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Introduction

Special Issue – As Time Goes By: music, dance and ageing

How many people have lodged in their musical psyche the melody and words of 'As Time Goes By' from director Michael Curtiz's 1942 film *Casablanca*? Performed by the nightclub pianist Sam (played by Dooley Wilson), the song opens with the well-known phrase, 'You must remember this … a kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh; the fundamental things apply as time goes by'. The song's wistful lyrics by Herman Hupfeld (1931) are inscribed with notions of memory, time and longing, evident in Ilsa's (Ingrid Bergman's) request to 'play it once, Sam … for old times' sake' – a cinematic moment most often quoted as 'Play it again, Sam'.

That song, and the knowledge that people love to create and play music repeatedly over time, were the inspiration when we decided to compile a special issue of *Popular Music* on the subject of 'Music, Dance and Ageing'. Other examples came to mind: when the Beatles recorded 'When I'm 64' in 1967, they themselves were in their twenties and the brash optimism of youth tempered the fact that the age of 64 was still a long way off. When the Beatles released that track, the field of Popular Music Studies itself was young and few of the pioneering scholars were interested directly in questions of music and age, nor would they claim an evolved analytical viewpoint on music, dance and older people. More often they were fascinated with the 'here and now' of their own cultural experiences, musical tastes and, perhaps, the later media-ascribed power of 'baby boomer' status. At the time researchers and scholars largely ignored the tastes of their parents, many but not all overlooking the significance of adults' predilection for the 'light music' of the big bands or the preponderance of Tin Pan Alley vocalising. The music of those who lived between the First and Second World Wars seemed to be part of a rapidly receding past and was, thus, largely irrelevant to a younger generation growing up in relative prosperity and with diverse opportunities that surpassed those of their parents and grandparents.

Notions of music such as rock and pop being 'youth musics' shift when, in 2011, we consider that The Beatles' Paul McCartney is five years past the rhetorical age of 64, giving the song new meaning when he sings it on tour – and, yes, like many of his pivotal generation, McCartney is still touring. It is 46 years since The Who released 'My Generation' in 1965 with Pete Townshend's (now 66) once provocative lyrics, 'I hope I die before I get old'. From a different era, Tony Martin, US vocalist, film and television star, now 99 years old, performed live club dates as recently as three years ago. Tony Bennett, the great interpreter of song 'standards', is also still actively touring and recording at 85 years of age, releasing his CD *Duets II* in 2011. Indeed, in 2006 the American Association for Retired People (AARP) sponsored Bennett's US tour, while the 2007 AARP national convention featured performances by UK star Rod Stewart and the US group Earth, Wind and Fire.

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This issue of *Popular Music* is indebted to '… alles hat seine Zeit – Alter(n) in der popularen Musik' (All Things Have Their Season: Age and Ageing in Popular Music), the 19th conference of the German Association for the Study of Popular Music (ASPM) organised by Alenka Barber-Kersoven and others members of ASPM Germany in 2008, as it was there that the concept for this special issue of *Popular Music* was born. Clearly, as Popular Music is an interdisciplinary field there is no single response to the questions generated by the subject of age, ageing and music: factors such as genre, locale, performance contexts or media technologies all play their part in the ways that music is created, produced, enjoyed and made meaningful over time. Crossing each of these variables is age itself, constituting a significant cultural factor since what one does – and how and with whom – is closely linked to the passing of time. The convergence of age and popular music is traced with notions of memory and nostalgia, subjectivity and identity formation, taste and cultural capital, and social values of propriety, as the essays in this issue indicate.

While repertoire is one thing, age, it seems, is no barrier to the pleasure of continuing performance, a fact not simply restricted to pop and rock, as the international success since the mid-1990s of the veteran Cuban musicians of The Buena Vista Social Club demonstrates. As Jan Fairley (2009) explains, fetishism with age was integral to the appeal of the musicians involved in this ground-breaking collective which involved a group of musicians already 'pensioned off' by the Cuban state. Their transformation into an award-winning international group selling millions of discs worldwide in the space of a few years was, in the word of the group's singer Ibrahím Ferrer, 'more than a miracle'. Indeed, Ferrer declared he was happy to 'die on stage' and, remarkably, he did die only four days after falling ill on stage in 2005, having insisted on continuing to perform despite failing health. In a similar mode, as we write in 2011, Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar, in his 92nd year, performed a sold out concert at the 2011 Edinburgh International Festival to wide acclaim and an ecstatic audience.

Sheila Whitely has observed that 'age is critical to the identity of both performers and musical genres' (Whitely 2005, p. 16), although her reference to ageing pop artists, especially those who embark on retro-projects or adapt their set lists to the standards from a bygone era, as 'the never-ending return of the "wrinklies"' (Whitely 2005, p. 186) is challenging for its pejorative if ironic ageist discourse. Today the music recording, retail and media sectors summon concepts of age and temporality when they identify music in generic terms, as 'classics', 'oldies' and 'standards'. Scholars have correspondingly become more aware that the ways that age is defined with respect to music is transparently full of presumption and assumption. Yet, as we see in the articles in this special issue, age is a negotiated factor in music making and reception. While ageing may influence the character of the experience, it is not necessarily a barrier to the pleasures of popular music; in some circumstances, it actually improves the ways that music is experienced and enjoyed.

The analysis of cultural consumption patterns, the expression of individual and collective taste preferences, and various strategies of engagement, common in youth research, has rarely been applied in corresponding detail to the older population of different societies. There are several possible reasons for this: it is not mere cynicism to suggest that, lacking the proper 'hip' quotient, older individuals may simply not be cool enough to warrant extended study. To this end, David Hesmondhalgh observes, 'older listeners continue to treat young people as more knowledgeable about changing trajectories of hipness and fashionability' (Hesmondhalgh 2005,

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p. 37). Unlike their highly visible, loudly provocative, aggressive and 'spectacular' generational counterparts, those entering their third age and beyond seem comparatively understated or boring to a younger generation. In some countries, many older citizens live quite literally behind closed doors – and sometimes behind multiple sets of doors, some of which are locked to keep strangers out, some to keep residents in. This means that in some cases scholars must work considerably harder to locate ageing music fans.

It is also worth noting that ageing may be felt as threatening to younger scholars who sometimes focus indulgently on their own tastes, perhaps regarding older people as a 'bit of a drag'. Context is crucial, however, and research on ageing and popular music may also be influenced by the fact that many scholars increasingly find themselves – out of familial necessity – spending more and more of their time in the presence of older folks, visiting grandparents or parents at home, in retirement residences and geriatric wards, with greater frequency than the clubs or teen scenes that once fuelled their research.

While the global scope and diversity of genres and social settings here is striking, the papers in this issue of *Popular Music* also display many interesting shared qualities that warrant mentioning: many of the authors adopt a sociological perspective, employing as part of their approach some ethnographic research and providing distinct localised cases of ageing with music. Most, though not all, of the papers focus on audiences and reception; where musical performance is cited it is frequently amateur music making that falls under the analytical lens. Several of the contributors also emphasise dancing as a significant facet of age-based musical enjoyment.

The Weekend Warriors music programme in Australia is the focus of Helen O'Shea's article. Based in a music retail outlet and devised as a means of revitalising the musical abilities of 'lapsed' players, the programme offers musical instruction and performance assistance for those lacking prior skills, while providing new musical opportunities for those who have let their musical abilities fall by the wayside over time but who retain a desire to achieve musical pleasure from music making. O'Shea vividly identifies several crucial elements that emerge as enthusiastic 'amateurs' embark on learning or 'remembering' rock songs in a band context, including taste and genre preferences, gender and performance issues, attitudinal motivation and the musicians' complex relationships to music from their past. Ultimately, the labour of learning that O'Shea analyses is situated alongside the affective rewards of pleasure and satisfaction in the experience of music making.

Veracruz, Mexico is the setting for Hettie Malcomson's analysis of danzón, an ever-popular Latin American music and dance style which originated in Cuba yet is regarded as being almost indigenous today in Mexico. Malcomson explores the institutional appropriations of a regional aesthetic, interrogating what it might mean to construct a 'false tradition' that assumes a connection between ageing, taste and cultural practice. What Malcomson asks is, how relevant is being 'rescued' or preserved, if cultural traditions are not necessarily authentic to the individuals who practise them? How do older musicians and dancers who love danzón represent an authenticating presence and what might this mean for them as well as for younger danzón adepts who are marginalised by their age? She shows how codification of dance sequences emerges as a point of frustration among musicians who feel aesthetically restricted by the regimented repertoire that has emerged within the local dance community.

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Andy Bennett and Jodie Taylor take a scene-based approach to the issue of age and popular music, setting their analytical sights on ageing queer dance music enthusiasts in Australia and punk music fans in the UK. As they explain, their approach takes age as a performed facet of subjective identity with popular music intrinsic to the means by which individuals define themselves in relation to both wider mainstream society and within the loci of each respective scene. Age may emerge as an influential factor through which individuals experience their membership within a given scene, yet, as Bennett and Taylor's research reveals, it does not necessarily exert a determining force. Rather, middle-aged dance or punk music fans continually navigate a variety of social factors of which age is a crucial one. The article isolates the ways in which music cultures ultimately provide life lessons that are drawn from and expressed by fans long after one's first introduction to specific music genres or scenes.

Murray Forman goes inside Canadian seniors' social dances and retirement or nursing residences to observe how 'elders' maintain the interest in, and ability to play and enjoy music in a variety of social contexts. Forman observes how popular music is integrated into the patterns and rituals among elders as a way of expressing taste and locating their contemporary identities within a larger framework of meaningful experience. Popular music performances for elders and by elders is also integrated into the organised institutional recreation activities of these residence facilities, emerging as both a desirable facet of marketing and promotion for the facilities and a means of keeping ostensibly idle and potentially bored residents entertained. In this sense, popular music is recast as an element of professional instrumentalism that is structured within the logic of commercial elder care.

A cross-generational perception of music and identity is the focus of Matt Connell's contribution. Isolating a discussion group project called Talking About Old Records (TAOR), Connell explores the formation of stereotypes, taste categories and music reception practices among teens and older music fans, responding to pertinent questions throughout, notably: how is popular music implicated in the dynamics of generational dissonance? What kind of attitudes and dispositions affect the reception of music associated with the age-based 'other'? How is technology a factor in the distinctions between listening habits among different age groups? Genre emerges as a significant element in 'negative' musical assessments, with some musical forms eliciting greater challenge than others. By transposing prior parental or adult resistance to their own music, older individuals gradually acknowledge their role in the reproduction of negative values and attitudes about contemporary youth music.

Sverker Hyltén-Cavillius invokes memory and national meanings in his essay which explores two modes of musical communication in Sweden. In the first case, he describes the packaging and promotion of music aimed at the Swedish 'pensioners'. Cassette tapes aimed at this diffuse and diverse age group are narrowly, not to say conservatively, chosen, based on assumptions of 'safe' taste rather than other indicators. The cassettes function as a technology of memory with the past framed in specific ways via song selection and contextual packaging, intended to resonate favourably and unproblematically with older listeners. As Hyltén-Cavillius explains, an explicitly nationalistic theme interwoven into the cassette presentation invokes an idealised notion of Swedish heritage and popular culture. In the second instance, a group of older people congregate in a music circle where collective listening is accompanied by individual presentations and group discussions that merge

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the narrativisation of memory with significant personal experience. Here it is shown how 'older' listeners are active in the production of discourse and meaning that remains personal while negotiated in a manner that reflects a communal sharing and spirit.

In many ways, research on music and age is still in its relative infancy, yet we trust these papers will help lay the groundwork for further work in the field. We would like to thank our contributors for the reminder that 'old people' fall in love, learn, perform and play their favourite tunes, and dance them in public too. As the final words from 'As Time Goes By' say:

It's still the same old story
A fight for love or glory
A tale of do or die
The world will always welcome lovers
As time goes by

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