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Introduction

Special issue on popular music policy

This special issue of *Popular Music* has its origins in a seminar organised at the University of Stirling in 2004. This meeting, one of a series on cultural policy, brought together researchers from a number of European countries who were asked to describe state music policy in their respective countries and to reflect on what differences, if any, such policies had made to recent national music history. As the seminar's organisers, we were interested in a couple of issues: first, how policy approaches to popular music had changed since it first began to appear on the European political agenda in the 1970s; second, how local political and cultural conditions had affected ideas of what popular music policy could or should be.

The Stirling seminar suggested that the issues should be addressed on a broader canvass, if only to discover whether European state interest in popular music was unusual – hence this issue of *Popular Music.* In the event, the two general conclusions that had emerged from a comparison of European experiences are reflected here too in the articles from Australasia, North America and the Caribbean. On the one hand, there clearly is a global policy trend: from cultural policy to cultural industries policy, from treating popular music as a matter of social or cultural concern to treating the popular music industry as a matter of economic concern, from devising policies to counter the local effects of international commerce to devising policies to embed local practices within the world marketplace. On the other hand (and whatever the common development of such things as export support mechanisms and state-subsidised trips to the US music trade fair, South By South West), *how* cultural industry policy is articulated nationally is determined by quite different ideologies of what we might call *governance.* National music policies differ from country to country, that is to say, less because of different popular musical traditions or practices than because of different ways in which state power is organised and understood. (In the European case this can be seen clearly in the different ways in which music policy has developed in, for example, France and the UK – compare Loosely 2003 and Cloonan 2007.)

Our interest in these issues, though, wasn't purely academic in 2004 and isn't now, in 2007. Or rather, to put it more accurately, our academic interest in these issues can't be disentangled from our own political engagement with the (Scottish) music policy-making process. We were curious then to learn how colleagues from other European countries made sense of the problem of trying to understand and influence policy simultaneously, and we were curious when publishing the call for papers for this issue of *Popular Music* to see how academic colleagues in other parts of the world would place themselves within the political arguments that are a necessary part of the process through which policy decisions are made. In this we were hoping that the articles here would develop the discussion of the political role of popular music scholars begun by Keith Negus (see Negus 1998 and Cloonan *et al.* 2004).The issues here concern power, influence and evidence. As all the articles that follow illustrate, the shift of the policy making impetus from culture to culture industry marks a shift too in the way in which policy is formulated, from something driven by overt

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ideologies (in which political parties shape the ideas of what national culture is or should be, and argue explicitly about the role of the state in constructing and maintaining the nation's symbolic life) to something that is expected to be 'evidence based', the result of complicated behind-the-scenes negotiations between lobbyists for the various interested parties and 'consultants' providing governments with 'impartial' advice. The role of popular music scholars has changed accordingly. Whereas in the early days of IASPM one's politics were marked by how one participated (or didn't) in specifically political/ideological arguments, now the question is how one's 'expertise' should be used (or not) as evidence.

One (not very helpful) way of thinking about this is to suggest that any kind of engagement with the policy-making process is some sort of betrayal, either of one's academic status or, worse, of rock'n'roll itself (there are, perhaps not surprisingly, still a significant number of academic romantics in popular music studies). But as a matter of both institutional pragmatism (popular music policy makers are now a significant source of research funding) and research practice (what better way of understanding how policy making works than to engage with it?), such a stance seems foolish and, more importantly, undermines the claims that we should surely be making as popular music scholars that we are, indeed, experts and that we can, indeed, provide evidence as to how local and/or national music-making cultures can and should be politically supported.

Indeed, from our own Scottish experience, one of the most fascinating and politically significant aspects of the popular music policy making process is its dependence on competition among intellectuals for influence, influence exercised through the time-honoured system of getting the ear of influential politicians and civil servants, but also through the ability to shape the debate by providing the (usually economic) 'facts' and 'definitive' (usually outdated) account of the industry on which policy is based. If the most influential (because best-resourced) lobbyists tend to be established music businesses (record and publishers associations, the rights income collecting bodies, promoters' and managers' associations, etc.), the most effective agenda setters are increasingly a new breed of culture industry consultants whose skill is to provide policy advice as a matter of bullet points. Such advice is effective because it can seem at once evidence based, responsive to the lobbyists, independently conceived and, above all, organised into concrete policy suggestions that free politicians and civil servants from having to think. (And, further, as Sara Cohen's recent book on Liverpool shows, consultants' recommendations on what should be done almost always involve the advice that the same consultants should have a key role in implementing the proposals – see Cohen 2007).

This is the policy-making context in which the academic voice is more important than ever. Not because the academic has no vested interests (though we do have a commitment to evidence testing that is not compromised by past, present or future relationships with either the industry or the state) but because (as the articles here make clear) we are in a position to map the machinations of the various interests groups and to ask the otherwise neglected questions. *Who* is music policy for? In what ways is popular music a *public* good?

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