

The Variety of Climates in Popular Music Studies: From Raindrops to Fascist Bootsteps

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The 21st Biennial conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) was organized in Daegu, South Korea, in July 2022. The theme that was proposed by IASPM Executive Committee, *Popular Music Climates*, addresses one of the major future existential threats – namely the global climate crisis – but also has many other connotations.

The conference was organized in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus it took place mostly online. Some of us made it there and were able to enjoy the conference on location. Having travelled to Daegu to be the representative of the Executive Committee, together with then membership secretary Bernhard Steinbrecher, we felt sorry for the organizers, as only some rooms of the massive EXCO Convention Center were used by IASPM. But, at the same time, we were much impressed by the complex arrangements for the online activities.

The intention was to ask where we are now, what we are doing as a species, and what impact it has on our communities and our world. On a planet increasingly interconnected by a dizzying array of media channels, such a discussion has to be broadly framed. Our planet's climate is impacted by numerous forms of human activity, including those that are individual, personal, local, communal, institutional, commercial, corporate, cultural, political, and international. Music matters in this context, and its impact crosses mental and actual borders.

How, indeed, does popular music relate to our climate? Obviously, climate here relates to any part of the totality of surrounding conditions and circumstances affecting growth or development. A range of definitions were offered in the call of papers, including ecological climate, political climates, socio-political climates, and contextual and individuated climates. The presenters were asked to consider the impacts of activities related to popular music and its cultures on variously defined climates, and the impacts of changing or changed climates on different popular music and its contexts.

To address these issues, as well as any other questions and topics related to the past, present and future climates of popular music, the general theme of conference was divided into five interrelated streams, which I quote here:

1) Environment: Popular music has long been associated with green agendas, ecological concerns, and environmental activism, and this stream takes a more literal interpretation of the conference title than others. It also implies a link to ecological approaches that explore affordances as well as impacts, including insights from fields such as eco-musicology and ethnomusicology.

2) Milieu: Political climates no doubt seem to be more complex than those of the past to each generation. They have a direct influence on the stability and sustainability of our cultures, and this relationship is often reflected in our popular music. Political storms, quakes and disasters flow from isolationism into global cooperation, between east and west and from south to north. This stream will address local, national, and international politics, as well as individuated socio-politics, as reflected through issues such as identity, gender, class, sexuality, and belief, and seen and heard through popular music.

3) Ambiance: When describing climates, we may use terms such as ambiance, atmosphere, mood, or tone, to conceptualize the often unconscious perceptions of space and place. Studies of space and place have emerged as a key interdisciplinary subject across numerous fields and have crossed into popular music studies through studies of geographies, locality, scenes and subcultures. This stream invites explorations of receptions and perceptions, of audiences and ethnographies, of set and settings of popular music.

4) World: Climate, however defined, is intimately associated with questions that require a global approach. Although 'world music' has slowly made peace with ethnomusicology and although both have made inroads into popular music studies, they have not yet reached a truly global understanding of popular music. Areas such as South East Asia, where this conference is to be hosted, are having an increasing impact upon popular music, yet they are significantly

under-represented. This stream encouraged contributions which widen and deepen our global/local understanding of popular music and its cultures, whether through a detailed study of a specific subculture or scene, or by exploring changes in global popular music climates.

5) Mediums: The modes and channels of mediation of music have evolved at a rapid rate over the last 120 years, moving through cycles of oral, written, recorded, digital, and virtual transmission, into a multi-valent universe where revivals of folk singing and vinyl clubs mix with digital music and streaming. This stream focused on how mediums impact on popular music, and on the role of technology.

We have finally have the published proceedings in hand. Apologies for the longer than anticipated wait. I planned to have this out for IASPM XXII at Minneapolis, but sometimes it is better to have a bit of a delay and a better book. A referee round took place, and this was the last action I did as the Web/Publications representative of IASPM Executive. I got to witness perhaps the most challenging years that the organization has gone through, and hope the focus can again be restored to popular music studies in a collegial atmosphere. This publication offers plenty of new openings. The 19 presentations featured reflect the variety already hinted by the stream themes. Topics such as music festivals, live music, social media policies, local popular musics, visual identities, temporality, music genres, popular music politics, music technology, and gender issues, to pick up some currents from the general flow, offer the reader a complex web of meaning making in relation to popular music climates.

To think about climates in any cultural context seems more and more urgent. My own research has lately been focusing on Finnish fascism and populism, and popular music does play a role in both right wing propaganda, and anti-fascist struggles. The blatant way in which the populists often seem to deny climate change is in itself startling – the trust into research and tested knowledge, in this era of “post truth” and lazy internet searches, seems fruitful for the conspiracy theorists – indeed including climate change denialists – and plain neo-Nazis. In the future, are we going to have to listen to the extreme weather storm effects, and marching footsteps, or will we find ways to resist and solve the multiple and severe problems that threaten our at least seemingly democratic way of life?

A call to action.