

PART III

Metal and Identity

Personal Take III – Jasmine Shadrack

Music for Rebels: The Sounds of Our Perseverance

I was a fan first. I discovered metal when I was seventeen years old, and it immediately offered me something special; a place of belonging, a home for the underdog, sonic textures and compositions that satisfied me and an aesthetic that I felt mirrored how I already felt. I forged my identity through metal, and I have been in love with it ever since. It is how I engage with the world, how I listen to it, and how I negotiate my place within it. Sometimes, metal offers you everything you need – warmth, security, belonging – and sometimes it gives you a slap in the face (sometimes warranted, sometimes not).

After a while, being a fan was not enough. I needed to be part of its cultural production as well as its consumption, so I bought a guitar and amplifier, slowly started to change my appearance (so many band shirts!) and got to work. Since 2000, when I started playing, trying my best to play the right-hand triplets of Dino Cazares (Fear Factory), I have been completely hooked. Over the course of the last twenty years, I have been in gradually heavier and heavier bands, until my last band, Denigrata, where I decided to take up vocals too. Suddenly, I was a frontwoman, playing a BC Rich 1989 class axe series Warlock and screaming down a mic; it was perfect.

I have committed much of my academic research to exploring the ways in which metal and metal performance aids trauma recovery, specifically healing from grief and domestic abuse. I wrote my PhD dissertation and my first monograph on this subject: *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss*.¹ I don't know what I would have done without metal, and I know I am not alone.

Metal, as a music form and subculture, however, is not perfect. We love to think of it as this separate bubble where everyone is equal and treated fairly. After twenty years in the scene as a performer, this was only true some of the time. It has its problems with race, class and gender, and it is easy to forget that metal, whilst rebellious, is an extension of the dominant discourse; we cannot fully divorce ourselves from it, even though we try.

I became a feminist through metal, and I was able to identify those engagements at gigs that were self-affirming and those that were deeply problematic, when I was safe to make music and when I wasn't. I have come to understand that nothing got in the way of my relationship with the music, between me and my guitar, even if sometimes at shows, experiences could have led me to think otherwise. I persevered. And that is something metal expects of you as a listener and as a performer. You

have to stick with it. For example, the first time I ever heard Strapping Young Lad's *City* (1997), my ears felt utterly overloaded, but as I started to unpick and unravel what each instrument was doing, how the riffs moved in conjunctive motifs, I soon realised what a masterpiece it was and still is. As a woman guitarist playing extreme metal, it was the pinnacle of technicality, fluidity of playing and brutality of songwriting that I aimed for.

I have played in metalcore, death metal, black metal, blackened death and grind bands over the years, I've been in signed and unsigned bands, got to play with some of my heroes (Napalm Death, Morbid Angel, Arkhon Infaustus), and had moments when the only money we had was from merch sales at gigs! But none of this would have been possible without my love for metal, in all its glory.

I am therefore immensely proud to introduce Part III of this book that examines notions of identity and mental health, the rebellious spirit of metal, feminist fury and metal and the aesthetics of metal's uniform. I will leave you, if I may, with some of my all-time favourite metal lyrics that offer me hope and strength in difficult times; a gift from Sepultura's Max Cavalera to us all: 'under a pale grey sky, we shall arise . . .' (*Arise*, 1991).

Denigrata Herself

Note

1. Jasmine H. Shadrack, *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss* (Intellect, 2020).

