

Introduction: the mediations of music and alcohol

Music and alcohol have long been connected. It is a connection to be found in song lyrics; in the tragic and comic circumstances of performers' lives; in the economic transactions between artists, music industries and the purveyors of beer, wine and spirits; during communal singing in alehouses and taverns; within and without dancing bodies in speakeasies and discos; and among the convivial or intimidating behaviour of fans at gigs and festivals. This special edition of *Popular Music* is intended as a contribution to understanding the role of alcohol in music, as a facet of historical change, human interaction, individual creative practice, economic behaviour and political process. It is quite deliberately designed to be much more than a survey of song lyrics about drinking or anecdotal tales about drunken musicians.

Songs about drinking have featured across space and throughout history – from ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome to the tales sung by medieval troubadours and broadside ballad peddlers in Europe, across folk traditions throughout the Americas and in vernacular music making around the continents. This aspect of musical repertoires is unmistakable and would feature in any lexicon of the global languages of song. However, alcohol features in many other guises in popular music, and is often deeply embedded in the dynamics and relationship through which music is made and sold, performed and appreciated. The selection of papers in this special edition of *Popular Music* explore how the meaning and making of popular music and the actions and attitudes of musicians are mediated by alcohol.

That the contemporary commodified production, distribution and consumption of music is dependent on intermediaries is a truism. Many of those intermediaries are now receiving close scrutiny from scholars. The intermediaries are typically the various music company personnel, media organisations, agents and managers, consultants and data analysts, publishers, streaming services and collecting societies. There are many more. However long the list, it tends to be confined to individuals and institutions, and indeed the stories in this special edition are populated by a lively compendium of such characters and organisations. Arguably, though, we might treat alcohol as an intermediary. It is, after all, involved in all stages of the production and circulation of music; it also takes many forms. It is a stimulant, sponsor and site. It is material presence and ideological battlefield. Its movements through musical life are shaped by institutional interests, collective beliefs and individual endeavour.

In advocating the use of the terms intermediary and mediation we are not wishing to align ourselves with, nor privilege, a specific theoretical stance. We draw from the way these words are used in a variety of everyday situations, as much as we acknowledge their resonances in Adorno's critical theory, Bourdieu-inspired perspectives on cultural production, and actor network theory with its suggestion that non-human objects can have agency. But if we are to approach alcohol as mediator and intermediary, there is the question of how best to study it. This is an issue of disciplines and fields, and of perspectives and approaches. In this special issue, we

represent just some of these approaches to the mediations of music and alcohol. The articles each draw on substantive research and scholarship, all addressing the inter-relationships between those making music, the characteristics of songs and performances, and the dynamics of audience engagement. A number of themes emerge, opening up important avenues for further research and discussion.

History

It is fitting that we have two major contributions that not only give an insight into the relationship between music and alcohol in particular historical periods, but which challenge the still implicit orthodoxy that characterises the overwhelming majority of submissions to this journal (and indeed the field of popular music studies more generally). This is the assumption that the study of popular music begins somewhere around the middle of the 20th century. In this issue we reach back to the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Doing so helps to establish the persistent links between drink and music, but it does more than establish continuities, it also raises questions about the factors that intervene and shape the relationship.

Angela McShane maps the beginnings of a commercial music industry in London in the late 1500s, a time when recreational drinking too was on the increase. She argues that social drinking and commercial music production became irrevocably linked – an association that also included ties to religion and politics. Annemarie McAllister's historical perspective is that of the temperance movement of the late 19th century. Her focus is on a movement that set itself against the evils of alcohol by using music to carry its message and to mobilise its supporters. There are elements of this story in Gavin Carfoot's account of how songs narrate the risks to health of drink among Australia's First People.

Politics

Music and alcohol have both been the subject of law, separately and, more importantly, together. The regulation of one has often been because of its association with the other. This connection is brought vividly to life in the historical studies by McShane and McAllister, who jointly highlight the important ways in which alcohol, music and musicians are rooted in political struggles, movements and institutional constraints. For McShane, the civil wars of the mid-17th century provide the genesis for a spate of 'loyal-health drinking songs'; for McAllister, it is the temperance movement and its middle-class activists, fearful of the threat that working-class disorder poses to their values and privileged position. Both McShane and McAllister reveal how alcohol and music combine to constitute collective identities, whether factional or national, and how this combination is deployed to comment on the political order or on social decay. This same capacity can then become the basis of policy interventions. Carfoot's Australian case study highlights how composing, recording and circulating songs about alcohol can help to articulate a sense of community, out of which can come initiatives to counter the ill-effects of alcohol use.

Key to the politics of music and alcohol is the licensing system. Licensing serves to determine what is permissible for whom. McShane notes, for example, that licences issued in 1619 indicated what might be consumed at what cost by the

poor. Echoes of this practice, and of the temperance movement, appear in Dave Laing's wry account of the UK Licensing Act of 2003. The Act sought to confront anxieties about the alliance of live music and alcohol. It did not specify how much drink could be consumed, but it did limit the number of musicians in a licensed bar and the size of the audience. An illustration of the type of 'misbehaviour' that such political intervention seeks to control, along with the 'hassles' posed for musicians performing on stage in premises licensed for alcohol, is detailed in Alasdair Forsyth, Jemma Lennox and Martin Cloonan's study of musicians as 'gigging entertainers'.

Industry

The political regulation of music and alcohol is driven by governmental endeavours to maintain order in, and control over, public spaces. One way to achieve this is to attempt to ban alcohol, as happened during Prohibition and which continues in countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran. Attempts to restrict alcohol according to moral principles and concerns about its impact on health sit uneasily with an awareness of alcohol's commercial value. Alcohol is a major source of revenue. This is not lost on either governments or businesses with a stake in music. Almost all the articles here explore the ways in which alcohol and music are interrelated through industrial processes, commercial transactions and business dealings.

Alison Eales's article on alcohol sponsorship in Glasgow is revealing of how the interests of corporate sponsors may coincide and clash with the goals of event managers. She reveals how a type of alcohol dependency has affected the festival circuit. The financial support provided by drinks corporations can have implications for the character and content of the event. Sponsorship is not direct advertising, but it is a form of financial investment and a return on investment is anticipated. From the independent local brewery supporting a specific community and its musicians (such as brass bands in Yorkshire in northern England) to multinationals such as Diageo (Smirnoff, Guinness, Moët & Chandon, Hennessy), each is seeking to establish brand affiliation with particular audiences. This alerts us to the tensions that arise when brands and sponsors seek to intervene in music making – an issue ripe for further research as revenues from the sales of recordings decline and musicians seek alternative sources of financial support.

Creative individuals

On occasions the presentation of a musician's public self is indelibly linked to alcohol consumption, as in Frank Sinatra's use of Jack Daniels as a droll stage prop for his saloon bar numbers, or in the publicity accorded to Amy Winehouse's struggles with booze and drugs. Even back in the 16th century, the identity of ballad writers was mediated by alcohol; their epitaphs linked the singer to drink, as detailed by McShane.

Perhaps more commonly, alcohol features as part of a narrative deployed by critics, commentators and journalists when writing about musicians (like Billie Holliday or Hank Williams) and other creative individuals such as painters, poets and novelists. Sometimes alcohol consumption is unreflectively celebrated as a spur or facilitator of creativity, quite regardless of evidence to the contrary. Marcus

O'Dair's biographical study of Robert Wyatt challenges such simplistic assumptions. Wyatt's relationship to alcohol features prominently, but its role is treated as nuanced and complex, not simply a route to inspiration, but in large part psychological support. Like many creative artists, but also like many people dealing with occupational stress, Wyatt drank alcohol to counter performance anxiety. Equally, Wyatt imbibed to overcome his inhibitions and apprehension of songwriting, to enable him to undertake a craft that he found difficult – a skill he perceived that others could do in a more enthusiastic and effortless manner.

Events, performances and audiences

Just as artists may come to rely on alcohol as an aid to performance and composition, so drink is often an unavoidable component in the public consumption of music, whether the musicians like it or not. The sponsorship of venues and festivals is evidently central to this story, as is the effect that this has on the kind of music that is performed. But there is a further story to be told.

Although there are many occasions when music is played and heard in the absence of alcohol (whether on state occasions, in religious ceremonies or in youth clubs and community centres), the consumption of alcohol has an evident impact on *how* music is performed. Artists might seek to restrict the consumption of alcohol at live concerts; Abdullah Ibrahim and Neil Young, among others, have insisted on the bar shutting during performances in order to avoid noise and disturbance, and to aid their concentration and audience engagement. Unlike the frequently boisterous behaviour at 17th- and 18th-century Venetian Opera, 21st-century classical performances rarely take place to the accompaniment of chinking glasses, but the bar is anything but deserted during the interval (and at Glyndebourne operas, vast hampers and bottles of champagne are favoured between acts).

It is popular music where alcohol is most commonly present during the performance. What this means for the performer, a topic that has rarely if ever been addressed before, is the subject of the article by Forsyth, Lennox and Cloonan. From interviews with musicians, they reveal how performers deal with, and try to manage, the drinking (and drunk) audience. They suggest that this is a performance skill that rivals hitting the right note or striking the right chord. It can be vital for those mainstream musicians seeking to 'entertain' the crowd (and there are some genres and sub-genres in which drunkenness and antagonism is part of the pleasures for band and audience alike). As the authors point out, it is a skill for which musicians have little formal training, and about which their professional knowledge is acquired solely through experience.

One technique to which performers resort, particularly within the folk genre, is to incorporate the drinking into the event. But even those who wanted to ban alcohol used song, as McAllister points out, to spread the message of temperance.

This special edition of *Popular Music* explores an under-studied subject and demonstrates how songs about alcohol and musicians' encounters with drink should be understood in different times and circumstances, ranging from the politics of everyday life and individual biography to the exceptional politics of revolutionary social change. The articles here suggest some methodological routes for understanding how alcohol is mediated by, but in turn mediates songs, musical creativity and performance. It highlights how any meanings that might be derived from listening

to recordings or reading sheet music and lyrics are indelibly marked by ordinary and extraordinary human relationships, struggles and conflicts.

In summary, the articles illustrate multiple aspects of the relationship between music and alcohol, encapsulating a range of perspectives and a variety of disciplinary approaches. Together they make a powerful case for further study of the mediating and intermediary role of alcohol in the process of creating and consuming music.

Keith Negus
Department of Music, Goldsmiths,
University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW
Email: K.Negus@gold.ac.uk

John Street
School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies,
University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ
Email: J.Street@uea.ac.uk