

# Music, Performance and Protest

ANDY WARD

The Anthropocene is noisy, sonic and full of music. The emergence of listening as method has been brought to the forefront of the arts/science/creativity nexus. Less invasive, and rich in outcomes than other methods, this approach highlights that our need to listen to our planet and each other has never been more urgent. In the pre-COVID cacophony of the seemingly dying embers of late-stage capitalism, the world was flooded with divisive rhetoric pushing our world further into the isolating social silence of the market of one. In 2020, the proliferation of a Global pandemic seemed to change the music of the planet and its people. In the year that was, with one ear we could hear the calls for meaningful change in the Black Lives Matter Movement and Extinction rebellion, and with the other ear the endless dull roar of neo-feudal corporatism brought about the storming of a capital, the raucous argument for economy over humanity, and the continued cries as the environment was being sacrificed at the altar of the almighty dollar. And yet, for one short minute, the earth stood still. We could hear the seas again. Our ceasing of an endless need for consumption and travel heard the return of moments of meaningful stillness.

Here we find ourselves, now emerging from the discombobulation caused by a moment in human and earthly history. As scholars, through this rapid and sudden change we find ourselves in a data and information-rich research ecology. As pedagogues, the structures and modes of meaningful communication have been augmented, and very often for the aim of false austerity in the academy as it teeters on the edge of corporatism, fighting for its last benevolent social breath.

Gathered in this short special edition of six articles, are pages dedicated to the diversity of our social roles as scholars. Some contributions explore the intersection of music and activism for environmental gain, others unpack the economies of availability that inform our new online workshop spaces. All seek to address a key notion of the recent turmoil, and achieve this with heart-warmingly positive insight into popular culture and the diverse critical discourse of the modern music fan/artist ecosystem.

Music, like all human communication, is a social act. It is deeply embedded with its environment and acts far more in rhetoric, activism, and human change than the

soundbite it is very often reduced to. It is hard to remember, while walking the aisles of a neo-feudal corporate prison of dystopia like a supermarket, that music is making you move at a certain pace so you can carefully absorb branding communication on its shelves. Indeed, the ubiquitous nature of popular song can very much find its origin in the Military Entertainment Complex, but I digress. Music, like any great thing, is often used for nefarious purpose... but with careful socially informed and active listening, change can happen. The music we make, embrace and explore can be crafted into the weapons that free those of us who are among the oppressed in the frightening violent systems of consumption and oppression.

As the guest editor, I hope this edition serves to encourage us all to listen more to our planet, to its people, to its music, both anthropogenic and environmental.

## Author

Dr Andy Ward is a researcher focusing on songwriting, music theory, sustainability, and popular culture. Andy brings his years of industry practice to academia previously working as a songwriter, producer and performing artist. Today he continues to work with major record labels and music publishers on developing songs and artists from around the world. His research is focused on decolonising music hierarchies, narratology-based music inquiry, performance technology, music industry research, regional and remote music, sustainability in creative economies, and further establishing songwriting-as-research methodologies.

### Black Smokers<sup>1</sup>

For cities of bacteria that need not light nor air ...

In deepest darkness they began:  
before breath and green trees  
running deer and leopards.  
Before poetry, before death.

MARGARET DINGLE

1. Black smokers are hydrothermal vents in the deep ocean which nourish bacteria that do not need light or oxygen. They may be among the earliest forms of life.