

HEAVY METAL FROM THE ANTARCTIC ENDS OF THE EARTH: INVESTIGATING THE METAL MUSIC IDENTITY FROM INVERCARGILL, SOUTHLAND, NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

Murihiku/Southland, Aotearoa/New Zealand(NZ), is the western and southern most region of the country. Southland has a short but colourful history of whalers, sealers, bootleggers and gold miners from Northern Europe mixing with the local population. A landscape known for the epic scenery of Fiordland and Queenstown Lakes, heavy industrial-scale agriculture, powerful hydroelectric dams, the Tiwai metal smelter, and country music's Gold Guitars, Murihiku is also home to a culturally significant level of heavy metal musical groups. This paper reports on the cultural, external contributors and a musicological framing of this genre within the local independent music scene. Murihiku (Southland) metal is approached as a 'glocalised' study, centred on Invercargill one of the world's most isolated cities, which to date has not been rigorously investigated. This paper represents the beginning investigation of the metal music scene from the city of Invercargill in Southland, New Zealand. It is part of a larger project for a thesis on metal music and production as part of a Doctorate of Musical Arts through Griffith University.

Introduction

From a town of 50,000 with only a few live venues, over fifty original metal groups emerged to form the Southern Metal Confederacy Incorporated Society in 2014. For more than two and half decades the underground metal music scene of Invercargill has shown an unwavering and significant influence on the local music scene. From the origins of the formation of proto groups such as Militia (1988-94), Arcane (1990-93) and death metal band Hatred (1993-present), metal music has continued to influence the likes of Syndakit (2001-07), Ravenous (2003-present), Alphasintori (2007-present) and in the southern groove metal style of Osmium (2005-present). The metal music scene has influenced other groups as metal musicality elements is fused with blues and reggae sonic signifiers in the musical identity of bands such as Left or Right (2003-present) and Tie Dye (2010-14).

To address this local musical identity, first a discussion of the literature of New Zealand's national musical identity and regional sounds will be appropriate. The current literature of Invercargill and New Zealand metal music is examined. Focusing on the international metal studies literature suggests that heavy music scenes can be forged from historically identified influences such as a sociological sense of isolation and alienation (Weinstein, 1991), both large-scale industrialisation and de-industrialisation (Wallach, Berger, & Greene, 2011; Walser & Björnberg, 1995; Walser, 1993) and local geopolitical factors

(Avelar, 2003).

New Zealand and Invercargill offer some uniquely specific geo-local contributing factors to this argument. These include the biculturalism of New Zealand and the national musical identity, the perceived isolation of the city, the Southern Institute of Technology's influence on the youth culture as a tertiary institution city and the potential influence of wider regional influences such as the 'Dunedin Sound' on the music of Invercargill.

Concluding remarks will be made on the emerging theme of how individuals and key musicians or groups of musicians may have been significant contributors to fostering the music scene of Invercargill.

The summation of all the contributing factors indicates that from the relatively late arrival of original metal music in the early 1990s, this genre has had a significant impact on the local musical culture, identity and the sonic signifiers of the original popular music from Invercargill.

New Zealand popular music; from a sense of place and national identity to glocalisation

In New Zealand, the idea of a 'sense of place' in music making has sparked debate around specifics as to the regionalisation of 'sounds' within that country. The 'Kiwi sound' phenomenon provided an introduction to the subject of a national identity in popular music to the debate. Shuker & Pickering (1994, p. 272) initially concluded that there is "little evidence of any national indicators in New Zealand and until the 1990s at least, New Zealand music consisted of little more than "local versions of overseas genres and idioms" (Shuker & Pickering, 1994, pp. 272, 273).

However, as Mitchell points out, historically Aotearoa/New Zealand has followed other Western countries in absorbing and appropriating Anglo-American trends (1996, p. 213). He further elaborates that its (New Zealand's) Maori-Pakeha(European) biculturalism and its geographical isolation have often lent to idiosyncratic and eclectic colourings to its adaption of these external forms and models [ibid].

Indicators of national musical identity begin to emerge in the literature as Shuker later suggests that there are three main interrelated concepts, any local associations from a band or performers name or lyrical content; evidence of local accent or pronunciation of words of a song; and local musical styles or idioms such as the 'the Dunedin sound' of the Flying Nun label (2001, p. 68).

The collection of regional music making studies, *Home, Land and Sea* (Keam & Mitchell, 2011), is a key work and has many references to these more localised indicators, specifically local musical styles, a 'sense of place', and utilising the term 'sonic psychogeography' in the bicultural nation.

As Barker points out, "patterns of population movement and settlement established during colonialism and its aftermath, combined with the more recent acceleration of globalisation, particularly of electronic communications, have enabled increased cultural juxtaposing, meeting and mixing on a global scale"(2002, p. 74). This idea that the reality of sharp differences between 'the global' and 'the local' being difficult to navigate, has given rise to the term 'glocalisation'.

'Glocalisation' is observed when a structural form of the style is the same but they differ in the way they have been globalised at the local level and is used to describe the metal music scene on the isolated island of Malta (Bell, 2011, p. 285). Weinstein also contrasts older black metal sub-genre (2011, p. 53) with the newer death metal sub-style, which shows a tendency towards a 'glocalised' model. She describes death metal in which the style is combined with elements of a local group's pre-modern culture, melodic approaches and scalar material, musical instruments, allusions to glorious ethnic myths and the indigenous language (2011, p. 54).

This is observed in Invercargill's metal scene, as death metal band Hatred incorporates indigenous Maori culture and imagery with the members being all descendants of the local indigenous Ngai Tahu Iwi, and their most recent 2014 national tour being called the Hikoi (protest march) of Hatred.

Factors of New Zealand's geographical isolation and the appropriation of Anglo-American musical forms incorporated into a bicultural environment have produced 'glocalised' models in the music scenes of the country. Bendrup's study also highlights that "the Rapanui engagement with metal is a result of the genre's presence within mainstream, Anglo-American, commercial modes of musical transmission and dissemination" (2011b, p. 314). To what end this engagement has occurred in Invercargill being New Zealand's most isolated city, and what impact this has had on the metal music scene development is the question.

Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand

One hundred and fifty years ago, settlers named this southern area of the New Zealand islands, the all too liable, Southland. Its Maori name is Murihiku, meaning "last part of the tail". Southland consists of 3.1 million hectares (28,681sqkm) with over 3,400km of coastline, and an estimated population of 94,800 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). This makes Southland one of New Zealand's most sparsely populated areas.

Invercargill's weather is severe by New Zealand standards, with a mean maximum temperature in July (mid winter) of 9.5°C (Grant, 2013). With an average temperature in the short summers of 15° down to single digit averages in the long winters, this generalisation has an over-enhanced perception of Invercargill as New Zealand's isolated, grey and gothic city.

Invercargill music

To date the musical story of Invercargill has been well documented in Neil McKelvie's 2006 publication, *45 South In Concert*. The work is primarily a historically chronological work about music in Southland from its roots in the 1800s up to 2005. It details the rich musical communities that form the interwoven sonic tapestry of Invercargill such as the country and western clubs, musical theatre and repertory societies, traditional brass and Scottish pipe bands, amateur jazz groups and choirs, and the traditional folk musical groups in Southland. The work includes the city's popular music scene and covers bands, however the original music of the city is somewhat limited. This is in no way a criticism of the author whom clearly states "it is felt that due to the large scope of the music in Southland has all been reasonable well represented" (McKelvie, 2006, p. 4). A decade since, an independent contemporary music

scene has emerged within the city and the prevalence of the underground heavy metal music scene both are deserving of commentary.

To date, no formal studies have been done on the local original metal music scene or sub-culture of Invercargill. The idea of a musical 'scene' has now largely displaced the concept of sub-culture (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004). A scene can be described as "a special kind of urban cultural context and practice of spatial coding" (Stahl, 2004, p. 76).

Invercargill has an ever-present underground scene of heavy metal and punk rock scene dating back to the success of original bands such as 'Pretty Wicked Head and the Desperate Men' in the late 1980s which would have been an inspiration for a generation.

Southland has more than its share of national and international success in the pop and country mainstream, but in three decades since the age of punk no alternative Southland musician has ever come closer to, or deserved more, cracking at the big time on his own uncompromising terms.... of music legend, they remain to many Southland's greatest alternative band (McKelvie, 2006, pp. 142–143).

Many of Pretty Wicked Head's song lyrics penned by the bands front man Shaun Kirkpatrick, speak messages of place and identity. The single *All New Zealand Heroes* is one example and *Rise And Shine* is a song narrative in which Kirkpatrick is surveying his surroundings "from a house on a hill in the middle of a town at the bottom of a country at the bottom of the world". The album release of *New Age Savage* contained many ideas of the Southland local identity, or sense of place at that time in Invercargill. Chilton also offers a line of suggestions of the underlying environment of the city's culture, "New Age Savage is an honest and unashamed social commentary on Invercargill's grog-fuelled underbelly – sometimes ugly but never less than irresistible" (2010).

Metal band Osmium's track about their hometown, *Forsaken City* from the album *The Misery Harvest* paints a darker picture of the city with the closing lyrics 'Desertion running rife, draining all of life, sorrow painted sky's, forsaken city dies'. It tells the story of the population decline of the city and the perception of depressed, grey weathered, dying city. From these examples a sense of alienation due to Invercargill's unique geographical location and social culture is apparent in the music of the city.

New Zealand metal music

Dix's definitive New Zealand rock essay commentary *Stranded in Paradise* first edition (1988) made some assumptions indicative of popular music's attitude toward heavy metal at the time. In contrast the second edition (2005), highlights the success of NZ heavy rock acts.

In the original *Stranded In Paradise*, Dix dissed metal in one contemptuous breath: 'Someone out there may like to write a book on New Zealand heavy metal, but not me, sports, that's for sure. Music for mutants, head bangers to the fore and brain cells aft.' This time, thanks to the sporadic international triumphs of the likes of Shihad, the D4, Datsuns and Blindspott, there's no ignoring the genre and Dix, to his credit -- gives the black T-shirt brigade a decent rap. (Chilton, 2005)

In terms of the New Zealand cultural context, Snell's seminal work entitled, *The Everyday Bogans: Identity and Community amongst Heavy Metal Fans*, becomes a foundation for the definition of a metal identity and community from the fans' point of view in the national context (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007). Metal music is a cultural activity of many New Zealanders and plays a large role of their cultural identity (Snell, 2014).

A recent NZ National radio documentary series *South of Heaven: A History of New Zealand Extreme Metal* (Hayes & Yates-Fill, 2014) discusses the birth of the country's most challenging and confrontational music scene in Christchurch in the early 1990s with bands like Suffocation and Convulsion. Christchurch is 670km north of Invercargill, and is the largest of the three main cities in the South Island. Hayes' work offers an insight into the globalisation of extreme metal in the larger cities of New Zealand. Was the extreme metal scene in Christchurch a geo-local influence in Invercargill?

Matt Sheppard of New Zealand's 8-Foot Sativa and Sinate alludes to the influence of the extreme metal scene from Christchurch.

"We've had sic shows down in the deep south! I know many metal bands have had more successful shows with way more support and fans in Invercargill than gigs in scarfie Dunedin. The support bands like 8-Foot and Sinate got in Invercargill (Invercargill) is massive!" M. Sheppard (personal communication, December 5, 2014).

With reference to the themes identified in the literature, and through a series of semi-structured interviews with local musicians and music critics a picture of the contributing factors about the metal music scene of Invercargill is beginning to emerge. Of specific note in this paper are Chris Chilton, a local musician and Southland Times features editor since 1981, Cleary West, founding member Invercargill's death metal band Hatred and numerous additional metal groups, and Daniel 'Chainsaw Charlie' Rodgers, musician, professional audio engineer and founding member of Ravenous.

Contributing factor – the (de)industrialisation of Southland

The Southland region's economy is based on heavy agriculture, fishing, forestry and energy resources like coal and hydropower. Many monstrous industrial factories are attached to this economy and are smattered about the Southland region. The relationship between industrial geography and music making from the birth of heavy metal in the town of post-war Birmingham is a constant theme in metal studies literature (Bayer, 2009; Harrison, 2010).

Industrial scale agriculture - the dairy and meat industries

The region has a high ratio of agriculture. Just over 11% of the nation's dairy herd is in Southland, with an estimated number of cows at 532,079 (DairyNZ, 2013). In 1932 there were up to 80 dairy factories in the Southland region, now only two large main factories remain. The Edendale plant, was largest raw milk processing plant in the world in 2009.

From 9.1 million in 1985, to current levels of 4.1 million in 2011 (Ledgard, 2013), Southland has sheep. Invercargill's meat industry has five, large-scale killing and processing plants. Alliance Group's Lorneville plant, just on the city

outskirts, is the largest meat processing plant in the southern hemisphere. An estimate of the lamb and sheep kill alone is 7 million units annually (Grant, 2013). As McKelvie suggests;

“it is general Southland belief that there is ‘money in mince’ and also that one in four households is supported by this meat industry.... when a Southland musicians reach maturity they seek careers in the meat industry” (2006, p. 4).

As many musicians have, the death metal musicians from Hatred (1990) and Ravenous (2003) have worked in the meat industry and expressed the desensitising and harsh reality of the freezing works as a source of topical musical inspiration. ‘Chainsaw Charlie’ highlights the influence of the freezing works on the formation of his band Ravenous.

“we all met in 2000 at the Alliance meat freezer ... we were all in the boning room or killing yards ... yeah it had an effect on us ... you kinda get used to the sight of death every minute.... it’s a soul destroying job... the title of the *Addicted to flesh* demo and songs like *Butchered Vermillion* and *Cats Ate Her Face* were influenced by the working environment. We would also talk about doing a music video out there because of all the blood and the uniforms we had to wear. The freezing works was also a source of depression, which also transposed into our music, making it much darker and aggressive. ” D. Rodgers (personal communication, November 14, 2014)

Tiwai Aluminium Smelter industry and Bluff

Another industrial presence is New Zealand’s largest hydroelectric power station. Manapouri Hydro electric dam powers mostly the 527 mega watt (13% of the nations total power demand) to the Tiwai Aluminium smelter at the costal fishing port of Bluff, some 160 km southeast of the dam, and 20km south of Invercargill.

The first original metal band in the region, which spawned the growth of the genre in Invercargill, was Militia from Bluff (1988-1994). Brady ‘the Colac Bay butcher’ Barrett and Cleary West, half of the original prominent personalities of Hatred, are also from the once idyllic fishing port which over looks the large smelter. Much of the port and the Ocean Beach meat processing were mothballed over the 90s offering limited alternatives of employment for the youth of the town, the access to new music however is of note.

“... smelter was opened in early 70's, Ocean Beach closed early 90's. Being a port town was actually an advantage as there were always international fishermen/sailors bringing new music. The Bluffies were always onto the new metal months before the Invercargill kids it was like that for our parents too. So, I'd say indirectly, the isolation effected both generations musical influences” C. West (personal communication March 15, 2015)

Contributing factor – Geo-political influences

Since 1944 the Invercargill Licencing Trust (ILT), a community-owned trust, has had a monopoly on the development of licenced premises and the sale of alcohol in the city of Invercargill. Over 90% of the licenced venues in the city are managed by the ILT. It is an unwritten policy of the trust to only have covers bands in their venues. Both successful New Zealand original acts, the bands Stereogram, Elemeno P had 900 and 750 attendees respectively, but

were unable to secure suitable ILT venues. When interviewed by the Southland Times about this, ILT sales manager Gary Muir responded:

... the most important thing to do was to get the right act for the right venue -- and in the trust's case that was mainstream covers bandsthe trust's support of covers bands might offend those out of the mainstream but it had to cater for the 80 percent which liked that kind of music, he said (McCarthy, 2006). This highlights a possible inherent geo-political resistance to all original music not just metal, that is somehow 'deemed to be' not what the public wants in Invercargill. The ILT's policy may also have been inadvertently instrumental in fostering the early metal and punk scenes as a form of rebellion against the normal covers band pubs, as Saints and Sinners and the Tillermans entertainment venues have been the mainstays of original metal music and are the only non-ILT venues in the city.

Contributing factors – Geo-localisation contributors to the Invercargill music scene

Population decline and the rebirth of a young city

In the late 1990s, Invercargill was a city of despair. Tough economic times saw job losses, businesses closed and people leaving the city in droves. The population was declining, property prices were extremely low and the future for the young looked bleak (SIT, 2013).

Between 2001 and 2003, the Southland community trust, the ILT, Invercargill City and District Councils and business funders contributed \$7.25 million to kick-start a full fee-funded for the Southern Institute of Technology's Zero Fees Scheme. The 46 per cent increase in numbers saw the roll leap from 1781 equivalent full-time students in 2000 to almost 2600 in 2001 (SIT, 2013).

Over a decade on, the Southern Institute of Technology's (SIT) continues to offer the Zero Fees Scheme to over 12,000 students in Invercargill and beyond (SIT, 2013) and has had a direct effect on the cities population and also the encompassing culture of the city.

This culture also produces an ever-evolving popular music scene with students from outside the city whom join the SIT's Audio Production and Contemporary Music programs. As identified in Meehan's work on NZ's Wellington's scene (Keam & Mitchell, 2011, p134), most university cities exhibit this cultural phenomenon. Invercargill's current popular music scene is reminiscent of this Dunedin scene and Otago University.

The city of Dunedin and 'the Dunedin Sound'

Dunedin, two hours north east of Invercargill, has been identified (Bendrup, 2011a) as a localised 'cultural industry'(Connell & Gibson, 2003). The parallels of the university town of Dunedin and the city of Invercargill where the tertiary institutions of the cities have had a significant contribution on the cultural industry on the creation of identifiable music scenes, is clear. Dunedin has also been described as also possessing a "distinctively local South Island sonic identity" (Mitchell, 1994). The 'Dunedin Sound', is well documented in the popular music literature (Tony Mitchell, 2009, 2014; Shuker & Pickering, 1994; Shuker, 2008) as the period between 1979 and 1989 and the establishment of the record label 'Flying Nun' in 1981.

This iconic sound from Dunedin could be argued to be a significant contributor to the 'sound' of Invercargill however the significant influence is more likely reversed from Invercargill to the original Dunedin music scene from the 70s through to today. One of the founding individuals of the Flying Nun record label, Chris Knox, a punk influenced musician was originally born and bred in Invercargill who moved to Dunedin in 1970, aged 18.

The influence of Invercargill musicians on the scene of Dunedin culture is still apparent today. Stephen Marshall, Invercargill musician for Left or Right moved to Dunedin in 2008. At the 6th annual Feastock festival held in Dunedin in 2014, "exactly half of the performing artists (33 out of 66) had their musical training in Invercargill" S. Marshall (personal communication, 13 November, 2014).

Chris Chilton believes that there is a difference between an Invercargill sound and the 'Dunedin Sound':

"if one exists [the Invercargill sound] its different to the punk DIY looking at your feet, jangly guitar predominate of the Dunedin Sound as being in contrast to the more hard rock in your face style of performance of Invercargill original music if an Invercargill sound exists it is from 'o to 50 in 30 years' and reflects the qualities of a hybrid of rock, alternate hard rock and metal, grunge, and the NZ dub sound that has come in between" C. Chilton, (personal communication, 24 December 2014).

This is reflective of the acts that are around the city currently. Some examples include: Left or Right (a hybrid of reggae, hard rock and soul and funk), Osmium (southern groove metal fusion of heavy metal and grunge) and Rhythmonyx (ultra-live NZ dub, hip-hop drum and bass fusion). This hybridity also indicates a prevalence of 'glocalisation'; as Shuker points out glocalisation interplay has notions of appropriation, hybridity and syncretism to demonstrate that the relationship is a 'negotiated one' rather than deterministic (2012, p. 154).

Concluding remarks and emerging themes

Over a decade ago popular music was identified as a primary leisure resource in modern society (Bennett, 2001). Being at one end of the earth, Invercargill offers a uniquely insightful perspective into the social, economical and cultural influences of its musical community and how this directly affects the intrinsic nature of the popular music creation from the city. The preliminary research shows support for the current metal and popular music studies theories and also extends the knowledge further by offering a unique insight of the impact of the metal genre still has over more than two decades on the sonic signifiers of a local music production.

An emerging theme of this on-going research is the significance of groups of individuals in scene development. Examples can be drawn from Shaun Kirkpatrick and Craig Watt being in multiple original bands in the early 1980s and as Chilton points out;

"I believe the Invercargill scene is more about individuals or a group of people rather than a style or type of music.... its still true today with many people such as Logan Hampton and Jake McQuarire (of Big Kitchen) and also Callum Hampton and Steven Marshall (of Left or Right) being in many influential ori-

ginal bands and also covers bands within the city ” C. Chilton, (personal communication, 24 December 2014)

In the punk and metal scenes these individuals are not hard to identify either. Of note is punk enthusiast, Rock n Rolla record store owner, BZP and FTOA front man, Cherrystock alternative music festival organizer and local Southland “Invers Originals” radio host Jay Sellwood. In the metal scene there is multi-instrumentalist Cleary West, founding member of Hatred, Arcane, Mean Mr Mustard, Bongnosis, Hardcore Homie & White Trash and Relentlessly Butchered. It is emerging that a core group of individuals may have been instrumental in forming the metal scene and still have an influence today. Jay Sellwood alludes to the beginnings:

“I met Cleary at school in the late 80s. He had the Iron Maiden patch and I had the Judas Priest one... I was more into the punk kinda stuff ... but it just went from there.”

J. Sellwood (personal communication, 14 December, 2014)

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