

NOT READY TO MAKE NICE POWER AND THREATS IN POPULAR MUSIC

Editorial

Popular music cultures always reflect current social developments and debates, sometimes they even form a burning glass under which processes and products become more visible. In the context of the #metoo debates in the film industry, it quickly became clear that, unfortunately, various misconducts and institutional cover-up processes take place regularly in the music and entertainment industry as well as at educational institutions. In 2021, this was most recently highlighted again e. g. with R. Kelly being found guilty on counts of sexual exploitation of a child, bribery, racketeering, and sex trafficking (Deutschlandfunk 2021, Rolling Stone 2021). In Germany, the #deutschrapmetoo debate (NDR Kultur 2021) and the #punktoo movement have gathered pace in 2021.

These issues have arguably existed for decades within the education of prospective musicians and artists worldwide (!) (Hoffmann 2006, Lazar 2017, Payne et al. 2018, Knobbe/Möller 2018, Kerst 2019, Bartsch et al. 2019). What is new is that musicians and other industry actors now not only dare to speak up, challenge, show solidarity, and increasingly bring accusations against assaults to the public, but that they are also being heard and taken seriously, at least in some contexts. As Zysik's article demonstrates, artists challenge the pressure within the K-Pop industry. At the core of threats and assaults in this music scene is the exploitation of power and its preservation (Bull 2019).

Active processes of (physical/sexual) threat often play just as an important role as does exclusion via censorship (e .g. who may make music where and when) or processes of hassling/cyberbullying. Reputation seems sometimes more important than morality and decency. But also more subtle and even non-reflected gestures such as body contact and the use of language (Josefson 2016) are significant.

These power relations and exclusion processes are not limited to the educational institutions but present in music practices in several spaces and contexts – both as a continuation of educational relations (e. g. professors on scholarship committees and in competition juries), but also in booking agencies, labels, live venues, music press as well as academic publications, and between actors and intermediaries of the music industry and state funding bodies. As Zaddach explores for artistic research and Proyer for music criticism, these incidents and processes include challenges to former research paradigms and musical hegemonies, too.

Finally, this also includes how artists deal with and process experienced threats as well as how they critique hegemonic power relations. This not only touches the different facets of power and how these power relations and ideas are reproduced and kept alive, but also the consequences this has for power abuse in music education as well as for the music industry itself, such as the numerous suicides within the K-Pop world have demonstrated.

Drawn from the GfPM-annual conference in 2020, the articles in this special edition of *SAMPLES* tackle some of these issues: they reflect on power relations and specific threat scenarios or experiences within popular music cultures, discuss strategies of resistance and (self-)empowerment, and explore current developments and (conceivable) alliances. The authors address different facets of power relations and forms of exclusion within popular music and jazz ranging from musicians and musical criticism over (sexual) misconduct and suicide to new research approaches in popular music studies.

Exploring jazz and rock criticism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Proyer charts a power struggle based on aesthetic value judgments. Here jazz critics attempted to discredit the (at the time) economically more successful rock music. Particularly, he focuses on the reception of the jazz-rock bands Nucleus and Soft Machine.

Applying an intersectional approach, Just explores different exclusion mechanisms within contemporary popular music which are related to neoliberal ideals and discourses around diversity. Using Beyoncé and Taylor Swift as two case studies, he argues how drawing on neoliberal ideals can be linked to social mobility. In some respects, their representation of diversity is an exclusionary one, especially considering class backgrounds and identity markers such as *gender*, *race*, and *sexuality*.

Challenging hegemonic structures (resorting to suicide as their final outcome), Zysik explores how K-Pop artists suffer from – but also resist – dominant discourses and how they battle the high pressure within the K-Pop industry.

Zaddach approaches the theory vs. practice discourse within academic research by suggesting how the (relatively) new field of artistic research can be applied to popular music. Tracing a lineage back to debates in popular music studies of the 1980s, Zaddach makes a case for how practice-based music research can enrich research on popular music.

Finally, Holzbecher and Alexi put the spotlight on abuse. They start by focusing on popular music and tracing recent interventions in the violation of (sexual) boundaries as well as networks for those affected with a focus on Germany. It has become increasingly clear that these boundaries have long been crossed not only within institutions such as those within higher music education (Johnston 2017) but just as often in wider areas of music culture and the music industry. They round off their article with recommendations on how to move forward and embed power-critical perspectives within didactics and beyond.

To end with the (former Dixie) Chicks: These articles show a range of actors who are *Not Ready to Back Down*. Researchers carry a responsibility to include their perspectives in analyses of power, threats, and harassments in the field of popular music (studies).

Michael Ahlers and David-Emil Wickström, October 2021

References

- Bartsch, Matthias / Knobbe, Martin / Möller, Jan-Philipp (2019). »#MeToo-Vorwürfe gegen Professoren in Hamburg und Düsseldorf – Seine Erwartungen – ›reden, trinken, vögeln‹.« In: *Spiegel Online*, 26 April 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/plus/metoo-vorwuerfe-gegen-professoren-in-hamburg-und-duesseldorf-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000163612070> (access: 19 October 2021).
- Bull, Anna (2019). *Class, Control, and Classical Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deutschlandfunk (2021). »Missbrauchs-Urteil gegen R. Kelly. Es ist eine Kultur des Schweigens«, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/missbrauchs-urteil-gegen-r-kelly-es-ist-eine-kultur-des.807.de.html?dram:article_id=503610 (access: 19 October 2021).
- Hoffmann, Freia (ed.) (2006). *Panische Gefühle – Sexuelle Übergriffe im Instrumentalunterricht*. Mainz: Schott.
- Johnston, Jennifer (2017). »Yes, Classical Music Has a Harassment Problem – and Now's the Time for Change.« In: *The Guardian*, 8 December 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/dec/08/jennifer-johnston-comment-classical-music-cult-of-the-maestro> (access: 19 October 2021).
- Josefson, Cecilia (2016). »Svart pedagogik.« In: *Fokus*, 27 May - 2 June 2016, pp. 31-33, <https://www.fokus.se/2016/05/svart-pedagogik/> (access: 19 October 2021).

- Kerst, Michael (2019). »Missbrauch an Düsseldorfer Kunstakademie und Musikhochschule?« In: *Westdeutsche Zeitung*, [https://www.wz.de/nrw/duesseldorf/kultur/missbrauch-an-kunstakademie-und-musikhochschule-
duesseldorf_aid-38471545](https://www.wz.de/nrw/duesseldorf/kultur/missbrauch-an-kunstakademie-und-musikhochschule-duesseldorf_aid-38471545) (access: 19 October 2021).
- Knobbe, Martin / Möller, Jan-Philipp (2018). »Sex im Präsidentenbüro.« In: *Spiegel Online* 20, [https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/sex-skandal-an-der-musikhochschule-
le-muenchen-a-1207253.html](https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/sex-skandal-an-der-musikhochschule-muenchen-a-1207253.html) (access: 19 October 2021).
- Lazar, Kay (2017). »Berklee let teachers quietly leave after alleged sex abuse, and pushed students for silence.« In: *The Boston Globe*, 8 November 2017, [https://
www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/11/08/berklee-college-lets-teachers-
quietly-leave-after-alleged-sexual-abuse-students-least-one-found-another-
teaching-job/yfCkCCmdJzkiEgrQK4cWM/story.html](https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/11/08/berklee-college-lets-teachers-quietly-leave-after-alleged-sexual-abuse-students-least-one-found-another-teaching-job/yfCkCCmdJzkiEgrQK4cWM/story.html) (access: 19 October 2021).
- NDR Kultur (2021). »#DeutschrappMeToo – Sexualisierte Gewalt in der Rap-Szene«, [https://www.ndr.de/kultur/musik/DeutschrappMeToo-Sexualisierte-Gewalt-in-
der-Rap-Szene,metooimrap100.html](https://www.ndr.de/kultur/musik/DeutschrappMeToo-Sexualisierte-Gewalt-in-der-Rap-Szene,metooimrap100.html) (access: 19 October 2021).
- Payne, Christine / Annetts, Deborah / Pohl, Naomi (eds.) (2018). *Dignity in study: a survey of higher education institutions*, [https://www.ism.org/images/images/
Equity-ISM-MU-Dignity-in-Study-report.pdf](https://www.ism.org/images/images/Equity-ISM-MU-Dignity-in-Study-report.pdf) (access: 19 October 2021).
- Rolling Stone (2021). »R. Kelly Found Guilty in Racketeering Sex Trafficking Trial«, [https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/r-kelly-trial-verdict-guilty-
1230777/](https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/r-kelly-trial-verdict-guilty-1230777/) (access: 19 October 2021).