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Sarah Baker, Catherine Strong, Lauren Istvandity, Zelmarie Cantillon

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Rosa Reitsamer
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GENDERED NARRATIVES OF POPULAR MUSIC HISTORY AND HERITAGE

Rosa Reitsamer

Introduction
Apart from ‘The top 5 greatest female rockers you’ve never heard of’, the popular genre of all-time-greatest lists, like most popular and academic histories, teach us that female musicians are significantly underrepresented in the discourses on popular music history and heritage. This chapter aims to shed light on these issues. The first part considers how the established rock music history and heritage projects came to exclude women. My analysis shows that white male music critics and rock historians deployed particular discourses for the formulation of a history of rock and specific criteria for attributing historical importance to performers which reinforced a definition of rock as a male art. I also show how the canon of ‘important’ recording artists is used as raw material by music and media industries for (re)producing and marketing male-dominated rock heritage projects. The second part addresses the discourse about ‘women in rock’ in music magazines and highlights how the museum sector has recently sought to redress the exclusion of women from popular music’s past with the display of exhibitions, which celebrate the achievements of female performers.

Finally, I examine the practices of history- and heritage-making deployed by feminist music archivists. I consider feminist online music archives as examples of ‘DIY institutions’ (Baker and Huber 2013) and show how these archives construct and continue to negotiate a popular music heritage that recognises feminist and queer music-making in the past and the present.

Constructing a history of rock music
The history of rock music as it was formulated by white male music critics and rock historians in the USA and UK in the late 1960s and 1970s has involved the celebration of certain performers as ‘great artists’ and the consecration of their songs and albums as ‘masterpieces’ (Regev 1994). As Regev (1994) notes, this practice of history-making is informed by the ‘ideology of the autonomous artist’ and it became the dominant standard by which other popular musical forms and musicians were evaluated. Stemming from Romanticism, the ‘ideology of the autonomous artist’ developed throughout the nineteenth century and significantly contributed to the establishment of the male artist as ‘genius’ and as the sole and privileged originator of the artistic work (e.g. Wolff 1993, DeNora 1995). As several feminist scholars have demonstrated, women were rarely accorded
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The status of ‘great artist’ in classical music and other fields of ‘high culture’ and subsequently they were marginalised and excluded from the canon of ‘great’ composers (Citron 1993).

The marginalisation of women has continued in the field of popular music production. Moreover, traditional ideologies of gender shape the working practices within the popular music industry and, like in business in general, men are predominant at the creative and execute levels of the music business (Negus 1992). As a result, female musicians have achieved limited commercial success not only in male-dominated styles like rock music (Kearney 2017), but in popular music genres in general (Whiteley 2000). Their careers tend to be shorter compared to male musicians since they obtain fewer industry resources (Bayton 1998) and their bodies and sexuality are foregrounded instead of their musical achievements (Davies 2001, Lieb 2013). Articulating the claim that rock is ‘art’ and ‘serious’ in music magazines, books on rock history, record encyclopaedias, record guides and so on, music critics and rock historians reproduced this marginalisation of women. For example, the list of ‘The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time’ published by *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2003 includes albums by 415 male artists, 38 female artists or all-female groups, and 47 mixed-gender groups mostly with female singers. Schmutz and Faupel’s (2010) analysis of the reviews of these 500 albums shows the gendered strategies deployed by critics to justify the inclusion of individual performers and groups in the canon. They found that historical importance is more often attributed to men by describing their albums as ‘art’ and ‘masterpieces’, as ‘pioneering’, ‘genius’, ‘inventive’ and ‘revolutionary’. The success of female performers is often attributed to the tutelage of male musicians or industry figures. Female musicians’ ability to express ‘authentic’ emotions in their songs is stressed to justify their inclusion in the canon. In so doing, critics downplay not only the agency of female artists by foregrounding their supposed dependency on others, usually on men, but also refer to traditional notions of femininity and masculinity to position women as subservient to male autonomy and creativity. The female solo musicians selected by the expert panel of nearly 300 professional musicians, managers, producers, critics, historians and prominent industry figures include, among other singers, Aretha Franklin, Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Lucinda Williams, Etta James, Madonna, Liz Phair and Mary J. Blige.

The process of list making was introduced by critics in the 1970s who constructed a canon of ‘great’ rock musicians by sifting the large number of past record releases ‘into a knowable and clearly identifiable collection’ (Leonard 2007b, p. 29). As Leonard (2007b) states, this process of sifting operates in stages. An end-of-the-year poll might include the biggest sellers and the most acclaimed musicians. A next sifting of musicians takes place for retrospectives of a decade, followed by all-time-greatest lists which were introduced by music magazines such as *Rolling Stone* in the early 2000s. Leonard (2007b, p. 29) argues that a poll that aims to review a large timespan ‘necessitates the omission of many artists who appeared in earlier polls . . . [and] only artists who achieved great commercial success or were well received by critics tend to appear’. The few women included in what became a relative stable canon of ‘great’ rock musicians (see Regev 1994, von Appen and Döhring 2006) usually forged their careers in periods which were designated by critics and historians in the 1970s and 1980s as ‘moments of “authentic” music-making’, namely ‘the sixties’ from 1964 to 1972 (e.g. Joni Mitchell, Carole King) and punk from 1976 to 1979 (e.g. Patti Smith, Chrissie Hynde). The ‘moment’ of rock’n’roll, which lasted from 1955 to around 1958, was generally perceived as a period without any ‘great’ female artists (Sanjek 1997, Keightley 2001). Many female performers in the 1950s and subsequent historical periods did not make a record and as a result were not considered ‘artists’ since recordings were seen as the primary source of evidence of music-making. Female rockabilly singers such as Barbara Pittman, Wanda Jackson or Janis Martin who recorded albums were belittled for their limited output (Sanjek 1997).
This taken-for-granted periodisation of rock music history in three historical periods up to the 1980s resulted in the erasure of many female and African-American artists from most of the written histories of rock and popular music. Keightley (2001) argues that in the years between the end of the rock’n’roll era, circa 1958, and 1964, the year when The Beatles and numerous other male British groups arrived in the USA, several girl groups (e.g. The Shirelles, The Ronettes), female solo singers (e.g. Brenda Lee, Connie Francis) and African-American rhythm and blues performers (e.g. Ruth Brown, Chubby Checker) forged successful careers with the creation of new sounds and an increasing presence in the charts. Many rock historians dismissed the music of these artists because they saw the years between Elvis Presley and the arrival of The Beatles in the USA as the period when rock’n’roll suffered a near-death experience. Rock’n’roll had lost its key male figures: Elvis Presley in the army, Chuck Berry in prison and Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens in a plane crash (Sanjek 1997, Keightley 2001). The bias towards male performers was based on a notion of rock as a revolutionary rupture with the past, ignoring the contributions of female and African-American artists in the movement from rock’n’roll to rock (Keightley 2001, p. 116), and led to the view that male, predominantly white British and American performers and groups introduced the next ‘moment of “authentic” music-making’.

The construction of male rock lineage thus rests not only on the forgetting of women’s contributions to early rock history, but also on the masculine understanding of ‘authentic’ music-making. As Regev (1994) suggests, ‘authentic’ music-making at this time was primarily associated, on the one hand, with the creation of electric sound, especially the distorted and loud sound of the electric guitar, that, in turn, was interpreted as the expression of rage, anger and negation, and on the other hand, with work in the recording studio, which was perceived ‘as an artistic endeavour’ (Regev 1994, p. 95). Bayton (2011) has shown how the arrival of the electric guitar in the 1960s contributed significantly to the rise of the white male rock group. Women didn’t pick up the electric guitar because the instrument itself and the technical skills involved, as well as the guitar poses perfected by the earliest guitar ‘heroes’, quickly became coded as masculine. The majority of women thus remained singers and singer-songwriters, which tended to affirm ‘the unsuitability of any serious and lasting connections between woman and instrument, woman and technology’ (Green 1997, p. 29).

As Cohen (1991), Bayton (1998) and Leonard (2007b) have shown, the association between masculinity and technology shapes the gendered dynamics of rock culture, including the power relations in the male-dominated recording studios where ‘the practice of rock is reinforced as masculine’ (Leonard 2007b, p. 63). The association between masculinity and technology also informed the definition of ‘authentic’ music-making deployed by critics and rock historians for the evaluation of musicians and their works. The ‘greatness’ of musicians was primarily measured by their ability to create a distinctive sound with the electric guitar and other instruments and to use the studio as ‘a workplace for the careful and refined construction of the sonic package which is the song’ (Regev 1994, p. 95). Since, in the 1960s and 1970s, women seldom played the electric guitar, started bands or used the recording studio as their workplace, they were overlooked when it came to consecration in halls of fame. The status of ‘great artist’ was accorded to numerous male performers and rock groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s (e.g. The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, The Who, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix) and their albums comprise a major part of the canon of ‘authentic’ classic rock music. Von Appen and Döhring’s (2006) analysis of 38 lists of ‘The 100 greatest albums of all time’ type point to this fact as well as to the predominance of white male musicians from the USA and UK in general. They write:
The fact that nearly all musicians are white males from the USA (43 per cent) or Great Britain (52 per cent) is striking. Among the thirty ‘best’ albums, a ‘golden age’ of rock music can be identified. The period from 1965 to 1969 contains forty per cent of all albums [included in the lists].

(von Appen and Döhring 2006, p. 22)

In the late 1980s, when the music and media industries increasingly sought to target the tastes of ageing baby boomers, certain male rock musicians of the late 1960s and 1970s were further re-positioned by emerging discourses of ‘rock as heritage’ (Bennett 2009). This discourse was mediated mostly by members of the post-war generation who had, by this time, achieved influential positions in the music and media industries. The heritage trend aimed at a ‘collective reclassification of rock from the music of their youth to a fundamental aspect of late twentieth century cultural heritage’ (Bennett 2009, p. 478) and was manifested by the production of ‘heritage rock’ (Bennett 2009) projects such as record releases of live concerts by, for example, The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin or Queen; compilations of ‘authentic’ classic rock songs; documentaries on Woodstock and other key events of the late 1960s; retro-style rock bands citing the music of the 1960s and 1970s; and so on. These projects adhere to the ‘dominant canonical reading of rock mastery and achievement’ (Bennett 2009, p. 475) and reinforce the definition of rock as a male art and masculine terrain on which female trespass is strictly controlled.

The discourse about ‘women in rock’

Grouping female performers together under the label ‘women in rock’ was another strategy of excluding the work of female performers from the canon. This strategy was introduced around the same time as the visibility and importance of female performers increased with advent of punk, and it was reinforced in the early 1990s as several female-centred grunge and punk rock bands (e.g. Hole, L7, Babes in Toyland, The Breeders) were signed by major labels, and Riot Grrrl, a collective of feminist/queer punk bands (e.g. Bikini Kill, Sleater-Kinney, Team Dresch), fanzine writers, concert organisers and independent record label owners, emerged in Olympia, Washington, USA. As several feminist scholars have observed, the beginning of the 1990s saw an explosion of articles in music magazines that heralded female grunge musicians and Riot Grrrl bands as the ‘new wave’ of ‘women in rock’. These articles heightened the visibility of female rock artists, but, as Kearney (1997) points out, the ‘women in rock’ label is used to defuse the threat that these women pose to rock’s masculinity. By depicting female rock performers as a perpetual novelty, the contributions made by women musicians to the history of rock music were ignored and have remained as ‘fads and fashions’ (Leonard 2007b, p. 35, Davies 2001). Strong (2011) has examined how grunge musicians are remembered by Australian grunge fans in the early 2000s. Apart from Courtney Love, all the female grunge performers have been either forgotten or relabelled as ‘Riot Grrrl’. She argues that this relabelling was a way ‘to allow the threat being posed to patriarchal relations to be compartmentalized and contained, while the “grunge” label is reinscribed as a form of “masculine” rock’ (Strong 2011, p. 400). Strong’s study demonstrates how the marginalisation and exclusion of women from rock music history and heritage projects, legitimised and marketed by the music and media industries, significantly shapes the memories of popular music audiences.

Recently the museum sector has sought to redress the absence of women from rock’s established narratives with the display of group exhibitions entitled ‘Women Who Rock: Vision,
Passion Power’ (2011, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, USA) and ‘Women of The Blues: A Coast to Coast Collection’ (2017, National Blues Museum in St. Louis, USA) as well as solo shows featuring the work of specific female performers (e.g. ‘Björk Digital’, displayed at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Spain, in 2017). Despite the different focus on female performers, musical genres, material objects and countries, these exhibitions share a ‘reforming approach’ (Deepwell 2006) which was introduced by feminist art-historical exhibitions in the mid-1960s as part of the emerging feminist art history and criticism. This curatorial approach aimed to insert women into the standard narrative of art history and to correct the male bias that has contributed to the scarce presence of female artists in most major museum collections, amounting to 10–20 per cent (Deepwell 2006, pp. 67–69).

A similar percentage of women can be noted for the list of inductees of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, whose Foundation annually induces a number of artists who ‘have had a significant impact on the development, evolution and preservation of rock & roll’ (Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum 2017). In 2017, only 43 (13.5 per cent) of the 317 inductees are women or groups that include female performers, among them ABBA, Heart, Etta James, Joni Mitchell, Madonna and The Supremes. The Rock Hall’s list of inductees thus has ‘similarity with the canonic lists of “significant” artists found in popular music encyclopaedias and guides’ (Leonard 2007a, p. 154), and in keeping with the criteria for inducting artists, the museum has displayed exhibitions which celebrate the work of canonic artists such as Elvis, John Lennon, U2, Mary Wilson, Roy Orbison and John Mellencamp.

For the ‘Women Who Rock’ exhibition, which was shown at the Rock Hall in 2011, the curators adopted the ‘canonic model’ (Leonard 2007a) deployed for the induction of artists and the curation of exhibitions and selected about 60 female recording artists from the 1920s to present day who were ‘the firsts, the best, and the celebrated and sometimes lesser-known women whose artistry advanced the progress of rock-and-roll music’, according to the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) website (National Museum of Women in the Arts n.d.). The exhibition, which was also shown at the NMWA in Washington DC, and at the Experience Music Project in Seattle, aimed at the construction of a canon of ‘great’ female artists. However, many performers were presented only by their stage outfits. By focusing on fashion and clothing, the exhibition tended to suggest that the female artists earned their status more by the degree of glitz and showmanship in their stage persona and less by their artistic achievements.

As Leonard (2007a, p. 156) has observed, popular music exhibitions often privilege ‘the spectacular, canonic or “aesthetically worthy”’ and tend to replicate mystifying aspects of popular music in order to create the widest possible appeal to museum audiences. King (2006, p. 237) argues that the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, MS, USA, draws on the popular ‘blues myths’ of ‘purity, simplicity, and primitiveness’ that appeal to tourists in search of an ‘authentic’ blues experience. As part of a ‘new blues tourism’ (King 2006), the exhibition ‘Women Of The Blues’, shown at American blues festivals, museums and galleries in 2016 and 2017, attempted to attract younger audiences by featuring photographs of more than 60 female blues performers of different generations, including Ella Jenkins, Koko Taylor and Anne Harris, as well as paintings of the ‘blues foremothers’ Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. The overwhelming majority of the photographs were of stage performances and, as a result, the exhibition missed an opportunity to explore the diversity of activities (e.g. song-writing, composing) and environments (e.g. recording studios) not only of female blues singers, but also of instrumentalists and all-female groups.

Exhibitions which celebrate the achievements of female musicians can be understood as strategic incursions into the male-dominated narratives of popular music’s past and present. By grouping women together under the labels ‘women who rock’ or ‘women of the blues’, they tend to reify essentialist concepts of identity and femininity and risk overlooking the oral
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histories of female artists which show that ‘women musicians do not tend to construct separate “women’s jazz” histories when they talk about their careers, nor do they simply “add themselves in” to dominant historical frameworks’ (Tucker 1999, p. 68; see also Leonard 2010). As the following section illustrates, feminist music archivists often conduct interviews with musicians and other (sub-)cultural producers involved in local music scenes to document and tell the oral histories of women’s, feminist and queer music-making.

Feminist music heritage formations

Since the early 2000s, several music archives have been established by individuals and collectives who have made use of the possibilities afforded by the internet in order to document and preserve women’s, feminist and queer music-making in the past and present and to disseminate alternative popular music histories. These archives are examples of ‘DIY institutions’ (Baker and Huber 2013) since they were founded by enthusiasts, are run largely by volunteers and exist outside the frame of national institutions and the mainstream music and media industries. As such, do-it-yourself feminist music archives are part of ‘a globally connected informal network of activity oriented towards a re-writing of contemporary popular music history’ (Bennett 2009, p. 483) and illustrate the various ways a feminist ‘DIY popular music heritage’ (Roberts and Cohen 2014) is produced, enacted and negotiated. In the context of recent scholarship on popular music and heritage, the term do-it-yourself has become accepted in the analysis of localised and vernacular music heritage formations which are characterised by self-organisation and self-empowerment, and rest on personal initiative and small collectives positioning themselves against dominant ideologies. Research on DIY feminist music archives (e.g. Eichhorn 2013, Withers 2014, Reitsamer 2015, Cantillon et al. 2017) thus contributes both to the increasing number of studies on popular music heritage formations (e.g. Cohen et al. 2015) and to the archival turn in popular music studies.

As Cantillon et al. (2017) suggest, the functions, practices and motives of feminist music archives are closely aligned with the values, norms and ideologies of feminist, lesbian and queer communities and DIY methods of feminist media production. Feminist music archivists reject the ‘ideology of the autonomous artist’ and the strategies of consecration exhibited by the male-dominated rock music history. They aim at inclusive collections of material by including, aside from records, as many different types of artefacts as possible, such as interviews, music, lyrics, videos, fanzines, posters, photos, letters and other ephemera. This archival practice reflects the feeling that ephemera ‘tell us something about the conditions of women’s everyday lives in particular era’ (Eichhorn 2013, p. 98). In this respect, feminist music archives differ not only from the established male-dominated heritage projects marketed by the music and media industries and popular music exhibitions framing specific female musicians as art ‘genius’, but also from the ‘DIY preservationism’ (Bennett 2009) of ageing male fans of popular music genres who have initiated alternative rock heritage projects such as record (re-)releases with material of lost and forgotten (male) musicians. By contrast, feminist archivists have developed participatory and collaborative practices of history- and heritage-making that give voice to the musicians and artists represented in the archival collections and aim at creating a ‘useable past’ (Flinn 2011); that is to say, using popular music history and heritage to inspire and support feminist struggles, activism and solidarity in the present and future (Reitsamer 2015). Feminist archivists thus have little interest in commercial exploitation of the material, but share a common desire for autonomy, independence and self-determination (Cantillon et al. 2017). Their documentation of female, feminist and queer music-making often aligns with their wish to prevent their own local feminist music scene being forgotten.
The Women’s Liberation Music Archive (WLMA) documents the lost and forgotten history of feminist music-making and activism in the UK and Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s. The six women who have been volunteering for the WLMA since its launch in 2011 were themselves involved in the women’s movement and in music-making at that time (Reitsamer 2015). This personal involvement has become an important resource for the collection, providing the connection not only with musicians but also with other small-scale cultural producers. The WLMA collective also conducts interviews and publishes a weblog. The collection underlines the continuous process and the dynamics of history- and heritage making and sheds light on the local feminist music scene as it was lived and experienced by women of different classes, cultural backgrounds and sexual orientations in the 1970s and 1980s. As Withers (2014) notes, these women refused to cooperate with the male-dominated music industry for political reasons and often lacked the financial means to make a record which could be included in the officially recognised popular music histories and canons. An entry in the WLMA’s weblog on the band The Fabulous Dirt Sisters (1981–1989) highlights the practice of feminist music-making favoured by the female performers and groups:

The Fabulous Dirt Sisters were a collective, inspired by the feminist and left-wing politics of the 1970s. There was an urgency at this time ‘to do things differently’. This meant trying out different forms of decision making, organisation and, with the context of the Dirt Sisters, writing music as well. The music the bands created has a very unique sound, . . . a product of them trying new things (including learning their instruments as they went along), experimenting with song structure and rhythm. The absence of the electric/6-stringed guitars situates the tradition within an emerging culture of ‘women’s music’ that sprang from the women’s movement. This music self-consciously sought to create music which reflected women’s culture in sound as well as lyrical content.

(The Fabulous Dirt Sisters n.d.)

‘Women’s music’ had emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a direct reaction against the male dominance within the popular music industry (Bayton 1993, Taylor 2012). It refers to a non-masculinist, folk-influenced music by, for and about women, rejecting the techno-phallic power of the electric guitar in favour of foregrounding the voice and acoustic instruments. The organisation of workshops, concerts and festivals created the spaces for rehearsing, performing and consuming ‘women’s music’ and defined another key practice of feminist music-making. ‘Women’s music’ and the temporary take-over and re-definition of public venues by using them for concerts and festivals constituted a DIY lesbian feminist music heritage.

Eichhorn (2013, p. 27) states that a younger generation of women born since the late 1960s increasingly engages in establishing feminist archives to preserve their generation’s activism and cultural production and ‘to align this work with legacies of feminist activism and cultural production, while simultaneously placing these legacies in a new light’. Drawing on Foucault’s understanding of genealogy, Eichhorn suggests how archivists who established collections of Riot Grrrl fanzines at US university libraries engage in ‘genealogical politics’ (Eichhorn 2013). According to Eichhorn, this politics fosters a dialogue and alliances between different generations of feminists who are often labelled as protagonists of ‘Second Wave’ and ‘Third Wave’ feminism and are seen to be separated by political differences rather than linked by shared political interests and methods of feminist media production (see also Reitsamer 2015). The Grassroots-Feminism-Archive, founded by Elke Zobl in collaboration with Red Chidgey in 2008, gives insight into how the organisers of the feminist/queer music festival Ladyfest position...
themselves in relation to DIY lesbian feminist music heritage. As a continuation of Riot Grrrl, Ladyfest music festivals are non-profit, activist-oriented events staged in diverse cities around the globe since the first Ladyfest was organised in Olympia, Washington, in 2000 (e.g. Leonard 2007b, Aragon 2008, Zobl 2012). The Grassroots-Feminism-Archive features interviews with Ladyfest organisers in Western and Eastern Europe, but also in countries like Paraguay and Brazil, along with interviews with feminist media producers and a collection of posters, fanzines, flyers and other ephemera. The organisers of Ladyfest Vienna 2004 describe in the interview the diverse strategies deployed for taking over and re-defining (non-)commercial venues, for instance by ‘marking’ the venues with graffiti, tags and banners with slogans such as ‘feminist spaces/free zones now!’ In so doing, they position themselves as heirs of DIY lesbian feminist music heritage. However, the key reference points for these and other Ladyfest organisers, as becomes clear from reading the interviews, are not so much ‘women’s music’ and ‘women’s music’ festivals, but rather the feminist/queer activism of Riot Grrrl and US Riot Grrrl bands who replaced soft acoustic sounds with electric guitars. For Halberstam (2005, p. 180), these musicians as well as the Ladyfest events revive an earlier model of feminism for a younger generation of women, but they also promote ‘another tradition of women’s music – namely, the emphasis on white womanhood, or the exclusive focus within lesbian feminism on issues of gender and sexuality, and the disinterest in a politics of race and class’. While several of the interviews with Ladyfest organisers in Europe tend to support Halberstam’s arguments, certain organisers also address the racial exclusivity of Ladyfest music festivals, such as Elisa Gargiulo:

I really want that other girls are part of the organisation to make it less white and middle-class. But we have to learn and I think we have to understand that at least in Brazil Ladyfest has this Riot Grrrl essence and history and then Riot Grrrl is really white and middle-class.

(cited in Zobl 2012, n. p.)

Riot Grrrl and the subsequent Ladyfest music festivals were initiated by a younger generation of women interested in punk’s masculine rituals, but alienated by the local punk music scenes dominated primarily by white middle-class males. These women have challenged the definition of rock as a male practice and inspired a younger generation of grrrls to start bands, write fanzines and organise feminist music events, not only in the USA but in many countries around the globe. However, the perception of rock as white music remains. Rock became white in the first place, for instance, by privileging of white male rock musicians by the music industry and in the formulation of the established rock music history.

As the Ladyfest programmes that included in the Grassroots-Feminism-Archive show, many local organisers do not place their focus on feminist/queer rock music; rather they aim to create a feminist, queer and anti-racist space for all genders by organising a programme which includes diverse music and art forms as well as workshops, performances, exhibitions, ‘slut walks’ and ‘dyke marches’. These are the local spaces where DIY lesbian feminist music heritage is not only celebrated, but also challenged by a younger generation of women, feminists and queers. The genealogical politics exhibited by the entries in the Grassroots-Feminism-Archive illustrate both collective celebrations of DIY lesbian feminist music heritage and collective experiences of conflicts, trauma, shame and marginalisation experienced by feminists, lesbians and queers in different times and places. As Cantillon et al. (2017) note, feminist music archives can be deemed as ‘archives of feelings’ (Cvetkovich 2003) because of the archivists’ emotional investments with each other, the songs and the material objects they collected (Baker and Huber 2013). Moreover, as ‘safe spaces’ for queer communities and repositories for traumatic experiences,
love, celebration and pride, feminist music archives can trigger affective experiences in people exploring the digital collections. DIY lesbian feminist music heritage is therefore not characterised by the linear history exhibited by the dominant heritage projects which reproduce the canon of male ‘great’ artists and celebrate the exclusion of women from the rock music history, but rather by queer models of temporality and queer strategies of place-making which refer to ‘nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time’ (Halberstam 2005, p. 6).

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to illustrate how the narratives of popular music history and heritage can be understood as gendered. As we have seen, established rock music history and heritage projects are based on the elitist discourse about ‘rock as art’ which was promoted by white male members of the baby boomer generation who achieved influential positions in the music and media industries. This discourse, informed by the ‘ideology of the autonomous artist’ and the claim that rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s should be recognised as an integral part of late twentieth century cultural heritage, reproduced the exclusion of women from the canons of ‘high art’ fields and reinforced a definition of rock as male art. I have also shown that journalist articles and popular music exhibitions which employ the phrase ‘women in rock’ have heightened the contributions of female artists to popular music’s past and present, but as supplementary to established canons, and they have hardly questioned the ‘ideology of the autonomous artist’ and the emphasis on women’s looks, bodies and sexualities. Feminist music archives challenge the established canon of ‘great’ male rock artists with the dissemination of alternative popular music histories and the construction of DIY lesbian music heritage. Integral to the participatory and collaborative practices of history- and heritage-making deployed by feminist archivists is the rejection of traditional notions of authorship and ownership as they place value on accessibility and the inspiration and support of feminist/queer struggles in the field of popular music production. Feminist music archives thus promote a genealogical politics which has the potential to unpick the generational logic that underpins the idea of feminist ‘waves’.

References


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