



DIETRICH HELMS, THOMAS PHLEPS (Hg.)

Ware Inszenierungen

Performance, Vermarktung und Authentizität
in der populären Musik

[transcript]

ASPM | Beiträge zur Populärmusikforschung 39

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Beiträge zur Populärmusikforschung 39

Herausgegeben von Dietrich Helms und Thomas Phleps

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EDITORIAL

»All that we see or seem / is but a dream within a dream« zitiert das Alan Parsons Project 1976 den Refrain eines Gedichts des Altmeisters des literarischen Horrors, Edgar Allan Poe, als Motto seines Instrumentals »A Dream Within A Dream«.¹ Damit ist sehr treffend das Dilemma beschrieben, mit dem wir auf der Suche nach dem Echten in den diversen Systemen des Pop konfrontiert sind. Wie ein Traum umreißt ein Popsong eine Welt außerhalb der Alltagswahrnehmung von (de facto) sehr kurzer Dauer, aber doch vollständig und abgeschlossen. Und wie im Traum hat man für die Zeit des Hörens einen Eindruck von Wirklichkeit. Wirkung entsteht, weil wir uns wirklich angesprochen fühlen. Erst in der Außensicht wird der Traum zum Traum, der Song zur Inszenierung. Doch wie wirklich ist die Außensicht? Für die Beantwortung dieser Frage leistet sich unsere Gesellschaft einen eigenen Berufsstand: die Musikjournalisten. Jetzt heißen Echtheit und Wirklichkeit Authentizität; Interviews, Homestories und Reportagen behaupten, die wahre Seite des Musikers erfahrbar zu machen, und sind doch – von außen betrachtet – wieder nur Inszenierungen zum Verkauf von Waren. Es bleibt die Wissenschaft mit ihrer gesellschaftlichen Lizenz zur Wahrheitsfindung. Doch mit welcher Methode will sie feststellen, was wahr und was inszeniert ist? Ergeben diese beiden Begriffe überhaupt ein sinnvolles Gegensatzpaar? Ist nicht die Frage bereits unmöglich – nicht zuletzt, weil auch die Wissenschaft sich selbst als solche inszeniert? Und wie glaubwürdig, wirklich und relevant ist ihre Inszenierung eigentlich für den Fan, dem der gerade gehörte Song viel wirklicher erscheint als die nüchterne Prosa der Wissenschaft? Übersetzt man Poes Refrain in ihre Sprache, könnte es heißen: »Es gibt keine inszenierungsfreie Zone. Hinter jeder entlarvten Inszenierung steckt womöglich eine weitere.«²

In »A Dream Within A Dream« geht es weiter: »And I hold within my hand / Grains of the golden sand – / How few! yet how they creep / Through

1 In den Liner Notes zur LP von Alan Parsons Project (1976). *Tales Of Mystery And Imagination*. 20th Century Records, AA6370 243 1 Y.

2 Jens Bergmann / Bernhard Pörksen (2007). *Medienmenschen. Wie man Wirklichkeit inszeniert*. Münster: Solibro-Verlag, S. 19.

my fingers to the deep«.³ Angesichts der Inszeniertheit aller Ebenen des Systems spielt der Unterschied von wahr und falsch keine Rolle mehr, sondern nur noch der von glaubwürdig oder unglaubwürdig. Diese Entscheidung muss freilich der (Un-)Gläubige ganz allein für sich fällen. Was der Wissenschaft bleibt, ist die Frage nach den Mechanismen und Institutionen der Authentizitätsinszenierungen, nach den Maschinen, die den Stoff produzieren, aus dem die wahren Waren-Träume sind.

Die im vorliegenden Band versammelten Beiträge sind Schriftfassungen von Vorträgen, die anlässlich der 22. Arbeitstagung des Arbeitskreises Studium Populärer Musik (ASPM) vom 18. bis 20. November 2011 in Kooperation mit der Universität Paderborn, Fach Musik/Populäre Musik und Medien, in Paderborn zum Schwerpunktthema »Populäre Inszenierungen / Inszenierungen des Populären in der Musik« gehalten wurden. Im Namen des ASPM bedanken sich die Herausgeber ganz herzlich bei der Fakultät für Kulturwissenschaften der Universität Paderborn für die großzügige finanzielle Unterstützung der Tagung. Ganz besonderer Dank gebührt den KollegInnen und Studierenden des Fachs Musik/Populäre Musik und Medien und vor allem Christoph Jacke für ihre Gastfreundschaft und ihr Engagement bei der Organisation und Durchführung einer rundum gelungenen Tagung. Ein besonderer Dank der Herausgeber gilt auch den GutachterInnen des Peer Review-Verfahrens, die leider, aber selbstverständlich ungenannt bleiben müssen.

Wer mehr wissen will über den ASPM, über aktuelle Forschungen, Publikationen und anstehende oder vergangene Tagungen, findet diese Daten, Fakten und Informationen rund um die Populärmusikforschung und vieles mehr unter www.aspm-online.de und in unserer Internetzeitschrift *Samples* (www.aspm-samples.de).

Dietrich Helms und Thomas Phleps
Osnabrück und Kassel, im Dezember 2012

3 David Lehman (Hg.) (2006). *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, S. 72.

THE VALUE OF LIVE MUSIC

Simon Frith

From April 2008 until April 2011 I directed a research project on live music in Britain.¹ We are now writing up our findings,² and since February 2012 we have had funding for a follow-up project, designed to establish ongoing links between academic researchers, the live music industry and the wider public.³

The original research project was organized around an investigation of the business of live music promotion and a crucial part of our method was interviewing. We talked to more than 100 promoters, from the MD of Live Nation in the UK and such big names as Harvey Goldsmith to local club owners and enthusiasts. We covered all types of music (including classical) – which is one reason why our findings will fill three books.

One of my roles in the research team is to present our work to the live music industry itself, whether by attending their trade events and writing for their trade papers or by inviting them to seminars we organise. Such »knowledge exchange« (to use current academic jargon) is not without its problems and two kinds of miscommunication between university-based researchers and live music industry players particular interest me (and have informed the design of our follow up project).

First, we apparently have quite different interpretations of a shared phrase, »the value of live music«. Their take is, it seems, straightforwardly economic: the value of live music can be measured by how much money people are prepared to pay for it. Our approach, by contrast, is more philosophical (or up our own backsides, as the industry would say): what is it that people think they are paying for? What exactly do they value? I'm not

1 See <http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/livemusicproject>. The project, »The promotion of live music in the UK – a historical, cultural and institutional analysis«, was funded by the AHRC (AH/F009437/1).

2 The first of a three volume history of live music in Britain, *From Dance Hall to the 100 Club*, covering 1950-1967, will be published by Ashgate in 2013.

3 »Developing knowledge exchange in the live music sector« (AH/J00474X1/1), for details see www.livemusicexchange.org.

sure the differences here are quite what they seem and I will come back to this, just noting here that it is only in the record business that you hear executives bemoaning the fact that »people don't value music any more« (meaning that they won't pay sufficiently for CDs or downloads). Promoters have, on the whole, a subtler understanding of the value of music in people's everyday lives and how this effects their spending decisions.

Second, it was soon apparent to us that current promoters are not much interested in the past of their business (though they do enjoy reminiscing about the old days). They are, understandably, far more concerned about the future. A couple of years ago I was therefore asked to write my own account of what the music world would look like in 2025, and to present this for discussion at MaMA, the annual Paris-based European music business event. I will come back to my predictions at the end of this paper. I need to begin, though, by saying something about how I reached them.

My starting points were that all predictions of the future are wrong and that the best way to look forwards is to look back or, more precisely, to look at the futures that were predicted in the past. Two such scenarios are relevant here.

The first scenario was that live music had no future. As Glenn Gould famously wrote in *High Fidelity* in 1966:

»In an unguarded moment some months ago, I predicted that the public concert as we know it today would no longer exist a century hence, that its functions would have been entirely taken over by the electronic media. It had not occurred to me that this statement represented a particularly radical pronouncement. Indeed, I regarded it almost as self-evident truth« (Gould 1966: 47).

This was the future that was assumed when I started researching the music industry in the 1970s. Evidence for this prognosis was provided by both economists and sociologists. In 1966, the same year that Glenn Gould predicted the end of the public concert, William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen published *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*. Baumol and Bowen's analysis of »the cost-disease« that afflicted the performing arts was highly influential on subsequent cultural economists (indeed, their book was in effect the founding statement for the field).⁴ Its argument can be summarized (for non economists) quite simply. A performing art like live music faces necessary limits to both its economies of scale and its labour productivity. On the one hand, live concerts can only take place in a specific place

4 See, for example, the special issue of the *Journal of Cultural Economics* (20/3, 1996) on the book's 30th anniversary.

at a specific time to a finite audience (which has to be in hearing distance); on the other hand, musical works have a fixed labour input: a quartet cannot be played by a trio. The result is that the performing arts cannot compete for leisure spending with the mass mediated arts in terms of price. Concerts either have to be priced at levels which limit audiences to a declining number of the wealthy, or they have to be subsidized in some way. (Baumol and Bowman were primarily concerned with concert music and opera although their arguments are generally valid.)

Meanwhile, sociologists (and social historians) were documenting the effects of the rise of recording on public and private listening habits. They documented, for example, how live musicians were progressively replaced by recorded musicians in cinemas⁵, hotels, dance halls, on radio and television and, most recently, even in the »live« performance of musicals and ballet. In 1947 the Musicians' Union's assistant general secretary, Hardie Ratcliffe, told readers of *Melody Maker*, the paper for dance band musicians, that »We Must Beat the Record!«

»A show-down will come before long. Musicians throughout the world — particularly those providing dance music — will be forced to fight broadcasting and recording interests. The issue will be whether musicians are to control the recorded music they make or leave control to those with the money-bags. Musicians must beat the record — or go out of business!« (Ratcliffe 1947: 4).

Unfortunately for Ratcliffe the record won. From the mid-1950s an increasing percentage of consumer spending on music was devoted to recording; a decreasing percentage to live performances. By 1966 in the popular music world, at least, »music consumption« meant »record consumption«. When I began researching *The Sociology of Rock* in the mid-1970s I took for granted that the music industry was organised around the record industry, which was by then clearly central to the economics of live music too: rock gigs were primarily organised and financed to promote record sales. It was common sense, in short, to assume that the future of live music was dependent either on high cultural policy and the provision of state support to preserve Europe's classical music heritage and elite musical art scene or else on the promotional policies of the record industry.

Move on 25 years to the early 2000s, when we first got interested in researching the live music sector. There was by now, in the digital age, a quite different future scenario: live music was now the future; it was the

5 In the early 1920s two thirds of Britain's professional musicians were employed in cinemas; within a decade there were none. See Davison 2012.

recording industry that was supposedly doomed. Various economic developments were cited to support this suggestion:

- From the mid-1990s ticket prices started rising more rapidly than inflation. Concerts became more expensive than CDs (previously promoters had tended to peg ticket prices to CD prices).
- In terms of consumers' »wallet share«, expenditure on records now began a steady decrease.
- The impact of downloading and file sharing on record pricing and sales meant that the ratio of musicians' earnings from live performance to their earnings from record sales began a steady rise.⁶
- By the turn of the century a new kind of international live music business had emerged. In the early 2000s, for example, all the major promotional/venue companies in Britain were taken over by such global players as Live Nation and AEG.

By the end of the 2000s annual expenditure in Britain on live music was greater than expenditure on all forms of recorded music and the live music business had become the biggest employer in the British music economy.⁷ Globally (following its merger with Ticketmaster), Live Nation can now plausibly be described as the world's biggest music company (only the Universal Music Group has a comparable turnover). The common sense suggestion has become that the music industry means the live music industry. Live music industry decisions are certainly central now to the economics of recording: if bands once toured to promote album sales, they now release albums to promote their concerts.

In twenty years time the assumptions here will probably seem as misplaced as the assumptions about the future of live music in the 1970s seem to us today, but I'm less interested in the inevitability of false predictions than in thinking about what we can learn from them. It could be suggested, for example, that the problem of the doom scenario was that by focusing so rigorously on the economics of live music it neglected the effects of music's ideological value. After all, »the concert hall« experience has always been the ideal of the classical recording industry (which it sought to make available in the living room) and the rock world, like the folk and jazz

6 One effect was record company exploration of so-called 360° degree deals in which they took their share of live concert revenue. Another was that HMV (a record retailer) took over the Mama group (a venue chain).

7 See, for example, »UK live revenues surpass record Sales.« In: *Music Week*, 17th March 2009. <http://www.musicweek.com/news/read/uk-live-revenues-surpass-record-sales/039558> (accessed 19th September 2012).

worlds, has always treated the live show as the most authentic setting for musical expression.

One could argue, in short, that the cultural meaning of music remained rooted in live performance even at the height of record company domination of the music industry and, more generally, I now believe that my working assumption in *The Sociology of Rock* that music was a rights industry was wrong or, at least, misleading. Rather, it is better understood as a service industry. Most musicians make a living selling services rather than exploiting rights, and live performance is the service they mostly sell – to a wide range of clients, not just to concert promoters and club owners, but also to record, film, television, advertising, videogame, and other media companies, to cruise ships and casinos, to a variety of private customers for music at weddings, funerals, bar mitzvahs and other such events. And such music making goes on despite the cost disease.

That said, it could equally well be argued that present day optimists about the future of the live music sector are ignoring the economic symptoms that the cost disease describes (and there is increasing evidence that the live music »boom« anyway peaked in 2010).⁸ Our research project was designed in part to examine how British promoters have addressed these cost problems historically and it's worth indicating here some of their solutions:

The most significant is probably the music festival. In the European classical music world, festivals can be dated back to the eighteenth century and by the early nineteenth century many British cities had annual »musical festivals«. The first Edinburgh Musical Festival, for example, held between 30th October and 5th November 1815, featured seven concerts in two venues with 150 performers. It brought in visitors – »the concourse of strangers towards Edinburgh was unexampled«, as a report of the time put it, adding that »all the lodgings round the city were occupied« (McLarty 2010: 8). (There was already, it seems, an association being made between a music festival, the attraction of visitors, and the local economy.) But the explosion of classical music festivals was a post-1945 phenomenon. Bruno Frey (1994) cites figures suggesting that there were at least 1000 and possibly as many as 2000 such annual festivals in Europe by the end of the 1970s (numbers vary according to what is defined as a festival); in Britain regular classical, folk, jazz and blues festivals were well established by the end of the 1950s, and rock festivals have been a familiar part of the calendar since

8 The best source of UK music industry data is PRS for Music, which publishes annual economic reports. Copyright Societies in other countries also provide relevant data. US ticket sales are monitored by Pollstar.

the 1960s, although the huge increase in the number and variety of popular music festivals has been a twenty first century phenomenon.

Festivals offer various solutions to the cost disease. In terms of economies of scale outdoor festivals at least can reach much larger audiences than is possible in an indoor venue (especially as audience members can be mobile between different stages). In terms of productivity, the investment in staging infrastructure – sound and lights, security, promotion and publicity, ticketing, etc. – is sufficient for a much larger number of performers and performances than is possible for a show in a theatre and, as Frey points out, festivals also tend to use contracted freelance workers (rather than concert halls' salaried permanent staff) which cuts labour costs.

Festivals also have a value that is qualitatively different from that of routine concerts and which cannot simply be measured as a quantitative accumulation of performances. Many festivals, that is to say (Glastonbury is a good example), have established themselves as »leisure experiences« involving something more than music. A rock festival like Scotland's T in the Park thus routinely sells out before it has announced its line-up; classical musical festivals, as Frey (1994: 37) documents, are sold as part of all-in luxury holidays. A festival ticket may well offer the consumer good value for money (in terms of the number of acts seen) but festival goers are also willing to invest much more into time, travel and subsistence costs than they would be willing to pay as an add-on to a workaday gig. For a promoter a festival is thus an essential part of their portfolio – it has a much higher profit margin than a tour and, even more importantly, offers a sure return on the investment.

A second way of achieving both economies of scale and an increase in productivity is by putting on a succession of performances in the same venue, as »a run«. Instead of an act touring from town to town, audiences are encouraged to take a trip to a single venue where the act will play for many nights. This was the entertainment model developed in Las Vegas by Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and, more recently, Celine Dion, who from 2002 played five nights a week at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, for an astonishing five years. Promoters can invest sufficiently in a single space to stage a spectacular show that can command higher ticket prices as well as reaching a much bigger audience who, like festival-goers, may well treat the musical act as just part of a broader leisure experience (involving a night in an up-market hotel, fine dining, and a flutter on the roulette wheel). This is also, of course, the way in which musicals work (and UK promoters have developed a strategy of moving such shows as the *Sound of Music* to provincial cities for extended runs after their London dates have