

***Popular Music-Style and Identity: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Seventh International Conference on Popular Music.* By Will Straw et al., editors. (Montreal: The Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Associations, 1995. ISBN 0-7717-0459-3, pbk.)**

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Volume 23, Number 1, 2001

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087927ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087927ar>

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**Publisher(s)**

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

**ISSN**

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

**Cite this review**

Bodner, J. (2001). Review of [*Popular Music-Style and Identity: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Seventh International Conference on Popular Music*. By Will Straw et al., editors. (Montreal: The Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Associations, 1995. ISBN 0-7717-0459-3, pbk.)]. *Ethnologies*, 23(1), 319–322. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087927ar>

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

***Popular Music-Style and Identity: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Seventh International Conference on Popular Music.*** By Will Straw *et al.*, editors. (Montreal: The Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Associations, 1995. ISBN 0-7717-0459-3, pbk.)

With fifty-seven entries from IASPM's Stockton conference in 1993, *Popular Music-Style and Identity* is an eclectic and insightful document that captures contemporary popular music studies. This volume shares both the strengths and weakness of academic conferences: some papers are well thought out, while others are the barest survey of a topic. Generally speaking, there are two benefits to this type of collection to a folklorist or folksong/music scholar: first, as a survey of the main methodologies, theories and topics in the field of popular culture studies; second, as a kind of interlocutor by which our own discipline can be investigated. In his "recollections" of the Stockton conference, Simon Frith acknowledges the general shifts that have occurred in the study of popular music as a new generation of researchers have entered the field: "the long domination of IASPM (sociology division) by subcultural theory is over. The central concept now (a fruitfully muddled one) is scene." He goes on to explain that "scene" is a more complex notion than subculture, emphasizing such ideas as aesthetics, diachronic changes, place and genre (iii). Will Straw also takes some time to note the shifts that are occurring in the field: "Within the discipline itself... mini-revolutions are flaring up..." Straw notes that canons form and reform, basic texts are now suspect and he cryptically states, "creative figures previously enshrined for their ideological mastery re-emerge as clusters of libidinal or ideological impulses they cannot contain." Straw goes on to pronounce that "the most welcome developments... are those which embed musical practices within historical formations of taste, value and economic activity" (ii).

Many of Straw and Frith's observations are addressed, if only obliquely, in this collection. The structural economics of producing, marketing and distributing popular music are taken up by the political economist Marcus Breen in his analysis of the sale of the independent label Virgin to EMI. His discussion, while ahistoric, does provide a balance to the annoying propensity of post-structural cultural theorists who present *agency* and *resistance* as an

effective and equal force against the increasingly monopolistic entertainment industry. For those interested in questions of aesthetics, meaning and rhetoric, Kate Augestad's essay "Sensation and Seduction" is one of the most interesting in the collection. By questioning at what denotive level meaning is generated, Augestad treats the voice itself as a site of investigation. Thus she is self-consciously continuing Roland Barthes' project of *The Grain of the Voice* (1977) and opens up important methodologies and theories to investigate the rhetoric of voice.

Other writers in the collection investigate music scenes as an entry into larger sociopolitical investigations of power, aesthetics and consumption. Christopher Ballantine's study of South African Jazz combines Paul Claval's understanding of social relations as spatially encoded with a class analysis of black petit bourgeoisie to present an insightful glimpse into the use and function of music in pre- and post-Apartheid South Africa. The field of Popular Music studies has also generated some interesting studies of its own data-sets. An example of this is David Brackett's analysis of charting and the way that this apparently transparent text disguises narrative ideologies and material processes which are important if we are to understand areas like "crossover" hits. An extension of his project which may be of interest to folklorists is the effect (if any) of industry created charts for "folk music" and how this commercial strategy was secured through discursive means, its effect on the ideology of "folk", etc.

This collection also contains several ethnographic case studies which would interest those studying the intersection of popular and vernacular cultures and/or the use of popular culture in small group (folk) settings. Ute Bechdorf's audience centred study of music videos, while typical of this cottage industry, goes beyond the typical and argues for understanding the inseparable nature of seeing and listening in the consumption of video. The two gems of the collection are also ethnographies: Barbara Bradbury's study of the use of popular music by lesbians; and Sara Cohen's writings on the use of music and sound in the life of Jack, an eighty-eight year old British Jew. Cohen's writing is exciting because it suggests ways in which folklorists can investigate an informant's use of music in their lives outside of one folk music/song paradigm within which the music and the song are central and their biographies (where they existed at all) are of interest only as adjuncts to the collection process. While burdened with an unnecessary fascination with integrating her paper into the literary criticism debate over the death, birth, stillbirth and rebirth of the author (Foucault 1969; Kristeva 1980; Eco 1979), Bradbury's "Lesbians and Popular Music" overlaps with some of the central concerns that folklorists continually

face. Bradbury, and I believe many folklorists, are interested in investigating meaning as “negotiated in conversation, and in the relationship between conversation and text” (35). Her investigation of what I would call folk processes and popular culture extends to a brief, but useful, analysis of the use and function of queer audiences assigning lesbian identities to female performers in what Bradbury calls, “fantas[ies] of the performer’s identity” (36).

Within these investigations one might expect to find some discussion of the interactions of music as cultural text with other fields investigating similar terrain. Unfortunately theoretical models and discussion of methodology are either used mechanistically or exist as implications and/or omissions. Once again this is not the fault of either the writers or the editor but merely the end result of the conference paper format. One of the exceptions to this observation is Peter Narváez’s “Newfoundland Vernacular Song”. Narváez has long been interested in the intersections and methodologies implied by the labels, folk, vernacular, and popular culture (see 1986, 1996). As such, he uses his investigation of Newfoundland singing traditions to argue that the term “vernacular” has the advantage of being neither too restrictive (as in the case of folk song) nor too elastic (as in the monstrous popular song). He goes on to propose that “Vernacular... signifies song as a sector of aesthetic development and social practice” (215). Many readers of this journal will be well aware of the machinations concerning the name of our field, and while a book review is not the place to argue one side or the other, it is encouraging to find that in a volume as varied in its investigations, folklorists can make a contribution to exposing some of the underlying methodologies and theories under which we labour.

In summation, *Style and Identity* has several thoughtful and important pieces that rise above the format within which they were written. Unfortunately much of the publication suffers under the mediocrity of the conference paper and/or labours under serious length restrictions. This text remains an important reference work for libraries to acquire and for serious researchers in the field of popular music. Others may safely borrow a copy from one of the aforementioned places and spend an afternoon finding diamonds in the rough.

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***Ballads into Books: The Legacies of Francis James Child***. By Tom Cheesman and Sigrid Rieuwerts, editors. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997, pp. 283. ISBN 0-8204-3404-3, pbk.)

Each summer, The Ballad Commission, an arm of the *Société internationale d'ethnologie et de folklore*, sponsors an International Ballad Conference. The core matter of *Ballads into Books* consists of nineteen essays chosen from the 1996 meeting (which, held at Clyne Castle on the Swansea campus of the University of Wales, was one of the more enjoyable scholarly dos I've ever attended). Added is an extremely useful bibliography and discography by David Atkinson ("A Child Ballad Study Guide") and a list of ballad web sites (1997 model) made up by Tom Cheesman.

Five of the nineteen essays throw light on the British folk ballad data bank — that is, the corpus of texts ballad scholars continually (re)analyze and (re)interpret. Two treat the corpus as it existed before Francis James Child began his definitive work: Stephen Knight's "From Print to Script: Editing the Forrester's Manuscript" discusses a recently discovered c. 1675 compilation of