

In all, and my nit-picking notwithstanding, this certainly represents a worthwhile endeavour. This is a book which will take its place beside Harker, Boyes, Lloyd, Gammon and the rest, provided one does not expect too much from it. The publisher's blurb ends with the description of 'an absorbing and impeccably researched account that gives sonorous voice to England's musical past'. For absorbing writing, I think I'll stick with Lloyd and Boyes, while the sonority of voice finds no place here. However, as a reminder of the importance, execution and ordering of exhaustive research covering such a large temporal span, I can imagine few competitors.

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***On Becoming a Rock Musician*. By H. Stith Bennett. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, 2nd edn. 263 pp. ISBN 978-0-231-18285-0  
 doi:10.1017/S0261143018000302**

First published in 1980 (the year before the formation of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music), this book can in retrospect be seen as something an early ethnography of popular musicians. As such it acts as an important precursor to works by the likes of Ruth Finnegan (1989) and Sara Cohen (1991), which sought to capture the career paths of local popular musicians. However, being the first does not, of course, necessarily mean being the best and while it is good to see the book back in print, its overall contribution to the field is rather mixed.

The new edition includes a Foreword by Howard Becker, to whom Bennett is obviously in debt (and he is hardly alone there), as Becker supervised the dissertation on which the book is based. Becker summarises Bennett's case as being 'that the kind of pop music that began in the 1950s or 1960s . . . inaugurated a distinctly new direction in Western music, and did so by bypassing the lengthy history of music stored, taught, and transmitted by written notation, replacing it with an aural "notation" derived from recorded studio music' (p. vii). Indeed this is perhaps Bennett's major contribution – to illustrate that for (most) popular musicians music is learned from records (and fellow musicians) rather than via teachers and dots on pages. As he notes 'rock music is *learned* to a much greater extent than it is ever *taught*' (p. 3, emphasis in original) and he suggests that as a result of this musicians in the 'copy bands' – on which he focuses – develop what he terms 'recording consciousness'.

This is a book about being a *particular* sort of musician at a *particular* time and (mostly) in a *particular* place. The work is based in interviews carried out in Colorado between 1970 and 1972 and other work in Washington, California, Missouri and Provence. The work undertaken just as 'rock' was seeking to distinguish itself from 'pop' and the ideological gymnastics this entailed are sometimes on display here.

Bennett's concentration is on 'local' groups, which he defines as those playing to a regional market, self-producing and playing live (p. xii). Again this is an important precursor to later work in concentrating on both the 'hidden' musicians who make up the bulk of the musical workforce (Finnegan 1989) and upon local music scenes (Cohen 1991). What emerges is a series of issues which can be crudely demarcated as being either time-specific or perennial concerns.

The book has four parts: 'Group Dynamics', 'Rock Ecology' (a notion perhaps ahead of its time, given its more recent utilisation in work on live music; Behr *et al.* 2016), 'Mastering the Technological', and 'Performance: Aesthetics and the Technological Imperative'. Thus two parts focus on technology, perhaps the singular most important influence on musicians and music making (Williamson and Cloonan 2016).

The book begins with 'A Guide for the Reader' which is actually a rather 'list-y' book review wherein description is to the fore and any critique rather muted. After 30 pages featuring a Foreword, Preface, Guide to the Reader and Acknowledgement the book finally gets to its Introduction chapter. Much of what follows here are reflections on the interactions between musicians and audiences, especially how the same musical events can be interpreted very differently by audiences and musicians. Bennett suggests that the processes involved in joining a group is akin to that of becoming a couple, sometimes idyllic, often ending in break-up (p. 19). He also argues that it is the very way in which bands are formed which explains their propensity to disintegrate (p. 28) and that:

The crossover between music and community that makes local rock music groups possible also sets the stage for the pain, anger, and continued feuding that makes them impossible. Needless to say, the dissolution and reformation of groups is a continuing phenomenon. (p. 33)

Bennett's investigation of Rock Ecology in Part Two includes some discussion of the desirability (or not) of various instruments. He posits that a band's rehearsal space can be regarded as a scene (p. 60), a concept which was to become a staple within Popular Music Studies. In Bennett's case, the scene was often domestic as the bands he deals with could often not afford dedicated rehearsal spaces. Needless to say, this would often result in noise problems, something of a perennial issue. There is also discussion of other equipment, of logistical issues and of the various forms of road crew who might get involved at various stages. Here another perennial truth emerges: 'the poorer the group, the more sweat is expended in human transportation' (p. 83).

A brief chapter on gigs astutely notes that the fact that Americans came to use this term for any job 'points to a revelation and acceptance of musicians' ways of seeing the world' (p. 85). Bennett also stresses the importance of these events to musicians' working lives, something which may have increased since the demise of the recording industry which has followed the book's initial appearance. He divides gigs in to social (parties etc.), ceremonial (including weddings), bar ('the mainstay of local groups', p. 93) and steady (seen as the ideal for such bands), and highlights the importance of middlemen (*sic*) including managers, agents and 'independent producers' (p. 96) in arranging many of these events (and often taking their cut for doing so). His comment that: 'The lifetime of a local group is directly related to the number of gigs which are available in its locality' (p. 100) again appears as something of a perennial truth.

Part Three, dealing with Mastering the Technical Component, is divided into chapters on Technology and Practice. This involves some delving in to the history of American popular music and noting its mixture of African- and European-derived musics. He notes different approaches to studying this history, such as via sheet music and recordings, with the latter being his preferred option, although he also suggests that within popular music culture performance techniques may matter more than compositional prowess (p. 111). Importantly Bennett points out that what really matters is often the 'taken for granted' aspects of popular music making, so that, for example, it is not the fact that music is labelled which matters, but *how* that labelling is organised (p. 115). To the extent that gigs mean covers bands trying to replicate the sound of recordings, for audiences the live music event is not axiomatically superior (p. 119) and technology obviously plays a key role in shaping audience experience. Thus musicians' professional fate is bound up with their mastering of technology. Bennett writes at length about the possibilities afforded by the recording studio, the places from which musicians get the 'recording consciousness' (p. 131) which comes to shape how they imagine sounds and which also differentiates musicians of the electric era from their predecessors.

For Bennett's musicians the dominance of recording is played out in the practice room, where learning is done by seeking out recorded versions of songs rather than sheet music. Here the classical music repertoire is replaced by what Bennett calls 'The Music' – in essence all hitherto extant popular recordings. What matters for his musicians is not that they have a theory of music, but what they make of their 'aural experience of the recording' (p. 140). In sum 'the ability to get songs from records is the essential process for the transmission of rock music' (p. 142). Importantly this limits some forms of musical analysis as 'rock musicians tend to play in ways for which conventional notation does not exist' (p. 143). Bennett is concerned that in the classical tradition notation has *become* the music and so musicians have become subordinate to the composer, something somewhat alien to other traditions such as jazz (pp. 146–7). He suggests that in rock notation is replaced by recording so that: 'The special skills of rock musicians ... involve the use of commercial recordings *as* formal notation systems' (p. 149, my emphasis). He notes that local rock bands learn songs which they can put into sets and then try to make money by supplying product – The Music – to the local middleman (p. 158). In this, success for a 'copy band' comes when 'it has played what it cannot play, and the audience has heard what it cannot hear' (p. 161), in other words when the illusion of replicating the recording has taken place.

In all this the art of performance is crucial and this takes up Part Four of the book, consisting of two chapters – on Playing and Other People's Music. The former includes reflections on spaces used, the aesthetics of performance and performing with recording consciousness. Once again running through all this is the use of technology and musicians' interactions with audiences. Bennett uses notions of *play* to explain performer's roles, especially in a context of learning to imitate sounds which have originated from other musicians' recordings. Work remains interesting throughout, although it is not always clear that is relevant to the notion of *becoming* a musician which gives the book its title. The book also rather peters out before the end with description more to the fore than analysis.

There is no concluding chapter. Instead this edition has a new Afterword section which stresses the importance of the notion of recording consciousness as perhaps the book's most important contribution. However, while containing

interesting reflections, this section does not really capture the essence of what has gone before.

Inevitably some of the book is somewhat dated including, of course, its title. Rock narrows the book's range of reference, set next to the more embracing term popular music – although it should be noted that it is not inaccurate to label the musicians featured in the book as rock musicians. However, Bennett does broaden rock to include forms such as country-rock, folk-rock and jazz-rock (p. xvi), adding that 'my use of the term *rock* is intentionally imprecise' (pp. xv–xvi). He also cautions that rock should be understood in its widest sense and can be equated with The Music (p. 230) – pretty much all recorded popular music.

Bennett's first allusion to datedness is the relevant decline in the popularity of cocaine among musicians (p. xi). However, he also believes that the musical identities of small time musicians remains largely the same. It might be interesting to know how many popular music scholars would accept his view that Adorno's views of 'the music business' were 'largely correct' (p. xx). This seems to be a contemporaneous view which was to be challenged by a number of International Association for the Study of Popular Music (and other) scholars. Perhaps more timeless is the observation that without access to the right equipment nothing much will happen (p. 21) and the fact that artists need investment of various sorts to progress.

Overall, this is an important book but an oddly unsatisfying one. In many ways the book is less about *becoming* a rock musician than being one. After all, Bennett says that all someone needs to do to *become* a musician is to be able to play well enough to join a group (p. 4). The book's ethnographic content remains valuable, as do the insights which Bennett provides. In illustrating the career trajectories of rock musicians a lot of important ground work is covered. However, there are too many loose ends and too much loose use of terminology. In addition, as Van Cagle noted in a previous review of the book (1983), there is also too much generalisation from limited material and the emphasis on 'copy bands' means that the careers of those writing original material is, at best, marginalised. Consider this book a starting point, with much and better to come.

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