Popular Music (2005) Volume 24/2. Copyright © 2005 Cambridge University Press, pp. 163–164
doi:10.1017/S0261143005000395 Printed in the United Kingdom

Introduction to 'Literature and Music' special issue

Some of the best ideas emerge, not in moments of deep contemplation or studious silence, but in more convivial and relaxed circumstances. That was true of the idea for this special issue. It emerged in the course of a long lunch, and was the result of a suggestion by Dave Laing. He drew attention to the many ways in which music and literature were connected and the interesting questions and issues that their relationship raised. It would be a good theme, he said, for a special issue. He was right. The call for papers that we published produced a wealth of fascinating proposals. Sadly, there were too many to include here, and it was a difficult task to select the few that are published in the following pages.

The original proposal for this special issue began by noting the common elements between the study of music and literature. It suggested that the two areas often deployed the same theories and methods, but it also observed that this shared perspective had generated relatively little dialogue. It asked too about how the sound of music was captured in literature, both descriptively and stylistically, as a way of writing as well as a subject matter. It wondered about whether, when fiction described musical careers, was it always in terms of the inevitable decline in artistic creativity and of the triumph of corporate logic? The call for papers also asked about the ways in which theories in musicology and in literary criticism might apply across the disciplinary borders. It speculated too about the literature of biography, about how musicians' lives are narrated and about how music itself is influenced by genres and forms of literature.

The articles collected here do not answer all these questions, but they touch on a number of them, and of course they raise further questions of their own. Within the special issue, the authors, who themselves come from a number of different disciplinary traditions, explore a variety of themes. They show, for instance, how music can be used within fiction to indicate the feelings and sensibilities of the characters. They show too how music becomes part of the routine realities of the world depicted through fiction, and how musical lives are constructed in autobiographies. More than this, they show how literature *sounds*, how what is written and what is spoken are themselves informed and organised by music and noise.

Other contributors show how theories derived from literary criticism (whether Harold Bloom or Henry Louis Gates) can help us to make sense of musical performances. Just as other articles explore the ways in which musical styles become literary styles, where the swoop of the saxophone becomes the syntax of the sentence. We see too how literary ideas shape and influence musical practice. Although the authors themselves engage only occasionally with a comparative account of the relationship of literature and music, comparisons of various kinds emerge across the articles collected here. There are comparisons across time and across national border, across literary form and musical style.

It is the case – inevitably – that this special issue provokes as many questions as it raises, and that the conversation between literature and music initiated here needs

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143005000395 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to range more widely. Nonetheless, we believe that this issue of *Popular Music* establishes a research agenda that ought to be pursued further, as a way of enriching both our understanding of music and literature, and of the way the two play off each other.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143005000395 Published online by Cambridge University Press