
Andrew Alter

Denis Crowdy

Steve Collins

Introduction

Technology and Ownership amongst “World Music” Practitioners: Ongoing Debates in a Globalizing World

Andrew Alter is Associate Dean of Higher Degree Research and Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Music Studies in the Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, Sydney. His primary research is focused on traditional and popular music in India and Indonesia as well as world music practice in Australia.

Associate Dean, HDR, Faculty of Arts
Macquarie University
Sydney, NSW 2109
Australia
andrew.alter@mq.edu.au

Denis Crowdy is a Senior Lecturer in Music at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. Before that, he taught music at the University of Papua New Guinea for nine years. His research has explored Melanesian stringband, popular music and the nature of the music industry in the region. He is currently completing a book exploring the music of Papua New Guinean band Sanguma and the post-colonial politics of identity through music.

Senior Lecturer in Ethnomusicology
Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies
Macquarie University
Sydney, NSW 2109
Australia
denis.crowdy@mq.edu.au

Steve Collins is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University. His research focuses on disruption in the media industries, copyright law and creativity. Steve is the co-author of *Beyond 2.0: The Future of Music* (Equinox, 2014).

Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies
Macquarie University
Sydney, NSW 2109
Australia
stephen.collins@mq.edu.au

Abstract

The Introduction to the special issue identifies the overarching themes that frame the collection of articles within the volume. The actions and creations of musical practitioners not only demonstrate how technology is an integral part of the creative process, but also how different cultural circumstances create widely divergent attitudes towards musical ownership. In addition, the very nature of technology itself calls into question just what it is that is “owned”. Different stories from different cultural contexts reveal ongoing anxieties associated with technology and ownership. These stories demonstrate how, in a globalizing world, conventional notions of creative practice and ownership are concepts that are increasingly destabilized by musical practice itself.

Keywords: music industries; neoliberalism; ownership; studio practice; technoculture

Introduction

Not too long ago, many of us felt comfortable making binary distinctions between performers and producers, composers and arrangers, promoters and “the band”, the original and the remix, the studio and the stage or even the recording and the performance. In some cases the distinct roles and processes implied by these terms may still represent a kind of reality in musical practice. However, one thing that music research over the past twenty to thirty years has surely demonstrated is that concepts for different creative roles in contemporary musical practice are by no means stable, particularly when recording and sound technologies are involved. Moreover, technologies associated with digital recording, Music 2.0 and small-scale computerized devices encourage new ways to create and distribute music. These new possibilities challenge conventional attitudes towards musical ownership and entitlement. In recorded format, sound can be filtered and manipulated in ways that render it almost unrelated to “the” original. Similarly, live performances can now incorporate technologies in ways that blur the lines between live performance and mediated recorded artifact, what Knowles and Hewitt (2012: 6) term “performance recordivity”; that is, the movement of studio technologies and practices into the live arena. In all this, copyright remains a critical area for debate while new economies of distribution test the limits of old music industry practices (see Mills 1996; Gordon 2005; Kusak and Leonhard 2005; Bockstedt, Kauffman and Riggins 2006; Homan 2010; Young and Collins 2010; Dong and Krishna 2013; Thomson 2014).

This special issue offers a selection of stories about musicians and the ways technology impacts on their musical practice in different ways. At the heart of the issue are some old and vexed questions: Who owns what sounds? Who is entitled to use those sounds? At what level can ownership be ascribed? How have new technologies influenced musical production in ways that challenge conventional ideas of ownership? These questions, while at the forefront of many researchers’ minds, are not easily answered. Searching for direct answers would not do justice to the complexities behind the questions themselves. As Feld (1996: 1), in his frequently cited “pygmy POP” article, states, the schizophrenic mimesis of pygmy music is a story that highlights “the turbulent morality of today’s increasingly blurred and contested lines between forms of musical invasion and forms of cultural exchange”. Similarly, as the story of Enigma’s ‘Return to Innocence’ shows, the manipulation of recorded sound can allow for new forms of creativity while ignoring the “original” human source of those sounds (Taylor 2003; Tan 2008). Schizophrenic mimesis is a concept that is as relevant today as it was in 1996. Most of us in the academic world would probably agree that owning the “copyright” to a sound recording does not justify unfettered usage. But of course there are

many circumstances in which re-usage and reproduction are not problematic. In some areas, re-use, repetition and manipulation of copied sounds are the rule rather than the exception.

Perhaps, then, the reason for asking (and re-asking) the vexed questions listed above is that the worlds of sampling, remixing and DJing make the answers increasingly complex. These are worlds in which the ontology of recording becomes increasingly confusing. In particular, sound itself requires a new perspective. As Théberge (2003: 95) notes, sound is “both an aesthetic and a commercial category” and its status should be “equal to that conventionally accorded to melody and lyrics”. Elsewhere, Chang (2009) investigates sampling practices and cites Benjamin and Barthes to highlight how the role of the author/creator in “the age of mechanical reproduction” has dramatically shifted. As she notes, “*Archaic* [our emphasis] notions of what it means to be creative and original continue to dog theoretical accounts of sampling practice” (Chang 2009: 144). She argues for a perspective that considers sampling’s own creative logic—a creative logic that most coherently exists in a “studio”. Labelling earlier attitudes towards creativity as “archaic” is clearly provocative, and perhaps not totally justified beyond the world of sampling. Nonetheless, it is in the contemporary studio—a studio environment identified here in its broadest sense¹—that so many issues of ownership are contested, created, forgotten or erased. In addition, and as Chang suggests, the studio is a site for musical creativity—one in which musicians regularly engage with new digital media products and celebrate a global community of sounds that are now available through vastly expanded connectivity. Greene notes further:

Recording studios have become, among other things, spongelike centers where the world’s sounds are quickly and continually absorbed, reworked, and reincorporated into new musics. Music can now no longer be adequately modeled as something that happens in a local context and employs only the expressive means specific to a locality (Greene 2005: 2).

Thus, there is an ongoing tension in ethnomusicology and popular music studies between the products and possibilities of contemporary music technologies and the cultural integrity and ownership of music around the globe. The tension is most controversial in situations where live performance and recording have no lengthy tradition of comingling. Perhaps this is why Manuel (2010: 106) states: “[a]mong the most fundamental musical developments accompanying the advent of modernity has been the emergence of new conceptions of authorship, ownership, and the roles of composition”.

1. As Crowdy’s article in this issue shows, the notion of just what a “studio” is in the contemporary music world is regularly being challenged by new technologies.

His investigation of Flamenco reveals approaches to authorship that are representative of many “oral” traditions from around the world. Even in these situations, where technology may have had less impact, ownership and creativity are concepts that are less stable than we once thought.

Recurrent Anxieties

Because of the tensions highlighted above, a number of anxieties regularly emerge when world music discourse grapples with issues of ownership and/or technology. In such cases rhetoric frequently resorts to criticizing a hegemonic western musical culture—one that plunders the rest of the world for whatever it feels may be useful. In such scenarios capitalist systems are critiqued for not providing appropriate compensation to those from whom things are said to be stolen. In such discourses, emotive language tends to demonize the “West” as a monolithic opportunist. Superior western technology is the means by which the West carries out its hegemonic agenda.

Another disquiet is that associated with homogeneity. Globalization, with its implication of unfettered access to all sounds everywhere, emphasizes the loss of individual traditions. The “local” becomes subsumed and diminished by the global. Of course, such “local/global” rhetoric has a lengthy history. Technology in a globalized world is available to everyone and results in a more unified means of production and reproduction. Digital studios in India can recreate the bass of a reggae sound system because of technologies that provide a myriad of synthesized options. Some might worry that cultural independence is lost in the process. Ownership of musical material disappears as sounds become endlessly reproduced. Those searching for the “origin” discover it to be hidden in an ever more complex world of reproduction. Nonetheless, as Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000: 25) identify, there are examples of research where “the export of Western sounds and technologies has not led to the kind of cultural ‘grey-out’ and homogenisation that some ethnomusicologists and cultural imperialism analysts feared”. The anxiety may be just that—an imagined situation created through the imagined possibilities of the worst-case scenario.

Yet another disquiet is that associated with the ideology of the nation-state. Here national ideologies potentially invade spaces of “natural” cultural expression, and appropriate songs, music and sounds for their own political ends. Nation-states assume for themselves the right to uphold song ownership, and thus also sometimes assume the privilege to use songs (and sounds) for their own ends. Copyright regimes attempt to privilege the national sphere over the global but run the risk of quashing individual expression through political intervention (for example, see Biddle and Knights 2007).

National networks of communication may be created for national agendas and these could potentially limit the creativity of the individual.

Another discomfort often emerges from perceptions about the monolithic and hegemonic nature of capitalist music industries. Though Williamson and Cloonan (2007) suggest that such monolithic constructions are a misconception, the unease frequently remains. A capitalist imperative, which guides corporations to seek profit above all else, supersedes artistic expression and dampens the authentic voices of individuals. Large capitalist corporations use their power to invoke copyright to protect the sounds they legally own. Copyright, when enforced by the music industry, trumps individual ownership.

Neoliberalism, with all its promised economic freedoms, is a more recent source of unease. Forced to survive without the protections of the state while negotiating the breakdown of traditional sources of patronage and traditional venues of performance, musicians are left vulnerable without any of society's supporting institutions and conventions. Potentially, there may be no system left to determine the true ownership of a song or sound. Those with the right economic connections may be able to force their claim to ownership and thereby gain from the performance of a particular piece. Those with access to the right technological resources have the ability to manipulate and reproduce sounds seemingly at will.

In some instances these anxieties are based on real potentialities. Nation-states do sometimes exert an influence; corporations do sometimes exert their copyright against individuals; western powers are often forced to act to defend the interests of their corporations. However, more frequently, the reality of individual circumstances and musical creativity—musicians doing what they do—demonstrates a more practical approach to ownership and music technology. Such practicality is expressed in different forms, including the acknowledgement of blurred boundaries, the acceptance of ambiguities and the reality of getting the job done. For musicians there is always an underlying impulse to innovate with things at hand.

Technoculture and Ownership

Our volume is a small offering of stories from the world of musical creativity in which the actions and creations of musical practitioners not only demonstrate how technology is an integral part of the creative process, but also how different cultural circumstances create widely divergent attitudes towards musical ownership. In addition, the very nature of the technology itself calls into question just what it is that is “owned”, particularly when data files are exchanged in unstructured networks of sharing (see Crowley in this issue).

Lysloff and Gay (2003: 2) adopt Andrew Ross's term “technoculture” to expand the notion of technology beyond physical machines, electronics

and sound/video recording. This expanded notion includes, amongst other things, the way technologies influence musical practice and how agency can be ascribed to different technologies in the process of creation. As they note, technology is an inextricable part of almost all forms of contemporary musical practice. Consequently, different forms of technology, as well as the way they are used, are integral to musical practice. The articles in this special issue not only acknowledge the cultural element in technology but attempt to investigate how the nexus between technology and culture impacts on the concept of “ownership” in different ways.

At first glance the concept of ownership seems fairly straightforward. It may be communal or individual and refers to that special and somewhat unique relationship that exists between an object and living beings—most frequently humans. Invariably hidden in that relationship are histories of mutuality, emotional attachments, shared understanding, conventional practices, repetitive patterns of use and re-use and/or shared values and meanings. Musical ownership normally implies a set of rights and obligations on the part of the owner in relation to others and “their” sounds and songs. This is particularly the case when compositions, songs or sounds are understood to be owned communally (for instance, see Dor 2004). More specifically, Berge and Johansson (2014: 38–39) explore the contextual details of communal ownership associated with the folk music scene in Norway. They highlight the commonly cited tensions that exist between legal copyright ownership in the commercial world as compared to traditional music practice. They suggest that “there are strong alternative models of ownership and authorship operating within the field” and argue for a more detailed examination of the discourses surrounding ownership, “particularly whereby symbolic capital...is (unequally) distributed” (2014: 39).

Even though collective ownership and individual creation are central to the discourse of traditional music, Berge and Johansson provide evidence for the existence of a more intricate conception of ownership, one in which identity, communal participation, agency and interpretation all influence the different economies of authorship (*ibid.*). Such analyses are part of ongoing debates surrounding socio-cultural difference and appropriation in which authorship/ownership is understood to be complex precisely because musical practice and authorial agency are influenced by wider discursive formations (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 7).

Without the *concept* of musical ownership, actions such as exchanging, purchasing, borrowing, appropriating, sharing and stealing are not possible. Only after songs, fragments, phrases, stems or sounds are understood to have an original or unique connection to an individual or group, can their re-use be evaluated as a form of individual or cultural exchange in which the newer user

is connected to the original in some relative and echoic way. The complexity that results from the processes of recording, whereby sound is disconnected from its source, has received extensive attention in the literature (amongst others, see Feld 1996; Théberge 2003; Chang 2009). Re-use, re-versioning, reproduction and repetition create a web of interrelationships between sounds, their original owners and the varied communities that use those sounds in the process of musical creativity. Ever more intricate processes of production and interconnectivity emphasize the critical role that technology plays in this web of musical practice (see further Young and Collins 2010).

Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh introduce the contributions to their collection of essays within *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (2000), by posing a number of questions associated with musical practice and alterity. Amongst these questions they ask “What is implied by attending to the *boundaries* of musical-aesthetic discourses inherent in this notion of representing or appropriating another music or culture *in music*” [italics original] (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 1)? The theoretical framework they construct for the volume is comprehensive and touches not only on the general disciplinary perspectives provided by ethnomusicology and popular music studies but also on the more specific frames and academic lineages provided by postcolonial studies, diasporic studies, black cultural studies, modernism, post-modernism, globalization and more. Of particular relevance to this special issue is the way Born and Hesmondhalgh summarize issues surrounding hybridity, fusion and transnational popular musics (2000: 21–31). They warn that debates associated with processes of borrowing raise important issues about music, identity and difference even though they risk relying too heavily on “overly bounded notions of the relation of musical form or style to social grouping” (2000: 22).

Technology in various forms, but particularly those technologies associated with recording, have been central to the circulation of sounds around the globe. Implicated in the process are music industry players—both creators and distributors—who rely on participants from “exotic other” worlds while limiting those participants’ scope for true economic collaboration (ibid.). At the same time some popular music studies run the risk of an overly enthusiastic celebration of “the proliferation of new musical forms based on the encounter of non-Western migrants with Western musical languages and technologies” (ibid.). Just what is the role of sound recording and simulation technologies in musical appropriation? As the contributors to *Western Music and its Others* demonstrate, music technologies are enhanced through globalization, they are deeply implicated in the commodification of music, they often exist in collaboration with broader forms of commercialization and advertising, they are celebrated for the way they contribute to the suppres-

sion of the individual composer's ego, they are guilty of transforming and/or redacting the original and they are often the major reason why particular sounds become essentialized and iconic. Music technologies are guilty of many things while providing exciting new forms of creative practice.

The potential benefits of Music 2.0 interactivity has had a major impact on the music industrial complex (Young and Collins 2010). Industries struggle while borrowing and appropriation become ever more commonplace. Laptop studios, pervasive connectivity and new communities of musical interaction have all had a major impact on the concept of ownership. The narrative of a hegemonic western music industry may well be replaced by the warm glow of optimism surrounding a global community of musicians. The very concept of world music, originally associated with the music industry, has always been problematic. As music industries change and economic models for music creation and distribution continue to follow the opportunities provided by new technologies, "world music", as a term, becomes even less meaningful than it once was thought to be.

Articles in this Volume

This special issue begins with an article by Henry Johnson who investigates the use of traditional material within contemporary practice on the island of Jersey. The contemporary "pop-folk" group Badlabecques is invited to use "shared" musical material as a strategy to promote the survival of an endangered language—*Jèrriais*. As a contemporary group interested in both language preservation and musical creativity, Badlabecques creates new versions of old songs as well as original pieces, and consciously relies on sounds that link their music to a particular cultural tradition. Government intervention in the form of intentional promotion and support for the production of a CD provide the group with legitimacy. Along the way Badlabecques add their own musical ideas to pieces and sounds and thereby assume a level of ownership for material that might otherwise be reserved to traditional owners.

The second article in the volume is by Tony Lewis whose musical practice and research is engaged with the *garamut* drumming of Baluan Island in the Manus Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG). The contexts of *garamut* drumming and Jersey island folk music are dramatically different, and these different contexts result in very different concepts of ownership. Through a detailed examination of one "piece" of music, Lewis traces the way particular rhythmic statements come to be identified as sounds associated with a particular tradition of drumming. The same rhythms are learned by different musicians in different contexts and thereafter adapted into new contexts, while

musicians adopt and add sounds from overarching practices of contemporary performance. As the rhythms and “the piece” are learned and then recorded in different formats, the original is acknowledged differently by different performers. Questions of impropriety are bound up in different conceptions of insider/outsider identity associated with traditional music, while new genre contexts clearly place the musical sounds in new contexts of authorship. Recording provides a record of performance that allows for detailed analysis of particular rhythms in order to trace their identity through creative pathways.

Denis Crowley’s article investigates an example of music production that focuses more on technology than on histories of traditional music practice. In particular, he examines the way mobile phone technologies have become a part of some PNG musicians’ informal networks of practice. Here, collaboration results from the sharing of sound files amongst musicians in ways that not only illustrate the schizophonia inherent in the recording process, but also the way the production process is distributed amongst loosely associated groups of amateurs. It is the very process of production as well as the assumed communal relationships that together create a new and localized form of musical practice. Musicians share digitally recorded sounds in spite of limited internet connectivity. Original ownership of sounds may be understood, but pathways of circulation are obscured through regular and recurrent re-recording and re-use.

Diane Hughes and Sarah Keith provide the final article in this special issue with a re-examination of the notion of world music from the perspective of East Asian contemporary practice. Until recently, discourse surrounding “world music” practice has largely excluded the sounds of East Asia. While world music itself may be a discursive construct having been created by industry and media, the term remains stubbornly, and ambiguously, located in the contemporary music space as a semi-defined genre that potentially includes widely divergent sounds and styles. Nonetheless, as Timothy Taylor (1997: 9) noted at the end of the last century, the *Billboard* world music charts never included any music from the Far East. Just how contemporary artists in Taiwan, Japan and South Korea portray their relationship to national identities within a global context is therefore potentially quite unlike musicians from elsewhere in the world. Nonetheless, practices associated with global popular music industries heighten the iconicity of particular visual and sonic gestures, while global markets provide a fruitful arena within which to compare particular expressive forms related to presumed national and cultural identities. In this context, the term “world music” undergoes yet another metamorphosis, confirming its own discursive flexibility in an ever changing global environment.

References

- Berge, Ola K. and Mats Johansson. 2014. "Who Owns an Interpretation? Legal and Symbolic Ownership of Norwegian Folk Music". *Ethnomusicology* 58/1: 30–53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.58.1.0030>
- Biddle, I. and Vanessa Knights. 2007. "Introduction: National Popular Musics: Betwixt and Beyond the Local and Global". In *Music, National Identity and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local*, edited by I. Biddle and V. Knights, 1–18. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bockstedt, Jesse C., Robert J. Kauffman and Frederick J. Riggins. 2006. "The Move to Artist-Led On-Line Distribution: A Theory-Based Assessment and Prospects for Structural Changes in the Digital Music Market". *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* 10/3: 7–38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415100301>
- Born, Georgina and David Hesmondhalgh. 2000. "Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music". In *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, edited by Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, 1–58. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Chang, Vanessa. 2009. "Records that Play: The Present Past in Sampling Practice". *Popular Music* 28/2: 143–59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0261143009001755>
- Dong, Xue "Snow" and Jayakar Krishna. 2013. "The Baidu Music Settlement: A Turning Point for Copyright Reform in China?" *Journal of Information Policy* 3: 77–103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5325/jinfopoli.3.2013.0077>
- Dor, George. 2004. "Communal Creativity and Song Ownership in Anlo Ewe Musical Practice: The Case of Havolu". *Ethnomusicology* 48/1: 26–51.
- Feld, Steven. 1996. "pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis". *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28: 1–35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/767805>
- Gordon, Steve. 2005. *The Future of the Music Business*. San Francisco: Backbeat Books.
- Greene, Paul D. 2005. "Introduction: Wired Sound and Sonic Cultures". In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, 1–22. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.9783/9780812202090.1>
- Homan, Shane. 2010. "Dancing without Music: Copyright and Australian Nightclubs". *Popular Music and Society* 33/3: 377–94. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007760903086177>
- Knowles, Julian and Donna Hewitt. 2012. "Performance Recordivity: Studio Music in a Live Context". *Journal on the Art of Record Production* 6 (June 2012). <http://arpjournal.com/1929/performance-recordivity-studio-music-in-a-live-context/> (accessed 10 February 2015).
- Kusak, David and Gerd Leonhard. 2005. *The Future of Music: Manifesto for the Digital Music Revolution*. Boston: Berklee Press.
- Lysloff, René T. A. and Leslie C. Gay, Jr. 2003. "Introduction: Ethnomusicology in the Twenty-first Century". In *Music and Technoculture*, edited by René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay, Jr, 1–22. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Manuel, Peter. 2010. "Composition, Authorship, and Ownership in Flamenco, Past and Present". *Ethnomusicology* 54/1: 106–35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.54.1.0106>
- Mills, Sherylle. 1996. "Indigenous Music and the Law: An Analysis of National and International Legislation". *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28: 57–86. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/767807>

- Tan, Shyr Ee. 2008. "Returning to and from 'Innocence': Taiwan Aboriginal Recordings". *Journal of American Folklore* 121/480: 222–35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jaf.0.0005>
- Taylor, Timothy. 1997. *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. New York and London: Routledge.
- 2003. "A Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery: Transnational Music Sampling and Enigma's 'Return to Innocence'". In *Music and Technoculture*, edited by René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay, Jr, 64–92. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Théberge, Paul. 2003. "'Ethnic Sounds': The Economy and Discourse of World Music Sampling". In *Music and Technoculture*, edited by René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay, Jr, 93–108. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Thomson, Derek. 2014. "Why Would Anyone Ever Buy Another Song?" *The Atlantic*, 14 March 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/03/why-would-anybody-ever-buy-another-song/284420/> (accessed 12 January 2015).
- Williamson, John and Marin Cloonan. 2007. "Rethinking the Music Industry". *Popular Music* 26/2: 305–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0261143007001262>
- Young, Sherman and Steve Collins. 2010. "A View from the Trenches of Music 2.0". *Popular Music and Society* 33/3: 339–56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007760903495634>