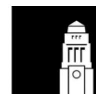

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Local and global intersections of popular music history and heritage

Robert Knifton

Introduction

In recent years, an expansion of heritage discourse away from a primary focus on objects towards an increased emphasis on social, intangible practices has led to music (often, but importantly not always, including popular music) being considered as a part of this discourse and thus the heritage industry as a whole. Regardless of whether we read the UNESCO definition of 2003 on intangible heritage as being concerned with popular music alongside the earlier 'traditional' music practices it directly references, the shift in values that the representation of intangible practices as heritage embodies is pertinent to how we regard popular music histories. As Ruggles and Silverman (2009, p. 11) contend, the movement represented by the adoption of intangible heritage as a category 'represents a radical paradigm shift from the objective nature of material culture to the subjective experience of the human being'. Regarding popular music as intangible heritage raises questions around its transmission across national boundaries, global mixing and the proliferation of new music forms where local and global meet.

It could be argued that there is a direct correlation between the growth of globalised music cultures and the rise of popular music histories and heritage; in other words, that the growth of popular music heritages doesn't represent a diversification of global music identities but rather is indicative of pressures of co-option by the culture industry, leading to homogenisation or a 'flattening out' of popular music into heritage 'experiences' – a sanding down of music's many rough edges in order to package it for a global, wealthy, tourist (and predominantly Western) audience. For example, Simon Reynolds (2011, p. 3) adopts a polemical position in arguing that heritage processes rob rock music of its vitality: 'Pop is about the momentary thrill; it can't be a permanent exhibit'. He dismisses the global hunger for popular music heritage as a form of debased nostalgia embedded within consumerist culture (Reynolds 2011, p. xxix). Therefore, for Reynolds, popular music heritage is a commercial co-option of memory for economic gain with precious little space available for any alternate readings to emerge.

Alongside Reynolds' concerns around heritage, we could draw on John Storey's account of globalisation and popular culture as further evidence of heritage as a homogenising force

within a global perspective. Storey (2003, p. 204) claims that homogenising forces have resulted in 'the reduction of the world to an American global village' where 'we encounter the global in the clothes we wear, the music we listen to, the television programmes and films we watch'. For Storey, audiences of globalised culture are denied agency since as passive recipients rather than active participants in this culture they lack an understanding of the processes in which they are immersed. However, in Storey's account of globalised culture homogeneity is only one possible outcome. He leaves open the possibility of a mixing of cultures or hybridisation as another possible response (Storey 2003, p. 108). Thus, the effects of globalisation on popular music heritage therefore could be seen as being reductive and limited; read via Guy Debord's (1994, p. 26) situationist theories, we might agree with Reynolds and regard the heritagisation of popular music as the commodification of its spectacle, in a form of commodity fetishism that replaces an authentic experience. Is heritage merely packaging to enable the culture industry to comprehensively commodify all aspects of popular music's past? And yet, those alternate forms permitted in Storey's account point to a different potential interaction between globalisation and popular music heritage. By reviewing and assessing the intersection of local and global pressures on how we define popular music heritage we may discover space for such alternate interactions to emerge, offering a more varied and complex reading of the intersections between popular music and heritage in different contexts.

Global music heritage, local active participants

What alternate forms could popular music heritage take in order to avoid falling into patterns of co-option? One possibility to examine is that agency could be claimed by local participants who refuse the role of passive consumers of a globalised heritage. This issue of active and passive participants within heritage actions is addressed effectively in Laurajane Smith's (2011, p. 69) defining of heritage as 'a process or a performance, in which certain cultural and social meanings and values are identified, reaffirmed or rejected'. Since Smith's reading of heritage encompasses a range of activities, our engagement with it is active and self-conscious, with the construction of heritage being carried out as much by the audiences who consume it and the gatekeepers who curate it. Two examples may help to illustrate this audience or participant agency in the creation of heritage further – Gaelle Crenn's account of the globally touring ABBAWORLD exhibition and its reception in Australia and Áine Mangaoang's study of Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (CPDRC) in the Philippines.

Viewing the version of ABBAWORLD that was displayed at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Crenn notes how visitors were incorporated in meaning-making processes by the curatorial choices made in the exhibition, placing audience alongside artist and producer in authoring the cultural encounter with popular music as heritage. Personal interviews with the band encouraged audience identification, objects were sited on low platforms without glass to place them close to visitors, fan-created objects were situated alongside 'officially sanctioned' ABBA heritage, and finally audiences were encouraged to actively participate via a karaoke stage. Crenn (2015, p. 147) notes that 'the public could be successively member of the audience and performer'. Exhibition visitors were clearly performing Smith's processes of heritage through their active engagement with the artefacts, interactives, and fellow audience members. In Smith's (2011, p. 80) terms, visitors perform heritage and thus create the site's significance through this act, since 'the authenticity of heritage lies not in its physical fabric, but in the legitimacy given to the social and cultural values we imbue places of heritage with through the performance we construct at them'. Thus, audiences at the exhibition were arguably active participants in the creation of heritage, not passive consumers of a globalised heritage industry.

More intriguingly, Crenn's case study of ABBA exhibited in Australia also uncovers some of the dynamics within the intersection of local/global identities via the heritagisation of popular music. Whilst the topic of ABBA does represent a hugely successful, commercialised global form of popular music heritage, the exhibition also acted as a site for heritage processes around ABBA's significance for local Australian identities to be played out. Crenn (2015, p. 149) astutely observes that 'their links with Australian audiences (via items, memories and perceptions of Australian people) showed how they have been transformed into an aspect of Australian heritage'. Although, we may well question whether this version of 'Australian heritage' itself is limited and exclusionary: could it include indigenous Australian identity also, for instance? Nevertheless, Crenn's reading of the exhibition therefore offers a fascinating case study into active heritage processes focused on popular music, and the active performance by audience-participants leading to an expression of social identity in the present through the observation of the collected heritage of one globally-exported Swedish pop music act. As Crenn (2015, p. 150) highlights, 'This re-curation attempted to legitimate the museum as the place where popular music is interpreted as social phenomenon'. Similarly, Áine Mangaoang's postcolonial reading of the highly disciplined and

choreographed dances by prisoners of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (CPDRC) in the Philippines deals with an active local interaction with globalised popular music heritage.[1] Mangaoang (2014) offers an insight into the intersection of local and global in performing popular music heritages via these dances, which are performed to globally recognised Western pop hits. Should we read these performances as instances of Storey's 'American global village' or do they offer the possibility for hybrid versions of popular music heritage, with performer and audience involved with processes of meaning-making? Whilst dances are choreographed to familiar American pop music classics, the form of dance and its interpretation has complex local associations. Mangaoang (2014, p. 2) views these performances as displays of hegemonic power by global audiences on localised performers (and inmates) via forms neo-colonial nostalgia linked to the specific colonial history of the Philippines. She contends, 'the performances serve to tap into both a neo-colonial nostalgia and YouTube's digital archive of nostalgia, where a mere mention of such culturally valuable texts as Michael Jackson's *Thriller* can unleash a tsunami of global nostalgia' (Mangaoang 2014, p. 3). There is, however, arguably a case to be made that the local performers (or perhaps more realistically, their choreographers) are manipulating globalised nostalgia in order to display aspects of identity specific to the Philippines. The agency on display is nuanced and complex, an interplay of local and global expectations of popular music heritage, which could be considered a form of heritage claim embodied in dance.

The intersection of global and local music heritage interaction is taken to its logical extreme with the performances staged by the inmates at the CPDRC now listed in tourist guidebooks as an attraction for monthly public dances. As Mangaoang (2014, p. 6) comments, 'CPDRC continues to function as a maximum-security prison while concurrently transforming into a tourist site once a month, a hybridised site of leisure and incarceration'. Regardless of the disciplinary discourse on display in the dances, they equally 'highlight the porous nature of music, in particular to song and dance's ability to transcend physical borders and offer a sense of expression, a carefully framed celebration of liminal liberation otherwise unknown to those incarcerated' (Mangaoang 2014, p. 10). As an instance of popular music heritage under pressures of globalisation, it highlights the complex, multiple meanings that arise out of performing heritage. The problematic nature of meaning-making on display is neither a simple co-option of local identity as consumers of global popular music heritage nor an active, positive creation of a hybrid version, but a complex combination of both. Therefore,

both ABBAWORLD visitors and the dancers at CPDRC alternate interactions with global music heritage by active local participants.

Radio (and artists) crossing borders

What happens when territory-specific local popular music heritage crosses borders? In both the examples of ABBA and Michael Jackson's *Thriller* given above, the popular music in question was already globally recognised. How does the global-local dynamic shift when the popular music heritage travelling is less well known? The case study of globalisation and popular music heritage offered by the Transnational Radio Encounters project (TRE), which examines cross-border European radio broadcasting and archiving, addresses this question. Whilst the case study of the CPDRC offered an example of imbalanced power hierarchies and discipline in action, TRE offers a counterbalance via individual listener resistance, or 'listening against the grain'. The research, with participants from Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom, looks on the one hand at the territory-forming aspects of radio stations, adhering to an authorised version of national identity, and on the other hand it highlights how 'radio was the first medium to so incredibly easily cross borders and spread … inspiring people's ideas about foreign mentalities, political attitudes and even general anthropological conditions' (Föllmer 2007). As Kate Lacey (2000, p. 280), a participant within the project, highlights, 'we need to be sensitive to the historical specificity and plurality of listening positions'. By accessing archives related to European radio and its listeners, such as those held by the Netherlands Sound and Vision Museum in Hilversum, TRE offers a heritage-led approach to questions of globalised radio and its audiences. This appears not simply as a debased nostalgia, or as hybridisation or a flattening out of potential narratives, but rather as a complexification of identity via a plurality of listening positions within specific historical settings. TRE therefore perhaps points to a version of popular music heritage that is polyvocal, multiple, and contingent upon its reception. The act of listening is equally a performative action and one bound up with meaning-making. Thus, accounts of heritage within popular music histories should aim to address listeners and audiences as much as musicians and performers.

A troubling example of the complex listening patterns in transnational radio broadcasting is found in the reception of Serbian turbo-folk music in neighbouring nations. In the 1990s, stations such as Radio-ponos (Radio-pride) and Radio-Pink shaped the genre as an ideological nationalist, chauvinist and militaristic spectacle that promoted the Serbian

political agenda forwarded by president Slobodan Milosevic. Part of a subculture known as 'warrior chic', Ivana Kronja (2004, p. 107) argues that it acted as a 'cultural background, moral excuse and spectacular promotion to the new, war-profiteering ruling class in Serbia and Montenegro'. She explains that, 'Starting from a street subculture of deprived and violent youth, turbo-folk developed into a mainstream pop culture which sophisticatedly promoted militant, criminal and immoral values of the regime' (Kronja 2004, p. 112). Turbo-folk emerged from local patriotic folk music traditions, but merged them with global influences, 'into a fusion of the folk musical matrix and rap, hip-hop and dance of American and West-European artists' (Kronja 2004, p. 103). In each of the former Yugoslavian nations, war-patriotic songs emerged at this era, but the Milosevic regime's involvement with and manipulation of turbo-folk made it particularly pronounced. DellaVigna *et al*. (2012, p. 12) note that the genre 'is considered offensive by many Croats and Bosnians as it is associated with glorifying the war by Serbs'. Yet, Kronja (2004, p. 112) notes that:

> the TV Pink satellite programme, which resembles the notorious heritage of the nineties, with fortune-teller shows and more aggressive turbo-folk sound, is extremely popular throughout Serbia and Montenegro and among Serbs abroad, but also in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Bosnia and even Croatia.

Despite its politically provocative nationalistic content, this music still appealed to some of those communities it denigrated, Kronja (2004, p. 105) argues, because they face similar cultural pressures in the transition from Eastern bloc communism to liberal capitalist society.

Whilst Kronja is studying the cultural hybridisation of music heritage in a moment of high political fluidity, Martin Husak's study of Czechoslovak rock music demonstrates that even before the dissolution of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, transmission of popular music forms was occurring, arguably creating its own hybrid popular music heritage. Husak (2017, p. 312) notes that 'many music journalists have viewed the Czechoslovak rock scene as the most advanced in the whole Eastern bloc'. Whilst Husak primarily documents the censorship and suppression of rock by the authorities, he details an incident where the wider global knowledge of popular music possessed by music journalists had to be self-censored in order to protect recording artists. The music journalist Zdenko Pavelka recalls:

> When you listen to the song 'Levandulova' by Hapka and Horacek, you will find that it is basically a poor copy of Cohen's song 'Hallelujah'. And then we had a problem. This song received an award from *Melodie* and no journalist who was aware of it

> wrote that it was actually a song by Cohen, because everyone knew that doing this could actually harm them. (cited in Husak 2017, p. 320)

Artists such as Karel Gott, Hana Zagorova and Pavel Novak constructed careers on Czech language covers of popular Western songs. Karel Gott in particular was a state-sanctioned music star at home but also unusually was permitted to travel and was popular in Germany and Austria. Gott thus inhabited a unique position in local/global intersections within the Eastern European popular music scene. Petr A. Bilek (2016, p. 235) has written about Gott, arguing that 'the communist regime used him as an index referring to an official culture that enjoyed authentic popularity across generational, class or gender divides'. Gott's debut album in 1965, *Zpiva Karel Gott* (Karel Gott Sings), included Czech language covers of Mancini's 'Moon River', Don Gibson's 'Oh, Lonesome Me' and 'From Me to You' by the Beatles (Bilek 2016, p. 226). In 1967, after the release of his second LP, Gott travelled internationally: to the MIDEM music trade fair in Cannes, to be a part of the Czechoslovak entry for the World's Fair exposition in Canada, and to take up a half-year residency at the New Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas (Bilek 2016, p. 226). Thus, Gott was appropriating Western songs, interpreting them in a Czechoslovak context and re-exporting them to the West. Artists like Gott remain popular in the Czech Republic today, and the tradition for Czech-language cover versions of popular Western songs also persists, despite the removal of restrictions on listening to Western music that initially led to this genre developing. In heritage terms, how would we assess the intertwined histories of a song such as, for example, Peter Sarstedt's 'Where do you go to my lovely', its Czech language cover version, 'Kdo vchazi do tvych snu, ma lasko' sung by Vaclav Neckar, and their competing roles in the memories of the listener? Arguably, these cover versions exist as more than simple simulacra of the original songs, taking on new meanings and constructing different heritage actions in the Czechoslovakian context.

Post-colonial music heritages

A similar interplay between local and global music heritage to create something distinct and new out of traditional folk, Western and Arabic music influences, is viewed in West African Highlife – a distinct popular music tradition that emerged in Ghana and Nigeria in the early twentieth century, incorporating melodies and rhythms from traditional music but utilising Western musical instruments. As Austin Emielu (2011, p. 377) notes, 'Early prototypes of Highlife began to emerge in the 1920s from the indigenisation of the military and regimental brass band music of foreign armed forces and European colonists in West Africa'. Thus,

musically it incorporated both Western and African traditions in its formation, although the influences it drew upon were in fact much wider, taking in a range of cross-cultural and trans-national influences: ‘church hymns, American Swing and Jazz music, Latin American and Caribbean music like Rhumba, Foxtrot, Salsa and Meringue’ (Emielu 2011, p. 378). In an interesting parallel to Karel Gott’s movement from communist East to West, Markus Coester argues that the movement of Highlife musicians to London from the 1950s was crucial. West African Highlife musicians recorded LPs and participated in the popular music culture of the city – especially interacting with musicians from the Caribbean such as Calypso artists. Coester (2008, p. 142) asserts that ‘cultural processes in different locales were interrelated in the making of Highlife, across national and continental boundaries’. The movement of performers such as the Ghanaian and Nigerian Highlife musicians and the Trinidadian Calypso artists evidence the effects of globalisation on the spread of varied popular music heritages.

Emielu and Coester are writing about the immediate post-colonial era; however, such concerns of musical influence and the role of heritage in preserving traditional music so that it can have a continued influence on popular music are contemporary issues as well. For instance, Rebecca Corey established and co-ordinates the Tanzania Heritage Project, which is dedicated to preserving and digitising Tanzanian popular music recorded between the 1960s and 1980s. In an interview with the Quietus from 2016, Corey explained that, ‘One of the reasons that we started the Tanzania Heritage Project was because we saw a gap between the music of this earlier era and the music that was being played today’ (Judkins 2016, n.p.). Due to the privatisation of Tanzanian radio stations in the 1980s, quotas for local content were relaxed, resulting in the influence of Western genres such as hip hop and pop coming to the fore. Of course, external musical influences such as American soul music and Bollywood soundtracks featured in the earlier music in the archive, but these earlier tracks arguably offered a more varied range of connections with music and society in the nation. Thus, the aims of preserving the musical heritage of this era is not simply to fix it in aspic, but rather to actively attempt to connect a local music tradition obscured by powers of globalisation to a new local audience. Corey remarks:

> Of course culture is always changing but the level at which the music of today seems to bear no stamp of that old music is quite noticeable. We wanted to explore that by speaking with musicians, radio DJs, historians, etc. (Judkins 2016, n.p.)

Corey notes that the music collected within the archives frequently has political links, for example, to the Pan-African movement; this highlights another significant aspect for arguing for the preservation of specific localised popular music heritage: that the suppression of such music often acted as a form of political censorship. In Czechoslovakia, we can see this dynamic in the case of underground band The Plastic People of the Universe, who after the process of 'normalisation', which saw an end to the relative cultural freedoms of the 1960s, saw their music suppressed and band members persecuted. In a different context, Michael Drewett has examined censorship by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in 1980s apartheid South Africa. He explains that, 'Given the SABC's almost complete monopoly of the South African airwaves, these censorship practices had a devastating effect on censored musicians and their record companies' (Drewett 2014, p. 4). Drewett (2014, pp. 17–18) notes that the act of censorship itself creates spaces for resistance: 'spaces of resistance to censorship were possible because of the very censorship structures that attempted to blot out spaces within this resistance voices could be heard'. This might explain why popular music of resistance, formed in opposition to an oppressive regime, survives to feed into processes of heritage where other forms are assimilated into a mass, globalised culture.

Popular music heritage myths

Ideas of the intersection of local and global music traditions have taken on mythic qualities in one of England's most significant music cities, Liverpool. Paul Du Noyer explores the concept of the Cunard Yanks, shipworkers who allegedly brought the newest American music releases into the city before it reached anywhere else in the country. Du Noyer (2007, p. 58) quotes former Eric's DJ Roger Eagle, who encapsulates the myth well:

> Liverpool is the most American of English cities. It's got the most intensely aware soul music black community in the country. They're getting American records in so fast they're probably getting them before they're properly released in the States. It's like a sinew that goes across the Atlantic.

Yet, the story of the Cunard Yanks, bringing black American music to Liverpool and influencing beat groups such as the Beatles, arguably represents a co-option of these music traditions, assimilating them into a dominant narrative about the city's music. The central position of the Beatles within narratives around popular music in Liverpool has led to 'a concentration on white guitar-based groups in the construction of Liverpool's ongoing musical heritage' (Strachan 2010, p. 85). As a result, Strachan (2010, p. 85) highlights,

‘Black music in the city has had to contend with a highly pervasive set of dominant historical narratives’. The dominant heritage narrative of the Beatles in Liverpool either assimilates or sidelines other stories resistant to its myth.

The form of myth surrounding the Beatles in Liverpool has interesting parallels with Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of generic form in literary storytelling. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin discusses how genre is intimately connected to the time-space, or chronotope of a particular narrative. He explains:

> These generic forms, at first productive, were then reinforced by tradition; in their subsequent development they continued stubbornly to exist, up to and beyond the point at which they had lost any meaning that was productive in actuality or adequate to later historical situations. (Bakhtin 2011, p. 85)

The form that a story takes inevitably influences the possibilities of how it can be told. Bakhtin was examining the literary forms of storytelling within differing novel constructions, but the same ideas of time-space, genre, and the restrictions of format in shaping the telling are applicable to popular music and heritage. For example, Lily Kong has written about the invention of a heritage of popular music in Singapore, thus constructing a time-space for the reception of myths and stories about the nation. Kong asserts that exhibitions such as the National Archives’ *Retrospin: Sounds of Singapore 1950s–1990s* were focused on harnessing popular music for nation-building, and especially investing young people in the heritage of Singapore:

> This association of popular music with the young is particularly important in understanding the focus now given to popular music heritage, as the attempt to recover Singapore’s heritage is primarily though not solely seen as a ‘means for younger Singaporeans to understand their roots’. (Kong 1999, p. 11)

Kong argues that while the sources for many of the Singaporean performers highlighted by this heritage work were globalised Western music, their reframing as a heritage narrative was an attempt (similar to that seen with Cunard Yanks) to co-opt and claim these to a distinctive ‘Singapop’ identity. She writes that Singapop ‘assumes that the identification and promotion of a music tradition that is generically non-Singaporean will help to bond young Singaporeans to a shared identity in Singapore’ (Kong 1999, p. 22). The question for sites of heritage is whether they aim to fix narrative or rather offer an opportunity to open up popular music histories to new readings beyond those already accrued.

In stark contrast to state use of ‘Singapop’ to build national heritage, we can view the strange case of Cantopop – seen as crucial to the development of Hong Kong cultural identity, yet declining post-1997 to near disappearance. Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet have traced the memory of Cantopop via its key venues. They argue that it is venues that ‘facilitate the construction of a collective emotive memory’ (Chow and de Kloet 2008, p. 55). In particular, they identify one venue, the Hong Kong Coliseum, as central in the collective memory of Cantopop, labelling it ‘an important producer of Hong Kong culture and Hong Kong identity’ (Chow and de Kloet 2008, p. 59). They argue that the heritage of Cantopop continues to exist, tied to the specific spaces such as this venue. They contend, ‘music venues, the material, stable embodiment of sight and sound, operate as emotive landmarks that help to invest memory with emotion and therefore identity’ (Chow and de Kloet 2008, p. 61). Creating sites where popular music heritage can exist is highly significant, and a topic which has been addressed at length elsewhere (Cohen *et al.* 2015, Mazierska 2015). What is of particular interest with regards Cantopop is that a musical genre with persistent contemporary adherents was consciously presented as heritage, for instance in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum’s exhibition from 2008 *Riding a Melodic Tide – The Development of Cantopop in Hong Kong*. By framing Cantopop as heritage, with its close ties with Hong Kong identity, this was also an attempt to erase aspects of culture that define Hong Kong as a city ‘in-between’, or apart from mainland China: ‘It seems as if Hong Kong is haunted by the spirit of disappearance, as if the return to the “motherland” could only result in its erasure’ (Chow and de Kloet 2008, p. 53).

Conclusion

The intersection of local and global music traditions and cultural concerns in sites of heritage as presented here have multiple readings, interactions and implications. Heritage and popular music may appear to be uneasy bedfellows. Yet, the shifts occurring within heritage discourse toward interpretation of the subjective experience of the human being inevitably entails consideration of music as an important aspect of meaning-making and symbolic ordering. Whose heritage is displayed, and the agency gained for performers, listeners, producers and other participants in music subcultures is crucial in assessing the benefits and drawbacks of these interactions. In presenting different aspects of heritage discourse alongside an examination of its application of global popular music heritage, my aim has been to start to map out a terrain for the engagement of heritage with popular music, and to argue for a more dialectical relationship between meaning-making and heritage presentation,

where audiences participate in the construction of heritage to as much a degree as those who act as its gatekeepers. Academic engagement with this topic continues to grow, and it is vital that alternative visions of music's heritage emerge out of such work. Heritage is a process which happens now, in the everyday – and as such it is our responsibility to articulate the heritage qualities of popular music we wish it to represent.

Notes

[1] For an example video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMnk7lh9M3o

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