drinkers who might clash with each other. Most of the pubs did not welcome such gangs and one tactic we were told of was using “slushy” music to keep them away or to disperse gangs which had gained entry. (Most of the pubs surveyed used security to prevent undesired customers from entering). While not using it himself, one interviewee referred to this as ‘not a bad plan at all’ and another as ‘really good, that is amazing’. This has its parallels in the use of music to disperse crime from public places such as shopping malls or train stations (Cloonan and Johnson).<sup>6</sup>

### **Saturday night’s alright....**

In contradistinction to previous research which reported music and entertainment as a calming influence, the observers noted several risk factors for alcohol-related disorder which could be associated with the music policy in pubs. The first of these potential triggers for violence was the high sound levels, especially in pubs employing a DJ. A high volume could stymie any attempts at conversation, thus increasing rates of alcohol consumption (see Knibbe *et al*, Lang *et al*). It could also create frustration for customers attempting to be served at the bar.

(White Horse) Loud music prevented any kind of conversation, people obviously speed drinking, lots of shouting, flashing lights with semi-disco / club atmosphere. It was a non-threatening atmosphere for those drinking,

but perhaps more so to those sober. It could be regarded as intimidating to someone unfamiliar with this type of atmosphere (e.g. over 50's / straight-edgers etc) (Male Observer).

(Royal Oak) Music was loud round the bar and had to shout to be heard (Female Observer)

(Crown) Server could not hear order for drink due to music and was a bit tense / hostile when serving (Male Observer)

(White Hart) The music was louder, the bar was busier. I could sense more aggression in the young males. Boiling pot for trouble (Male Observer)

In the three club-like branded chain super-pubs and in the karaoke lounge of the 'Plough' this loud music was accompanied by dancing. This could result in bumping and drink spillage - both of which are potential triggers for violence. This was particularly the case in the 'Plough' where dancing was common, despite the fact that it lacked a purpose-built designated dance floor. In all four of these pubs, this risk was heightened by levels of intoxication and off-floor dancing.

(Plough) ...layout awful – could not help but squeeze past people – no space to dance but everyone was dancing anyway (Female Observer)

(White Hart) Drunk young men bumping into people whilst trying to dance, not even noticing (Male Observer)

Another potential trigger for disorder, which was frequently noted by the observers in these four pubs, was the sexual nature of this dancing. This behaviour seemed to be encouraged by the manufactured party atmosphere, which included playing songs with explicit lyrics augmented by the visual content of the accompanying videos.

(Plough A tune by [Khia] – very crude – something like “lick my crack” ... DJ played it between songs and expected the girls of the night to dance and writhe in front of him (Female Observer)

(White Hart) Loud music, sexy videos, flashing lights, creating a club atmosphere in the bar. Emphasis is on partying, looking flash and promoting ‘feeling good’ as a commodity! For punters, women want to look sexy and there is a lot of cleavage and thigh on display. Men want to look flash – in a Robbie Williams type of way. These attempts at desirable style gradually erode with alcohol consumption and people become less caring of their physical state as time goes by. Women dance (standing and sitting) provocatively (often emulating videos) whereas males stand in groups watching (often leering) the women. “Between 9 and 10.30PM there was a party atmosphere. Females were dancing suggestively and ‘getting in to the groove’, males content to watch and joke amongst themselves. During this time – a ‘happy’ atmosphere with little danger. By



10.30, and up to midnight, the atmosphere seemed to change negatively. There was an electricity in the air, everyone was charged and there was an undercurrent of threat/danger. This was never manifest, but you could sense a shift from 'party-party' to 'party-party-but don't fuck wi' me OK'. Overall, quite a hostile environment to be in unless intoxicated with the rest of them (Male Observer, emphasis his)

As noted above, during observations it became apparent how this form of musical entertainment could result in disorderly incidents. This tended to occur because of an interaction between the entertainment and the drinking environment (including sound levels, lack of space, dancing behaviours and intoxication). This is illustrated by the account of the conflict below, which took place in one of the super-pubs, the 'Royal Oak'. In this account (and those of the other conflicts described below) the notation 'P' (P1, P2, P3... etc.) is used to indicate a patron, while letter 'S' is similarly used to indicate a member of the pub's staff.

(Royal Oak) Earlier in the evening at approximately 10PM to 10.30PM P1 [young male] was drunkenly dancing. He danced closely in a 'sexy' manner with P2, P3 and P4 [partner and other 'couple']. He was clearly very drunk as he repeatedly spilt his beer – including on others who did not look happy (Female Observer)

Another incident, witnessed in the same pub, was perhaps also related to the lack of scope for verbal communication in such loud, dancing, drinking, 'party'

environments. This incident may only have been a misunderstanding, but it does seem to have caused harm and the situation could easily have escalated.

(Royal Oak) P2 [young female] was standing alone at the corner of the bar near the dance floor. Her friends had left to go somewhere. P1 [young male] was dancing alone across the dance floor. P1 noticed P2 and danced across to her. He attempted to catch P2's attention with no reaction. P1 reached out and grabbed P2's arm and attempted to pull her on to the dance floor. P2 pulled away aggressively – clearly upset that P1 had reached out and touched her. P1's ego was badly dented and he danced away somewhat less confidently. P2 was looking a bit upset but did not pursue the matter any more (Male Observer)

Another incident, this time witnessed in the karaoke lounge of the 'Plough' indicates that in this loud environment those with the mike have the power of communication/influence over the situation.

(Plough) 11.35-ish – Karaoke compere rushes quickly downstairs to get the bouncer before song finished. Bouncers (S1) and S2 come upstairs and ask P1 [spiky-haired middle-aged male] to stop sitting on speaker and move away from the 'performance space'. Ten minutes later S1 [bouncer] escorts P1 out of the bar. P5 and P6 [on the karaoke mike] singing "I Got You Babe" (Female Observer)

The above incident has some similarities with another witnessed at the karaoke which brought together all the elements of crowded, drunken, 'sexy' dancing to loud music and suggestive DJing (this was the night where the Khia song – 'My neck, my back lick it' - was used as the linking track between songs).

(Plough) There is no dance floor yet many people were dancing (some on the speakers). The DJ was egging people on and it seemed to be more of a disco than a karaoke at times... suddenly P1 [grey-haired mother of P2] 'waded in' to the dance floor and started having a go at P5 [young female]. Perhaps P5 had in some way insulted P2 (pregnant and drunk). P2 then started 'having a go' and P5's friends got involved. There was lots of noise and name-calling and some pushing. Meanwhile the DJ was clearly taking pleasure in this and was stood in the middle of the women making comments like "this is better than the X Channel" (a pornography channel). S2 a youngish bartender came over and started pushing them apart and suddenly there were four burly bouncers calming it down. The women retreated to different sides of the room. No one was asked to leave. There was still some animosity between the two parties and lots of talking and looking over. About ten minutes later P5, P6, P7 and P8 [young females] left. They walked with a lot of attitude. P1, P2, P4 and P4 [mixed age females] seemed not to care and carried on dancing and drinking. The DJ revelled in it all and seemed to be energising the whole thing and gave us all a fantastic Robbie Williams rendition to make us all feel better again (Female Observer)

This incident was witnessed by two observers. Both agreed that it was centred on the karaoke/dancing environment, although interestingly they differed over the role of the DJ. Instead of thinking that he aggravated the situation the male observer, himself a pub DJ, felt that he had helped to calm the situation.

(Plough) P1 seemed to be the one with the problem. Her problem seemed to be with whatever P5 and P6 were doing on the dance floor area. Although this is only my guess. P5 was dancing provocatively with P6 and P1 seemed to take exception to this. P1 made a move towards the dance floor and the incident began... S1 [DJ] seemed to know P2 and tried taking to her to the side to talk to her. S1 seemed to try to calm the situation with the others too (Male Observer)

With regard to maintaining order in licensed premises, the role of musical entertainment would thus appear to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand certain types of music and related activities (e.g. dancing) may increase the risk of alcohol-related disorder. On the other hand there also appears to be opportunities for music (or interventions by entertainers) to be used to reduce this risk, perhaps even as a tool to help quell disorder when it has broken out. As such this research would appear to be in agreement with the view of Homel and Clark ("The prediction" 41) who commented that 'investment in better quality entertainment... reduced reliance on sexual titillation and alcohol promotion to attract patrons' to attract patrons to pubs whilst minimising risks of disorder.

Additionally there would appear to be need for the licensed trade and those who train bar staff to take into account the role that music and those who provide the music have to play in disorder reduction. As such our findings would appear to chime well with a view expressed by a bar manager interviewed in a recently published book by Phil Hadfield (“Bar Wars” 99) in which DJ’s are described as the ‘Phat Controllers’:

Music policy is a clever form of manipulation that most people do not recognise, even people in the (alcohol) industry. You will find a lot of inexperienced managers, DJs and security staff who don’t pick up on these first signs of having discontent within a venue and they are important control measures. It is much more important to control the crowd with music than it is to control the crowd with security staff because if you have to constantly control the crowd with security staff you’ve lost the plot, basically. You should be creating an environment which keeps people out of the mood where conflict can occur.

### **Implications for Popular Music Studies**

The use of popular music in Glasgow’s pubs gives further insight into issues of soundscape, locality and the use of music in everyday life in the field of Popular Music Studies. It also serves to dispel more romantic accounts of the power of music. Here music was used strategically – to recruit customers, to retain them, to mould behaviour, and to deter them from entering/encourage them to leave. Moreover, that strategic use of music was mediated by the broader social phenomena we noted earlier. In the case of Glasgow pubs music is used in such

a way as to almost deny the possibility of going for a 'quiet drink'. It was used as part of a policy of showing the town to be a 'party' town, where music was used to reinforce that image. Thus one observer noted of the 'White Horse':

The in-house video perpetuates the theme of the bar. It seems to promote the message – “this is what it is like to be pissed in our pub, come on join the party” (Male Observer)

A key finding is that whereas previous reports of live music had emphasized its use in social bonding (Björnberg and Stockfelt 141), in our research music was used for demarcation, for separating out. It also had enormous potential to be used in contestation and conflict. Music was not only used to aid the consumption of alcohol, but was the backdrop to disputes about appropriate behaviour during alcohol consumption. Notably incidents of disorder were often centred around music – especially dancing and karaoke. If music is implicated in the enjoyment of a night out, it is also the setting for the playing out of disputes when that night goes wrong.

There seem to be at least three implications for Popular Music Studies of this study. The first is to stress Popular Music Studies has to recognize that popular music can have a downside as well as providing immense pleasure. In this instance it can be used to encourage excessive drinking, inappropriate behaviour and, ultimately, violence. Previous work by one of the authors (Cloonan and Johnson) has drawn attention to the darker side of popular music, especially its potential as an agent of violence. Music is not a neutral force and there is a need

for more work on the ways in which it is used to shape the behaviour of its audience under particular circumstances. Secondly, the research helps to fill out the notion of music in everyday life. Music is obviously a key part of the Night Time Economy. In fact, along with alcohol, it is *the* major force within that economy. If the Night Time Economy has problems, then Popular Music Studies has to study those problems. It needs to study the ways in which popular music is used in 'branding' pubs and creating their image. If popular music is being used to frame the drinking experience then more needs to be known about why and how this is done and, most of all, in whose interest. This suggests a third implication – that more research is needed on the role of music within the Night Time Economy in general and in pubs in particular. Our methodology did not allow for the interviewing of drinkers, but that is one area to be considered. There are others including research on the role of DJs in superpubs and how decisions about music policy are determined. This again chimes with De Nora's work, with the twist that this is music in 'every *night* life'. Ultimately until we know more about the role of popular music in pubs, we will know little of one of the most important uses of music in everyday life.

## Notes

1. In 2005 the UK Parliaments introduced new legislation to liberalize licensing regulations and, subject to certain conditions, to allow pubs to remain open longer. See [www.culture.gov.uk/alcohol\\_and\\_entertainment/licensing\\_act\\_2003/default.htm](http://www.culture.gov.uk/alcohol_and_entertainment/licensing_act_2003/default.htm).
2. The UK alcohol industry's social responsibility 'watchdog' The Portman Group's code of advertising practice states that (among other things) the

“naming, packaging and promotional material pertaining to alcoholic drinks” ... “should not in any direct or indirect way”... “suggest any association with sexual success” and “encourage” ... “immoderate consumption such as binge drinking”

3. In this context the term ‘cheesy’ refers to songs of dubious musical merit (i.e. kitsch) that most listeners would prefer not to admit to liking (i.e. guilty pleasures), though with the lowering of inhibitions brought about with alcohol consumption this view changes. In practice many of the ‘cheesy classics’ observed here were songs from movie soundtracks such as *Grease*, *Dirty Dancing* or *There’s Something About Mary*.
4. Celtic and Rangers are the main football clubs in Glasgow (and Scotland). The former is associated with a largely Catholic following, the latter with a Protestant one. To lower the potential for trouble, their home games are generally held on alternate weekends.
5. The term ‘on the pull’ is used here to describe those visiting a pub in search of a casual sexual partner for the evening, the act of which is known as ‘pulling’. Premises where such activity is commonplace are described as ‘meat markets’.
6. It also seemed to work in deterring one of our observers from ever going back to the ‘Railway’ – ‘the bloody music was a constant source of irritation for me and as such I doubt I would return through choice’

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