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Middle Eight

To mark the 30th Anniversary of *Popular Music*, *Popular Music*'s two founding editors reflect on the journal's past and future.

Birthday thoughts on *Popular Music*

DAVID HORN

The first thing that occurs to me is that the format introduced in *Popular Music* 6/1, after the first five hardback volumes, has stood up well and is still looking good visually after 25 years (with the welcome addition of colour to the covers). A journal should always be a pleasure to open and handle! Looking at 6/1 now, it seems to strike a note of confidence entering what the editors called 'a new phase of influence and appeal'. Whether any of the editors of the time, or indeed we two 'founding editors' five years before, anticipated that the journal would establish itself quite so strongly over time I cannot say. I think it unlikely, however, as the aim of providing the growing-but-still-emerging field of popular music studies with its own space in the world of academic journals was part of a larger and more contested one of establishing popular music studies itself. If the journal could play a part in achieving that aim – which, thanks to the efforts of a great many people, it has no doubt helped to do - it was also dependent on the vision and energy with which that major aim itself was pursued. So no reflection on what happened 'all those years ago' can be made without a wider acknowledgement of all those who participated in that endeavour.

Just why there was such a groundswell of activity (and activism) towards this goal, beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is also a hard question to answer. It is clear, however, as indeed it was at the time, that this activity was very disparate, and it was perhaps as a consequence of this that two initiatives of 1981, the first appearance of *Popular Music* and the international conference in Amsterdam that would beget IASPM, were broadly welcomed as offering possibilities beyond providing a platform for the products of individual study.

Not everyone agreed that an academic journal (published by a long-established academic press), and an 'association' were the way forward, given the propensity of such institutions to narrowness and specialisation (among other things). And indeed, Philip Tagg, speaking of the official formation of IASPM two years after the initial event, strongly exhorted everyone involved to recognise and avoid the pitfalls set by 'the heritage of bourgeois institutional divisions' and to 'take into account a

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common field of studies as perceived by the people, that is, as a whole, as an intrinsic part of everyday living'. To that end, Philip continued, 'cooperation should be the order of the day, mutual respect and the absence of professional or disciplinary egotism our ethical strategy.' Journals do not perhaps need such rallying calls in the way that organisations sometimes do, but had a manifesto for *Popular Music* ever been needed, we could have done worse than adopt the spirit of this one.

Like Richard, I too celebrate this anniversary and congratulate all who have been involved in its production for their contributions – the by-now huge list of authors, the tireless (and often long-serving) editors and, by no means least, the staff of Cambridge University Press who have served the journal so well.

Popular Music is Growing Old(er)

RICHARD MIDDLETON

As I hazily recall, when you're in your teens or twenties, the prospect of one day reaching the grand old age of 30 looms in the far distance as a moment marking impending decrepitude. As one arrives, of course, this moment is miraculously reinterpreted as signalling the onset of vigorous maturity. Which is it in our case? Is *Popular Music* growing old? Or is it, rather, just healthily grown-up? Perhaps both.

Weirdly – if readers will forgive a brief moment of autobiography – the journal's first 30 years have run almost exactly in parallel with the equivalent phase in the lives of my own three children. They seem pretty youthful to me. Does *Popular Music* feel like a fourth infant? Sort of – but any claims to parentage would have to be swiftly and comprehensively qualified, not only for the obvious reason that so many others have played key roles, at the start and since (far too many to be mentioned here individually), but also because the birth event, as is also the case with human genealogy, was as much a renewal as an *ab initio* beginning. My generation has a tendency, sometimes, to talk as if 'popular music studies' didn't exist before 1981. But many of those involved with the journal from the start – I think for instance of Paul Oliver, Bert Lloyd, János Maróthy, Charles Hamm – had already been studying popular music for years; if the disciplinary definition is made as wide as it should be, it's easy enough to trace the genealogy still further back, into the 19th century or even earlier. One way in which the discipline – and this includes *Popular Music* – is arguably *too* 'youthful' is the overwhelming emphasis on the contemporary; it's a point often made, but it bears repeating: we have not yet properly got to grips with the full extent of the history, either of our discipline or of the music we study.

One feature of the early years of the journal – and here the parallelism would be most obviously with the concurrent development of IASPM – was an intense interest in *theory*, including a pressing engagement with the *political* dimensions of the theoretical debates. For a novel disciplinary excursion, this is normal, no doubt. And just as normal is that this prominence, this pressure, should fade with time. Growing older, growing quieter, more accommodating, more unquestioning, more 'realistic' – more conservative: a sequence that constitutes a familiar trope. Is it inevitable? No, and nor is it uniformly evident in the publications of recent years. Besides, a

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