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Article

Dilemmas of purpose in higher popular music education

Dilemmas of purpose in higher popular music education: A critical portrait of an academic field

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Abstract

Since the first degree programme in Popular Music opened in 1990, the academic field of higher popular music education (HPME) has grown exponentially in the United Kingdom. The current provision includes 128 programmes offered by 47 institutions including Russell Group universities, specialist conservatoires and private providers. The majority of programmes, however, are found within 'post-92' institutions, reflecting the political and cultural conditions from and challenging which the field has emerged. This article critically appraises the field's emergence within the frames of higher education policy, discourses of employability and widening participation, the high/low culture dichotomy and the dialectic of commerce and art, which has been identified as a perennial issue at the crux of popular music as a cultural phenomenon. It proposes that the field is characterized by dilemmas concerning its nature and purpose, and that the narrative of HPME's emergence might serve as a valuable case study against which other young fields or subject areas might be compared and appraised.

Keywords

popular music studies

popular music education

purpose

dilemma

disciplinary culture

HPME

Introduction

The UK higher education sector has undergone significant expansion and change over the last three decades, in line with successive governments' strategies. While this expansion is unprecedented in terms of student enrolment, it sits within a longer narrative of sector growth, starting at the end of the nineteenth century with the creation of civic universities, that charts a gradual and exponential move away from elite provision towards mass provision. This move from elite to mass provision has been undergirded by a shift in understandings of the purpose of higher education, away from a Humboldtian one towards a Napoleonic one.^[1] Since the 1990s, UK higher education policy has been increasingly rationalized in macroeconomic terms, with higher education presented as a driver of economic growth and a means to secure competitive advantage in the global marketplace and knowledge economy (e.g. Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2009, 2011, 2016; Dearing 1997; Department for Business Education and Skills 2003).

While this has not resulted in exclusively vocational curricula, and liberal arts and humanities disciplines are still widespread throughout the sector, the utilitarian aspect of higher education has arguably become more pronounced across the disciplinary

spectrum. In recent years, this shift in emphasis has been facilitated in part by regulatory protocols within the sector, such as the expectation that degree programmes explicitly justify the value of their offer in terms of graduate employment prospects,¹ which applies equally to degrees with and without a straightforwardly vocational focus.

As is discussed in more detail below, music as an academic field of study has possessed both liberal and vocational aspects since its beginnings and spanned ‘soft-pure’ (concerned with creative expression and ideas) and ‘soft-applied’ (concerned with personal growth and preparation for professional life) epistemic terrain (Biglan 1973). As such, considered in terms of Becher and Trowler’s (2001) discussion of the nature of knowledge within academic disciplines, the field has been at once ‘utilitarian’ and ‘holistic’, with ‘functional’, ‘purposive criteria for judgement’ existing alongside ‘subjective’ criteria (Becher and Trowler 2001). Importantly, however, higher music education in the United Kingdom has historically been rooted in the Western art music tradition, and accordingly understandings of its purpose across both its liberal and vocational aspects have corresponded to upholding high culture through the mediation of canonical repertoire and the supporting of high cultural infrastructure (Ford 2010). In contrast, the advent of higher popular music education (hereafter HPME) in the 1990s marked a stark departure from the repertoire and values of higher music education at large, and thus from its associated conceptions of purpose. HPME has emerged as part of what Jessop and Maleckar (2016) describe as a ‘spawning of hybrid, inter-disciplinary and new subjects [that have] made disciplinary classification more complex and ambiguous’ (697).

In this article, I consider the case of HPME, an acronym now established in the literature (e.g. Parkinson and Smith 2015) to refer to the study of popular music within a taught higher education context, and which can encompass performance, composition, musicology, analysis, technology, business, song writing and other foci. I suggest how, at various junctures, developments in higher education policy, discourse and climate have given rise to the appropriate conditions for the field's emergence and subsequent establishment. I argue that tensions within the sector at large, concerning what higher education is ultimately for, are felt particularly acutely within HPME and are further compounded by the disruption of normative and canonical value frameworks that HPME's entry into the academy has entailed.

This article's broad focus on the field of HPME as a whole requires a degree of generalization, particularly in terms of identifying matters of ideological climate within the field. There will inevitably be exceptions to my general observations, and I have sought where possible to account for these. Where generalizations are left unqualified, this is on the basis that they are readily verifiable through publicly available information, typically programme websites and those of sector bodies such as the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), but to give full references would risk doubling the length of the article. My observations are underpinned by eleven years of experience working within the HE sector, eight of which were in a music context. I encourage a discursive reading of this article and invite others working and studying within the field to consider my observations in relation to their own experiences.

Beginnings and context

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HPME is a comparatively young but firmly established academic field. Its beginnings and precursors have been variously identified in the field of cultural studies, and in particular at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham (Cloonan 2005; Huq 2006), on the music education programme at Göteborg, Sweden (Tagg 1998), in popular music within school-level curricula (e.g. Swanwick 1968; Vulliamy and Lee 1982), in academic studies of popular music artists such as the Beatles (e.g. Mellers 1973) and in colleges offering unaccredited courses in instrumental performance (e.g. Guitar Institute 1991). While popular music has featured in curricula across a range of disciplines and subject areas since at least the 1970s, it came into being as a stand-alone, taught academic area in the United Kingdom between 1988 and 1990, with the first 'Popular Music' postgraduate and undergraduate degree programmes, respectively.¹ All but one of the undergraduate programmes existing today, however, were first delivered after 1992, a 'watershed' year in UK higher education (Quality Assurance Agency [QAA] 2008: 9) that saw the university status conferred onto former polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education under the Further and Higher Education Act, amounting to what was arguably the most significant expansion and change within the sector since the aftermath of the Robbins Report in 1963, when an earlier wave of new universities was established. In addition to the establishment of new universities, the Act precipitated the growth of new disciplines and fields, HPME among them, provoking tense debate surrounding the nature and purpose of higher education (Parkinson and Smith 2015), the roles of different institutional types, the relative value of different types of knowledge and the relative emphases placed on 'applied' and 'pure' (Becher and

Trowler 2001: 36) academic content. It is predominantly within post-92 universities (as they are collectively known) that popular music studies has burgeoned as a taught field.

In addition to '[doing] the heavy lifting in terms of overall student expansion [and] widening participation for students from "middle England," working-class homes and ethnic minorities' (Scott 2012), post-92 institutions have tended to position themselves as 'business-facing' institutions with a vocational emphasis (Scott 2012), arguably a legacy of their earlier status as polytechnics, coupled with a need to differentiate themselves in a newly competitive higher education market. While arts and humanities degrees are common in post-92 institutions (as indeed they had been in polytechnics since at least the 1970s), in recent years a number of institutions have reduced their provision in these areas (notably London Metropolitan University and the University of Greenwich), in response to cuts in teaching grants for non-STEM subjects, which have disproportionately affected teaching-intensive post-92 institutions (Morgan 2011). In 2011, the University of East London closed the School of Humanities, rehousing subjects including English Literature within a new 'School of Arts and Digital Industries', whose explicitly industrial nomenclature might be interpreted as a subtle recalibration of the university's arts and humanities offer towards the priorities of employability and skills.

Such tensions relating to the balance of vocational and liberal emphasis have accompanied the growth of HPME and continue to be felt within the field (Parkinson and Smith 2015). Subsequent developments in higher education at large (such as the move towards a fee-dependent funding model and incremental increases in tuition fees), while less abrupt, have also corresponded to values and ideological positions that bring new

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complexities to the context in which the field of HPME is situated. Further tensions emanate from HPME's obvious departure from the high culture norms of the arts and humanities, and the academic study of music in particular. It is worth paying some attention here to the latter.

Tertiary music education in the United Kingdom

Prior to the advent of HPME degrees (see above), music, as it featured in UK Academe, was overwhelmingly focused towards the Western art tradition. This was the case both at the more vocationally focused conservatoires and at universities whose curricula tended towards a liberal/Humboldtian scholarly model (QAA 2008). Indeed, the relationship between Western art music practice and its educational institutions has historically been, and continues to be, integrated and mutually supportive (Dibben 2004, 2006; Ford 2010; see also Nettl 1995 for a focus on the US context). In the United Kingdom, conservatoires have been loci for the composition, stewardship and performance of repertoire since the inception of the Royal Academy of Music in 1823 (QAA 2008). These institutions were initially founded specifically for educating performers and composers to sustain and build a high-cultural repertoire. Based on earlier Italian and French models, they were paradoxically borne of a nationalist drive for cultural institutions but initially maintained a predominantly Austro-German repertoire (Ford 2010). A 1965 Gulbenkian foundation-funded report into conservatoires depicted an institutional type whose pedagogies and curricula were steeped in history and tradition and had seen very little change since these beginnings in the nineteenth century (Gulbenkian Foundation 1977). Subsequent studies of classical music conservatoires have identified 'long-held traditions and habitus' (Perkins 2013b: 207) and 'time-honored

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practices that continue to be exempted from scrutiny' (Carey et al. 2013: 151). The master-apprentice model remains the signature pedagogy (Clark and Jackson 2017; Long et al. 2012), although as Perkins (2013) notes, 'challenges to "traditional" ways of operating are emerging from conservatoire educators across the globe' (197). University music departments, meanwhile, initially followed a model of textual appreciation and analysis (QAA 2008), at once reifying and applying the criteria by which art music was defined and judged.

The historical narratives of Western art music and institutional music education in the UK context are, therefore, thoroughly enmeshed. The nomenclature of the diplomas that until the 1990s were conferred to conservatoire graduates (and are still used for honorific purposes and awarded by external exam boards) – licentiateships, associateships and fellowships – suggests continued institutional affiliation and thus might be seen to stake an implicit claim of institutional authority over standards of performance and composition. In short, the Western art music 'profession' has historically been mediated by a high degree of institutional credentialism, even if, as Ford (2010) notes, it is not subject to official or legally bound industry accreditation in the manner of professions proper, such as nursing or medicine. It is not my intention here to gloss over the complexity and heterogeneity of Western art music education. What is important to note, though, is the sense of institutional stewardship and the integrated systems of production, dissemination, apprenticeship and evaluation that have characterized and set the parameters both for tertiary music education and for Western art music as a cultural form since at least the mid-nineteenth century. As such, a holistic conception of purpose, rooted in tradition, is implicit in this model.

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The master-apprentice model...

While this conception of purpose still endures in higher music education today on degree programmes with a Western art music emphasis, it is tempered by a concern for ‘employability’, a concept now well established within official (i.e. policy and sector body) HE discourse (e.g. HEA 2012, 2015; OECD 2012; QAA 2012), and which enshrines a vision of HE as a means to prepare students for employment through provision of skills and the nurturing of attributes such as entrepreneurship. As noted above, since 2010, degree programme teams have been expected to set out in the form of an ‘employability statement’ (Langland 2010) the ways in which their programmes enhance students’ employment prospects and prepare them for professional life. In music, where in contrast to other subject areas, graduates are less likely to access their chosen profession by way of a graduate ‘milk round’ (Cloonan 2005), emphasis has been placed on enhancing students’ entrepreneurial and self-management abilities for embarking on ‘portfolio careers’ (Burnard and Haddon 2016; Conservatoires UK 2016; Hallam and Gaunt 2012). In addition to this increase in emphasis on employability, the curricula of many generic (i.e. not explicitly genre-specific) music degrees have long since broadened beyond a Western art focus (Pace 2016) and now encompass a range of musics and musicologies. Although this does not necessarily entail antagonizing and/or displacing canonical value frameworks, at the very least it constitutes giving increasing space to alternatives, and thus challenges the pre-eminence of Western art music within academic music contexts. This inevitably correlates to a broadened conception of what higher music education is for, in which the values, practices and repertoire associated with Western art music are no longer necessarily foundational or sine qua non.

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While these developments within generic higher music education have been gradual, the advent of HPME as an explicit entity was an abrupt incursion, in which a traditionally non-academic cultural phenomenon (popular music) was brought into the academy and placed at the centre of a new field. Prior to the 1990s, popular music(s) had seldom featured prominently in higher music education in the United Kingdom. Scott recalls teaching the curricula typical in the 1980s:

I was granted permission to give one lecture (out of twelve) on popular music. This was to include everything from early jazz to punk rock. It is perhaps difficult for some readers to believe now how distorted a picture was being given to students of music in [the 20th] century.

(Scott n.d.)

In contrast to the highly integrated infrastructure and practice of Western art music (discussed above), of which formal education is a fundamental aspect, popular music has developed largely outside of, and has often positioned itself in direct opposition to, institutional settings and authority, and indeed to (normative understandings of) formal musical tutelage (Green 2002). Green (2002: 99) identifies, in the case of rock music, an 'ideology of authenticity' in which value is placed on a natural, unschooled outpouring of expression on the part of the musician, in contrast to the highly trained musicianship associated with classical orchestral musicians. Moreover, a perceived freedom from institutional control is fundamental to anti-establishment identities often associated with genres of popular music (Middleton 1992; O'Hara 1999; Soderman 2013). As such, the co-opting of popular music into the academy is doubly transgressive, disrupting not only academic norms but also ideological and learning norms associated with the object of study (popular music). Questions of authenticity brought to the fore by such a disruption

have an obvious bearing on how the purpose of HPME is understood (Parkinson and Smith 2015).

I wish to offer some personal anecdotes at this stage. In recent years teaching on a BMus in Popular Music Performance, I have assessed final-year composition and production projects for which students are required to provide accompanying scores in standard notation, even where the chosen genre is punk involving three note power chords moved consecutively up and down the neck of a guitar, with the bass guitar playing only the root note of each chord. It is unlikely that a punk band in the 'real world' (that oft-invoked imaginary – see Bennett 2015) would ever use standard notation as a performance guide or anything else, and any sophistication in the composition of such music is unlikely to reside in those intrinsic elements that can be conveyed on a staff. In such cases, I have often wondered whether this assessment requirement served any legitimate, authentic purpose, but I have also wondered whether removing these requirements would undermine the 'academic-ness' of the task; in other words, does it meet my tacit expectations of what higher education should entail? This dilemma encapsulates, I think, some of the anxiety that surrounds the task of making popular music 'academic' and represents a point of impasse between the forces of 'epistemic drift' and 'intellectualizing shift' within HPME, as set out by Parkinson and Smith (2015), and explored in more detail below.

In April 2016, Professor Simon Zagorski-Thomas of the University of West London delivered a short provocation on BBC Radio 4's 4 Thought programme, broadly concerned with the impact of entrenched high/low culture assumptions on music in academia (Zagorski-Thomas 2016). This covered a number of interrelated topics

including research funding distribution, the perceived privileging of the music of 'dead white composers', the relative sophistication of popular and classical music and the extent to which musicology was fit for (and honouring its) purpose. Ultimately, Zagorski-Thomas asked whether 'the prestige of some aspects of academic subjects over others might be determined by prejudice and snobbery rather than relevance, complexity or academic rigour'. In his view, 'the lack of alternative narratives of quality is stifling music in universities and contributing to [a] continuing lack of balance' (Zagorski-Thomas 2016). The broadcast provoked a good deal of discussion on social media, much of which was curated by the musicologist and pianist Ian Pace, of City University, who published responses from a number of academics and musicians, including myself, on his blog (Pace 2016). Among the arguments made by various commentators were: that this was a time-worn and tired argument; that popular music education was flatly not comparable in value to notation-based classical music education; that, contrary to Zagorski-Thomas's portrayal, there was in fact a bias against classical music at the present time within higher music education, as in wider cultural life; and that Zagorski-Thomas had predictably but unhelpfully framed the discussion in terms of identity politics. Pace's own response centred around two principal arguments: first, that academic music education and scholarship had a responsibility to resist 'hegemonic', commercially bound conceptions of musical value that are implicit in the ubiquity of Anglo-American popular music in broader cultural life, and that Zagorski-Thomas's rhetoric worked against that responsibility. Second, Pace argued that the tendency within (popular) musicology to focus on extra-musical aspects, as opposed to sounding music, amounted to a 'de-skilling' of the discipline and risked 'relegat[ing] [music] to a mere

sub-section of cultural studies' (a recurring concern in Pace's recent work [2015]). In a subsequent response, Zagorski-Thomas agreed with the latter argument; he felt that this tendency towards sociological analysis diverted attention from the intrinsic musical value of popular music. Pace revisited this concern in December 2016, when it was announced that Simon Frith, Professor of Music at Edinburgh University, was to be awarded an OBE in the UK's New Year's Honours List:

The emotional tenor of this debate, which garnered significant attention on social media,⁸ hints at an uncomfortable tribalism within higher music education and revealed chronic anxieties as to who/what higher music education should be about/for, in particular what role HPME has to play. Themes of marketization, identity politics, widening participation, liberalism, utilitarianism and cultural value were drawn together in complex ways, revealing the scope of interrelated factors perceived to be at stake. Pace's comments on 'de-skilling' are particularly interesting for untethering the notion of skills from its normative moorings within the discourse of employability and industrial demand; for Pace, musical analytical skills have a Humboldtian, intrinsic purpose rather than a Napoleonic, utilitarian one, and HPME's privileging of commercial value puts this purpose in jeopardy.

More generally, Zagorski-Thomas's broadcast draws attention to the high/low culture distinction that has been a defining condition of British cultural life since at least the Victorian era, and by extension, therefore (given the institutionalization of British cultural life), of arts education in the United Kingdom. The subtly pejorative adjectives historically used in association with popular culture ('vernacular', 'light', 'low', 'mass') set it apart from that which has been prized, husbanded and mediated by institutions, and

to which adjectives such as ‘art’, ‘high’ and ‘serious’ have been apportioned. In the case of popular music, this arguably implies a conceptualization that corresponds to Birrer’s (1984) first and second (of four) ‘categories of definition’ by which popular music is commonly defined and understood:

1. Normative: popular music as an inferior type
2. Negative: popular music is music that is not something else (in this case art music) (Birrer 1984: 104)

As Middleton (1992: 4) notes, Birrer’s definitional categories are ‘interest-bound’. However, they are also useful in highlighting the dualistic reasoning by which musical categorization takes place; indeed, as Walser (2003: 5) notes, categories of ‘popular music and classical music [...] are interdependent and actively reproduced’. Birrer’s third category – ‘Sociological: popular music is associated with or produced by a particular social group’ (Birrer 1984: 104) – encompasses the musical identities, forms and lifestyle practices associated with social groups, whether class-, locale- subculture- or otherwise-based. The fourth category of definition (‘Techno-economic: popular music is disseminated by mass media and/or in a mass market’ [Birrer 1984: 104]) brings into focus the oft-alleged inextricableness of popular music from its economic and mass-produced aspects. Drawing these features of popular music into synthesis with debates in which the academic integrity of higher arts education is cast in opposition to economics-driven agendas (NAMHE 2011; Pace 2016), and those relating to widening participation in higher education, highlights some of the field-specific complexities that popular music brings to these prevailing tensions.

Tagg (1998) has written of the Swedish social, economic and cultural conditions out of which popular music education emerged in that country, almost three decades earlier than it did in the United Kingdom. It is worth reproducing a portion of his text, as it provides an interesting counterpoint to the UK context:⁷

[Sweden lacks the] high cultural historical ballast in relation to other nations. Put simply, Swedes did not have to contend with legacies of the likes of Bach, Bacon, Beethoven, Descartes, Debussy, Dante, Gallilei, Goethe, Haydn, Hegel, Mozart, Pascal, Purcell, Sartre, Schiller or Shakespeare [...] there were no big historical names of high culture on which to focus bourgeois national identity and [...] the institutionalisation of high culture was therefore less substantial and less powerful than elsewhere. [...] Sweden's history of class conflict also differs radically from the UK or Central Europe and the nation experienced a much later and faster process of industrialisation. [...] all these factors and others [...] contributed to the establishment of a political climate in which [popular music education] was able to materialise and flourish earlier.

(Tagg 1998: 220–21)

The UK context is markedly different. High cultural achievement and national identity are accompanied by a famously stratified class system, which has been linked to distinctions of high and low culture (e.g. Savage et al. 2013;⁸ Bennett et al. 2009), engagement in music education (e.g. ABRSM 2014) and access to/choices of higher education (see Dibben's [2004] analysis of National Statistics Social Class [NSSC 1998–99 to 2001–02] and National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification [NS-SEC, 2002–03] data). Given this context, and moreover, the long-established institutionalization of the high arts, it is perhaps inevitable that popular music's entrance into higher education has been slower and more tentative in the United Kingdom than in Sweden. As discussed above, the post-92 expansion of the HE sector in particular can be seen as a critical

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development that gave rise to the necessary conditions both for new academic disciplines and fields to emerge and for widened participation in HE across class strata. Just as the University of Göteborg, at that time an unremarkable university without a famous intellectual heritage (Tagg 1998), provided a context for popular music education to grow in Sweden, it was in the newly established post-92 universities that the discipline of popular music was to thrive in the United Kingdom. As is discussed below, the post-92 status of HPME has been identified as both a driver and a symptom of cultural and class-based prejudice.

As already noted, the vocational ethos of many post-92 universities has endured, as has a high degree of ‘applied’ instruction, albeit amidst pressure for post-92 institutions to prove themselves deserving of university status and research funding. Zagorski-Thomas (2016) makes reference to a statistical disadvantage of post-92s in securing research funding, which he links (anecdotally in the absence of data) to a bias towards high culture in the funding of music scholarship. As is discussed in more detail below, HPME exemplifies the tensions between ‘applied’, ‘business facing’ delivery and traditionally ‘academic’ scholarship (Cloonan 2005). As noted above, the field can be seen to have experienced both ‘epistemic drift’ (Elzinga 1985) towards the industry demand for skills and an ‘intellectualising shift’ (Becher and Trowler 2001) towards the expectations of the academic setting, giving rise to conflicting values as to the purpose of the discipline (Parkinson and Smith 2015). Should HPME be concerned primarily with preparing students for the music industry, or should it commit to a Humboldtian ideal centred on the pursuit of musical knowledge for its own sake?

‘What is popular music studies?’ Variations in programme content and analysis

The first part of the above subheading was the title of an article by Cloonan (2005) that examined the state of play within the field of HPME at that time (as noted above, the term Popular Music Studies has been supplemented with alternatives in the interim). Cloonan discusses the diversity of provision within the field, which he examines further in his later investigation with Hulstedt (2012). This diversity is due in large part to the multifariousness of its object of study; the term ‘popular music’ is itself rarely defined precisely within academia and is instead understood tacitly in different ways, encompassing a vast array of cultural forms and practices. Furthermore, popular music’s aforementioned techno-economic aspect (Birrer 1984: 104) is such that it does not sit as straightforwardly within the arts and humanities as other subjects. Thus, in comparison with fields such as English literature and music (i.e. not specifically ‘popular’ music), HPME is extremely difficult to position, and its sheer scope is such that categorization according to distinctions of practical/theoretical, arts/sciences/humanities/social sciences, hard/soft/pure/applied (Biglan 1973) is contentious. Cloonan and Hulstedt’s (2012) Higher Education Academy–commissioned mapping exercise, for which questionnaires were sent to UK popular music degree programme leaders, indicates that some educators find the term ‘popular music studies’ to be an inaccurate representation of their field, implying an attribution detached scholarship to that label, as opposed to applied music making (‘we don’t teach popular music studies, we teach popular music’ [Cloonan and Hulstedt 2012: 20, emphasis added]).

The core content of HPME programmes can vary markedly. Cloonan (2005) proposes three main curricula categories – musical, critical and vocational – while acknowledging a high degree of bleed across these distinctions. In his later article with Hulstedt (2012), Cloonan revises musical to practical in recognition of the fact that much of the practice covered within HPME, such as journalism or tour management, is not strictly musical (in the music-making sense). This issue of balancing the practical, critical and vocational aspects of programmes is arguably consistent with current trends within higher education at large, and the imperative of promoting employability has inevitably led to increased scrutiny in terms of how this balance is struck. In many cases, HPME delivery exemplifies trends associated with shifts in higher educational purpose towards a utilitarian model, such as work-based learning ('WBL') (e.g. BIMM 2016), industry links and professional practitioners as faculty (Becher and Trowler 2001). In conceptual and practical terms, this model entails a range of micro-, meso- and macro-level stakeholders, including individual learners, employers, corporations, the nebulous entity of the 'music industry', the national economy and the state, and as such brings us to consider not only what, but also who HPME is for.

Parkinson and Smith (2015: 99–102) propose that current HPME curricula bear the trace of three 'narratives' of popular music education in the United Kingdom, stemming from different origins, each with a different implicit purpose. The first is the 'popular music studies' narrative that begins with the study of popular music within cultural studies, and whose purpose was liberal and sociological rather than vocational; the second is a 'commercial music' narrative, beginning with the University of Westminster's Commercial Music programme in 1993, whose purpose was utilitarian and

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explicitly orientated towards the music industry; the third is a ‘popular music performance’ narrative stemming from a collection of unaccredited instrumental tuition colleges in West London, whose purpose was to train musicians. Parkinson and Smith (2015) suggest that most programmes on offer today reflect all of these narratives together, but with different degrees of emphasis, such that different conceptions of purpose can coexist, sometimes uncomfortably, within programmes.

From the findings of a multiple case study of HPME programmes across the United Kingdom (Parkinson 2014: 185), I proposed an ‘art school/business school/conservatoire/humanities department’ typology, each type signifying a different emphasis within HPME provision. Influenced by Biglan’s (1973) disciplinary groupings of higher education, and Becher and Trowler’s (2001) epistemic characterization thereof, I ascribed epistemic characteristics to each type (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Parkinson’s (2014) HPME typology with epistemic characteristics.

It is important to note that these types are reductive ‘archetypes’ and not absolute, but are intended to denote relative emphasis (all programmes in the study incorporated at least some aspects of each type, but there were significant differences in emphasis). The types can be presented as a graphic model in which each type is represented as a quadrant. Users of the model are encouraged to represent their programmes visually by drawing a shape across the quadrants (see [Figure 1](#)), accompanied by verbal explanations, to assist in engaging critically and discursively with issues of programme emphasis, content and, ultimately, purpose (Parkinson 2014).

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Figure 2: Parkinson's (2014) model for gauging the epistemic emphases of popular music programmes, with Parkinson's representation of the four UK HPME programmes in the study.

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Widening participation and the realpolitik of academic survival

Dibben (2004, 2006) has noted that engagement in higher music education in the United Kingdom is predominantly among higher socio-economic groups, where consumers of classical music are also typically to be found, helping to preserve a Western art-oriented status quo within higher music education. Linked to this, Dibben argues that pre-92 universities' bias towards Western art music and reluctance to include popular music in curricula 'maintains social distinctions because it values the culture of the Western European middle-classes more highly than that of other social groups [and thus] perpetuates music as a basis for class divide' (2006: 3). Expressing a view similar to Dibben's, a programme leader interviewee in Parkinson's (2014) study saw the provision of popular music education at his post-92 institution as nothing short of an act of social justice, helping young people from less privileged backgrounds to access higher education and study music on their own cultural terms, and to get past what he perceived to be a 'bifurcated social capital-led distinction' in which '[so little] social capital is attached [...] to the kind of music that goes on here' (201).

At a 2013 round table comprising leading educators and industry figures at the Royal College of Music, one panel member suggested that 'top' music programmes were largely populated by students from 'music specialist schools, private schools and a few enlightened LEAs', while others identified 'a situation in which only those with financial clout can access musical training to a standard that will enable them to pursue it

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to higher education' (White 2013). Unlike traditional music programmes, however, access to HPME at both pre- and post-92 institutions is frequently via non-traditional (i.e. not A' Level, post-compulsory education qualification) routes, including BTEC, access courses (such as Access to Music) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). Maintaining formal relationships with local further education colleges^[10] offering access routes is common, such that many HPME programmes recruit a majority or sizeable minority of their students from their local area. The recruitment strategies of those running HPME programmes can therefore be seen to align with widening access agendas, suggesting a strategic understanding of HPME's purpose on the part of institutions, as a means to achieve widening participation targets.

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Pace (2015: 29) sees 'much of the new embrace of popular music' as a symptom of the move from elite to mass higher education and 'simply a means for attracting and holding onto less able students', suggesting that HPME's strategic function can also extend to securing student funding. Carr (2009: 9) argues that the failure of traditional humanities subjects to attract students 'may well put them on the wrong side of "down-sizing" arguments in financially straitened institutional circumstances'; industry-focused courses, meanwhile, are more likely to recruit well. Aligned with this view, a participant in Parkinson's (2014) study suggested that co-opting HPME into the music department was a means to ensure financial stability and support the wider music department:

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[There are] places that were formerly very good at classical music but have seen their places dwindle from seventy to twenty. [It's] the realpolitik of trying to keep your job as a 14th century paleographer, that you're going to have to accommodate that kind of music.

(Parkinson 2014: 201)

Such readings imply that the tuition-fee-dependent funding strategy of UK higher education has, via the threat of failure to recruit students and generate income, and the consequent risk to survival, instilled in academics ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault 1988), whereby state and institutional imperatives are internalized, and the disciplinary culture is shaped in ways that ensure academics’ professional survival. HPME’s purpose as a field of study can thus appear enmeshed with departmental and institutional strategy.

Conclusion: Dilemmas of purpose

Ford (2010: 1) explores institutional culture within a leading British conservatoire (and by extension the classical conservatoire as an institutional type) in terms of ‘discourses of purpose’, on the basis that the practices, behaviours and ethos of the conservatoire are underpinned by beliefs regarding what a conservatoire is for. Ford’s findings suggest that such beliefs occupy an unstable, dilemmatic space between *ars gratia artis* and vocational rationalism. Parkinson’s (2014) study reveals similar crises of purpose within HPME, yet in this context they are further complicated by the characteristics of its object of study: popular music. Shuker (1994) refers to a fundamental tension in popular music between the creativity inherent in the music-making act and the commercial context, brought to the fore in positivist understandings in which ‘popular’ is understood quantitatively in terms of consumption statistics (Middleton 1992). As the debate surrounding Zagorski-Thomas’s (2016) broadcast illustrates, this tension has implications for higher music education, particularly within the current climate. First, the employability agenda dictates that undergraduate degree programmes should simultaneously equip students for financially sustainable careers and meet the demands of industry. In the case of HPME, this might be seen to favour curricula orientated

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towards the economic logics of a commercial industry that thrives on that which is 'popular' in the quantitative (profit-generating) sense, as opposed to curricula that prioritize aesthetic and cultural value, understood in intrinsic terms. In some cases, this priority is made explicit; for example, the BA in Commercial Music at the University of Westminster states on its website that it seeks to help students create music that meets 'the prevailing standards of the commercial music sector' (University of Westminster 2016). Aesthetic values are inevitably implicit in such a mission; an orientation towards the values of the commercial music industry entails a commitment to maximizing profit across all aspects of the value chain, including product design, which equates to privileging commercially successful musical genres, styles and attributes over those with little commercial appeal. Other programmes, meanwhile, are explicitly founded on a preference for experimentalism and avant-garde musical outputs over commercial formulae; Newcastle University's BA in Contemporary and Popular Music states in its promotional literature that it encourages students to 'look beyond formulaic commercial music forms, and to engage with more exploratory contemporary ways of making music' (Newcastle University 2012). A dilemma of purpose between Napoleonic and Humboldtian visions of HPME can thus be read across these examples.

Just as commercial value and intrinsic value have been understood in oppositional terms within critiques of popular music, so can these value aspects present a dilemma of purpose in popular music education within the current climate. Furthermore, there are clear points of analogy between the dialectic of commercial value and intrinsic value in popular music, and a dialectic within higher education discourse that pits the massification (and marketization) of the sector against notions of intrinsic academic value

(e.g. Williams 2013). This brings to the fore the mission of widening participation that has accompanied successive expansions of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom. As with the employability agenda, the characteristics of HPME's object of study, popular music, impart a unique complexity to the issue of widening participation. Alongside positivist understandings of popular music, Middleton (1992) identifies social essentialist understandings in which 'popular' connotes the populus, as opposed to the elite, and thus celebrates the democratic potential of market (as opposed to institutional) mediation. This assumption that popular music is the music of the populous arguably underpins strategies that position HPME as a driver of widening participation and social mobility/justice. As discussed earlier in this article, HPME has been seen as a route by which students from atypical socio-economic backgrounds can access higher education on their own cultural terms (Dibben 2004, 2006; Parkinson 2014), and a means of breaking down the supposedly elite status of higher music education by disrupting its canonical norms. Yet this coincides with the rhetoric of employability that assumes and predetermines HPME students' aims and motivations, and positions students themselves as drivers of macroeconomic growth; the implicit message is that participation in HPME comes with the responsibility to accrue industrial skills and commercial nous. HPME's roles as a champion of widening participation, and as a driver of economic growth, can thus appear woven together. HPME's overwhelming representation in the United Kingdom's post-92 sector, which has accounted for the bulk of widened participation and is also associated with industry-facing disciplines, foregrounds this dual purpose. To return to the examples above, it is worth noting here that the University of Westminster is a post-92 institution (its BA Commercial Music programme came into being the year

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following the Further and Higher Education Act 1992), while Newcastle University is one of only seven universities within the Russell Group of elite pre-92 institutions to offer HPME. The marked contrast in programme aims may therefore hint at wider macro (sector) and meso (institutional) conceptions of purpose implicit in the micro (programme) setting.

The acronym HPME represents, figuratively, the opening up of one supercomplex (Barnett 2005) phenomenon – higher education – to accommodate another: popular music. In this article, I have suggested that HPME in the United Kingdom is characterized by dilemmas related to both phenomena, but that these dilemmas do not manifest discretely; rather, each complicates the other. While the particular intersections of these dilemmas are unique to HPME, the field might to some extent be seen to exemplify many of the challenges associated with other ‘new’ academic fields that fall within the conceptual category of the ‘creative industries’, a controversial descriptor that enshrines the tension between art and commerce (Hewison 2014). Interrogating such disciplines in terms of their purpose, and their place in relation to the wider purpose of higher education, may help educators to tease out and address implicit assumptions and tensions, leading to a more enlightened, responsive and coherent field.

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[1] I use this distinction throughout this article alongside the more commonly used liberal-vocational distinction, for the reason that while the Humboldtian university ideal promotes knowledge for its own sake 'regardless of concerns for the utilitarian or economic value' (Carr 2009: 5–6), it does not necessarily entail broad curricula (a feature of liberal education) and allows for narrow specialism. Thus, it would seem to better account for music education which can be narrow in focus without being vocational. A Napoleonic higher education meanwhile is identified by Carr (2009) as utilitarian in purpose and subject to central political direction and control; as such, it aligns with this

article's discussion of higher education's responsiveness to policy directives and state agendas.

2. All undergraduate programmes in the United Kingdom are expected to publish employability statements (Langland 2010), detailing the skills students will develop and the career opportunities that they are likely to encounter as a result. In addition, Key Information Set (KIS) data pertaining to graduate employment is embedded into all programme websites.

3. The MA in Popular Music Studies at the University of Liverpool in 1988 and the BA in Popular Music and Recording at the University of Salford in 1990.

4. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

5. The pace and manner of this incremental change have varied across institutions, such that a precise chronology is not possible within the bounds of this article.

6. Much of the ensuing discussion took place on the Researchers in Music Education public Facebook group, and in the comments to Pace's blog.

7. Providing another useful international comparison, Hebert (2011) gives an analysis of resistance to popular music education in the United States. Interestingly, in that context, it is attributed not only to the dominance of European 'art' aesthetics but to a Jazz aesthetic (Jazz education in the United States preceded popular music education by a longer interval than in the United Kingdom). Hebert also makes the important observation that time is a factor in the acceptance of popular music, that it is still too young to be appraised from the vantage of hindsight.

8. Although recent statistical investigations into the relationship between cultural consumption and class have identified an omnivore/univore delineation across class strata

rather than a high culture/low culture homology (e.g. Chan and Goldthorpe 2007), a very clear bias towards higher social classes in the consumption of high-brow culture can be observed.

[9] Local Education Authorities. These are local/regional governmental bodies in the United Kingdom, historically responsible for funding education provision in areas under their jurisdiction.

[10] Further education refers to a sector of education provision in the United Kingdom, between compulsory schooling and higher education.

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