

Circa 2004

Introducing Music Scenes

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It is widely said that something over 80 percent of all the commercial music of the world is controlled by five multinational firms. It is good that this is not the whole story, because then music would deserve no more attention than do men's shoes or shower fixtures. Instead, music is an important way that millions of people find enjoyment, define who they are, and affirm group membership. While the music industry is global, most music is made and enjoyed in diverse situations divorced from these corporate worlds. The concept "music scene," originally used primarily in journalistic and everyday contexts, is increasingly used by academic researchers to designate the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others. We have commissioned the chapters in this book especially to illustrate the diversity of musical worlds currently being investigated using a scenes perspective. Each chapter focuses on a distinct aspect of scenes, from how individuals construct and negotiate scenes to the behind-the-scenes activities needed to sustain them. In the process, a number of different methods of analysis are illustrated. No chapter aims to be a complete description of a music scene; each highlights an aspect of scene life, and together they present something that approaches a complete view of scenes.

term “scene” was first widely used by journalists in the 1940s to characterize the marginal and bohemian ways of life of those associated with demimonde of jazz. In the years since, journalists have applied the term self to a wide range of other situations—“Venice West poetry scene,” “st Village beatnik scene,” “this year’s London theater scene,” “goth ne,” “punk scene,” “hip-hop scene,” and the like. This journalistic discourse not only has served to describe the music, dress, and deportment appropriate to a scene, but also has functioned as a cultural resource for fans particular musical genres, enabling them to forge collective expressions underground” or “alternative” identity and to identify their cultural inctiveness from the “mainstream.” Many scenes go unacknowledged he press, but as Thornton notes, the music press and associated niche lia can “baptize scenes and generate the self-consciousness required to ntain cultural distinctions” (1995, 151).

The contemporary tourist industry helps perpetuate some music scenes respond to the expectations of what Urry (1990) calls the “tourist gaze.” tis, tourists travel to particular regions or cities with a stock of expectations based on visual, print, and other media-generated information to riously experience their expectations about a scene. Music often figures rally in these efforts, as local promoters for the tourist industry exploit distinctive aspects of their city’s music scene. A notable example of this verpool in the United Kingdom, which, partly in an attempt to revive its l economy in the 1980s, created a number of tourist venues, including nteractive museum, an inner-city shopping mall, and a series of tours, ased around the lives and work of the Beatles. Artifacts associated with s Presley serve the thriving tourist industry of Memphis in the United es, and country music and jazz draw thousands of tourists to Nashville New Orleans, respectively. Writing in this volume, David Grazian ilicates how the global image of Chicago blues as an authentic musical ession of the black urban experience is maintained through a series of s clubs and bars, many of which, according to blues purists in the city, e been created purely to satisfy tourists’ desires for what they define as authentic” blues experience.

Scenes in Academic Research

Since the early 1990s, the concept of scene, first mentioned in academic discourse by Will Straw (1991), has increasingly been used as a model for academic research on the production, performance, and reception of popular music. Work in the scenes perspective focuses on situations where performers, support facilities, and fans come together to collectively create music for their own enjoyment. In many ways the organization of music scenes contrasts sharply with that of the multinational music industry, in which a relatively few people create music for mass markets. The scenes and industrial ways of making music of course depend on one another. The industry needs scenes to foster new forms of musical expression and to give its products the veneer of authenticity, while scenes take advantage of technology, from the CD to the Internet, created by the music industry.

What we and others call “scenes” have often been called “subcultures” (see Clarke 1990; Bennett 1999). We use the term “scene” here rather than “subculture” because the latter term presumes that a society has one commonly shared culture from which the subculture is deviant (Gelder and Thornton 1997). In addition, we avoid “subculture” because it presumes that all of a participant’s actions are governed by subcultural standards, while the scene perspective does not make this presumption. To be sure, a few at the core of the scene may live that life entirely, but, in keeping with a late-modern context in which identities are increasingly fluid and interchangeable (Chaney 1996), most participants regularly put on and take off the scene identity (Bennett 2000). Our formulation of the scene concept draws heavily on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) idea of “field” and Howard Becker’s (1982) idea of “art worlds,” which both make many of the same assumptions we do.

There are already a number of studies of particular music-making sites that exemplify important aspects of the scenes perspective, even though their authors may not employ the term “scenes.” Here we mention only a few to illustrate their range. In *Dissonant Identities*, Barry Shank (1994) looks at the various music scenes that have developed in Austin, Texas, from the cosmic cowboys of the mid-1970s to the alternative punks of the 1990s. He focuses on how the bands, clubs, critics, and university students of Austin generated a series of scenes over these twenty years. In “The Local Economy of Suburban Scenes,” Donna Gaines (1994) describes the ways in which kids stuck in the wasteland of suburban America spawn their own music scenes and subcults in an effort to invest their lives with new mean-

ng. Focusing on youth and music making in a single city, Sara Cohen's *Rock Culture in Liverpool* shows that the depressed socioeconomic conditions of Liverpool engendered in many young people the feeling that "you might as well pick up a guitar as take exams, since your chances of finding full-time occupation from either were just the same, being in a band was an accepted way of life and could provide a means of justifying one's existence" (1991, 3). Four chapters in Andy Bennett's *Popular Music and Youth Culture* (2000) are devoted to how music scenes that originally developed in quite different scales can be shaped to fit specific local sensibilities of quite a different sort. These include hip-hop in Newcastle, England, and Frankfurt, Germany, as well as Punjabi Bhangra and DJ-based dance music in Newcastle. In his discussion of the development of rap in a number of distinct places across the United States, Murray Forman (2002) shows how "place" moves from being a source of identity to being a merchandising tool for bands.

In a kaleidoscopic focus that ranges across the world from New York City to New Zealand, Tony Mitchell (1996) shows how local music is expressed, appropriated, and recombined to fashion local identities through music. In the 1990s, widely scattered music scenes devoted to extreme metal music existed in Brazil; San Francisco; Tampa, Florida; Stockholm; Chile; Malaysia; Norway; and Israel. Keith Harris (2000) calls the links that bind these "global," but here we will describe such networks of local music scenes as translocal. Finally, Marjorie Kibby (2000) describes how an Internet-based music scene devoted to a particular folk artist, John Prine, emerged and died within two years. Participants in Internet chat rooms were delighted to find other fans scattered across the world with whom they could exchange information and opinions online, as well as via phone and in person if they so chose. In the process, they were able to create what Kibby (2000, 93) calls a "virtual place of music community" and what we will call a "virtual music scene."

enes and the Culture Industries

enes are often regarded as informal assemblages, but scenes that flourish come imbedded in a music industry. Typically, as Ken Spring shows in a chapter on the making of a rave scene in Ruston, this form of "industry" contrasts sharply with the corporate form dominated by a handful of media conglomerates. In the established corporate model, large firms produce, market and distribute music, routinely referred to as "product," to an organized mass of individual "consumers" (see Peterson 1990; Negus 1999;

Bennett 2000). Quite a different sort of music industry typically develops where there are music scenes at its core. This scene-supporting industry is largely the domain of small collectives, fans turned entrepreneurs, and volunteer labor. This sort of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) industry is an important site for researching the dynamics of music scenes and the music they produce (Smith and Maughan 1997):¹

Much early research on the DIY industry focused on bands in Manchester in northwest England. During the early 1990s, research carried out by the Manchester Institute of Popular Culture (MIPC) on the local rave scene noted that illegal warehouse parties relied on informal networks of entrepreneurs who found and organized DJs and secured and transported the necessary sound and lighting equipment (see Redhead 1993; Hemment 1998). Further research by Smith and Maughan (1997) has demonstrated more fully the extent to which music production and performance at the local level has become an entrepreneurial activity. According to Smith and Maughan, the scale of such local music-making activities and various support networks is such that they constitute an alternative form of transnational music industry, coordinated by young people for whom such informal means of making a living are becoming an accepted norm as more conventional routes to vocational and economic success are increasingly blocked by unemployment and the casualization of labor. In his chapter in this volume, Tim Gosling shows how DIY band-driven record companies in the United States and the United Kingdom played a central role in the international spread of the anarcho-punk music scene.

The 1980s digital revolution and its impact upon the nature of the recording process facilitated the rapid development of this DIY music industry. Whereas high-quality recording facilities were once the sole property of extremely costly professional studios, digital and computer technology opened up new levels of access to the recording process. The creative potential of "amateur" musicians and producers has also been substantially enhanced by relatively cheap state-of-the-art technology (Ryan and Peterson 1994). Important in this respect is the digital program called Musical Instrument Digital Interface. It enables a musical instrument or sound to be electronically connected to a computer so that sounds can be manipulated and combined with an infinite number of *samples* of sounds made by other instruments or generated electronically. Thus, with relatively inexpensive equipment that can easily be set up and used in a bedroom or living room, it is possible to create a full band sound. "Studio quality" recording can now

be made inexpensively in any location and without the need for supporting technical staff (Negus 1992; Ryan and Peterson 1994).

Easy access to such cheap but high-quality recording equipment has democratized the recording process and has allowed songwriters, solo artists, groups, and nonperforming music samplers to record their music without the financial backing of record companies. Such grassroots musical activities have been matched by the growth of an informal infrastructure designed to give the music of home and bedroom recording artists exposure in the public sphere. Thus, as Smith and Maughan explain, in addition to music making itself, the informal music industry comprises a range of support services, including "record labels, distribution companies, specialist record shops, agencies, artwork etc." (1997, 21). While researching dance music in Newcastle, U.K., Bennett (2000) discovered an alternative dance-music scene in the city generated entirely by informal economic networks. These networks were comprised of young people who, tired of the restrictive club-licensing laws in the city, created their own scene around house parties and local DJs.

The rapid development of the Internet beginning in the mid-1990s has facilitated the democratization of music making, its distribution, and increased fan communication. It has also made possible music file sharing among musicians and fans around the world. Internet-based Web pages make it possible for any enterprising band to get the latest word out about upcoming appearances and to promote its latest self-produced recordings without having to sign with a major record company. As a result, a lively cenilike exchange among fans can flourish, as is shown in the chapters by Steve Lee and Richard Peterson and by Andy Bennett.

Types of Scenes

Each scene is unique. Nonetheless, it is useful to recognize in this scattered scene several distinct types that share a number of characteristics in common. Of course many classifications are possible, but for the sake of this discussion and for the organization of the chapters that follow, we define three general types of scenes. The first, local scene, corresponds most closely with the original notion of a scene as clustered around a specific geographic focus. The second, translocal scene, refers to widely scattered local scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive form of music and festivity. The third, virtual scene, is a newly emergent formation in which

people scattered across great physical spaces create the sense of scene via fanzines and, increasingly, through the Internet.

Local Scenes

Initial academic work on popular-music scenes considered the relationship between local music-making processes and the everyday life of specific communities, where the forms of music in question were seen as imbedded in long-standing local cultures. Cohen's (1991) research on the local music scene in the city of Liverpool, U.K., provides a highly insightful account of the ways in which local music-making practices correspond with issues of socioeconomic hardship, male camaraderie, creative desire, and spiritual escapism. Shank (1994) also focuses on a specific urban location in his study of the local music scene in Austin, Texas. Shank, however, refines Cohen's analysis of the relationship between music and locality through his consideration of the local as a space for multiple expressions of musical life, characterized by a series of coexisting scenes. He shows that while such scenes may conflict musically, visually, or both, each corresponds, albeit in different ways, with particularized local sensibilities of the city and the state. This is demonstrated by Shank through his examination of cowboy song and punk rock, musical styles which have very different historical and cultural associations with Austin, but which are linked through their offering of parallel, yet conflicting, discourses on Texan identity and local political attitudes.

Much recent work on local music scenes is less concerned with "organic" relationships between music and the cultural history of the locale than with the ways in which emergent scenes use music appropriated via global flows and networks to construct particular narratives of the local. Besides music, such narratives of emergent local identity incorporate aspects of other local cultural forms (Williams 1965), such as local dialect, dress, and history, as well as diverse forms of local knowledge, that are often used as strategies of resistance to local circumstances. For example, socioeconomic hardship, racism, sexism, personal identity, and the like, as these are experienced at a local level, are illustrated by Rob Drew in his chapter on karaoke in the United States and by Norman Urquía in his chapter on Salsa in London. In each case, music becomes part of a creative process whereby members of particular local scenes construct shared narratives of everyday life. As Harris observes: "Industrialisation and globalization have made available an increasingly large range of musical resources that

ave enabled a growing range of groups and individuals to use them in the construction of identity and location” (2000, 26).

A notable consequence of this approach to the study of scenes has been the equation of “scene” with “community.” This device has been frequently employed in journalistic accounts, notably in relation to punk (see Frith 1983), to suggest that there are locally situated pockets of grassroots musical creativity distinct from global mainstream music styles. Thus, as Strawson observes, while emergent musical styles in specific urban or rural locations may on the surface appear to constitute “moments of disengagement from the functioning of the international music industries,” in reality such styles are the result of an “interlocking of local tendencies and cyclical transformations within the international music industries” (1991, 396, 370).

Recent work on hip-hop culture offers examples of such uses of global music to construct particularized forms of local identity. Although early theorists suggested that hip-hop can be regarded as translocal culture, producing urban U.S. black culture around the world (see, e.g., Gilroy 1993; Spitzer 1994; Rose 1994), more empirically grounded studies of hip-hop have demonstrated highly particularized local rewritings of hip-hop that are used to engage with issues of race, identity, and place in various national and regional settings (see Mitchell 1996; Bennett 2000; Forman 2002).

To summarize, we view a local scene to be a focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific span of time in which artists of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical site, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using musical and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local scene. The focused activity we are interested in here, of course, centers on a particular style of music, but such music scenes characteristically involve other diverse style elements as well. These usually include a distinctive style of dance, a particular range of psychoactive drugs, style of dress, politics, and so on, like:

Translocal Scenes

Often the most self-conscious local music scenes that focus on a particular kind of music are in regular contact with similar local scenes in distant places. They interact with each other through the exchange of recordings, CDs, fans, and fanzines.² These we call translocal scenes because, while they are local, they are also connected with groups of kindred spirits many

miles away. (See Harris 2000 and, in this volume, Kristen Schilt, Paul Hodgkinson, and Tim Gosling on Riot Grrrls, goths, and anarco-punks, respectively, as seen in these terms.)

Kruse (1993) considers alternative rock of the 1980s what we here call a translocal scene. While face-to-face interaction may form one aspect of the scene-building process—for example, in clubs and other local urban spaces—Kruse argues that equally important are the translocal properties of the music and its associated stylistic innovations. These serve to produce affective communities that transcend the need for face-to-face interaction as a necessary requirement for scene membership. A further example of the power of such translocal processes in the building of scenes is evident in the evolution of contemporary dance-music culture, which, as Laing observes, is sustained as much by “the flow of affinities across national and continental borders” as through a sense of belonging to a particular club crowd (1997, 130).

Ironically, global media messages can be the catalysts for what become intensely local scenes. The Beatlemania of the mid-1960s is an excellent case in point. Within months, teens around the world became acquainted with the band’s sound, look, and deportment. At the same time, the teens reinterpreted the Beatles to fit the image and music of the band into their own cultural experience. Accordingly, a number of popular-music theorists reconsidered the relationship between the global and the local to recast the link between the localized innovations and the stream of globally available media products (Gebesmar and Smudtis 2001). Slobin, for example, uses the concept of transregionalism to illustrate how such innovations emerge simultaneously in disparate local scenes across the world. Thus, argues Slobin: “Transregional musics have a very high energy that spills across regional boundaries, perhaps even becoming global. This category of musics is increasing rapidly due to the mediascape, which at any moment can push a music forward so that a large number of audiences can make the choice of domesticating it” (1993, 19). The complex interplays among local and global musics are represented by the authors anthologized by Gebesmar and Smudtis (2001). The worldwide diffusion of hip-hop and its incorporation into a wide range of local scenes is an excellent case in point (see Mitchell 1996; Bjurström 1997; Condry 1999; Bennett 2000, 133–165).

The music festival is a special sort of translocal scene. While most such scenes involve the interconnection of several local scenes, festivals draw dispersed individuals together on designated occasions. “Festivals,” as we mean the term here, are large multiday events that periodically bring to-

gether scene devotees from far and wide in one place, where they can enjoy their kind of music and briefly live the lifestyle associated with it with little concern for the expectations of others. Events are most likely to take on the characteristics of a scene if festivals take place over a number of days in a risk-free environment, such as a rural area, so that participants have a chance to enact the ways of life idealized within the scene free of the usual supports of urban life and away from other people and from the agents of social control. The rock festivals of the late 1960s and early 1970s were the largest and most spectacular (Peterson 1973), but the practice of festivals goes back to the early eighteenth century, when religious congregations held massive singing revival conventions. Adherents of bluegrass and other roots musics are most likely to hold festivals, but as Timothy Dowd, Kathleen Liddle, and Jenna Nelson show in their chapter here, feminists and marginalized devotees of classical music have regularly held festivals as well.

Another kind of translocal scene is created when a band's fans regularly follow their favorite musicians around the country from tour date to tour date and energize local devotees of the music and lifestyle. Such tours might best be called "music carnivals." The caravans of Deadheads who trek with the Grateful Dead are the model of such a scene, but a number of other jam bands have devoted followers who follow their tours. To date, such carnivals have not been studied from a scenes perspective, but the chapter by Dowd, Liddle, and Nelson describes a commercialized version of a carnival scene in the section on the SkatePunks who follow the annual Vans Warped Tour with their boards and BMX bikes and enjoy thrash junk over a weekend.

Virtual Scenes

In this age of electronic communication, fan clubs dedicated to specific artists, groups, and subgenres have proliferated by using the Internet to communicate with each other. Like the participants in translocal scenes, participants in virtual scenes are widely separated geographically, but unlike them, virtual scene participants around the world come together in single scene-making conversation via the Internet. A chat room-based group devoted to the folk artist John Prine has been studied by Marjorie Sibby (2000). In this volume, Laura Vroomen also focuses on a virtual scene devoted to a single artist, Kate Bush; Lee and Peterson explore the dynamics of a listserv-based scene built around a subgenre, "alternative

country music"; James Hodgkinson shows that fanzines fostered a post-rock virtual scene; and Bennett's chapter on the revival of the Canterbury Sound of the 1960s by Internet-based enthusiasts illustrates a virtual community whose focus is the nostalgia for rock associated with a particular English city.

Whereas a conventional local scene is kept in motion by a series of gigs, club nights, fairs, and similar events where fans converge, communicate, and reinforce their sense of belonging to a particular scene, the virtual scene involves direct Net-mediated person-to-person communication between fans, and the scene is therefore much more nearly in the control of fans. This may involve, for example, the creation of chat rooms or listservs dedicated to the scene and the trading of music and images online. Much chat room communication quickly descends into name-calling and flame wars, but the listservs of virtual scenes that last for any length of time evolve norms of communication; novices to the group are informed about the norms of civility, and there is the exchange of the kind of knowledge that Thornton (1995) refers to as "subcultural capital." Lee and Peterson in their chapter here explore the dynamics of this process as they study the life of a listserv-based virtual scene that has thrived since 1996. Among other findings, they learn that group members are sensitive to attempts by musicians and music industry members (the latter called "weasels") to promote their own work or the work of their artists via the listserv. Thus to a far greater extent than in other kinds of scenes, virtual scenes are devoted to the needs and interests of fans, and Net-based media that try to influence them tend to be quickly found out and censured.

Although the concept of virtual scene has been highlighted by the advent of the Internet, fanzines (Duncombe 1997) and other forms of niche media (Thornton 1995) have long served as an important resource for fans of particular genres of music, offering a channel of communication, for example, for the exchange of information about their favourite performers, performances, production techniques, and so on. Such media of communication can become the focus for intense local scenes. For example, McKRobbie and Garber identified a strong teeny-bopper culture among teenage girls in Britain of the 1970s. Denied access to male subcultures and subject to paternal control stricter than that for their male peers, teenage girls constructed a teeny-bopper scene "around the territory available. . . the home and the bedroom" (1976, 219). In such domestic spaces, teenage girls met, read pop-music magazines such as *Smash Hits* and *Jackie*, exchanged posters and pictures of pop stars, and discussed their personal preferences. In her chapter here, Melanie Lowe shows the continuing relevance of such