

Introduction to 'Music and Television' special issue

Television has been conspicuously neglected in studies of popular music, and music has been notably absent from most accounts of television. The thought that this neglect might be significant was taken as the starting point for this special edition of the journal. Unlike some subjects (such as popular music and gender/sexuality, for example), where it is readily apparent that a number of people are busily pursuing research and where there is a history of sustained engagement in a range of related theories and debates, it was not clear initially who, if anyone, was seriously thinking about or researching the relationship between music and television. Even work on popular music and video, which once grabbed the imagination of popular music and media scholars, has faded from the academic agenda. We hoped that the call for papers might strike a chord and prompt new thoughts about this area.

We were aware that broaching the topic of music and television would inevitably require scholars of music to address themselves to questions about televisual form and scholars of television to write about music. Although this might have been a source of apprehension, we were gratified by the number of submissions and we encouraged writers to speculate and to push at the boundaries of current debates. The result is a range of exploratory and innovative pieces, which together constitute an edition of the journal that makes a significant contribution not only to the study of popular music, but also to the study of television and media in general.

In this brief introduction we want to highlight some of the key themes which arise from the articles, often implicitly, sometimes tangentially. We also want to identify further questions which follow from those addressed here. This introduction is not an attempt to map the contours of this sub-field of study, nor to set a definitive agenda. Whilst we will refer to individual articles, our intention is not to present the type of condensed summary which begins edited book collections. Instead, this introduction should be read as a modest attempt to open up some issues for further debate and critical reflection.

A key theme is that television is a significant mediator of knowledge, understanding and experience of music. It has been particularly important to the circulation of certain genres since the 1950s, notably facilitating the widespread appreciation of big band jazz, the solo singer, r'n'b, rock and soul. But while this truth is generally acknowledged, and has been the subject of some detailed study, the focus has usually been on the emergence of Elvis Presley in the mid-1950s. Murray Forman's article argues for a wider time frame in understanding the relationship between music and television, taking us back to the 1940s and a period of uncertainty and experimentation as musical performance met the new modes of televisual representation. Besides establishing musical genres, television has had a direct effect on the musical experience of vast numbers of people – teenagers and children in particular who are more likely to be moved by seeing musical performances on

television than through attending a concert or club (whether Jimi Hendrix on *The Lulu Show* in 1968 or *Pop Idol* in 2002). If music has been important in addressing children and teenagers, so it has also been significant in addressing their parents within the context of the domestic family environment in which most television reception is still embedded. Television's domestic role is vividly captured in Karen Lury's article on the way television mediates children's earliest experience of music. Thus, a focus on television is important for understanding music within the dynamics of family life since the 1950s. A more general point follows from this: television should be more than a footnote in popular music histories – particularly those which have taken the 1950s as their starting point.

In researching and writing these histories, it is evident, as Matthew Stahl also suggests, that we need to pay particular attention to the changing relationship between television and music as industries. Stahl explores this through a study of *The Monkees* and *Making the Band*. As can be seen from a number of the articles here, television was immediately significant for the music industry as a means of promoting existing artists, and it has continued to be an important site for the promotion of rock and electronic dance music – whether via a music show which seeks to emulate a concert or club, or in the way that music has been used as a theme tune or as a complement to the action in sports, drama or documentary. Michael Chanan's account of his own personal experience of making television programmes about music is revealing of the ways in which an institutional focus on the political economy of television can provide insights into the identity and representation of music.

A critical issue here concerns how television and music communicate in combination. In much of the writing within the field of media studies, television has often been approached in terms of a dualism between information and entertainment, which in turn rests on a naive distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction'. This apparent dichotomy has often been moralised in terms of assumptions that one is worthy, weighty and demands our attention, whilst the other is superfluous, trivial and makes no demands on us. Indeed, the study of popular music has for years had to battle against dismissals of the subject as associated with diversion, pleasure, distraction and the pursuit of fun. In contrast, television has usually been studied in a manner which privileges a very particular mode of communicating knowledge and makes very clear assumptions about how knowledge of the world is acquired. The emphasis has usually been on the linguistic – spoken/verbal discourse, the written word, the representational. Very little attention has been paid to how television conveys knowledge via non-representational/non-verbal forms of communication – gestures, movement, colour, dramatic use of body, and of course music. These can impart tangible embodied forms of understanding. John Corner's article is notable for highlighting both the endurance of anxieties about the use of music in documentary making, and also in pointing to the practical and theoretical importance of musical sound to the rhetoric and arguments posited by documentaries.

Such an approach to television begs intriguing methodological questions about how we research and understand the combination of sounds, words and images through which television represents the world. It would seem to require that the study of music on television entails more than merely importing the methods of film studies. As K.J. Donnelly points out, television's use of music, for a variety of commercial, technological and aesthetic reasons, is different to that of film. Not only do these differences need to be acknowledged, but they also suggest that we need

to rethink the study of film music in the light of television. Most studies of film music have tended to neglect the period since the 1960s, being mainly concerned with 'classic' Hollywood cinema. In addition, film is usually treated in terms of notions of diegesis/narrative. Yet, when it comes to television, many programmes are not straightforward self-contained narratives within which music can be situated. In addition, the use of music is frequently extra-diegetic. That is to say, music is not so much source (diegetic), background (non-diegetic), nor just mutually implicated in the narrative meaning of a scene. Instead, it refers to a series of meanings outside of the televisual context – music imports the meanings associated with popular songs into television. How this occurs (and its consequences) is another theme being explored throughout this edition. As Mark Brownrigg and Peter Meech show, music's ability to signal a complexity of social meanings can be heard in the very brief few seconds when it is utilised as a type of sonorial branding for television idents.

The relationship between music and television also raises questions about aesthetics. From the 1950s onwards, television has been integral to the aesthetics of rock and pop, genres that have featured in much theorising by popular music scholars. In highlighting the importance of television for shaping the performance codes of rock music, Simon Frith suggests that what seems less apparent is whether music has played a significant part in the aesthetics of television. Other authors imply that perhaps the impact of music on television is a more delayed process of influence. TV clearly shaped the mediation of rock, pop and soul throughout their histories. The important influence of television on musical practices and experience is explored in various ways in the articles which follow, with Forman and Frith taking us from the impact of television on dance bands in the 1940s to the way that the square screen framed and facilitated the emergence of rock styles in the 1960s and 1970s. Stahl points to the way in which television reconstructs a notion of 'authenticity' to fit the bands and performers it mediates, and, as others point out, musical notions of 'authenticity' are actively constructed through and in opposition to television conventions. The articles by Donnelly and by Brownrigg and Meech might suggest that the 'reverse' influence (of music upon television) has been felt more since the late 1980s, as electronic dance music has begun to define the aesthetic codes of television, informing the presentation of sports, idents, theme tunes, and 'stock music' in general. Lury speculates as to the way in which television impacts on the acquisition of our earliest musical values by teaching musical appreciation, providing children with an intriguing mental compilation of traditional nursery rhymes and pop hits. Corner suggests that music can be integral to television's role in educating and informing us as adults. Finally, on the question of the interplay between television and music aesthetics, Chanan makes explicit a further issue threading throughout these articles, that television has been an important populariser of 'classical' music. In reading his Middle Eight contribution, one of us was reminded of a comment Adorno made back in the 1940s (in his *Philosophy of Modern Music*) when he remarked that 'classical' had become a vague arbitrary category, uncritically heard as different to 'light music' but actually produced and consumed within the same industrial conditions.

Although the papers collected help advance our comprehension of the ways in which music and television relate, there is evidently more work to be done. One issue which is conspicuous by its near absence is that of music video. Music video has certainly had an impact upon the pop marketing process, but, over time, its

influence might arguably be less significant than the growth of televised music competitions (from the Eurovision Song Contest to the Grammys to the Smash Hits Awards, Brits and so on). In retrospect, with the hindsight that very few years seems to have given us, it could be argued that what we witnessed from the early 1980s was less a (postmodern) video revolution and more a short-term music video epoch which was of relevance to specific types of pop performer and audience in particular parts of the world. In terms of aesthetic form, despite early optimism, video has rarely been claimed as art, and is more or less accepted as a routine marketing device carrying less artistic flair than most adverts. Indeed, music in television advertising is a surprisingly under-researched area of study, one which has the potential to shed many insights into the consequences of how sound and image are combined. In a similar vein, there is clearly much more to be said about the uses of music in soap operas and other dramas, not just what is used and how, but in terms of the processes involved in the selection of the sounds and in terms of the imperatives which they have to meet. Film themes either sell a movie as a song (promotion) or address viewers in the darkened cinema. Television theme tunes, in contrast, must pull people to the small screen, away from other domestic activities – gardening, washing dishes, showering, etc. Finally, there is scope for further research into the way in which musical tastes and canons have been formed in relation to televised music, and how television has acted as a certain type of musical educator.

In highlighting the dynamic interplay of music and television, we hope this special issue goes some way to showing how music has played a part in organising our experience of television, whilst television has, in turn, played a key role in organising our experiences of a range of musical genres. While scholars from both subject areas will no doubt continue to explore their own distinct terrain, it is evident that there is much to be gained by continuing the dialogue between the two.

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