

his music shares much of the aesthetic of high camp. He concludes by presenting his thoughts on 'bridging persistent dualities', the most persistent in the past 200 years being that between *ernste Musik* and *leichte Musik*. He notes that camp loves to position itself 'on the louche side' of whatever fences exist and to indulge in 'border skirmishes'. It may be too optimistic, however, to expect any day soon that 'campy intrusions' will open up the concert hall to 'less religiously regulated experiences'. On the other hand, I think Knapp is too pessimistic about the lack of scholars who are prepared to join Richard Dyer and Mitchell Morris in attacking the stigma attached to categories such as 'entertainment' and 'camp'. Not only has Knapp done so himself, but musicologists Stan Hawkins and Freya Jarman have been pursuing this course for many years, and that is to say nothing of the related scholarship that has emerged in the present decade.

I recommend Raymond Knapp's book strongly; it is provocative, stimulating and overflowing in original and insightful argument. He moves the study of Haydn in a new direction, while developing new ways of understanding how idealistic perspectives on music have shaped the values attached to different forms of music-making. In advancing a camp aesthetic, he offers an alternative means of understanding music and its social dynamics.

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***Nothing Has Been Done Before: Seeking the New in 21st Century American Popular Music.* By Robert Loss. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. 288 pp. ISBN 9781501322020**
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The premise of this book is, as the subtitle would suggest, that American popular music remains capable of doing something new and valid in the 21st century. Loss is broadly in favour of the idea that newness is essential for popular music to retain value, but he argues that it is in performance that this newness can be made manifest. 'No instance of performance is ever exactly the same' and, indeed, 'Each instance [of performance, including the re-playing of a recording] is unique because it happens at a concrete, distinct moment in time' (p. 9). Consequently, 'Nothing Has Been Done Before': the possibility for newness is always already in play and 'new opportunities ... may not be radically new'; 'small formal innovations' can be important (p. 11).

This reviewer is in agreement with all of this except for the assumption, which Loss does not make consistently but to which he mainly adheres, that a dimension of newness remains the best yardstick with which to evaluate popular music. If nothing has been done before, then everything must be new: indeed, the theoretical position sketched in the previous paragraph would insist that such is the case. Every performance is different and, therefore, every performance is to at least some extent 'new'.

Many readers will be dissatisfied with this trajectory of argument owing to its relativism. These readers will object that, although there may be something novel about, say, the music of Gillian Welch (which Loss admires), this music remains familiar to an extent that cannot seriously excite the critical ear and bears poor comparison with the greats of novelty from previous decades and centuries of popular music: Scott Joplin, Elvis Presley and so forth. Such argumentation can be challenged on the grounds that, to stick with those examples, Joplin and Presley's innovations were inseparable from their historical juncture; and, furthermore, they too carried pre-existing elements forward simultaneous with doing something new. The objector could then riposte that the radical novelty of ragtime in the 1890s and rock'n'roll in the 1950s is of a completely different scale from that of Gillian Welch in the 21st century. Everything changed, the argument goes, after (and, some claim, because of) those seminal inventions within popular music history, whereas the music of Gillian Welch merely tinkers with well-known and easily recognisable musical forms, affects and so forth.

Loss does not mount a clear defence against such an attack. He instead affords bountiful space to discussion of Dylan's performance at Newport in 1965, reaching for the kinds of superlative exaggerations which have already (in countless accounts to which I would say Loss adds little if anything) obfuscated the scale of change which 'rock'n'roll Dylan' wrought. Is it really the case that Newport 1965 'burned [folk music's cultural archive] to the ground' (p. 36)? If so, how did it come to pass that so many who were not yet born in the 1960s still visit Cecil Sharp House in London searching for the archives which Loss's (frankly exaggerating) words would imply failed to survive Dylan's dismissal? Supposedly 'Dylan entirely, irrevocably changed what was possible' (p. 36), and yet Dylan-associated music had, by 1965, already started to be matched up with rock (the Animals, the Byrds) to an extent that means one could argue that Dylan did no more or less than spot a good commercial opportunity. If anyone had managed to not hear the one about the guy shouting 'Judas!' at Dylan, Loss recounts it (p. 36).

What Loss really needed to do, in this reviewer's opinion, is to emphasise that our 21st century situation is very different from that of the past. Whereas the 1890s and the 1950s and so forth offered a set of elements which could be fairly easily combined (by a creative historical actor, granted) to create something excitingly novel, elements of ostentatious novelty are not so easily found today. Loss tends not to make points of this kind. Instead, his glances to the past re-emphasise a heroism in historical actors which is arguable at best. Regarding electronic music, for example, Loss speaks of 'the new sonic language *it* made available' (p. 74, emphasis added). It never seems to occur to him that the opposite might be the case: that the availability of new sounds made the apparent novelty of electronic music possible, that is. Loss admires Prince and 'the Linn drum sounds he'd made famous' (p. 123) but it never strikes him that perhaps the Linn drum made Prince famous, as well as enabling the artist in question to appear greatly novel. Surely, if there is no likelihood of a timbral revelation in the 2020s comparable with the invention of electronic drums in the 1970s, it is of dubious validity to beat the younger generations with their failure to 'do something new' as Prince supposedly did, is it not?

Actually, Loss has copious and genuine enthusiasm for the music of the present century, and his writing is at its best when he is just expressing enthusiasm for Kendrick Lamar or whoever. Many scholars will find his tone too journalistic – 'So happens, he's from Mount Vernon' (p. 28); 'The performance works ...' (p. 189); a

piece of music is 'spazzed-out' (p. 29), a problematic term (at best) which invokes spastic behaviour – but others will probably enjoy the relaxed tone. As a piece of scholarship, however, the text is faulted. On the one hand, Loss doesn't appear to mind if things don't seem all that new. 'The old is merely out of fashion' (p. 77); 'it's sometimes better to be good than new' (p. 78); 'using the old doesn't mean music can't be new' (p. 97); the 'repeatable' is 'capable of feeling new every time' (p. 134); and so forth. On the other hand, he yearns for 'the best art, *new art*' (p. 56, emphasis retained), implicitly assuming that the latter is contingent on the former. Young bands, Loss argues, are 'terrified of trying to be new' (p. 60) and if a young musician thinks they 'can't possibly do anything new', it follows that their 'actions will be meaningless' (p. 64). Not only value but also meaning itself would seem to be contingent on novelty, then, if I am understanding Loss correctly.

Are today's bands really 'terrified' in this way, or is something else going on which Loss has failed to theorise? Loss assumes that 'every musician chases . . . newness that is total and overwhelming' (p. 11). However, a few pages earlier he has mentioned Billy Childish. Either Childish is lying when he says, as he indeed often has said, that he doesn't care about being new (the musical evidence would suggest otherwise), or Childish is not a musician (ditto), or Loss has got this wrong with the word 'every' (in which case his theory should try to cope with the exceptions, such as Childish).

Towards the end of the book, Loss experiences something of a moment of clarity: 'often in the 2000s, the more explicitly political the artist, the more consistent their sound remained' (p. 191). Sadly, however, this datum (an observable fact, I would assert) flashes past him without being followed through. At a theoretical level, the major issue is that Loss fails to disambiguate radical aesthetics from radical politics. For example, in his penultimate paragraph, Loss associates 'the new' with 'gaps and empty spaces'; 'The performer's job is to seek out those gaps and empty spaces' and failure to do so entails acceptance of 'what already *is* or what society claims is the only thing possible' (p. 235, emphasis retained). Does this mean that the 21st century tendency for 'explicitly political artist[s]' (see above) to accept consistent aesthetics dooms their politics to failure? If, and only if, the link between radical politics and radical aesthetics is necessary.

My own feeling is that the link in question is contingent (sometimes, at least) but not at all necessary (Dale 2016). Loss engages with my text on this question, but clearly does not understand my argument. As a riposte to my theoretical position, Loss argues that 'If the protest singer seeks a newness of thought, then his [sic] greatest mistake is to assume that the audience already agrees with him' (p. 171). Perhaps so, but my argument is that the generation of radical thought does not depend on radical aesthetics: the audience could enjoy the protest singer's music and disagree with the politics or vice versa. Unless this claim can be disproved (that aesthetics and politics do not necessarily correlate, that is), then the assumption that a song from 'the cultural archive' (Loss means folk music, it seems to me) comes from 'people who've decided that everything's already been decided' (p. 172) is an unfair dismissal. Folk song can be Marxist and, when it is, the singer might assume that much of the potential audience disagrees with him *politically* but might simultaneously consider that familiar music might help spread 'newness of [Marxist] thought' despite its *aesthetic* familiarity. At a theoretical level, Loss can cope with 'new art *and* new politics' (p. 192, emphasis retained), but he fails to consider the possibility that one of these could exist separately from the other.

To critique the book further at a theoretical level, it seems to me that the theorem *every performance is new* (see above) is Derridean and, therefore, the choice of Badiou as the principle theorist upon whom Loss draws is a mistake. The statement that ‘every performance has the possibility of becoming an event’ (p. 13) is a poor fit with Badiou’s theories; to link Badiou’s work with rap (p. 26), jazz (p. 13), rock and pop does not fit with Badiou’s stated preferences (Western art music, in short). Loss knows that he doesn’t really understand Badiou properly: comparing the latter with a ‘howitzer’, Loss admits he is ‘not sure I know how to operate the howitzer’; ‘we’ll leave out the set theory’, he adds, dismissing what Badiou himself would certainly see as a central and indispensable part of his theory (p. 11). Like Badiou, Loss will dismiss what he doesn’t like as being ‘weak’ (pp. 24, 59, 138) and deploy language around being ‘faithful’ (p. 24), ‘forcing’, ‘naming’ and so forth. However, he understands Badiou’s terminology and theories in a ‘commonplace sense’ only, by his own admission (p. 237); that being the case some readers may feel that it would have been better to leave the French theory to one side.

Overall, I would suggest that the book is likely to introduce many readers to interesting and valuable music from the 21st century (I myself googled and enjoyed several songs and artists of which I was previously unaware). The writing is often engaging, furthermore. As a scholarly text, however, it has major failings which are unfortunate as I for one consider the theoretical area on which Loss has centred his book to be an important one which I suspect will captivate scholars in the coming years.

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Reference

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***The American Song Book: The Tin Pan Alley Era.* By Philip Furia and Laurie Patterson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 264 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-939188-2**

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The American Song Book: The Tin Pan Alley Era is an accessible introduction to Tin Pan Alley’s first three decades. The book reprints public domain sheet music of 34 standards originally published between 1890 and 1922, from Charles K. Harris’s ‘After the Ball’ to George Gershwin, B.G. DeSylva and Ira Gershwin’s ‘I’ll Build a Stairway to Paradise’. The selections emphasise music published after 1914, the date of Irving Berlin’s ‘Alexander Ragtime Band’ (even the edition of ‘After the Ball’ is a reprint from 1919 with a new piano part). Earlier examples focus on ragtime, coon songs and the early songs of George M. Cohan, although songwriters associated with turn-of-the-century operettas such as Harry von Tilzer or Victor Herbert are conspicuously absent. Each song is introduced through a brief prefatory essay, usually covering composer or lyricist biographies with occasional forays into genres (ragtime) or institutions (the Princess Theatre and ASCAP). Furia and Patterson also