

## On Popular Music Studies in Canada: An Interview with John Shepherd by Kyle Devine

KYLE DEVINE and JOHN SHEPHERD

John Shepherd has been described as “a leading architect of a post-War critical musicology.” In Canada and internationally, he has also been a leading advocate for the inclusion of popular music in the curricula of schools and universities, as well as in sociological and cultural research. I have been fortunate to know John and to have worked with him in various capacities for about 15 years. It was a pleasure to be invited by *MUSICultures* to discuss with him the development of popular music education and research at Carleton University and in Canada, to reflect on his own background and intellectual formation, as well as to think through the history of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music.

Still, I think it is fair to say that both John and I had reservations about such a project. For my part, I was concerned that the interview format, with a senior figure, by a former student, in a journal issue about institutional and disciplinary histories of ethnomusicology and popular music in Canada, might problematically canonize and authorize certain versions of a historiography, its figures, and its lineages — at the expense of others. That is not our intention. Rather, our hope is that a dialogue such as this may fulfill a documentary function in terms of understanding where popular music teaching and research have come from, the difficulties that have been faced and overcome, the limitations that have expressed themselves in this project, and the challenges that therefore remain. Our hope is such an understanding may serve scholars in their ongoing efforts to take forward this field of study as an intellectual and political intervention.

**Kyle Devine:** To begin, can you talk about how you became interested in studying and researching music?

**John Shepherd:** It goes back to my time in school in Britain. The school was basically equivalent to a Canadian high school. At that time, in the last two years of such a school in Britain, you would only take three subjects, and mine were history, English, and — this was a novelty in an all-boys school at the time — music. This was an academic course, it wasn't performance. We were obviously studying the canon, there's no doubt about that: Bach and Handel through to Brahms and Wagner. This was between about 1962 and 1964.

At the same time, of course, I belonged to a peer group that was heavily into British rhythm & blues. I remember the Beatles hitting town in about 1963. It was a huge event. I also remember going to a concert by The Who in Portsmouth, which was my hometown. They performed in this ballroom on the south coast of England where the atmosphere had a definite aura of evil about it. So during the day I was studying the classical canon, and also taking flute lessons, which were my performance studies and which were completely private and outside the school. And then, evenings and weekends I was hanging out with my friends. So this to me was a real contrast, and I think it was the grist that eventually got things going.

I went to Carleton in 1967 as an undergraduate, and in 1968, I started taking music courses. The Department of Music there was started in 1967 with one professor and one course: Music 100, not surprisingly. But in the second year the department offered a course in Canadian music in addition to the Music 100 course. I took the Canadian course and, eventually, I registered in the new Bachelor of Music program. As I went through this degree course, I had this feeling that music was somehow inherently social and cultural — something, of course, that would have been fuelled by my exposure to British rhythm & blues. Popular music and popular culture at that time were decidedly political. I remember, as I got into my senior years, that I was advocating music as a social and cultural phenomenon as well as the study of popular music — I was asking why weren't universities studying and doing research into popular music and teaching it? Because popular music was such a huge phenomenon, it always seemed to me that, from a social perspective, it should be studied and taught. And I remember I got invited, in my final year, to give one lecture on popular music in the Music 100 course. So that's how things basically got going with me in terms of an academic interest in popular music. But I think it's very important to emphasize that, right from the outset, it was allied to this feeling that music was inherently social and cultural, including the music of the canon, including classical music. At that time, this was a point of view that bordered on heresy.

I think that one of the things which also got me going in this direction was that, when I was an undergraduate, I also took courses in art history and

French literature. I became intently aware that at the end of the 19th century there were very striking parallels between French impressionist and symbolist painting, music, and literature — poetry in particular. And this again resonated with the idea that these art forms were social and cultural, hence the parallels.

When I left Canada in 1972 to go to the University of York in Britain to do my doctorate with Wilfrid Mellers, I got accepted to do a thesis on the life and music of Frederick Delius. But the approach I took in my research was that the music of Frederick Delius was somehow socially and culturally significant. The short story is that the theoretical and intellectual approach took over. I changed topics, and ended up writing a thesis entitled “Towards a Sociological Understanding of Music,” a good part of which went into a book I co-authored (with Phil Virden, Graham Vulliamy, and Trevor Wishart) that was published in 1977 called *Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Languages*. Paradoxically, the only musical languages that I examined in my thesis and came out in this book were medieval plainchant through to the functional tonal system. So that’s basically how I got started.

From there I went to Trent University’s Department of Sociology and the university’s cultural studies program. (I was viewed with great suspicion by music departments!) Trent didn’t have music, and I was teaching some mainstream sociology courses, but also a course on the sociology of music. In 1984, I obtained my position at Carleton and was explicitly hired to develop courses in the sociology and aesthetics of music and the history of popular music. So — long answer to a short question!

**KD:** One thing I notice about how you describe your pathways into teaching and research is that *popular* music hasn’t necessarily been your main interest or the main engine of your work. What you describe is more like a commitment to understanding *all* forms of music in social and cultural terms. Maybe we’ll return to this later. But I’m guessing that one of the reasons you became involved in the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) quite early on in the organization’s history, is less because you were especially drawn to studying popular music and more that you found a group of likeminded people who were thinking socially, culturally, and critically about music.

**JS:** I think that’s true. When I was at Trent between 1979 and 1984, as I mentioned, I regularly taught a course on the sociology of music — in fact, I put on a summer school along the same lines in Trent’s cultural studies program. But I was in contact with other people in Canada and around the world who were similarly inclined. And in 1983, I organized a two- or three-day conference on the sociology of music at Trent; a number of Canadians

attended and some gave papers: I remember Will Straw, Line Grenier, and Jody Berland in particular. But also, a lot of people attended from other countries. I distinctly remember being on a panel with Philip Tagg and Simon Frith. This panel was very much about social and cultural approaches to studying music.

Sometime prior to that (I think it was because I had an article on popular music — one of my few! — published in the 1982 volume of the journal *Popular Music*), Philip Tagg became aware of my existence. He was one of the founders of IASPM along with my UK colleague David Horn and a Dutch colleague, Gerard Kempers, who sadly is no longer with us. Philip asked me if I would succeed him as the Executive Secretary of IASPM in 1983. Philip had actually started the organization and done all the legwork from 1979 through to 1983, when the second international conference was held in Reggio Emilia in Italy (the first had been in Amsterdam in 1981). I agreed, because it seemed to me that IASPM was a hugely important initiative. It was a truly international organization. Its centre of gravity, perhaps, was not so much in North America as in Europe. I served as the Executive Secretary from 1983 to 1987.

The other important thing is that the Canadian branch of IASPM was founded during this time, I think in 1982. I believe I was the chair of IASPM Canada from 1982 to 1984. At about the same time, in 1982 or 1983, Charles Hamm, who was Professor of Music at Dartmouth College, called together a meeting — if I remember correctly — to initiate the US branch of IASPM. And he did invite some Canadians: myself, and I also remember that Josée Destrempe was there. I think Charles was hopeful that a North American branch would form. But I think by that time, as he put it, the Canadians had decided to do their own thing. So, IASPM Canada was alive and well, certainly from about 1982. If I were to be asked about the real motivation for my involvement with IASPM and also popular music studies, I would say that it was because I felt it was hugely important that popular music was researched and taught within higher education.

**KD:** Another thing worth mentioning here is that many of your publications around this time had a dual focus, or participated in at least two conversations. On the one hand, there were critical and conceptual propositions for understanding music as a cultural artifact (and in ways that could not be reduced to the linguistics-based theories that predominated in cultural studies at the time). On the other, you were involved in discussions and initiatives about the elitism of existing music education. So you were also an advocate for the study of popular music in school and university curricula.

**JS:** That's true. I came to Carleton in 1984, and in the first year I was teaching Music 100 on the classical canon, I think a course on music analysis and, of course, the course on the sociology of music.

At the time, Carleton had its Honours Bachelor of Music program as well as, I think, a Bachelor of Arts music program. There were no performance courses when the department was founded, so, while I was a student there, I was shipped off to the Royal College of Music in London in the summer of 1971 to attempt to polish my abilities as a flautist and obtain the College's Associateship Degree. The Department had instituted performance courses mandatory for Bachelor of Music students by the time I returned in 1984, but the program has never appointed full-time performance faculty as such. The program right from the beginning has had a strong academic focus: the history of music and composition.

When I left in 1972, there were five faculty: John Churchill, the founding professor; Willy Amtmann, from whom I had taken that course in Canadian Music in the 1968-1969 academic year; Bob Fleming, who had previously been a Film Board of Canada composer; Alan Gillmor, who joined in the fall of 1971; and Deirdre Piper, appointed in 1972, just before I left. Despite the modest faculty complement, the program was distinctive from the beginning: the course on Canadian music counted as a core course towards all the department's degree programs, which was not always the case in other faculties, schools, and departments of music where it might only count as an option along with courses in other disciplines. There was also a specialty in electronic — and later computer — music, which was started during the 1971-1972 academic year. While I was away from Carleton, Elaine Keillor was appointed in 1977 to replace Willy Amtmann, who retired in 1976. Elaine took over the teaching of Canadian music and initiated courses in ethnomusicology. She also introduced a course in Canadian popular music in the early 1980s.

I think that it was the desire to carve out a distinctive niche in the Canadian higher education music scene that led to my appointment to specifically develop courses in popular music and the sociology and aesthetics of music. And, of course, I had been a student in the department — the first to graduate with the department's B.Mus. program in 1972 — so I was a known quantity! Another factor may have been that the atmosphere around music studies in universities was beginning to shift slowly as a younger generation of faculty members entered the academy.

During that first year at Carleton, I developed a whole series of courses, including one on the sociology and aesthetics of music. The interesting side note to that is that I got a call from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology saying, "You can't call it that," because the word "sociology" was involved. So I

think that in the end the course was called Music and Culture. Another six half courses at the second-year level (the music and culture course was at the third-year level) were in the history of popular music. If memory serves, they were on ragtime and jazz, blues, Tin Pan Alley, rock music, country music, and soul.

I taught the majority of these courses, relying quite heavily on the major books that had been published in these areas (for example, Bill Malone's *Country Music USA*, which was published in 1968). If I remember correctly, the department was quite open to purchasing the necessary recordings (the department rather than the Carleton Library was responsible for the University's collection of recordings for the purposes of teaching). However, colleagues at Carleton helped out considerably with teaching these courses. Alan Gillmor taught the ragtime and jazz course for many years. And the rock music course that we started was team taught, I think, between myself, Alan Gillmor, Will Straw — who of course, wasn't in music at Carleton, but appointed to the film studies program (perhaps paradoxically, so many of his publications have been in popular music) — and a composer, also appointed to Carleton in 1977, Pat Cardy, whom I remember lectured a lot on reggae and Jamaican genres. And then we were fortunate to have the service of some contract instructors, one of whom taught the soul course.

I also remember the contrast between the rock music course — in which we had high enrollments, and which attracted television crews to the first lecture because it was such a novelty and viewed as controversial at that time — and the country music course, which I think garnered only six students in its first year. That difference in itself is of sociological interest. The numbers in the country music course increased quite markedly after a while. However, I believe that the contrast still remains: rock music was viewed as countercultural and close to the hearts of many students; country music was viewed as much more conservative and of less interest to the particular demographic of young people attending university at the time. Today, the contrast might more likely occur with a course on rap and hip-hop. Anyway, that's really how popular music studies got started at Carleton. And it's been there ever since. Will Echard took over the mantle when I left Music to chair the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in 1999. By that time, we had also had to retrench a little bit because of resources. I think we came down to three half-courses in the end: the ragtime and jazz course, popular music before 1945, and popular music after 1945.

**KD:** Can you say a little bit more about what it was like to teach popular music in Canada during the 1970s and 1980s? Was there a strong sense of community or a shared sense of purpose?

**JS:** I don't remember that so much in the case of popular music studies. It was more the case, I think, in the area of what I would call progressive musicology at Carleton. Paul Théberge was there for a year in the 1990s before he came back at the beginning of the 21st century as a Canada Research Chair. Will Straw was in the film studies program until 1995. Jody Berland was there in the Communications program, I think, for a couple of years. So that certainly felt like a community. We and Geraldine Finn — a feminist philosopher who specialized in music and was appointed to Carleton at the time as a professor of cultural studies — were all involved in a cultural studies initiative in which music played a prominent role, as did feminist theory, something highlighted through a visit by Susan McClary.

I remember thinking that we had kindred spirits, certainly at York University in Toronto. Beverley Diamond and Bob Witmer come to mind. And of course, starting in 1979, Rob Bowman taught popular music at York University on and off for many years until he became a member of the full-time academic staff in 1993. We were in touch with the folks at York, who were obviously quite sympathetic to what we were doing. They had a PhD in ethnomusicology and had had for some years. And I think that was one of very few in the country.

The other place that comes to mind is the Department of Music at the University of Alberta, where Regula Qureshi was, and that department, at the time, seemed to be quite progressive in what they were doing. There were other individuals there who were moving in the same direction. I think they had a colleague by the name of Henry Klumpenhouwer, a music theorist who was producing some work in popular music. And certainly, of course, when Rob Bowman came to York in 1993, full time, that was a huge shot in the arm for the teaching and research of popular music in Canada. He had a real international profile. He's been nominated for a Grammy six times for liner notes and for producing historical albums — his first nomination was in 1987 — and he actually won a Grammy in 1996 for his very extensive liner notes for a very important compilation of Stax records and Stax studio recordings.

So I think there was always that kind of community. This community manifested itself, I think, in a couple of special issues of the *Canadian University Music Review* that I edited, one back in 1990, and then one, I think, about 10 or 12 years later. I'm sure there were some popular music articles in them. But again, they were very much in the area of what I would term "progressive musicology." I've always felt that Canada was something of a leader in that area going back to the early 1980s. Someone who was very important in this context was Jocelyne Guilbault, who was at the University of Ottawa at the time before she moved to UC Berkeley (she, Murray Dineen, and, a bit later, Lori Burns were

very sympathetic to what we were trying to achieve at Carleton). I remember her role in the first special issue of the *Canadian University Music Review*. There were articles in both French and English, and I remember Jocelyne Guilbault and Line Grenier being *very* important in helping to make that happen. And, of course, Jocelyne Guilbault's principal interest at that time, and for many years, was Zouk music. She was definitely an important Canadian figure in popular music studies.

**KD:** What you're describing sounds like a group of people who had some sense of self-consciousness about their connections and their project. But, again, that sense of purpose seems less centred on popular music and more focused on a wider project of theory, critique, and politics.

**JS:** Yes. Although I would say that, without the presence of popular music and popular music studies, I don't think the collective work of those individuals would have had quite the same kind of profile.

**KD:** So popular music, as an object of study, was a kind of crucial intellectual and political gathering point. Let's reach back earlier for a moment. At York in the UK, you were working with Wilfrid Mellers (as well as Trevor Wishart). And Mellers had been publishing serious essays on popular music since the early or mid-1960s. I guess that made York a popular music-friendly environment, and that it may have opened doors for you in terms of thinking seriously about popular music. Can you describe the influence this had on you at the time?

**JS:** Yes, that's true. Richard Middleton had also been a doctoral student at York working with Mellers a few years before I arrived and had completed a thesis on jazz and the blues. I think it was that environment that really both led me and permitted me to move to a thesis on the sociology of musical languages. At that time, in 1973, Mellers published a book on the Beatles (*Twilight of the Gods: the Beatles in Retrospect*). And I remember, in terms of doing my research for the thesis, reading a book of his which was published in 1946 (*Music and Society: England and the European Tradition*). I definitely remember reading an interesting argument in that publication about medieval music. I think that's what got me started on looking at medieval plainchant as a social and cultural form. So I think the environment at York was very important.

Maybe one other comment I should make is that in all these developments the history and development of ethnomusicology should not be forgotten. Ethnomusicology became a real presence in the United States in the mid 1950s. It undoubtedly provided a measure of support for the development of popular



music studies. And it's really interesting that, as we came towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, the boundary between ethnomusicology and popular music studies became highly porous. Jocelyne Guilbault and her work would be a definite case in point. I remember that John Blacking, who was the professor of social anthropology at Queen's University Belfast had published a book on Venda children's music, and also another very important book in all this called *How Musical is Man?* which was very influential in these kinds of broad developments of which popular music studies were a part.

**KD:** We've been talking about institutions like York and Trent and Carleton, as well as organizations like IASPM and (implicitly) the Society for Ethnomusicology. The history of popular music teaching and research is undoubtedly a history of institutionalization. That's why I find it interesting that there has always been an anti-institutional and anti-disciplinary (as well as anti-field) sentiment among scholars of popular music. For example, Jody Berland and Nikolas Kompridis published a review of an IASPM-adjacent event that took place at Carleton in 1985, before that year's international IASPM conference in Montreal. Berland and Kompridis were very supportive of studying popular music, yet they were quite critical of what they saw as a drive toward "disciplining the 'popular'" (1985/1986). Additionally, in Philip Tagg's 1985 IASPM keynote (and echoed in his 2011 keynote in Grahamstown) he wrote: "If IASPM still exists by the turn of the millennium, or if it has not changed its name to IASM (International Association for the Study of Music), then there is either something very wrong with this 'address' or something very wrong 'with IASPM'" (2011: 15). And, looking back on his career from 2019, Simon Frith noted that his initial goal "was not to establish popular music studies as a new field but to transform the existing study of music" (2019: 154). That popular music studies has taken the form of a strong field is part of what Frith describes as the failure of its success. Those are all different lines of argument and different strands of criticism. But, to me, they articulate a general sense of letdown at how popular music studies established itself as a field rather than leading to the kinds of changes that would have led to its self-rendered obsolescence. Indeed, there is a clue to all this in the name of the organization. It is the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (which is a statement of politics and advocacy) and not the International Association of (or for) Popular Music Studies.

**JS:** Those are very important statements from Phillip Tagg and Simon Frith. The whole time I was involved in IASPM I really felt that its role was not to institutionalize popular music studies, but to advocate for research into popular music studies and its teaching. And I think what Philip was saying and what

Simon was saying has been reflected in my own career as a scholar with a dual interest in popular music studies and the sociology and aesthetics of music. This linkage has constituted an undertaking that's never been institutionalized. It's been more about having a certain kind of theoretical and intellectual approach. My involvement with IASPM, which was very much in the 1980s, had to do with seeing these kinds of causes advanced.

The comment that Philip made is hugely important — the comment that maybe the International Association for the Study of Popular Music should shift to the International Association for the Study of Music. What was distinctive about IASPM was probably two things. One was that it was a truly international organization. Its centre of gravity, at least at the outset, was in Europe, although it spread and very quickly became global. Having said that, Americans and Canadians were obviously involved from very early days. But the other thing about IASPM, certainly in its early days, was that it was heavily involved in cultural theory. And I think that, to a degree, is what's behind Philip's statement: that in fact he was advocating for a different approach to the study of music — full stop — as exemplified through the research and study of popular music. And, again, this is something that would have been presaged, probably in somewhat different ways, by the growing area or discipline of ethnomusicology. So I think those statements from Philip and Simon are very important. It's the reason, I think, that Philip had in mind that the kind of advocacy that was behind the formation of IASPM would actually spread and encompass the study and teaching and research of music more generally. It wasn't only that he gave this address in 1985 at the IASPM conference in Montreal, it was that we were all talking about that issue. I remember many of those conversations. I've never really been for the institutionalization of popular music studies as a discipline. I think that in a lot of my presentations, and maybe in my publications, I've always talked about popular music studies as a kind of intellectual trajectory, and I think that's a much better characterization.

I think that three things are worth noting about popular music studies. The first is that when it has a presence in a music program, it's alongside the study of other traditions (assuming that these traditions can always be legitimately identified as “separate,” which in many cases they can't). I think that what's important for students is not only a catholicity of objects of study, but a catholicity of intellectual approaches. This was very much the case with music at Carleton when I was involved with it, and I think it has remained that way and is also, I believe, apparent to some extent in other faculties, schools, and departments of music in Canada. The second thing is that popular music is researched and taught in university departments other than music. These departments have disciplinary orientations that bring different perspectives to

the study, not only of popular music, but potentially all music, that are unlikely to be apparent in music programs, no matter how “catholic” they are. Finally — and most importantly, in my opinion — it is crucial that popular music scholars in different disciplines talk to each other. I have been involved in the supervision of theses in music at Carleton in programs other than music, as have some of my colleagues in music, and I think that that is a very healthy thing.

**KD:** Right. As a political and intellectual project, the institutional element of popular music teaching and research has been both necessary and beneficial as well as suspect and problematic. Maybe this is an irony of most similar university-based projects of criticism and revision.

**JS:** Exactly. I think that I was vaguely aware when we introduced popular music studies at Carleton (which also importantly included performance — the link between performance and the academic study of music is very important — knowing how music feels in performance really helps to understand it academically) that there had been courses on popular music, mainly rock music I think, in other faculties, schools, and departments of music. And — to be honest — I think they were there because they got large enrollments which, of course, from an institutional point of view, is good for faculties, schools, and departments of music. But what was interesting was that they did not always count towards a music degree. They could count towards a degree of which music was a major, but only as an option. In the current climate, it is sometimes easy to forget how strong the opposition to the introduction of popular music studies and alternative approaches to studying music could be. Their introduction was viewed as an attack on the established canon, which I guess in a way it was: witness Simon Frith’s statement. I also remember at a musicology conference in the United States in the late 1980s being accused of being “a barbarian.” The emergence of feminist musicology at about the same time — a development which reached well beyond the study of popular music — experienced a similar reaction. So I think that the confrontation was not so much with classical and serious music themselves as with classical and serious music’s almost exclusive grip on the curriculum and a largely homogeneous, male-oriented, and asocial approach to their study.<sup>1</sup>

The approach of Carleton was very different. The half courses in popular music counted equally alongside all the courses on classical music and the ethnomusicology courses in both the Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Arts programs. So, where Carleton was concerned, the introduction of popular music studies simply broadened the somewhat catholic approach to the study

of music that existed from the outset. That breadth of possible topics of study for students militates, I think, against the institutionalization of popular music studies as a discipline and the attendant creation of a canon.

But I can also see that the teaching of popular music has suffered the same process of canonization that has marked other disciplines. It certainly marked the research and teaching of jazz. It's obviously been there from the outset with the teaching and research of classical music. But particularly going into the 1970s, there was a sense that there was a rock music canon. And I think it's possibly this that Simon Frith was reacting against: that there was a body of work that somehow came to represent the object of study, and it would have been a body of work that, by necessity in these processes, would have begun to exclude other things.

There seems to be a proclivity on the part of some people to want to categorize things and put a boundary around them, and I think this gets emphasized when an academic program's principal goal is career training. Popular music studies has included music journalists and industry professionals — Dave Laing would represent a prime example of this — but I don't think that, on the whole, popular music studies has been overly involved in this goal (certainly not Dave Laing!). If I was asked to identify the underlying motivation of those involved in this intellectual trajectory, I would say it has been a desire to understand popular music as a crucially important form of human expression in all its manifest cultural and political variations. So I think the spirit of IASPM has always been very much against institutionalization and canonization.

**KD:** In terms of the intellectual and political project of IASPM in its early days, there are clearly anti-classicist and anti-classist dimensions. There were also definite political and critical discourses surrounding gender, sexuality, and race in popular music as a historical phenomenon and a fact of life. Yet if we look at the demographics of IASPM itself during this time, it does reflect the advantages of birth and other systemic inequalities that marked the wider university in certain parts of the world at that time. It was largely men, and it was largely white. I wonder how conscious IASPM members were of these issues, and I wonder how the historiography of the organization might look different in light of the questions raised by initiatives such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

**JS:** If you go back to the beginning of popular music studies as a somewhat coherent and recognizable intellectual tradition, I think you will see that the players were going to be middle-class, young white people. A significant number of women were centrally involved from the outset: Josée Destrempe,

Jan Fairley, and Line Grenier come to mind immediately as well as Anna Szemere from Hungary, who was at the Reggio Emilia conference, but there were others. This demographic had grown up with certain forms of popular music and this music had formed a very important part of their biographies. In some ways, it's a replication of how jazz studies got into the academy with an earlier generation, drawn from the same kind of demographics. And as you mention, political and critical discourses surrounding gender, sexuality, and race in popular music had characterized IASPM from early days. In this context, it perhaps should be mentioned that the 1987 IASPM conference was held in Accra in Ghana. Klevor Abo from Ghana, who sadly passed away in September 2020, was a member of IASPM early on, and it was largely because of him that the decision was taken at the 1985 Montreal biennale conference to go to Ghana in 1987. Nonetheless, I think that things have broadened since those early days and I also think that contact with ethnomusicology has been very important, although ethnomusicology has faced and continues to face its own challenges. I haven't been centrally involved with popular music studies for some time now, but I'm sure what you say about #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and Truth and Reconciliation is true. I'd be surprised if it wasn't.

**KD:** One thing that this conversation highlights for me, and which is maybe a reason to be hopeful about the future of popular music teaching and research, is that the study of popular music has never been one thing. It's always been many things — which means it may yet become many other things.

**JS:** I think that's true. If you look at places where popular music has been studied — such as the University of Liverpool — you will see this. David Horn was the Director of the Institute of Popular Music at Liverpool for many years — a professional librarian whose motivation was a strong interest in American popular music, particularly the earlier part of that history; Sara Cohen is a cultural anthropologist. Philip Tagg, a musicologist, was at Liverpool for several years, and there have been other members of staff there who come from quite different backgrounds. I think that's very healthy. One of the grists to the development of popular music studies has been the tension between various disciplinary contributions. People like myself, Richard Middleton, and Peter Wicke have come from musicology and have been very concerned that musicology be part of the study and music be recognized as a distinctive form of human expression and culture. But there are more sociologically- and communications-oriented studies involving figures such as Simon Frith and Larry Grossberg, who would probably feel that an emphasis on the sounds of music betrays a certain essentialization of music — which I don't think is

the case. But that tension has been there as it had been, I think, in slightly different ways in ethnomusicology. I think that's good because those kinds of tensions and frictions are what gives the intellectual trajectory its vitality and strength and is an important engine for its continued development. They also probably militate to some extent against the institutionalization of popular music studies.

**KD:** Is there anything important that you think we haven't yet touched on?

**JS:** One thing, perhaps, is an international venture that Carleton has been centrally involved with almost since its beginnings in the late 1980s, and that is what is now the *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, a project that is still ongoing, although the end for the encyclopedia's hard copy volumes is almost in sight! The encyclopedia is very much a brainchild of IASPM. Discussions around developing a reference work on the world's popular music that was subject-based and not biographically based (as are so many such publications for the trade market) and that was academically rigorous began at the 1985 IASPM conference. A somewhat silly in-joke among some early IASPMites was that the study of popular music is a very serious business! IASPM and its national branches have birthed an impressive range of academic journals and conference proceedings. The encyclopedia is representative of these kinds of initiatives and many Canadian scholars and journalists have made important contributions (Paul Théberge, Will Straw, Beverley Diamond, Bob Witmer, and Rob Bowman to name a few, but there have been so many others as well).

**KD:** To wrap this up, I'd like to ask: Are there any lessons from the past of popular music scholarship, and critical socio-cultural music scholarship more generally, that you think would be valuable for researchers and teachers of a younger generation to hear as they continue this work?

**JS:** One comment I would like to make is that a number of people have been really kind about my role and possible influence in the development of both popular music studies and the sociology and aesthetics of music. But as time went on and I saw things developing, I actually came to the conclusion that a major force behind these kinds of changes is generational. As I think you know from other conversations and projects we've been involved in, there is one central question (about the fundamental importance of music to human societies and human life) which still rattles around in my mind. But I've come to realize — and I think this is very important — that the kinds of

things which motivated me and the kinds of intellectual adventures which stimulated me belong to a particular time and place. And I think you have to accept as you get older that time passes and younger generations have different interests. And that's completely understandable. So some of the questions which may still haunt you, and maybe that you still want to explore, are not necessarily the questions that today are seen as important.

I think that the sociology and aesthetics of music and cultural theory were so important because they represented the intellectual tools which allowed or helped doors to open, particularly in prying us away from the domination of the classical canon. If people like myself and Richard Middleton and Simon Frith and Larry Grossberg and Peter Wicke and Will Straw and Jody Berland and Paul Théberge and Rob Bowman and Jocelyne Guilbault have played any role, I think it's prying open doors that other people are then going to walk through. And I think these people then walked through these doors because their biographies are different, they were born in a different time, and they have different awarenesses of the world. 🍀

## Notes

1. Prior to Joseph Kerman's 1985 book, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology*, and for a significant period thereafter, a belief in the "superiority" and "universality" of the classical musical canon was quite entrenched. As a consequence, opposition to the introduction of popular music studies and the application of various forms of social and cultural theory to the study of music was, indeed, equally entrenched (witness, for example, the controversy engendered by Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings*, published in 1991). The opposition to both was often based on the assumption, on the one hand, that the music of the classical canon was inherently "asocial" (or, at least, if created in specific social and historical circumstances, capable of transcending both the circumstances of its creation and subsequent circumstances of its reception), thereby giving expression to an "other-worldly" reality of universal, permanent, and immutable values and, on the other hand, that popular music was inherently social, therefore of inferior value and, as a consequence, unworthy of study in music programs. By arguing that all music is pervasively social and cultural as a form of human expression and communication, it then becomes possible to assert that no music is inherently of greater value and more worthy of study than any other and that the classical musical music canon (as well as other forms of music) can be studied in different, insightful, and revelatory ways (see, for example, Shepherd 1991: 49-74).

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