

Hear the Sound of Rawness: On IASPM, Canberra, and Proceedings

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Rawness has always had a special place in my heart. In relation to music it equals spontaneity, newness, risk, experimentation, excitement, an openness to whatever would follow. Be it hardcore punk, noise, free improvisation, or learning to play a new instrument, there is a need for the raw sounds.

Having said that, there is also a need for traditions, understanding ones roots and history. IASPM held its 20th biennial conference at the Australian National University in Canberra, 24th to 28th June, 2019. For me personally, it was a return to a city where I lived some months as a child in 1986, even learning some English in the process. And so it felt like a completed circle, revisiting some places I still remembered vividly. And the conference itself was wonderful as usual, it truly is a “global family reunion” of popular music scholars.

As we always aim to find as inclusive theme to the conference as possible, the chosen one at Canberra, “Turns and Revolutions in Popular Music”, echoes well with the idea of the rawness and new beginnings. Looking back, I was co-editing one of these proceedings 20 years ago, for the Turku 2001 conference. That was the 20-year mark for IASPM as an organization. I was raw then, and hope to have retained some of the intellectual curiosity of that young man, now that we have reached 40 years of IASPM.

Back then, in 2001, it was a massive volume, with 830 pages and more than 100 published papers. This time we are looking at 135 pages and 27 papers. Proceedings have definitely gone out of style, and it says a few things about the state of publishing. There seems to be a strong emphasis on high-end reviewed collections with some well-known academic authors to bring both gravitas and potential sales for the multinational commercial publishers. It is also clear that the publishing opportunities in the field of popular music studies have multiplied, as there is a good number of devoted journals in our field, and hence the proceedings are no longer as “necessary” for younger scholars. But would there be another reason for releasing proceedings?

IASPM, as an organization, is all about inclusion, democratic practices, and the flow of ideas. The idea of this kind of raw proceedings came up in a discussion in Canberra, and if my memory serves me right, it was Professor Martha de Ulhôa, who spoke strongly in favour of returning to this kind of open proceedings book format. Both to strengthen the links between researchers, and to give anyone who got to read such volume an idea of the rich diversity of themes and perspectives present at our conferences. Even if this current proceedings book is much more modest than the last one I was editing, I think the variety of the presentations still speaks for itself.

Hopefully these now published conference papers – some developed further, some published pretty much as they were presented at the Australian National University – will resonate with you in a raw, powerful way. Hope we can see face to face again at the IASPM Daegu conference in 2022, and as the pandemic pushed the biennial conference forward by a year, again in 2023.