



The production and consumption of music in the digital age

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BOOK REVIEW

The production and consumption of music in the digital age, edited by Brian J. Hracs, Michael Seman and Tarek E. Virani, New York, Routledge, 2016, 278 pp., £90.00 (hardback edition), ISBN 9781138851658

From peer-to-peer file sharing and the proliferation of user-generated media to the rise of crowdsourcing and music streaming services, the Web and digital technologies have transformed how music is produced and consumed. *The production and consumption of music in the digital age* aims to take stock of some of these transformations and consider how they are shaping specific aspects of the production and consumption of music, ranging from the labour conditions of music industry workers to the rise of new kinds of tastemakers in the contemporary music marketplace. It presents 17 snapshots into the production and consumption of music as it unfolds in particular spaces and places and in relation to the practices and perspectives of a number of different actors, from major record labels to independent producers.

The editors structure this collection of essays to take us on a journey from the production of music to its consumption, with sections devoted to recording, working, playing, distributing and promotion, and consuming.

Beginning with recording, part II (chapters 2–3) provides two accounts of the opportunities and challenges faced by music production in the digital age. Watson's chapter explores the working conditions of freelance music producers, with a focus upon the opportunities and challenges faced by the extensification (e.g., the overlap into leisure time and the home) and intensification (e.g., more demanding and extreme working hours and commitments) of labour and how they relate to the flexibility and mobility of digital recording technologies. Meanwhile taking a more macro perspective, Arditi's chapter explores how the proliferation of digital audio workstations (DAWs) have disrupted the labour relations of the recording industry, such as contributing to the spatial reconfiguration of recording away from music industry clusters, such as London, Los Angeles and New York, to more banal, suburban spaces.

Part III (chapters 4–7) takes a comprehensive look at the working lives of several actors in the music marketplace, including independent musicians in Toronto (Hracs), indie hip-hop artists working in British and Dutch music scenes (Haijen; Speers), as well as record label employees in New York (Frenette). These four chapters are united by their shared interest in the precariousness of working conditions, with each case study exploring how precariousness is experienced in different contexts. For example, Frenette's chapter considers how workers become disenchanted with the allure of working in the music industry and identifies several reasons for this, including precariousness, a changing relationship to music, and 'aging out.'

Part IV (chapters 8–11) is focused upon the functions performed by music venues, music festivals and live performance in the digital age. Virani, and Johansson et al. elaborate on some of the strategies used by music venues to remain competitive and resilient. For example, Virani highlights how one London-based venue embeds itself into the local music scene by recording and archiving live performances, whilst developing collaborative relationships with trans-local scenes abroad. Meanwhile, Wynn and Dominguez, and Jansson and Nilsson focus upon music festivals and how they function as spaces for cultivating one's reputational and social capital and for seeking work opportunities and inspiration.

Part V (chapters 12–15) explores music distribution in the digital age. Bürkner examines the challenges faced by electronic dance music labels in developing sustainable revenue models in light of declining record sales. Brandellerro and Kloosterman, and Sonnichsen examine the strategies used by world music distributors in Paris and vinyl retailers in Los Angeles, respectively, in order to respond to the challenges of online distribution. On the one hand, some vinyl retailers have added value through the manipulation of the spatial dynamics of the physical store (see Sonnichsen), whilst some world music retailers have utilised the Web to extend the geographical reach of their distribution efforts and enhance their product offering through the creation of ‘digital packages’ (see Brandellerro and Kloosterman). Meanwhile, Pratt’s chapter explores how territorial intellectual property rights shape how ownership and distribution of music is understood in different places, thereby producing a ‘geography of copyright.’

As we end the journey from production to consumption, the final section (chapters 16–18) brings together three chapters which explore the promotion and consumption of music in the digital age. Arriagada explores how a group of music fans in Santiago’s indie music scene perform as ‘cultural intermediaries’ through the development of websites informing fans of the scene’s activities. Lange explores how the status of journalists and music critics as ‘tastemakers’ is contested with the rise of algorithmic music recommender systems. Finally, working through the case of crowdfunding, Leyshon et al. explore how the music industry has shifted toward an economy based upon the mobilisation of fans’ affect and emotional labour in the pursuit of economic capital.

One of the strengths of this edited collection is that it begins to examine some of the contemporary issues and trends in the music marketplace, such as the vinyl ‘resurgence,’ the crowdsourcing phenomenon and the use of algorithmic music recommendation by music streaming services, whilst continuing to develop our understanding of the long-term effects of the ‘MP3 crisis.’ A particular strength of this edited collection is its contribution to the literature on the working lives of music industry actors and cultural workers more broadly. This theme is discussed across a large number of the chapters, highlighting the relationships between the production and consumption of music to issues such as precariousness (see chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 18), the need for multi-skilling and diversification (see chapters 2, 4, 5, 8, 12, 9), and the importance of physical spaces for social networking and collaboration (see chapters 6, 9, 10, 11).

However, this edited collection could have given more attention to the topic of consumption and the experiences of music consumers in the digital age. With the exception of Arriagada’s ethnographic study of indie music fans in Santiago, Chile, the other chapters in the section dedicated to consumption comment upon broader phenomena, offering limited insight into the material practices of music consumers in the digital age.

In summary, the subject matter of this edited collection is broad in scope and it would be suitable for an academic audience interested in the relationships between digital technologies and the contemporary music marketplace. For readers with an interest in the working lives of music industry actors, this book would prove particularly insightful as this theme is explored widely. Overall, this edited collection is a useful resource for readers who would like to update their understanding of the issues facing the production and consumption of music in the digital age.

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