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MUSIC EVENTS AND FESTIVALS
Identity and experience

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Introduction
Music has long been a significant component of rituals, festivals and other community events. Historians point out that music and dance were integral to religious ceremonies and political meetings in ancient Egypt, while the Pythian Games held in Delphi – a 6th-century precursor to the Olympic Games – included music performance as well as music and poetry competitions (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson 2015). What we might recognise as a music festival today is evident in the festivities associated with the troubadour guilds of 11th-century southern Europe (Frey 1994). The music festival as a format is particularly long lived; for example, for a little over 300 years, the Three Choirs Festival has rotated between the English cathedral cities of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester, making it one of the oldest continuing music festivals in Europe (Boden & Hedley 2017). Many contemporary music festival practices and programmes continue to maintain a focus on specific music genres, which some scholars argue was in response to the lack of live performance opportunities in society following the Second World War (Robertson, Yeoman, Smith, & McMahon-Beattie 2015). Even so, the music festival format remains an important live music strategy in the face of issues such as policy regulations in regard to noise, urban and regional development strategies, and the rapid increase in the development and democratisation of participation in the online world. Indeed, as numerous studies have demonstrated, the number of music festivals has grown exponentially (Getz & Page 2016), and with this the range, goals and formats of music festivals have increased (Gibson 2013). The prevalence and scope of music festivals means that the study of music festivals is more than an examination of musical genre and style. Scholars have sought to better understand the role these festivals play in such things as the formation of identity and community; inclusive and exclusionary practices of social formation; the maintenance of tradition, urban and rural regeneration and development; health and well-being; tourism; and the experiential economy (Ballantyne, Ballantyne, & Packer 2014; Gibson 2013; Laing & Mair 2015).

Music genres and identity
Most music festival research has focused on music genres as forms of representation that are linked to specific groups or communities (Connell & Gibson 2003; Quinn 2003). The music
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genres performed – the song lyrics, instrumentation, melodic structures or performance styles – are understood as constructions of identity that are associated with specific cultural groups or lifestyles (Curtis 2010; Gibson & Connell 2005; Goulding & Saren 2009). This approach aligns with studies of music that have, until recently, conceptualised music in terms of highly patterned and stable sound profiles that served to identify the social group from which the music originated (Lomax 1976). Critiques of this approach have pointed out that there is no simple relationship between music and meaning (DeNora 2000; Frith 1996). Rather, the interactions between musician, listener and the cultural context in which music is performed result in complex and varied sets of meanings that are not static, but shift in response to different situations. In this way, ideas about identity and belonging emerge through performance. The ways in which musical practices are perceived by performers and audience lead to the formation of particular alliances and the creation of a sense of group identity. The identity or identities of individuals and groups are actively constructed through the production and consumption of various musical practices and genres. The relationship, then, between music and identity is always ambiguous and contextualised, and therefore the arrangement of sounds into music does not result in a transparent and stable set of meanings (Martin 1995).

Many studies in sociology, anthropology and human geography have explored ways in which music festivals help to create and express ideas about the identity of a community through distinctive cultural artefacts and activities, in which music is presented in conjunction with dance, costume and food (Derrett 2003; Gibson & Connell 2005; Quinn 2003). Often such music festivals are a means to preserve traditions and group identity, particularly in spaces of contestation and transition (Brennan-Horley, Connell, & Gibson 2007; Costa 2002; Fortier 1999; Mair & Duffy 2015; Matheson 2005). The community festival provides a popular framework for such goals and is closely associated with the multicultural festival as this format can help contribute to processes that facilitate new forms of belonging, especially for migrant, diasporic and transnational groups (Duffy 2003; Keller 2007; Permezel & Duffy 2007; White 2015). Multicultural festivals are often promoted as sites for ongoing dialogues and negotiations within diverse communities, and music’s role is often that of a medium for such dialogue as well as providing an atmosphere in which social harmony and integration may be fostered (Duffy 2005; Lee, Arcodia & Lee 2012; Osterlund-Potzsch 2004; Permezel & Duffy 2007). However, such notions of belonging can also be problematic because of the sort of identities or social relations invoked (Cornish 2015; Jodie 2015), or because members of a community may feel excluded due to such things as ticket prices.

The significance of music in the festival format is that music can be viewed as processes or performances that act out, create and negotiate various forms of identity. Music is a conceptual and symbolic practice, and can be interpreted in idiosyncratic ways by individual listeners, but collective meaning is also attributed to musical sounds. In this way, music can be associated with places and particular images, emotions and meanings, as well as a way of shaping social action. Yet music can also be used to erect boundaries, thus serving to maintain distinctions between groups of people. As Erlmann (1996) suggests in relation to world music, there are border zone relations in which different styles and genres of music are performed that are zones of contestation and negotiation between different groups with different agendas. The official discourses of those groups controlling the festival operate to produce an official ‘imagined’ community (Anderson 1983), which the festival is then planned to address. Yet the transitory nature of the event – the brief encounters and exchanges occurring within the festival space – produces other ways of being, resulting in a performative set of identities that are constituted at the time of the festival and in that place. Such
processes produce different and often conflicting configurations of identity, place and music. Music festivals are therefore complex sites of identity formation and community building. Nonetheless community music festivals can facilitate a space for ongoing dialogue between differing groups and communities, each trying to negotiate some form of local identity that then has input into a framework of belonging (Permezel & Duffy 2007).

The focus on the relationship between music, performance and identity has also raised ideas about authenticity and authentic practices, in which music practice and performance are often linked to geographically distinct locations and communities (Carney 1997; Duffy 2005). Authenticity is a highly problematic concept because it often reproduces oversimplified categories about the relationships between music and community, and hides the ideological framings of tradition that condemns ‘change’ (Waitt & Duffy 2010). Nonetheless, there is some correlation between sound structures and social structures, because, as with language acquisition, we learn to recognise certain musical patterns or conventions as ‘correct’ (Attali 1992; Feld 1984). Even so, scholars continue to question what is meant by authenticity and the impact this may have on music festival participation (Kim & Jamal 2007; Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Morey, Griffin & Riley 2017). However, it is not musical practices alone that raise issues of authenticity. In the tourism literature there is a differentiation between an authenticity attributed to objects or events deemed ‘genuine’ (MacCannell 1976) such as attending particular performances or prototypical events such as Glastonbury, and events that feel more authentic to the individual because s/he perceives his or her participation as a means of (re)connecting to a sense of a ‘true’ self (Steiner & Reisinger 2006). This framing of the music festival has strong links to a conceptualisation of the festival as something outside of daily life and extraordinary, and where festival activities serve to help bind people together as a community (Durkheim 1912/1976).

Yet what constitutes authentic music festival practice does have some relationship to spatial scale. The emotional impact aroused while participating in these music festival events has become significant for those tourists seeking to experience some notion of an authentic ‘other’. In a highly competitive market, some festival destinations have sought to provide a unique experience through the use of music festivals, a particular feature of regional and non-metropolitan development strategies (Croes, Semrad, & Rivera 2016; Gibson 2013). In these festival settings, music can be deployed to create an ‘emotive narrative for tourists, as an expression of culture, a form of heritage, a signifier of place and a marker of moments’ (Lashua, Spracklen, & Long 2014, p. 4). Small music festivals may foster a sense of uniqueness and intimacy, yet major outdoor music festivals are nevertheless perceived as authentic sites of freedom, perhaps because of a nostalgia associated with the counterculture music festivals of the 1960s. Major music festivals also have links to Bakhtin’s (1984) notion of the carnivalesque, offering ‘temporary bounded spheres of ‘licensed transgression’ (Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Riley, Morey, & Szmigin 2016, p. 1) in which the usual constraints of the everyday can be abandoned, thus resonating with Turner’s (1984) notions of *communitas*.

Music festival experiences

**Liminality and communitas**

Music festivals offer important forms of participation that facilitate belonging and identification through representational and experiential processes. Engagement with music and its contribution to feelings of connectedness (as well as at times a sense of disconnection) during the festival event has been explored through the concepts of liminality and *communitas*. 

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Liminal events are most often understood as offering some contact with the sacred or divine, and hence facilitate the individual’s transformation into a full participant of the community or group, exemplified in anthropological literature by ceremonies of initiation (Lewis & Dowsey-Magog 1993; Turner 1984). In the anthropological literature, this liminal period is conceived as a time of possibility and transformation (Turner 1974). An important part of this process of sociality is the generation of strong, often spontaneous feelings of connectedness that arise out of involvement in the community event, producing what Turner (1984) calls *communitas*. While some argue that truly liminal events can only occur within small-scale, integrated or indigenous societies, there is empirical evidence arising in cognitive neuroscience of a ‘communicative musicality’ (Malloch & Trevarthen 2009; Trevarthen 2002) that helps facilitate new forms of social being (Benzon 2001). Examples of such new forms of social being can be found in contemporary performative events such as electronic dance music festivals, which are understood as deliberate responses to contemporary feelings of alienation and instability. Nor are they limited to small-scale participation. Indeed, many electronic dance music festivals have become platforms for associated art and lifestyle industries with audiences at some events attracting large-scale audiences in the thousands (St John 2015). As this body of research on music festivals suggests, even while transient, the generation of feelings of attachment is important to consolidating feelings of belonging to a specific community that continues beyond the event period.

The reference to liminality and *communitas* in the conceptualisation of the music festival as an event apart from the everyday is a common grounding for many studies on festivals. The festival is conceived as a liminal and temporary spatialised process in which participation can lead to an ‘enacting [of] lifestyles’ and experiments with identities that are often created through playing with notions of the authentic and the tribal/primitive other (Lavenda 1992; Melucci 1989; St John 1997). Moreover, many alternative music festivals become sites for a ‘pilgrimage to a location outside the parameters of the everyday where inspired travellers seek affirmation and wholeness, orchestrating the (re)production, the becoming, of self, identity, attitude, lifestyle’ (St John 1997, p. 173). Such music festivals are explicitly framed in terms of facilitating access to something sacred or fundamental within a community or group, and participation enables the creation of a sense of connectivity and belonging. Yet the affect and impact reaches beyond that of the immediate time and space of the event. In this framework, a sense of community comes into being within the festival event and then disperses, to be reformed and reactivated at the next festival. The generation of intense feelings of belonging can operate across different social structures, including class, ethnicity or gender, and serve to reaffirm group identity and belonging, and this sense of deep connection is significant to the maintenance of social structures (Costa 2002; Falassi 1987; Prorok 1998; St John 1997).

**Emotion, affect and the senses**

Research in a range of disciplines has started to think about the relationship between place and music more specifically in terms of music’s unique qualities. A focus on music can help us explore the emotional and intuitive aspects of our social life, qualities missing from the visual and rational modes of study (DeNora 2000; Duffy, Waitt, & Gibson 2007; Smith 1994; Wood & Smith 2004; Wood, Duffy, & Smith 2007). This approach to music and its emotional affects is significant to understandings of how the world works. Our emotional responses locate us within specific networks of human and non-human relations (Wood & Smith 2004). Music is significant to the ways in which individuals experience themselves and
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others, in part helping people to feel their subjectivity in certain contexts: for example, in terms of ethnicity, class or subcultural group. Music operates by tapping into our emotional and intuitive selves, and this provides a means through which to examine how the emotions influence social interactions (DeNora 2000; Juslin & Sloboda 2001). Simultaneously, space becomes shaped by how people respond to the embodied, emotional and fleshy experience of music (Waitt & Duffy 2010). The significance of music performance within the festival is because it arouses feeling:

[m]usic’s evocative qualities are used to add credence to the visual images, to convey excitement, tradition, continuity with the past, elegance or escape. Why music is powerful in this regard is in part simply because of its ability to elicit emotional responses from audiences – excitement, energy or melancholy.

(Gibson & Connell 2005, p. 72)

Emotional and bodily responses to sound, music and the presence of others can set up an ambiance in which music festival attendees are caught up by the thrill of an event in ways that bring individuals ‘into the groove together’ (Keil & Feld 1994, p. 167). Work in the social sciences in the past few decades has emphasised the significance of the senses and the body in instituting forms of sociality because of the ways in which sensory experience contributes to concepts of the self and culture and their interrelationship (Lowe 2012). The generation of strong, often spontaneous feelings of connectedness arising out of participants’ responses to the sensual (visual, oral, olfactory and haptic) elements of an event is a significant part of the process of sociality and producing communitas (Turner 1984).

However, musical engagement is not a benign process. Listening to and engaging with music can create an affective ambience that encourages an openness to others and belonging together (Fiumara 2006), or, conversely, individuals and groups may feel alienated and excluded. Music is significant to reinforcing hegemonic sociocultural views. It also has an important role in disrupting as well as creating forms of social cohesion (Duffy 2005). Thus, the sonic and visceral experiences of a music festival structure the social, spatial, cultural, economic as well as political relationships of everyday life (Attali 1992; DeNora 2000).

Rodaway (1994, p. 4) argues that we need to critically examine the role of the senses because such an approach contributes to ‘the fullness of a living world or everyday life as a multisensual and multidimensional situatedness in space an in relationship to places’. Visual and textual frameworks and methodologies have provided important insight into the representational processes and practices of music festivals, yet these approaches are less appropriate for capturing the aural characteristics of sound and music and their associations with the emotional, affective, sensual and visceral ways we engage at a music festival (Duffy, Waitt, Gorman-Murray, & Gibson 2011; Saldanha 2007; Waitt & Duffy 2010; Wood et al. 2007). Recent work in this area has utilised a variety of methods, including a focus on listening (Duffy & Waitt 2011; Waitt & Duffy 2010), the senses (Duffy & Mair forthcoming) and ethnography (Duffy 2005; Morton 2005). All of these have ‘the potential to reconfigure listeners’ relationships to place, to open up new modes of attention and movement, and in so doing to rework places’ (Gallagher 2015, p. 468).

Music festivals, economic development strategies and tourism

Florida’s (2002) creative industries framework can help conceptualise the role of music festivals – and festivals more broadly – in local economic development (Cudny 2014). Music
festivals are understood as part of a range of cultural activities that attract the so-called creative classes into economically depressed urban areas that then help initiate urban regeneration through a cultural economy (Gibson 2013). In addition, cultural industries have also given rise to what has been termed ‘experience societies’ (Schulze 1993) and the ‘experience economy’ (Freire-Gibb 2011), where, particularly in developed countries, surplus time and money allow for increased participation in leisure activities and heightened emotional experiences (Aikaterini, Seonjeong, Liang, & Lanlung 2014; Cudny 2014). Music festivals readily fit within this experiential framework (Aikaterini et al. 2014; Ballantyne et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2012; Morgan 2008). An enjoyable festival experience is not only desirable but a source of competitive advantage. According to Ballantyne et al. (2014) the music festival experience can provide a range of psychological benefits such as attendees developing or reflecting on their understanding of themselves and the cultivation of new expressions of self-identity. There are also social benefits, such as connecting with others who share similar or different beliefs, creating a sense of community, participating in social activities and engaging in intense and concentrated interaction (Ballantyne et al. 2014). While the location of music festivals has been an important component of development strategies in specific locations, the tourism industry has also started to consider the benefits arising from a focus on experience. For example, music festivals on cruise ships are increasingly significant in the calendar of cultural tourism experience (Cashman 2017). Typically devoted to a specific genre of music, modern cruise music festivals combine the luxury of a cruise with the ‘hedonistic, neo-tribal experience of a music festival’ (Cashman 2017, p. 249).

Conclusion
The boundaries between the music festival and its geographical and social context have also become increasingly the focus for understanding the influences and effects of a festival. A festival may spill beyond its temporal and spatial boundaries, a process called festivalisation (Cremornna 2007; Roche 2011). As Roche (2011) argues, festivalisation processes draw on collective understandings and practices of space, time and agency that are then deployed so as to shape communal notions of identity and belonging. Moreover, these events are interpelated into a community’s calendar of ‘memorable and narratable pasts, with the sociocultural rhythm of life in the present, and with anticipated futures’ (Roche 2011, pp. 127–128; see also Duffy et al. 2011). Festivals, rather than transcending the everyday, are now also examined for the ways they are intimately embedded within the public sphere as normative and at times transformative processes (Giorgi & Sassatelli 2011). Thus, music festivals are becoming increasingly important in developing economic and social development strategies.

References


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