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Music, memory and memoir

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Music, Memory and Memoir, edited by Robert Edgar, Fraser Mann and Helen Pleasance. New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2019. 244 pp. ISBN 978-1-5013-4064-2

The publication of *Music, Memory and Memoir* has been galvanised by the plethora of music memoirs that have materialized on our bookshelves over the last decade. Indeed, with music itself appearing to be increasingly devalued in the post-digital environment, such texts have assumed a renewed significance within the burgeoning music heritage marketplace, where, in many cases, they have been promoted, and readily consumed, along the same lines as a major release by the artist-as-author, befitting the issue of a prestigious career-defining album.

Of course, such memoirs rely on the provision of stories as a locus for engagement. As Katja Lee (2016) reminds us, despite a myriad of storytelling techniques which are normally utilised across countless music memoirs, their very essence requires the artist to present, in a compelling and intimate manner, a performance persona continuum in order to sustain enduring fandom, and to renew interest in their career, within which they can reconstruct their identity and shape cultural memory.

As well as presaging an exciting new research area for Popular Music Studies that embraces a host of compelling interdisciplinary characteristics, perhaps the main strength of *Music, Memory and Memoir* is that it skilfully fuses the several storytelling perspectives that emerge within the featured memoirs, and thereafter facilitates incisive analysis within a fluid critical framework that interconnects the relationships between fandom, music experiences, nostalgia, cultural memory and music identity.

Edited by Robert Edgar, Fraser Mann and Helen Pleasance, the collection is presented in two parts, which embrace critical and creative practice. The first part ('Readings'), consists of contributions by Popular Music academics, who, as still-connected aca-fans in most instances, serve to critically re-engage with the memories of their music experiences, and the affective links that manifest within the selected memoirs.

The second part ('Recollections'), includes contributions made by an array of music industries personnel who have now been afforded the opportunity to reconsider and retextualise their earlier memories as fans or artists. Across both sections, the conflict articulated between past music experiences and modern memory proves to be both invigorating and instructive. Indeed, the collection possesses a diverse range of voices, accents, genres, spaces, timeframes and places, where memories and myths coalesce to create new complexities, and which obligates the critical unravelling that manifests within its nineteen chapters.

One of the most illuminating chapters by Robert Edgar considers how the now almost obligatory band reformations are a progression that has problematised our existing memories of the artists concerned. Edgar relates that what was once a 'final' break up, is now effectively a 'hiatus'; an inevitable gap that precedes the readily accepted reformation, and which ultimately provides a continuum in its wake. As the author capably highlights, this process can enable the misalignment of memories in relation to our level of engagement with the 'then and now' timeframes that the artist now inhabits, albeit their longevity can serve to authenticate the now-elevated earlier reminiscences of the music fan.

In another chapter, the intertextuality prominent within David Bowie's late career flourish is explored by Kevin Holm-Hudson. Openly borrowing from a myriad of cultural texts may have formed basis of the artist's *raison d'être* from the outset of his career in the mid-1960s, but, as Holm-Hudson notes, Bowie's take on intertextuality assumed a more reflexive stance in his last stage of his

career, where he increasingly drew upon his own work, reviving and recontextualizing memories of previous characters, associates, places, music and songs. Whilst some of the featured examples will be familiar, Holm-Hudson skilfully creates a critical pathway through numerous intertextual cues, which ultimately allowed the artist's knowing audience to gain access to Bowie's scrapbook of memories.

Nicola Spelman's chapter focuses on Bruce Springsteen's performance of memory in recorded and live contexts, more notably within the between song monologues which, to many of the artist's fans, are just as meaningful as the songs that follow. With the analysis being complemented by the reminiscences that circulate within Springsteen's autobiography and, more patently, in the fairly recent *Springsteen on Broadway* venture, the artist's emphasis on the re-enactment of poignant memories can, suggests Spelman, be regarded as both a template and a conduit, which both enable compelling experiences for his audience.

In the 'Recollections' section, ex-members of the successful Britpop band Jon Stewart (now an accomplished music academic) and Louise Wener (now an acclaimed author), reconsider Wener's memoir on her time in Sleeper. The memoir, which highlights the futility and frustration associated with the fleeting nature of fame, served to demystify the strived-for-stardom that stimulates many artists at the outset of their careers. In this case, Werner reflects in the distance of time that her memoir represents an accurate portrayal of the reality of being in a band who experience some form of success. Demystification also features prominently within Tom Hingley's chapter, which concentrates on the incremental process involved in writing his memoir on his time with the Inspiral Carpets.

Bill Drummond's contribution on the passing of Pete Burns (Dead or Alive) in 2016 proves to be the most affective chapter overall. Initially Burns' death triggers little emotion in Drummond, but the appearance of a long-forgotten photograph that featured both artists generates numerous memories, which eventually leads him to reassess the cultural significance of the late singer.

If anything, the publication of *Music, Memory and Memoir* focuses attention on a much-neglected area of Popular Music Studies. Furthermore, the collection quite ably underlines why our music experiences shape our identities, which is a process that is both accentuated and problematized by music memoirs, thus necessitating the incisive analysis that emerges here.

Reference

Lee, K. (2016) 'The Intimate Publics of Popular Music Memoirs: Strategies of Feeling in Celebrity Self-representation.' In: Marshall, P.D., D'Cruz, G., McDonald, S. and Lee, J. (eds.) *Contemporary Publics: Shifting Boundaries in New Media, Technology and Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 267-281.

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