

Introduction: Special issue on Popular Music and Heritage

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This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in *Popular Music History*.

The version of record is:

Leonard, Marion and Robert Knifton (2015) 'Introduction: Special issue on Popular Music and Heritage', *Popular Music History*, 10 (2): 107-112
(DOI:.1558/pomh.33289)

In Autumn 2016, the Victoria & Albert Museum's major exhibition *You Say You Want a Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966-1970* was the latest in a series of high-profile museum exhibitions that took popular music and its related material culture and harnessed it to explore ideas about society, politics and culture. In the UK alone a host of music exhibitions and displays have opened or are currently in the planning stages, including the forthcoming Pink Floyd retrospective at the V&A and the reopening of the British Music Experience in Liverpool in Spring 2017. With such an active field of practice now seems an excellent time to investigate the role of museums in the collection and display of popular music and its material culture, and to examine how exhibitions present music histories and represent popular music as heritage. This special issue presents perspectives from a group of international scholars on the development of museum collections and exhibitions in Australia, France, the UK and the USA.

Scholarly attention to heritage presentations of popular music has grown in recent years in response to the diverse ways in which different music practices, locations, artists, genres, events and objects have come to be understood in heritage terms by a variety of interested parties from government bodies and national archives to music collectors and fan communities. While, as Bennett and Janssen (2016:2) note, music tourism initiatives have long been based around popular music histories, it is 'only in relatively recent times, though, that a broader heritage boom has taken hold of popular music, particularly in relation to its sociohistorical significance in a post-1945 context'. The academic attention which has been given to this has, amongst other things, unpacked some of the debates around the construction of popular music as heritage (Bennett 2009; Reitsamer 2014; Roberts 2014), explored the location of memories and histories of popular music (Cohen et al. 2015), and discussed the agents active in the preservation of popular music's material past (Baker 2015). Many of the papers included in this issue raise questions about what constitutes heritage and how it is constructed and defined. The discussions also sensitise us to how international conceptions of heritage vary, as illustrated by the subtle difference between Anglo-American 'heritage' and French 'patrimoine' as discussed by Crenn and Le Guern.

It is perhaps unsurprising that a special issue on music and museums should touch on the subject of memory. The particular and vivid ways in which popular music and memory are intertwined and the ways in which recollections are articulated has been the subject of increased scholarly attention (see for example van Dijck 2006; Pickering and Keightley 2015; Strong 2015; Bennett forthcoming). In turn, museums have often been referred to as ‘memory institutions’ because of the role that they play in preserving the materials of the past and in activating the memories of their visitors. As Crane has commented, the act of collection ‘means being valued and remembered institutionally; being displayed means being incorporated into the extra-institutional memory of the museum visitors’ (2000: 2). In this issue the idea of the museum as a storehouse for memory is brought together with an investigation into music as one of the ‘most significant technologies of remembering in everyday life’ (Pickering and Keightley 2015: 1).

A number of the articles in this issue interrogate the particular display strategies that popular music exhibitions employ and the emphases, biases, and approaches to the topic that they reveal. The curation of popular music histories and their presentation as heritage can be a charged and contested area with multiple stakeholders engaged – often with great passion – in shaping and responding to the museum presentation of materials. Such exhibitions often exist on the boundary between memory and history, leading to intriguing processes of viewing and interaction with audiences. The ‘hot-topic’ nature of popular music curation may partly be attributed to the fact that these exhibitions are dealing primarily with the recent, remembered past – where the music being played or referred to in a gallery context may have particular associations for visitors, linking to their personal experiences and biographies. Thus, popular music as a museum topic creates complex relationships between museums and their visitors, with myth, memory, audience self-recognition, identity, the role of expertise, and the inclusion of community perspectives all featuring within the relationships discussed in the following articles.

In drawing together these contributions a number of common questions began to emerge. How exactly do museums create new ways of understanding popular music? Who has authority over how histories are narrated? Who are the stakeholders in these public presentations and how is meaning negotiated? Do popular music displays merely serve to reinforce pre-existing canons or are they spaces where alternate narratives of popular music heritage can potentially emerge? Using case studies of particular exhibitions the papers explore these issues opening up debates about authority, interpretation, collaboration and the changing role of museums.

Pirrie Adams’ reflections on *Nirvana: Taking Punk to the Masses* exhibition at the Experience Music Project in Seattle, raises issues about curatorial authority and strategies taken by museums to generate dialogue between the curated content of an exhibition and the existing knowledge of its visitors including the values,

attachments and identities that they bring with them. Through this case study Pirrie Adams raises a central point about the challenge of curating popular culture material: it belongs to the recent past, connects with living memory, and in many cases is material which visitors are already passionate or knowledgeable about. The article's discussion of the display strategies used within the Nirvana exhibition also highlights the reliance of museums on 'charismatic' objects associated with music stars. The example of Kurt Cobain's V-neck pullover illustrates how such objects are not necessarily iconic because of their design or scarcity *as objects* but because of their associative resonance and auratic value as relics. Her case study of the Seattle Band Map further highlights the collective processes of cultural heritage construction in the popular music museum, where canon and de-centered cultural community coalesce. Pirrie Adams adopts UNESCO's definition of heritage as composed of artefacts, sites and living heritage and applies it to popular music contexts in order to question the effect of museum presentation on collective memory around popular music.

Gaëlle Crenn offers an examination of the touring exhibition *AbbaWorld*, considering its reception when displayed at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Her article examines how popular culture material is defined as heritage through its inclusion and display within a museum context. Crenn highlights the pivotal role that museums play in bestowing value on cultural objects: as they select material, thereby making a claim for its significance, which they then articulate to the public through the processes of display. The article examines the relationships between different stakeholders in the process: considering specifically the points of negotiation during the exhibition production between producers in the cultural industries, museum designers and curators; and then the further negotiation of the exhibition content by audiences when visiting the museum. This highlights the ongoing process of meaning-making which happens in the development of an exhibition project and continues in the ways that the 'finished' display is engaged with, navigated and experienced. Moreover, by comparing the different ways in which the exhibition was curated when shown in two Australian cities, Crenn is able to examine how distinct interpretative frameworks gave different emphases to the exhibition content, made separate claims about who had authority to speak for music heritage, and encouraged different modes of reception.

Crenn also discusses the differences between English-language heritage studies and the French concept of 'patrimoine' or patrimonialization, raising the possibilities of cultural and linguistic frameworks determining meaning within such debates – something at the forefront when discussing the presentation of Swedish group Abba to Australian museum audiences. Drawing on Kevin Moore's reading of popular culture within museology as being plotted on two variable axes (adapted from Clifford by way of Pearce) – between masterpiece and artefact and from spurious to authentic – Crenn delineates how the producers of Abba and the museum curators aimed for different effects, with the producers paradoxically being the ones who

aimed for museum-style curating to legitimate 'authentic masterpieces' whilst the museum curators constructed less closed-off displays designed to represent the objects as 'authentic artefacts'. The article offers an intriguing insight into the mediation between museum representatives and agents of the cultural industries, and the mixed motivations of each party in representing popular music culture and heritage.

In tackling the topic of the 'museum mummification' of rock Le Guern raises important issues about authenticity, veracity and the relationship which today's celebrations of music heritage have with the lived past. Focussing in on three music exhibitions in France he considers to what extent such displays are reductive, overlooking the everyday ways in which we engage with music and the different contexts in which we do so. This provokes debate about the distinction between the representation of histories and our own memories about an event, context or era which have a different sense of 'truth'. Le Guern urges us to consider the reasons that might explain our current 'rock heritage obsession', proposing that this is connected to the possibilities afforded by digital technology, generational factors linked to an aging rock audience and an increased desire to preserve the past brought about by the crisis of our accelerated culture of consumption and social change. By attending to the history of rock in France and how it has subsequently been represented through exhibition Le Guern's paper reminds us to the importance of context and the need to identify and distinguish different perspectives on history influenced by factors including location, social class and gender.

In our contribution to this issue we move back from the topic of exhibitions and into the store room of the museum. Drawing on extensive research undertaken with UK museums, the article discusses the nature of museum popular music collections, revealing the results of a national survey to present a sense of the scope and significance of these museum holdings. Both the character of institutions engaging with popular music topics and the nature of collections assembled are scrutinised. The article considers what the development of these collections reveals about how such institutions select and prioritise material as well as discussing some of the challenges to building these collections. We argue that museum collections are important public resources for collective and individual memory as well as markers of institutional understandings of cultural heritage, and as such play a significant role by establishing formal popular music collections which are public resources for the future.

Finally, in the Resources section of the issue, Rob Horrocks reflects on his time as research intern for the Home of Metal initiative. This ambitious project resulted in a series of events and exhibitions which took place in 2011-12 across 15 venues in the English West Midlands covering the four local authority areas of Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, and Sandwell and Dudley. Horrocks describes the process of gathering oral history material for the museum exhibition at the Birmingham

Museum and Art Gallery which formed a centrepiece to these events. His comments offer insight into the gathering, selection and use of this material within the gallery presentation, balancing practical concerns about visitor engagement and fit with the exhibition narrative alongside a desire to use this oral testimony as a way to bring to life hidden histories which did not have the support of objects on display.

How popular music is presented in museums is a developing area of scholarly inquiry (see for instance, Leonard 2007, 2010; Henke 2009; van der Hoeven and Brandellero 2015; Cortez 2016; Baker, Istvandy and Nowak 2016), reflecting both the growth in music exhibitions internationally and the key role that these bodies have in shaping our understanding of the past. The contributions to this special issue document and analyse how museums collect and display popular music materials, and consider how museums offer perspectives on our social and cultural past to the public. The development of collections and exhibitions is far from straight-forward and the practice of curation involves selection, interpretation and the development of narratives about histories. With a considerable increase in the number of music exhibitions, alongside the establishment of dedicated music museums, it is important that we examine the processes and decision making which inform these representations and interrogate how the performers, events and audiences of yesterday are reimagined within these heritage institutions.

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