

Editorial

This issue of *Context* is devoted to popular music studies. I thank the *Context* committee for their generosity in inviting me to be the guest editor of this volume. In my article, I review some of the core concerns that have driven popular music studies in the past, and note the increasing calls for ethnographies of popular music cultures. I argue that other methods of research—including textual and ‘discursive’ analysis—can still make valuable contributions to popular music studies. Some of these contributions are exemplified in Melissa Campbell’s article, ‘Saying the Unsayable.’ Campbell argues that the meanings of popular music can often be traced to elements other than actual song lyrics or notes. To demonstrate this, she treats Michael Jackson’s non-verbal vocalisations as conveyors of meaning, highlighting links between the sounds and Jackson’s performance persona. Her approach also demonstrates that popular music is often inextricably bound up with issues of race, gender and sexuality. John Scannell’s article explores why James Brown’s work—despite being disparaged by his own band members—proved to be so influential in the broader realm of popular music. Using a theoretical framework derived from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, Scannell argues that it is in fact Brown’s musical ‘naivety’ that partly contributed to his innovations.

The next part of the journal consists of an artist profile by Tony Mitchell, a performer interview by Liz Giuffre and a research report by Sarah Baker. In his profile of MC Trey, Mitchell notes one of the accusations commonly levelled at Australian hip hop: that it is a pale imitation of ‘real’ (read: African-American) hip hop. He shows that this attitude is not only perpetuated by US-based critics such as Robert Christgau, but is also vociferously debated in the pages of the Australian street press. Liz Giuffre’s interview is with Sydney-based musician iOTA. Their discussion touches on many issues that affect Australian popular musicians: the difficulty of performing original songs in the face of high demand for covers bands; the lack of venues for live music; disputes with record companies; and the need to assert a unique performance persona in the face of inevitable comparisons with overseas artists. Adelaide-based researcher Sarah Baker discusses a research method that might be used to counter musicology’s preoccupation with static ‘texts.’ Her case for an ‘auto-audio ethnography’ describes a process where respondents (in this case, pre-teen girls) record aspects of their musical lives on tape, making them more active participants in the research process.

The issue concludes with reviews of four recent books on popular music and culture. The following three have an Australian focus: Shane Homan’s *The Mayor’s a Square: Live Music and Law and Order in Sydney*, John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell’s *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* and Ian Maxwell’s *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes*.

I would like to thank the *Context* editorial committee and all of our contributors for their patience in seeing this issue through to fruition. I would also like to thank all the anonymous readers whose suggestions have been invaluable. Lastly, a special mention should go to Tony Mitchell, who provided many helpful suggestions along the way.



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The continued publication of *Context* is made possible by a grant from the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne.