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Introduction: Festivals and Musical Life

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The articles in this special issue of *JSAM* originated as contributions to a seminar session at the 2017 SAM conference in Montréal. After meeting a growing number of music scholars who were researching festivals from a variety of disciplinary and methodological orientations over the prior five years, I wanted to provide a forum for festival research at SAM that went beyond a standard conference paper. As a contemporary popular music scholar and ethnomusicologist, much of the research I was encountering examined modern pop festivals, particularly those situated in Western neoliberal capitalist contexts: the rise of massive (and massively profitable) electronic dance music (or EDM) events, the importance of festivals in the live music economy, or the "festivalization of culture" discourse, for example.[1] Festivals are big business in EDM, rock, and pop music, as music industry scholars and pop culture observers have been telling us since at least the early 2000s.[2] Mythic events loom large in popular music's history: Bob Dylan unplugging at Newport in 1965; the US debuts of the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Ravi Shankar, and the Who at Monterey Pop in 1967; the romantic utopia of Woodstock in 1969, later undermined by the violence at Woodstock 1999 and the cancellation of Woodstock 50 in 2019; and the tragic violence at the Altamont Speedway at the end of 1969. The popularity of annual destination events in Europe in the 1980s (such as Glastonbury, Isle of Wight, Reading and Leeds, Rock im Park, and Roskilde) and touring festivals in the United States in the 1990s (such as Lilith Fair, Lollapalooza's first iteration, Ozzfest, and Warped Tour) set precedents for the emergence of massive events like Bonnaroo, Coachella, Electric Daisy Carnival, Lollapalooza's current iteration, Ultra, and others. Although sales of recorded music declined in the early 2000s, and revenue from digital downloads and streaming have never fully compensated for that drop, the success of festivals indicates that fans and listeners are still passionate consumers of music. Major festivals—many of which are as much fashion and social events as they are music events—have become important sources of income for performing artists and sites of music industry gatekeeping.

This narrative represents the popular perception of music festivals. But music festival studies have much more to teach us beyond the health of entertainment industries under neoliberal capitalism. Festivals existed before Newport and Woodstock; they exist for genres other than EDM, rock, and pop; they support small scenes as well as host the largest audiences; and not all festivals are focused on profit. First at the seminar in Montréal and now in this special issue of *JSAM*, my overarching goal

[1] See, for example, Graham St John, ed., *Weekend Societies: Electronic Dance Music Festivals and Event-Cultures* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward, eds., *The Festivalization of Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

[2] See, for example, Fabian Holt, "The Economy of Live Music in the Digital Age," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 243–61.

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has been to showcase the rich diversity of festival research, decentering popular music studies from it, and in doing so to demonstrate both that music scholars working in a variety of areas have much to contribute to contemporary popular and academic discourse on music festivals, and that festival studies has much to contribute to music scholarship beyond popular music studies. The articles collected here contribute to a broad interdisciplinary literature on music festivals. Each also illustrates the value of music festival research to the scholarship of music in the Americas. I asked the authors to consider, broadly, what festivals *do*—that is, what do they do for music, for musicians, for audiences, and for researchers? What might research into music festivals reveal about strategies for promoting musical cultures, repertoires, and aesthetic hierarchies? What do festivals contribute to music scenes, be they local, trans-local, or virtual? What roles do festivals play in shaping historical and contemporary cultural life more broadly? How do festival organizers, stakeholders, artists, and their fans navigate and negotiate broader socio-cultural tensions in festival spaces?

Music festivals provide rich insight into musical life, both in historical periods and in the ethnographic present. Although some events occur only once (or, at best, irregularly), each festival discussed here takes or has taken place over the same few days every year.[3] Many long-running jazz and popular music festivals, including Bonnaroo, Burning Man, Electric Daisy Carnival, New Orleans Jazz, and Newport, are ephemeral, yet they have also become annual rituals for all participants: musicians, audience members, and the cultural intermediaries involved in planning, organizing, and reporting on the events. In my own research into Christian rock festivals in the United States, I have found that this ritualization is true for very large festivals as well as for smaller, more local events. In both cases, festivals provide simultaneously fleeting and permanent spaces whose organizers, performers, and audiences foster distinct cultures, legacies, reputations, and even repertoires. But when the festival itself is iterative and ritualized, its organizers are able to pursue different objectives and interact with their local environments and constituencies in ways that reflect and perpetuate long-term investments. For some festivals, those long-term investments are reflected in attendees' lived experiences: although they may only be physically present at the festival site for a few days every year, attendees for whom the festival has become an annual ritual often extend the spatial, social, and temporal boundaries of the event into virtual spaces. Friends and friendly strangers share memories of past years and anticipation for upcoming festivals online and via social media in ways that participants and observers of local music scenes would find familiar.[4]

The anthropologist Birgit Meyer, a scholar of media and religion, has introduced the concept of "sensational forms" to describe media and forms of mediation as

[3] My thoughts on festivals in general build upon observations Aleysia Whitmore has made regarding "world music" festivals. See, for example, Aleysia K. Whitmore, "(Re)Defining Bands, Genres, and Cultures on the Festival Circuit" (60th Annual Conference of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Austin, TX, December 3–6, 2015).

[4] Holly Kruse, "Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 5 (2010): 625–39; Diane L. Cormany, "Coachella Fans, Online and Translocal," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 27, no. 2 (2015): 184–98.

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"modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between believers."[5] For Meyer, media (broadly defined) is an integral component of religious experience; sensational forms are those that work so well that their materiality is rendered invisible, "attributed with a sense of immediacy through which the distance between believers and the transcendental is transcended."[6] Meyer also deliberately expands Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" into "aesthetic formations," or social entities (and also the processes that form these social entities) grounded in sensory experiences.[7]

Of the festivals you will read about in the following pages, only Cornerstone serves a strictly religious purpose. But if festivals bind their attendees in shared experiences that connect them to larger aesthetic formations whereby formations become conflated with experiences, then I think there is a strong argument to be made for all festivals (not only religious ones) as sensational forms. If music can be a transcendent experience, then the concentrated period at the festival represents a particularly intense period of time during which music's significance is felt especially acutely by everyone present. Because festivals are extraordinary, set apart from daily life and yet clearly integrated into lived experience, they enable and encourage experimentation and innovation: composers and collaborators create new music, attendees try on new identities and tastes, and organizers test new entrepreneurial and business ideas. When fans go home, musicians go on tour, and organizers go back to the drawing board to plan next year's events, they reflect on and remember their festival experiences and are changed by them; in this way, festivals are felt in different places and different times. When festivals are ritualized, they are anticipated, expected, planned; although they are indeed extraordinary, they are nonetheless present in daily life. It is through this ritualization of the festival—whether experienced as an organizer, a performing artist, or an attendee—that festivals transcend their temporal, geographic, and even aesthetic boundaries. Katherine Brucher, Colleen Renihan, Timothy Storhoff, and I each address annual events: Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival, the Banff Summer Festival of the Arts and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, the Havana Jazz Plaza Festival, and Cornerstone Festival in rural Illinois. Brucher, Storhoff, and I provide finely detailed analyses of individual years of Grant Park, Havana Jazz Plaza, and Cornerstone, revealing the impacts of these investments in microcosm. Each article also gestures toward the festivals' broader trajectories, which Renihan addresses directly in her work on Banff and Stratford: over a long period of time, both of these festivals have contributed to the development of musical theater and opera in North America. Longer historical narratives, such as Renihan's, reveal artistic, commercial, social, and cultural trends in the macrocosm that might not otherwise be immediately apparent to individual attendees.

[5] Birgit Meyer, "Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding," in *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, ed. Birgit Meyer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 13.

[6] Meyer, "Introduction," 12.

[7] Meyer, "Introduction," 6–7; Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

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Some festivals occur in self-contained places separated from everyday life.[8] Some of these events are literally fenced off; others are bounded by vast geographic nothingness, bleeding into the rural landscape, enforcing a kind of self-sufficiency among attendees that is itself a bonding experience. Many festivals spread throughout urban areas, invading everyday places and soundscapes, and contributing to cities' senses of tourism and cosmopolitanism.[9] Importantly, this collection of articles gestures toward differences—both perceived and real—between rural and urban experiences of musical events. In either case, be they sponsored by civic institutions (such as a mayor's office, Chamber of Commerce, or tourism board), a non-profit organization (including arts and religious institutions), or for-profit corporations, festivals redefine music's relationships to place, space, and identity in ways that individual concerts and performance series do not. Their relationships to tourist and local economies are significant yet contested, as are their relationships to local live music industries.[10] Festivals promote cultural tourism, contribute to local economies, and attract wanted and unwanted attention from local residents. Festival performances and audiences are both separate from the world that surrounds them and enmeshed within a region's cultural history and identity. In short, festivals inflect broader cultural values of their locales, cities, and regions.

We read about these tensions—both explicitly and implicitly—in this issue's articles. A set of questions we might ask of the festivals addressed herein concern their relationships with respect to place, space, and identity. In what ways do these festivals contribute to the economic, social, and cultural lives of their host city or region? In what ways have festivals impacted tourism, civic and urban development, and local economies? Drawing from Mark Clague's notion of arts institutions as "cultural machines," Brucher details the ways in which the organizers of Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival designed its economic, social, and aesthetic objectives holistically from the outset in the midst of the Great Depression.[11] How do festivals negotiate the contested intersections of cultural tourism and daily life? Are the

[8] See, for example, Catherine Cocks, "The Chamber of Commerce's Carnival: City Festivals and Urban Tourism in the United States, 1890–1915," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 89–107; Stephen A. King, "Blues Tourism in the Mississippi Delta: The Functions of Blues Festivals," *Popular Music & Society* 27, no. 4 (2004): 455–75; Robert W. Fry, "Becoming a 'True Blues Fan': Blues Tourism and Performances of the King Biscuit Blues Festival," *Tourist Studies* 14, no. 1 (2014): 66–85.

[9] See, for example, Derek Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Music in Chicago, 1873–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Marina Peterson, *Sound, Space, and the City: Civic Performance in Downtown Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Jonathan R. Wynn, *Music/City: American Festivals and Placemaking in Austin, Nashville, and Newport* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[10] See, for example, Bruno S. Frey, "The Economics of Music Festivals," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 18, no. 1 (1994): 29–39; Christer Thrane, "Jazz Festival Visitors and Their Expenditures: Linking Spending Patterns to Musical Interest," *Journal of Travel Research* 40, no. 3 (2002): 281–86; Steve Oakes, "Demographic and Sponsorship Considerations for Jazz and Classical Music Festivals," *Service Industries Journal* 23, no. 3 (2003): 165–78; R. Scott Hiller, "Exclusive Dealing and Its Effects: The Impact of Large Music Festivals on Local Music Venues," *Review of Industrial Organization* 45, no. 2 (2014): 153–75.

[11] Mark Clague, "The Industrial Evolution of the Arts: Chicago's Auditorium Building (1889–) as Cultural Machine," *Opera Quarterly* 22, nos. 3–4 (Summer–Autumn 2006): 477–511.

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festivals even accessible to local residents, or are they instead designed primarily for tourists and visitors? Organizers plan the Havana Jazz Plaza Festival to take place in venues throughout the city. But the economic disparity between the majority of Havana's local population and the tourists whom festival promoters seek to attract means that much of the festival remains inaccessible—and even unknown—to most Cubans. Nonetheless, the festival plays an important role in bringing musicians and visitors from, for example, the United States to Cuba, which is difficult even in the most favorable political circumstances given the US government's strict travel restrictions placed on US citizens. In contrast, organizers affiliated with Chicago's city government intentionally planned the Grant Park Music Festival for city residents (even if, in reality, it was not easily accessible to all constituents). For attendees in Chicago, Brucher writes, "being present as a listener was a form of participation in civic life." Banff, Stratford, and Cornerstone are self-contained destination events whose accessibility is limited, in part, by their geographic remoteness. Unlike civic events (such as Chicago's Grant Park Festival), attendees suspend their daily lives and travel to these sites, where they often camp in tents and RVs at the festival itself. But, unlike massive destination events that attract fans of many different musical genres (such as Bonnaroo, Coachella, and Glastonbury, which I mentioned earlier), Banff, Stratford, and Cornerstone all cater to particular (and particularly peripheral) taste communities. Thus, although the Grant Park Festival and Havana Jazz Plaza may be inaccessible because of external factors (Chicago's history of segregated neighborhoods; restrictions on travel to Cuba), these other events contain their own inherent boundaries—both physical and musical—that limit participation by outsiders.

Through their programming, festival promoters can empower participants to celebrate particular genres and markets, such as jazz (at Havana Jazz Plaza) or Christian rock (at Cornerstone). Festivals both reinforce and redefine genre-mappings as they intervene in discourses about musical styles and aesthetic values. The advent of Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival capped a period during which wind band music had become increasingly popular in events catering to a diverse public, and Brucher argues that its varied concert programs containing a "potpourri" of musical styles subverted what Lawrence Levine has described as the "sacralization" of Western art music in the United States.[12] Contestations over genre boundaries figure prominently in Renihan's investigation into the development of musical theater and opera at Banff and Stratford where, she writes, "the spirit of adventure and experimentalism is certainly one that the festival context seems to breed." Remote festivals' geographic peripherality, she reminds us, maps onto social and aesthetic peripheralities as well, enabling and supporting artistic innovation far from the normative (and normalizing) cultural centers. For

[12] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform*. Brucher's characterization of the Grant Park Music Festival aligns with Vaillant, who describes free concerts throughout Chicago's public park system during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At these concerts, as at Grant Park, wind bands and orchestras performed varied repertoires for diverse audiences. These accounts problematize Levine's sacralization narrative, under which US audiences became stratified along genre and class boundaries by the turn of the century.

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contemporary opera during this period, Renihan writes, Banff and Stratford served as loci of experimentation at least as important as North American urban spaces such as Los Angeles, New York City, and Toronto. At Cornerstone, too, organizers subverted aesthetic hierarchies by prioritizing otherwise peripheral genres (such as hardcore, metal, and punk) over commercially successful mainstream popular music. And Storhoff notes that festivals, as liminal spaces, often encourage artists and audiences alike to defy genre conventions; in Havana, where the state had officially disapproved of jazz as a US-born music, these dialogues and articulations carry political significance.

Importantly, these festivals do not operate in a vacuum: like all other performances, they are situated within economies and marketplaces of musical production and presentation. The businesses of festivals and their strategies of promotion are visible in their marketing materials and physical ephemera (such as the concert programs found in archives); audible in musical programming (both in its ideal, marketed form and in its encountered, lived state); and embodied in festival grounds' physical layout, design, and construction. Through music festival studies, then, we gain insight into the political economy of public musical life as well as the relationships between an individual festival's economic realities and its aesthetic objectives. How do the business needs of festivals impact their artistic decisions? Considered inversely, how might the aesthetic objectives of a festival inform its funding, marketing, and other managerial decisions? As Brucher describes, organizers launched the Grant Park Music Festival partly as a response to declining employment opportunities for musicians during and following the Great Depression. At both Banff and Stratford, according to Renihan, the gradual shift in musical theater programming reflected the events' economic needs (including the fact that musical theater was originally not the primary focus at either festival).

One final way to read this issue of *JSAM* is as an attempt to examine the multiple ways in which festivals affect musical life in the Americas at the micro and macro levels. How have festivals shaped the production and reception of musical genres throughout the history of music? How might studying festivals inform the work of American music scholars researching the development of music cultures, economies, audiences, and repertoires? Brucher uses Grant Park Festival to rethink Mark Clague's "cultural machine" framework; Renihan centers festivals as sites of innovation in opera and musical theater; in Storhoff's analysis, Havana Jazz Plaza epitomizes liminality from a number of perspectives (musical, political, social) and yet also transcends that liminality; my own article argues that festivals in general, and Cornerstone in particular, model new ways for thinking about music scenes and their construction. What other challenges might studying festivals pose to established theoretical and methodological frameworks for music scholarship? I am delighted by the diversity represented by this issue's articles, spanning North America (addressing festivals in Canada, Cuba, and the United States), historical period (events in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries), genre (jazz, musical theater, opera, orchestral music, rock and roll, wind band music), and methodology (including archival and ethnographic research). The fruits of our labors are represented here in the following pages.

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