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Book Reviews

The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock edited by Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 303 pp, £15.95, paperback.

I come increasingly to think that the hardest part of writing a book is the blurb one sends to the publisher. On the rhetoric, rather than the accuracy, of this may hang many casual sales. The implication of this Companion's blurb is that its scope is largely historical – it charts changing patterns, tracks the emergence of the industry, and traces the impact of technologies. A reading of the book itself suggests nothing so prosaic. Indeed, a continual sense of historical change is perhaps the one thing this Companion does not offer. Instead, we are presented with three sections: context; texts, genres, styles; and debates. Clearly, there is no single narrative at play here, and particular historical moments do figure in more than one chapter, in order to focus, as the jacket again claims, on issues. Don't, then, assume this book will give you a basic outline of what pop and rock are. Not only does it imply that this is actually an exceedingly difficult task, it assumes the reader comes with a great deal of competence in popular culture. And, although the introduction offers a chronology, it is highly idiosyncratic: clearly 1964, 1967 and 1969 are the century's key years. I guess given the age of the editors . . .

So, what does the book offer? Beneath these three sections, which I discuss in a moment, there are perhaps three guiding principles. The first, now commonplace, is that meaning does not inhere in music, but is always negotiated. How carefully this has to be dealt with is clear from Simon Frith's exemplary discussion of Elton John's revision of 'Candle in the Wind' (pp. 93–4) – how easy it is to slip into the 'old' way of thinking is clear from the occasional assertion of the 'essence of a music' (p. 284). A second principle concerns the level of detail. With only a few exceptions, examples are drawn upon to illustrate themes and issues, rather than being the focus of study. Those examples are expected to be known by most readers. This leads me to the third principle, which is that of engagement with (intellectual and cultural) theory. Here, two different approaches are adopted – some chapters foreground theoretical discussion, others almost ignore it, and a greater measure of consistency here would have made the book hang together better.

The opening section consists of three chapters which look, respectively, at the changing impact of technology (Paul Théberge), the industry (Simon Frith) and patterns of consumption (Will Straw). Théberge's chapter aims at comprehensiveness, thereby highlighting some key historical turns (the commodification of experimental techniques in the 1960s and how this led to a new round of experimentation in the 1980s) and themes (how misleading universal distinctions can be, such as that between 'live' and 'recorded' performances). He discusses not only producer, but also consumer, technology, and is only the first contributor to talk about the historical importance of Bing Crosby (who, strangely, appears nowhere in the chronology). Frith's chapter again raises a series of problematic distinctions, between the amateur and the professional, the special and the everyday, the public and the private, and identity and difference, poles which other chapters could usefully have employed. He argues that the industry now has four facets: managing talent, collecting rights, publishing material, and depending on electronics, and he traces how these have arisen historically. This chapter is conceptually focused, underpinned by a determination to see the industry as only one aspect of popular music culture, fundamentally

unable to control the consumption of the commodities it produces. This leads Frith to the occasional strange redefinition, such as that of the musical instrument as a device for the storage of music. Straw's topic is too large to enable easy structuring. He raises issues of the importance of venue, of the effect of music on our senses of space and time, and on generational, subcultural and global markets, noting some of the theoretical issues attendant on these. This is useful in demonstrating a variety of different angles, but is frustrating in that there is no clear line of argument.

The second section offers views on five distinct categories of musical product. Keir Keightley views rock as being, fundamentally, about the changing relation between the categories of 'art' and 'mass' consumption. This perspective collapses into concern with 'authenticity', whose roots he finds in both the 1950s folk revival and the swing era. The discussion is strongly historicised but, especially here, readers are assumed to be deeply familiar with the musicians he discusses. He offers a number of effective arguments, for example in favour of seeing the category 'youth' as a marginalized mass, leading to the late 1960s invention of the category 'rock', and in distinguishing between a 'seriousness' of approach and a political radicalism. He is weaker, however, in asserting that this same seriousness points to the music's lack of function. He closes by identifying two authenticities, one 'Romantic' and the other 'Modernist', but in so doing he situates authenticity as an aspect of production, rather than as part of the process of constructing meaning by the listener, losing touch with the first principle I identified above. Jocelyn Guilbault's chapter, on 'world music', initially appears more theoretically focused than most here. However, it then settles to the discussion of a single issue, that of transnationalism, viewed from a single perspective, that of Caribbean artists. And even this does not produce a strong argument – she concludes that the institution of world music can have both positive and negative effects on both musicians and fans. The remaining chapters in this section are more useful. Russell A. Potter traces the development of soul music into varieties of hip-hop, as a continuous Black American response to the appropriation of the culture's music. He argues that both the continuities of dance, and the phenomenon of rapping, are often not observed due to their only occasional appearance in the mainstream. He mentions many names but, again, few dates. Will Straw's chapter on dance music is refreshingly unusual in that his historical focus begins in the dance hall and the ballroom. He also observes continuities developing into the recent growth of 'dance music', but these he focuses on scholarly consideration of the body in motion, a consideration which requires a more fully interdisciplinary account than he has the space to provide. Both Straw's account and Simon Frith's discussion of 'pop music' provide clear evidence that the construction of popular music as a music of resistance, with which academic work in the area started, and which is still a key element in journalistic discourse, is no longer the dominant paradigm. Frith's essay is a *tour de force*, perhaps taking its lead from his insistence that pop is defined by its working in unexpected ways. He argues that it is defined as much by what it is not (musicians who prefer to be identified as rock, or country) as by what it is, although he does go on to identify the genre with the sentimental song. Most surprising to me is his conclusion, wherein pop music is found to be both ubiquitous and oblivious to the actual origin of any example, characteristics which have long been associated with identifying folk music.

The final section raises particular debates which surround the discussion of popular music – interpretation, gender, politics and race. The book then concludes with a second essay on world music, this time by Jan Fairley. This is

less theory-laden than the first, and based on the notion that the 'local' and the 'global' are not simply opposites. It is uneven, providing a level of detail in the definition of the term 'world music' that is nowhere else in evidence in the book. Fairley proposes two paradigms for transnational relationships, based respectively on the experiences of Ry Cooder and Paul Simon. It is very unfortunate that the synergies between this and Guilbault's chapter are left unexplored. Richard Middleton's discussion of the interpretation of popular music outlines a history of academic approaches, through the contributions of Leavis, Hall, Gramsci, Thornton, Adorno and Tagg. He identifies the importance of the gesturing body, attempting to correct what he sees as a misreading of Barthes's concept of the 'grain', and notes how the turn to discourse marks a shrinking of the interpretive horizon. A very full chapter, then, whose concision points to a deep level of understanding. The strategies adopted in the remaining chapters are reminiscent of some of those we have already seen. Sarah Cohen adopts a case-study approach to argue how attributions of gender embody power, difference, and inequality. My difficulty is seeing how generalisable her discussion is. John Street's chapter on politics is organised around the perennial contradiction between commerce and ideal. In the process, he argues that the politics of the music cannot be reduced to its context, to the text, or (although the importance of this is gaining ground) to the mix – indeed, public policy has a greater role than it is often given. Barry Shank's chapter on race argues both that racial differences are at the core of popular music, and that popular music is an arena for negotiating social tensions concerning race. His focus is exclusively North American.

These three sections are separated by a series of 'star profiles', musings on the careers and significance of figures who represent key positions in some of the outlined debates: Presley, Hendrix, James Brown, the Beatles, the Spice Girls, Derrick May, and nine others. These are crucial to the construction Simon Frith places on the field, in that the production of stars is key to its understanding, but the detail supplied here is not what is needed to support the generalised views adopted in most chapters. These too are uneven: the points made concerning Nirvana and Bowie appear to me to be more widely applicable; Abba and Madonna are far more idiosyncratic.

Overall, then, this is a far from uniform, but also a far from even, text (and that goes, as well, for the way authors have offered guidance on further reading). Individual chapters provide much food for thought, and I shall recommend parts of it to final-year undergraduates, but I am left wondering where libraries will house it. It's not really a work of reference . . .

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Learning to Teach Music in the Secondary School: A Companion to School Experience edited by Chris Philpott. London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001. 288 pp, £16.99, paperback.

In all probability, this book will already appear on the reading lists of most secondary initial teacher training courses, and quite right too. Because I think many of its target audience will already know it, as well as reviewing it I would like to offer a slightly tangential thought that occurred to me as I read it.

First, the book. Chris Philpott not only edited it, but also wrote the lion's share of the chapters, with contributions from a class teacher, a recently retired teacher and three university lecturers. Subtitled 'A companion to school experience', it is intended primarily for trainee music teachers, and it is designed to complement the more general *Learning to Teach in the Secondary School* (Capel *et al.*, 2001) in the same series. Chapters – which are

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called 'units' – deal with matters such as musical learning, the National Curriculum, planning, classroom management, individual needs, ICT, assessment, extra-curricular music and public exams. A final chapter discusses issues surrounding ethnomusicology, gender and creativity, and a particularly useful set of appendices presents sample audits, lesson plans and some questions to consider when visiting a primary school, a secondary school, and when planning professional development. Because Philpott runs a PGCE course, I imagine that the book might have started life as lecture notes for his course, and this means that it could usefully be used as a main ('basal') course book, particularly for a course involving a degree of distance learning.

There is a strongly practical feel to much of the book – although Philpott denies, in his introduction, that it is a manual, it is essentially about how to do the business of teaching. Each unit starts with a list of objectives, for instance: 'by the end of this unit you should know how to devise effective lesson plans with clearly stated methodology'. The content is presented in a variety of ways: lists, tables and diagrams break up the continuous prose, and the reader is constantly challenged to reflect on what has been read by performing a number of tasks. These are genuinely thought-provoking and range from ideas for discussion to practical activities such as designing worksheets, assessing compositions, and so on. Each unit then ends with a brief summary, expressed largely in bullet points.

Although it is a good and necessary book, I do find it uneven. The two chapters on external exam courses are both good, and the one on post-16 exams has some particularly useful ideas for teaching music in a way that stays close to first-hand experience of music. Philpott's own chapters are well researched and scholarly in the best sense of the word; that is, they review complex and sometimes conflicting theories in simple and clear language, without resorting to superficial generalisations. The influence of Keith Swanwick is everywhere but other major voices – Paynter, Sloboda, Abbs, Mills and Odam – are also in evidence. Although the thrust of the book is practical, readers are encouraged to form their own theories. Philpott manages well the tension between the instructional/behaviourist structure provided by the series editors (objectives – content – summary) and the fuller, more complex realities generated by research and theory-making. His underlying view is that practice both influences, and is influenced by, theory, and that individuals can improve their understandings by a process which involves both practical activity and reflective reading.

I find the other contributors' chapters less good, for three reasons. First, they are simply less good. In short, Charles Plummeridge attempts too much and, instead of developing an interesting thesis showing how music education can be interpreted in the light of three conflicting ideologies, is sidetracked into other brief and inevitably more superficial discussions. Bill Crow's chapter falls into the too much, too superficial trap, and also suffers from poor proofreading. Pauline Adams's content sometimes remains at a fairly abstract level, with the result that readers might reasonably say, 'I know that this is important, but I don't know what to do about it'. More than once I found myself thinking that the book might have been better if Philpott had exerted a stronger editorial influence.

Second and more importantly, the guiding principles that are articulated in the book's introduction and explored in Philpott's chapters are distinctly less evident in the other chapters. For example, Philpott describes musical immersion as 'a basic principle' of music education, and suggests that the principle of putting sound before symbol is 'a central tenet' of his book. However, these principles really don't come across in the chapters on planning

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and ICT in the way that they should. Nor do the authors articulate a shared understanding of what it is to teach music musically, another 'main premise' of the book. So the philosophy that underpins some chapters is absent from others. Finally, there is a degree of repetition which might not be noticeable if the reader is taking a chapter at a time, but which can be irritating when the book is read in full. Taken as a whole, however, this book will prove very useful for its target audience. I imagine that, sinking under the weight of audits, tests, standards and the like, they will reach for it as for a lifeline.

Now to the tangential thought. During the last ten years, successive UK governments have dealt with initial teacher training so as to give more responsibility to schools and less to universities. It has even been suggested that ITT might become entirely based in schools and, although the present crisis in recruitment has halted the seemingly inexorable decline of university education departments, there are certainly fewer full-time permanent music education posts in UK universities now than there were ten years ago.

But books like this are important, and they are almost always written by university lecturers. School teachers, particularly music teachers, simply don't have the time – time to read and reflect, as well as time to write. If the decline in the university education departments continues, then it is absolutely vital that something be done to encourage teachers to write. Substantial sabbaticals, for teams of teachers, might help. If nothing is done, new educational thinking will be entirely dominated by government quangos and 'hit and run' inspection teams. Perhaps that's what they want.

Reference

Capel, S., Leask, M. and Turner, T. (2001) *Learning to Teach in the Secondary School: A Companion to School Experience*. London: RoutledgeFalmer. 3rd edn.

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Voiceworks: A Handbook for Singing by Peter Hunt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, in association with BFYC, 2001. 171 pp, £45, spiral bound with 2 CDs.

Fashions and theories come and go, and for those of us who began teaching in the 1970s, nothing was more frustrating than the prevailing opinion in education and society that children did not wish to sing and should not be required to sing in school. Where Kodály had asserted that every classroom houses a potential choir, his message was largely ignored in the United Kingdom, except in schools where hymns were still practised for assembly. The publication of this impressive volume with its accompanying CDs is vindication for the many teachers and educationists who, beginning with a vocally creative counter-culture in the 1980s, have contributed to one of the more positive ideological and pedagogical U-turns in curriculum design and cultural provision to have occurred in our field.

The National Curriculum proved a stimulus to this movement, notwithstanding the reluctance of the Secretary of State for Education to recognise the value of musical participation for all, of which singing along the lines favoured in *Voiceworks* represents so effective an example. The book's publishers, Oxford University Press, invested in this process in the mid-1980s through their inaugural sponsorship of the Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD). The ABCD's sister organisation, formed some two years earlier, the British Federation of Young Choirs (BFYC), must take much of the credit for Peter Hunt's book, having employed him as a regional *animateur* and mounted the influential series of

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conferences on The Adolescent Voice which allowed these ideas to find a receptive audience. Parallels with the success in the USA of Doreen Rao's publications are acknowledged.

So much for the history. But it is important to recognise that teaching materials have their time and place, and *Voiceworks* could not be better designed to illustrate the difference in approach between the development of the classroom choir as a resource for teaching music in the twenty-first century and the tired practice of community singing which so many still associate with vocal education. The songs and exercises in this book are illustrated with CDs comfortably lodged in the back cover; many of the arrangements and compositions carry permission for copying, so that, as an investment, this book's value can be multiplied in practice at no additional cost; the range of songs draws heavily on multicultural examples which appeal to the body and the imagination as well as the voice; other examples recognise the pop and jazz idioms to which children respond, and some give opportunities for scat and vocal percussion. Above all this book recognises its brief as developing the whole musical personality and experience of participants: it could form as effective a basis for developing composition as it does for the singers for whom it is intended. Some of the material, indeed, is written by schoolchildren themselves.

Peter Hunt has designed the book as a resource of great flexibility. There is an introductory section which provides a persuasive and accessible background to the methods employed and shows how to monitor the development of the instruments – the voices of pupils. The body of the book comprises some 60 vocal projects, each based upon a specific song. It is in the opportunities for vocal education and development conveyed in the material surrounding each song that the book defines its purpose and advantage compared to that of a songbook *per se*. The repertoire is laid out so as to address specific musical skills, beginning with unison singing and proceeding through the introduction of parts through rhythmic improvisation, the layering of ostinati, antiphonal singing (called 'Echoing') and developing the capacity for various harmonic textures. At every stage, material is provided so that pupils can go away from the lesson with ideas for their own musical invention, in addition to attractive songs committed to memory. The accent is always on discovery and understanding, never on note-bashing. Indeed, the majority of the songs, representing a key aspect of Hunt's pedagogical practice, are self-sufficient *a cappella*. While there are piano accompaniments to some items, it is clearly an article of faith that the teacher does not have to possess piano performance skills to employ this book effectively. One prays that lessons will take place in sufficiently supportive acoustics for pupils to enjoy the sound of their own voices, and not use this resource as a form of *karaoke*.

In this respect, one has to admit that there are challenges which need to be faced in developing practices such as this book encourages. The teacher needs to be a good role model as a singer, fearless in leadership and demonstration, solicitous and sympathetic in the capacity to encourage. The material needs to be committed to memory for this to be so. Working from this text in front of the children is unlikely to succeed. While the attractiveness of presentation and content of the book are a tribute to its author and his colleagues, the yardstick for its success will be that teachers can absorb what they choose to of its contents and then put it to one side. One does not have to have seen Peter Hunt in action (though I have had the pleasure of doing so) to recognise that, in dealing with songs and vocal exercises of this kind, he works entirely from memory.

With these thoughts in mind, I see

Voiceworks as more a practical manifesto than the last word in its field. In some respects, it may date quickly: the pop arrangements are already classics, and newer material should be sought for a future volume. *Voiceworks* has built on the strengths of several publications which individual teachers, composers and arrangers have exchanged over the last decade. As the geopolitical scene shifts, the strong representation of South Africa could be complemented with, perhaps, music from Cuba or the Far East. While the musical value of the non-Western material is not in doubt, we could have more detailed attributions respectful of its origins: the continent of Africa is a big place, where they speak different languages, poorly mapped onto national boundaries. A second edition proofread by African teachers could easily put this right.

Voiceworks fulfils many needs, provides well for the top years of primary education and on through secondary to GCSE. I am excited by the prospect of hearing singing based on its approach in schools in which the voice has been neglected in favour of IT and group percussion. I anticipate this resource, properly used, making a difference to the aural and creative capacities of students in a manner which could positively affect the musical confidence of young people in years to come.

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Music in Words: Researching and Writing about Music by Trevor Herbert. London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2001. 212 pp, paperback, £11.95.

Professor Herbert sets out the aims of his book clearly: 'it introduces you to methods and procedures that enable and encourage you to find your own way. It provides hints about how to get started with a research project, how to write, how to organise your writing and how to observe some of the basic academic writing conventions such as footnotes and bibliographies.' *Music in Words* is both a textbook and a reference book, the reference sections being set out in alphabetical order under some generic headings, and forming the second half of the volume. The first half dwells on different kinds of writing, for example CD liner notes, essays, reviews and research theses. From Chapter 2 onwards, Herbert concentrates on particular aspects of research methodology, attending mainly to larger research projects such as higher degree dissertations. He covers choosing a topic, overall design, initial research, synthesis and presentation. A section on 'storing data research' is particularly useful because it warns the beginner of the many pitfalls associated with faulty methodology. Chapter 3, 'Using libraries and the Internet', is less helpful because it fails to explain how to track down exactly what you might want on the Internet. Chapters 4 and 5 cover scholarly conventions and the use of illustrations of all kinds. The reference sections provide a wealth of information about 'language and numbers', 'musical terms and phrases', 'sources and research tools', and more on 'citation', more commonly referred to as 'referencing'.

The book certainly covers most of what it claims to cover. Herbert is clearly aware that his use of written English will be scrutinised closely. Writing about writing is a hazardous enterprise for obvious reasons, so he has taken care to meticulously omit split infinitives, to eschew superfluous tautologies and to avoid clichés like the plague. Unfortunately he avoids some other matters as well.

Music in Words is such an intriguing title. Before knowing what the book was about, I had hoped that its author was going to bridge the elusive divide between music as sound and writers' attempts to capture the spirit of that sound in words. A few authors have written about music so elegantly. Donald Tovey,

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Charles Rosen and Wilfrid Mellers spring to mind. It was not to be. A clearer indication of the book's purpose is found in the sub-title: *a guide to researching and writing about music*. For the most part, the advice is a guide to researching and writing about anything. True, the titles of publications used to exemplify techniques of presentation are 'musical', but that detail is irrelevant for the most part. In some sections, music passes out of sight altogether, for example in the short section on writing examination answers. I find this curious because some examinations in music expect candidates to include musical quotations, and advice on how this might be done efficiently and effectively would have been welcome.

The section on writing reviews also fails to mention a curiosity of some music reviews. In most other types of review (theatre, film, book, etc.) the author is trying to help readers to decide whether to buy the book, go to the film or attend the theatre. Other than in opera and musical stage shows generally, the music critic, however, is writing a *post mortem*. The concert has come and gone. What is the purpose of such a review, and how should it be written to ensure that it is worthy of a reader's time and attention? In what way does the style of writing differ from that used in the other types of review? Herbert could have dwelt on this topic usefully but it is clear that his primary occupation is to help students prepare their research and to write it up correctly. Many students will find his advice enormously helpful when they discover matters of which they are ignorant, but may be dismissive when they encounter what they know already.

But even within this rather narrow field, Herbert misses one crucial aspect of academic writing, namely converting a thesis (or parts of a thesis) into an article for a journal. As co-editor of this journal, I would welcome elegant metamorphoses of this kind, but it is apparent that some research students are uncertain of the techniques needed. This omission and the others mentioned could well provide a stimulus for a follow-up volume to *Music in Words*. Herbert is probably sensible in tackling the mechanics of research as a first step. Students and others will benefit greatly from learning the techniques for gathering relevant information, organising it sensibly and presenting it lucidly. With those preliminaries absorbed and out of the spotlight, they will be better prepared to tackle the really challenging aspects of writing about music, of conveying the character, the spirit and the joy of music in words.

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