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Music and Magic: Call for Articles

This special issue of *Popular Music* will focus on the intersection of popular music with 'magic', however authors may wish to define the term.

Despite its relegation to 'entirely misunderstood hocus pocus' (Henry 2001) since the development in the seventeenth century of modern music and acoustic science (see Gouk 1999), the notion of magic has continued to shape and influence our engagement with the world as one particular mode of knowledge – typically (but not necessarily convincingly) when pitted against so-called reason and science. In *Totem and Taboo*, originally published in 1913, Freud (1975) contends that magic is a body of instructions, a technique that primitive men and neurotics mobilise when they are confident about their ability to control the world – when they believe, specifically, that their acts can influence other persons or things, by a rather straightforward process of imitation. This does not just concern neurotics and savages, however, but also artists: in the modern, scientific age, 'only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects – thanks to artistic illusion – just as though it were something real' (Freud 1975, p. 90). The desire, and sometimes the ability, to produce emotional effects thanks to an imitative process with one's inner wishes is a fundamental characteristic of magic, which Freud also defines as 'the omnipotence of thought' (Freud 1975, p. 85). Further, and although he does not develop this point, Freud claims that the frequent comparison of artists with magicians is not just a matter of hyperbole, but also indicative of something more significant, a sense that artists (musicians?) can control or change the world.

There is no doubt that magic has its sceptics and critics. For Roland Barthes (1957), magic is the shutting-down of critical faculties, the regrettable depoliticisation of language, the acceptance of the world as it is presented to us by dominant discourse, most powerfully that of consumer capitalism. In a similar vein, although only in passing, David McGuiness (2016) recently took issue with the mobilisation of a vocabulary of magic in popular music criticism, alleging that it amounted to analytical ignorance.

Conversely, however, it is often for these very reasons of orderly appearance or satisfaction with the state of things that magic also appeals to many. For those regarded as mystics today, from Plotinus writing in 200 AD to Schopenhauer and since, music can be an enchantment, a 'form of sorcery that raises no question' with the capacity to calm thought, to transcend the human condition of suffering and/or to grant access to the world of 'the Beyond' (Godwin 1987). On a certain level, contemporary popular music is saturated with magic, with many artists following rituals prior to performance, like Beyoncé and Adele, who reportedly invoke their respective alter egos (Denham 2015), and others who use a 'magical' language to transform and assert their gender identity, such as the Japanese hip hop artist

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Hime (Condry 2006). Others suffuse their compositions and performance with the presence of sometimes long-dead others, including African-American vocalists from Billie Holiday to Tracy Chapman, who capture the memory of slave escapees (Davis 1999). Audiences and critics, too, frequently report having been mesmerised by performers (Looseley 2015 provides such accounts about Edith Piaf). In fact, given that the academic sub-field of Star Studies hinges on the premise that stars exist thanks to the propitious alignment of factors external to our control, i.e. the right type, place and time (Dyer 1998 [1979]), an argument exists for the recognition that pop stars are fundamentally magic figures, our contextual analysis of their success being necessarily incomplete. Back in 1981, Simon Frith insisted that myths and magic existed insofar as cultural participants believed in them and found them comforting, giving the example of rock songs that conjured up, for those who so desired, a working-class street culture. Eric Weisbard (2005) similarly proposed focusing our academic attention on the 'magic moments' of musical experiences, insisting that scholars should accept and recognise those instances when rapture, accidents, a sense of vertigo or one's perplexity ('the quizzical, not the categorical') takes centre stage in life, and all thanks to music.

These different interpretations of magic relate to control, with magic offering an illusion of coherence and confidence to artists, consumers and critics, and having the ability to re-enchant an implicitly and excessively rational world – whether this is interpreted as welcome comfort or as political disengagement.

So, when is magic actually mobilised in and around music-making? What does the mobilisation of magic reveal about the values and practices that underpin our contemporary popular music culture? What does the idea of magic bring to music, and to our understanding of the world?

This special issue seeks to explore these issues, asking its contributors to think through the musical implications of the concept of magic and to re-examine the habitual polarisation of the term against reason and science. Below are some non-prescriptive suggestions for contribution:

- music as a metaphor for cosmic organisation, for social 'harmony';
- magic and musical inspiration, the artist's connection with 'the other side';
- magic and fascination, listeners and consumers 'under the spell' of music;
- fetishes, rituals;
- music and magic-related notions, including (alphabetically listed) angels, chance, charisma, destiny, fate, incantation, luck, saints, shamans, stars, supernatural, trances, visions, voodoo, witchcraft.

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