

Introduction to ‘Dance’ special issue

‘Are ye dancin’?’ ‘Are ye askin’?’ ‘Yes I’m askin’!’ ‘Then I’m dancin’!’ This was the exchange between couples in Glasgow early in the twentieth century at the height of the ballroom dancing boom that made the city one of the dancing capitals of the world. It lingers on in Scottish dancing parlance. In Havana, people were dancing *danzón*; in Buenos Aires, tango; and in Río de Janeiro, samba. It was a time of big orchestras when women wore evening dresses and men wore suits. Today, whilst the clothes may have changed, dance with its link to sensual pleasure continues to be fundamental to our cultures.

In this special ‘Dance’ issue we have eight articles that examine aspects of dance and dance music in the wider world. The issue was inspired by the integral connection between dance and dance music, and it sought to address a dearth of work on popular music and actual dancing practices. We invited contributions that explored the complex interconnections between popular music and dance, asking questions about identity, cultural policy, history, technology, industry, the market and the body. We also encouraged inter-disciplinary approaches and perspectives. The result is a stimulating range of papers which engage in a multiplicity of ways with the phenomenon of dance and dance music at different times and in different parts of the world, and help to further our understanding of the world of dance and the world around dance.

Cristina Baade introduces us to the world of ‘The dancing front’, looking at the BBC’s ambivalent engagement with dance music during the Second World War, notably the genre known as ‘swing’ and ‘sentimentality’. Tim Wall’s ‘Out on the floor’ looks at the Northern Soul scene, lively since the early 1970s, exploring the meanings of dance for the scene’s participants, notably the importance of solidarity and senses of identity through gender, place and ethnicity. Lisa Gilman and John Fenn take us to Malawi looking at rap and raga in a nationwide scene characterised by male-dominated competitions. They contrast male dominance in competitions with female involvement as dancers, making attention to dance crucial for understanding gender dynamics. Their exploration of intersections between dance, music, gender and class provides insight into the reasons for and implications of male dominance in this popular music/dance scene.

In ‘Dancing with desire’ we go to the Tijuana–San Diego border with Alejandro Madrid, to the world of hybrid Nor-tec music which incorporates the sounds of traditional music from the North of Mexico and computer-based styles of dance music. Madrid looks at how Nor-tec became a phenomenon in the underground electronic music scene, and by focusing on Nor-tec scenes in Tijuana, Los Angeles and Chicago, identifies how different transnational communities appropriate this music and navigate notions of identity, modernity and tradition. Joanne Demers brings us to the world of ‘Dance Dance Revolution’ (DDR), an arcade and home video game where players move their feet in specific patterns to electronic dance music, popular among teenagers all over the world.

In ‘Understand us before you end us’, Charity Marsh looks at how power is (re)produced on and through the body, specifically on Toronto’s raving bodies

during the summer of 2000, a period when rave culture came under intense surveillance by the authorities, resulting in a temporary ban. Peter Manuel and Wayne Marshall's 'Riddim method' looks at 'riddim-plus-voicing', the unique and distinctive form of song construction, as represented by Jamaican dancehall reggae and the work of deejays singing (or 'voicing') over autonomous accompanimental tracks. Finally, in an extended Middle Eight, Jan Fairley (one of the issue Editors) takes us to Cuba to look at the controversial phenomenon of *regeton* (*reggaetón*) dance in the light of lyrics, dance moves, transnationalism and post-feminism.

Whilst the issue focuses on just a few specific issues and dance styles, and only scratches the surface of the complex relationship between popular music and dance, we hope that it will inspire further reflection and investigation and provoke further questions. 'Are ye dancin'? cos we're askin'!

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