

**VOLUME !**

## **Volume !**

La revue des musiques populaires

**9 : 2 | 2012**

**Contre-cultures n°2**

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### **Ian PEDDIE (ed.), *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest***

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#### **Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/volume/3395>

DOI: 10.4000/volume.3395

ISSN: 1950-568X

#### **Publisher**

Association Mélanie Seteun

#### **Printed version**

Date of publication: 15 December 2012

Number of pages: 00

ISBN: 978-2-913169-33-3

ISSN: 1634-5495

#### **Electronic reference**

Dave Laing, "Ian PEDDIE (ed.), *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*", *Volume !* [Online], 9 : 2 | 2012, Online since 15 December 2012, connection on 24 August 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/volume/3395> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/volume.3395>

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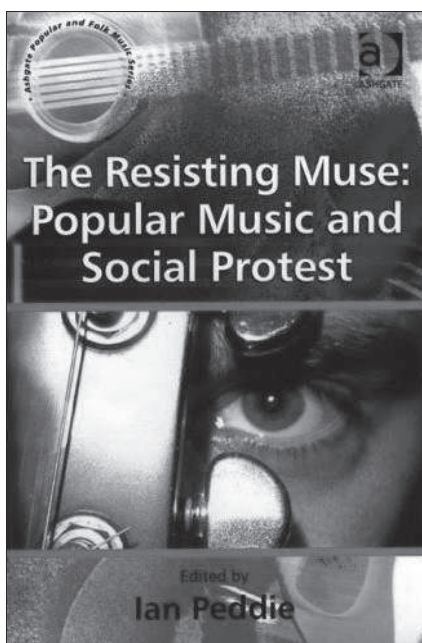
**Ian Peddie (ed), *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*, Farnham and Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2006.**

The terms 'resistance' and 'protest' – combined in the title of this collection of essays – have their respective origins in the discourses of warfare and politics. The paradigmatic instance of resistance in 20<sup>th</sup> century history is that of the *maquis* – the French guerrilla fighters against German occupation during World War II. From this comes the primary meaning of the idea, a national or nationalist movement offering total opposition to an invading foreign force, from the Vietnamese resistance to first France and then the US in the 1950 and 1960s, to Palestinian attempts to thwart Israeli occupation.

If resistance signifies a general intransigence, protest as a form of political action may be seen as more limited and pragmatic. A protest is aimed at specific policies or practices, but crucially protest's own methods are generally taken from outside the political system, be that so-called representative democracy of Western capitalism, or the bastardised democratic centralism of China, Vietnam and some of the former republics of the USSR. Protests can oppose such things as armament regimes (nuclear weapons), ethnic, gender or sexual oppression, and the censor-

ship of artistic, religious or political expression.

A reader of *The Resisting Muse* looking for editorial guidance on how music linked to protest and resistance is likely to be disappointed. In his brief and brisk general introduction, Ian Peddie dismisses what he calls 'the all-too familiar reductionism of the music-as-representative-of-youth-culture ideology'. He does not offer any clue to his alternative definitions of musical resistance and protest, except in a cryptic conclusion to his own chapter, which refers to 'a passing of the torch from modern to postmodern, from orthodoxy to ambiguity'.



The introduction (and the back cover text) also refers in passing to the 'post-1975' focus of the book, but gives no clue as to the reason for this cut-off point. Is it because Peddie believes that protest music prior to that date has been exhaustively covered, or because he feels that in the final quarter of the 20th century social protest in music took a qualitatively different direction?

Perhaps it is a world-historical issue. It is true that the years around 1975 saw the end of what is sometimes called the *trente glorieuses* – the three decades or so of almost uninterrupted eco-

nomic growth following the Second World War, at least in the capitalist world of North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australasia. But such speculations are probably unnecessary, since most contributors ignore the ban on discussion of pre-1975 music.

One way to classify the modes of music as protest or resistance is to borrow from linguistics the concepts of metonym and metaphor. Metonymically, the protest song can be articulated with a pre-existing protest movement or campaign, reproducing its slogans or themes. On the other hand, metaphorical protest music expresses its oppositional stance through aesthetic and/or subcultural politics.

In *33 Revolutions Per Minute* (2011), the British critic Dorian Lynskey provides a neat, if banal, definition of metonymic protest music, stating that it is 'a song which deals with political issues that aligns itself with the underdog'. In the United States, the classic examples have been the alignment of folk song with trade union and anti-war struggles and the elision of gospel, hip-hop and soul music with the civil rights and black power movements. In *The Resisting Muse*, these dimensions of protest song are explored in chapters on the fate of 'folk-protest' by Jerry Rodnitsky, on the singer-songwriters Michelle Shocked and Billy Bragg by Mark Willhardt, on 'women in rap' by Gail Hilson Woldu and on 'hip-hop in the aftermath of (post)modernity' by the redoubtable Russell A. Potter.

Deena Weinstein's thought-provoking essay on 'rock protest songs' addresses an important issue for the late 20th century – the relative paucity of such songs when there was so much to protest about. Weinstein attributes this situation to both the power of conservative media institutions in

the United States and to formal generic features that act as a barrier to effective communication, especially mondegreens (mishearings of lyrics).

Outside the US, two essays examine forms of musical resistance to postcolonial systems and regimes in Jamaica and Australia. Peter Dunbar-Hall provides analysis of 'popular music as a representation of Australian Aboriginal cultural loss and reclamation'. This is valuable but unexceptional. The same cannot be said for Stephen A King's chapter on reggae and Rastafari in Jamaica. Its title, 'Protest Music as "ego-enhancement"', indicates its frankly impudent argument, that the motivation for rebellion is not resistance to oppression but the narcissism of individual musicians.

The political practice of musicians as activists, is the subject of a chapter by John Street, who is even-handed in his critique of such figures as Bono and Harry Belafonte. James Smethurst considers the representation of social class in popular song, focusing particularly on the music of Eminem, which inserts white lumpen proletarian experience into pop. Smethurst does not mention country music, even though it is the primary locus for the representation of white working-class consciousness.

Country music is one of several genres that should have been included in a book seeking to deal with oppositional music in the final quarter of the last century. Where, apart from in an epigraph from The Clash, is punk? And disco? Or, beyond the Anglophone emphasis of the book, the massive upsurge of defiant music across Latin America, and the Asian rock music associated with such figures as Cui Jian (the 'Chinese Bob Dylan')?

What I earlier called metaphorical protest music is featured in the final section of the book, which

## The Resisting Muse : Popular Music and Social Protest

Peddie titles 'The Paradox of Anti-Social Protest'. It is difficult to see why these topics should be 'paradoxical' since each essay portrays a scene or subculture that consciously or not brackets itself off from various versions of mainstream (or hegemonic) society or music. They could reasonably be defined as cultural equivalents of the 'temporary autonomous zones', a concept introduced into radical political thought by Hakim Bey.

Kathleen McConnell focuses on an industrial subculture, the indie scene of the Pacific North-West; Kimberley Jackson introduces a classic, anachronistic subculture, that of Goth; and Steven Hamelman introduces a plangent

autobiographical note in his elegy for the protest dimension of 'straight edge' post-punk music. Sean K. Kelly adds a different take on heavy metal, reading its texts as models of 'a future democratic community' where resistance and universality are compatible.

In sum, like many such edited collections, *The Resisting Muse* is a mixed blessing. It suffers from an incoherent editorial concept but is redeemed by several chapters that deserve to outlive the book itself, particularly those by Weinstein, Potter and Street.

Dave LAING

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### "The Performance is the Record": Julien's *It Was Forty Years Ago Today*.

Olivier Julien (ed.), *Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles: It Was Forty Years Ago Today*, Aldershot & Burlington, Ashgate, 2008.

Olivier Julien's tribute to the Beatles' groundbreaking *Sgt. Pepper* stands, at heart, a retrospective that attempts to place the album both within its historical context and further understand its cultural merit. Acknowledging that "this masterpiece of British psychedelia" has an "absolutely unique position in the history of recorded popular music" (xvii), Julien and the book's contributors aim to contextualize the album's uniqueness from a variety of perspectives. Noted Beatles and music scholars such as Ian Inglis, Russell Reising, and Sheila Whiteley, to name just a few, contribute provocative insight into the album that help us understand how the forty years that have passed

since its debut offer new insights into the cultural uniqueness and merit of the album.

The collection begins predictably with Julien's brief overview of the circumstances leading up to the creation of *Sgt. Pepper*. Julien cites the Beatles' wariness of touring and the members' respective time apart as major contributing factors to the creation of *Pepper*; notable, too, in this brief introduction is the changes in studio space and equipment (a fact that Hannan's article explores in much more detail). Julien's other contribution to the collection, "A Lucky Man Who Made the Grade," places the album as a defining moment in the history of "the phonographic