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Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto

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MUSICIANS AS PERFORMERS: A DISCIPLINARY DILEMMA

Performance studies, the academic discipline with which I align myself, has found surprisingly little to say about musical performances. The principle journals in the field seldom publish articles about music as performance or musicians as performers and only a small number of papers on these topics are presented at conferences. At a common sense level, the absence of music from the array of subjects considered by performance scholars seems odd – musicians are performers, after all, and it would be eminently reasonable to discuss them as such. In this essay, I will first examine the general absence of music-based performance genres from the purview of theatre and performance studies. In the second part of the essay, I propose an approach to performance analysis that focuses primarily on popular musicians. In the spirit of a manifesto, this essay will concentrate more on defining this approach than on applying it to particular cases; I will present only very brief analytical examples.

I cannot explain fully the neglect of musical performance by performance studies, but I suspect that a partial explanation lies in the genealogy of the field. The original paradigm for performance studies resulted from a synthesis of theatre studies with aspects of anthropology, sociology, and oral interpretation.[1] Theatre studies generally stakes out its territory in such a way as to exclude music, and scholars in performance studies seem unfortunately to have inherited this unwillingness to deal with musical forms. Even opera, a musical form that obviously avails itself of the same means of expression as the theatre, is traditionally omitted from the theatre historical discourse. Vera Mowry Roberts, with whom I studied theatre history, argues in her introductory textbook that the

1. For a discussion of both the evolution of performance studies and the status of concepts of performance and performativity in a variety of disciplines, see my General Introduction in Philip Auslander (ed.), *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (4 Vols) (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1–24.

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history of opera and the history of theatre are separate narratives because 'the predominant force in opera was the music rather than the words' and 'the composer . . . is the focus of attention in opera'.[2] For Roberts, the fact that opera is driven by music rather than drama, by composers rather than playwrights, places it outside the realm of theatre history.

2. Vera Mowry Roberts, *On Stage: A History of Theatre*, 2nd edn (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 108.

Scholars whose primary concern is with analyzing performances, whom one might expect to be more open to the nonliterary aspects of performance, are no more willing than traditional theatre historians to bring opera into the fold. As sophisticated a performance analyst as Patrice Pavis more or less throws in the towel when it comes to this form, arguing that whereas it is possible to analyze theatrical performances by breaking them down into their component parts, opera demands a radically different 'fusional' approach:

> L'opéra, malgré la richesse et la diversité de ses sources, se prête mal à une dissection et à une énumération de ses matériaux. Car cette matière, sous l'influence du rhythme musical et gestuel, a déjà fusionné, mêlant et fondant ce qui semblait s'opposer: la parole et la musique, l'espace et le temps, the voix et le corps, le processus et la stase.[3]

> (Despite the richness and diversity of opera's signs and sources, it lends itself poorly to an enumeration of its materials. Under the influence of musical and gestural rhythm, these elements have fused, mixing and melding together what seem to be opposing elements: speech and music, time and space, the voice and the body, movement and stasis.)

3. Patrice Pavis, *L'Analyse des spectacles* (Paris: Editions Nathan, 1996), p. 121.

Although Pavis is not concerned as Roberts is with the specifically non-literary character of music, he does consider music to be a non-mimetic form whose representations do not refer directly back to the real world. He therefore feels that music confounds the very categories upon which successful analysis of theatrical events depends.

It would be grossly unfair, however, to chastise theatre and performance scholars for being reluctant to engage with musical forms without also pointing out that both academic musicologists and serious fans of classical music are traditionally uninterested in performance as an object of analysis. When attending a performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, for instance, one can sit at a score desk, 'one of the side seats on the top balcony where the view is obstructed but you can follow the printed score at a small table with a dim lamp'.[4] Granted that the score desk may be a way of deriving income from otherwise uninhabitable realms of the opera house, it nevertheless reifies a mode of spectatorship that is unimaginable from the theatrical point of view. No serious theatre scholar or theatre-goer would consider the opportunity to read a play while listening to actors perform it to be compensation for not being able to see the performance. The score desk is an artifact of the traditional perception of music described by Christopher Small, a way of thinking that locates 'the essence of music and of whatever meanings it contains . . . in those things called musical works . . .' not in performances of those works. This perspective rests on the premise 'that musical performance plays no part in the creative process,

4. Anthony Tommasini, 'Bravos At Opera Are Expected, But Booing?', *New York Times* (1 February 2003), pp. A19, A24.

being only the medium through which the isolated, self-contained work has to pass in order to reach its goal, the listener'.[5]

Small attributes this conservative view of music to traditional historians of music and musicologists, but one encounters dismissals of musical performance as an object of primary concern in other disciplines as well, even with respect to popular music. Philosopher Theodore Gracyk, for instance, argues that because rock music's primary existence is in recordings, it 'is not essentially a performing art, however much time rock musicians spend practicing on their instruments or playing live'.[6] Gracyk challenges traditional musicology by arguing that, in rock, recordings, not compositions, are the primary musical works, but his challenge privileges the recording in a way that parallels musicology's privileging of the score. Lawrence Grossberg, a major figure in cultural studies, takes a broadly similar position by claiming that live performances of rock are at most secondary iterations of a work contained in the recording: 'The performative side of rock seems to be simply another occasion, another activity, with no privilege beyond that of a night on the town, a potentially good time'.[7] For Gracyk and Grossberg, performances of rock may function as social lubricants but are inessential manifestations of the music with no inherent aesthetic or cultural value.

Perhaps because of its roots in sociology and ethnography, the field of cultural studies generally emphasizes the reception of popular music much more than the performance behavior of musicians. Although scholars in communications and cultural studies often make excellent observations concerning specific genres of rock and pop music, their remarks on performance are generally impressionistic and synoptic. Most of the work in cultural studies of popular music that focuses on production examines the sociological, institutional, and policy contexts in which popular music is made, not the immediate context of the work of the artists who make it. In contrast, my stance here is unabashedly performer-centered: I am interested primarily in finding ways of discussing what popular musicians do *as performers* – the meanings they create through their performances and the means they use to create them. Although I will not ignore the reception of these performances, I am less concerned with the audience than with the performers themselves.

This, then, is what I am choosing to call the disciplinary dilemma confronting the scholar who wishes to talk seriously about musicians as performers: those who take music seriously, either as art or culture, dismiss performance as irrelevant. Those who take performance seriously are reluctant to include musical forms among their objects of study. I hope that as a scholar in performance studies with a lifelong, passionate interest in popular music I can make a small contribution to bridging the divide between the study of music and the study of performance by encouraging close readings of performances by popular musicians, readings that attend to the particulars of physical movement, gesture, costume, and facial expression as much as voice and musical sound.

The good news is that there are scholars in musicology and cultural studies who are also interested in bridging this gap. Three recent books

5. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), pp. 4–5.

6. Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 75.

7. Lawrence Grossberg, 'Reflections of a Disappointed Popular Music Scholar', in Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook and Ben Saunders (eds), *Rock over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 25–59 (p. 49).

that argue explicitly for seeing musical performance *as performance* stand out as exemplary and I have drawn on all three in this essay. Simon Frith's *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (1996) provides a framework for thinking about popular music as performance in the disciplinary context of cultural studies. In *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (1998), Christopher Small confronts traditional musicology with a performer-centered account of classical music, declaring: 'performance does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to do'.[8] Small characterizes musical works as actions undertaken by musicians rather than works written by composers and breaks a model symphony performance down into its component parts (*pace* Pavis!) to examine how each contributes to the overall event and its social meanings. Susan Fast, in her book-length study of Led Zeppelin's music, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (2001) successfully integrates musicology, cultural studies, and performance studies. Fast brings concepts and approaches from all three fields to bear on Led Zeppelin, combining formal musicological analysis of their compositions with analysis of their performances in all media, the ideological and social issues raised by their music, and ethnographic work on their audiences. Drawing on these scholars, I will outline an approach to discussing popular music as performance modeled to a large extent on my own experience as a fan of rock music.

8. Small, *Musicking*, p. 8. Philosopher Stan Godlovitch adopts the same perspective on classical music in his *Musical Performance: A Philosophical Study* (London: Routledge, 1998).

PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS AND POPULAR MUSIC

While theatre scholars have long described and analyzed performances, the idea that performance analysis constitutes an identifiable – though not strictly defined – approach (as distinct from theatre criticism, say) is of relatively recent vintage. Performance analysis differs from the transcription methods of ethnomusicologists and the notation methods of dance scholars in the sense that it is as much interpretive as descriptive and is not organized around a specific technical vocabulary. Whereas dance notation may be of equal value to analysts and performers, performance analysis is understood to be specifically from the spectator's point of view. Theatre scholars' flirtation with the technical vocabulary of semiotics, popular during the 1970s, has largely dissipated in favor of a less 'scientific', more eclectic set of approaches drawn from reception theory, phenomenology, cultural anthropology, sociology, feminist theory, cultural and literary theory, and other orientations.[9]

9. Pavis charts the rise and fall of theatrical semiotics as well as the current eclecticism in performance analysis (*L'Analyse*, pp. 13–30). This list of contributing disciplines draws on Pavis and the authors represented in Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf (eds), *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook* (London: Routledge, 2001).

As the title page of Pavis' *L'Analyse des spectacles* (Performance Analysis) makes abundantly clear, the practice of performance analysis is geared primarily toward genres of performance in the theatrical tradition: the list of performance genres under the title includes theatre, mime, dance, dance-theatre, and film but no kind of musical performance, including musical theatre (I have already noted Pavis's reasons for excluding opera). This exclusion notwithstanding, I shall argue here that musical performances should be seen as legitimate objects of performance analysis. I will limit my comments to popular music, though I will

also indicate briefly ways that much of what I have to say applies to the performance of jazz, classical music, and other genres.

A discussion of how to analyze popular music as performance must begin with the question of what will count as a performance in this context. Pavis asserts that only live theatrical performances are appropriate objects of analysis, that the performance analyst should use photographs or recordings of performances only as additional documentation of the original live events.[10] If applied to the realm of popular music, this stipulation would bring performance analysis to a grinding halt, for recordings are the primary form in which the audience consumes popular music. The media economy of popular music thus dictates that sound recordings be considered performances, which is how listeners experience them.

10. Pavis, *L'Analyse*, pp. 39–42.

Despite the physical absence of the performer at the time of listening, listeners do not perceive recorded music as disembodied. 'In my view,' writes Susan Fast, 'the performer's body is very much present, in the particular sonoric gestures shaped and played in the first instance by him or her (they are human gestures, after all) through his or her body in such a way that they connect with the bodies of those listening.'[11] Perhaps that is why people often feel compelled to respond to recorded music by moving or dancing, singing along, or playing air guitar: the bodily gestures encoded in the recorded sound seem to demand an embodied response. Regardless of the ontological status of recorded music, its phenomenological status for listeners is that of a performance unfolding at the time and in the place of listening. Sound recordings of musical performances should therefore be considered legitimate objects for performance analysis – especially in light of the privilege it grants to the spectator's experience – alongside live musical performances, documentation of live performances, and music videos.

11. Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 114.

Although the listener both hears and feels recorded music as embodied, the experience of recorded music is not confined to the auditory and haptic senses. As Simon Frith points out, it is also a visual experience:

> to hear music is to see it performed, on stage, with all the trappings. I listen to records in the full knowledge that what I hear is something that never existed, that never could exist, as a 'performance', something happening in a single time and space; nevertheless, it is *now* happening, in a single time and space: it is thus a performance and I hear it as one [and] imagine the performers performing. . . .[12]

12. Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 211. Frith's suggestion that listeners mentally produce the aspects of performance not present in sound recordings is comparable to Wolfgang Iser's notion that because literary texts are radically incomplete in themselves, the act of reading consists of filling in the gaps of the text. See the excerpt from Iser's *The Act of Reading A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, in Counsell and Wolf, *Performance Analysis*, pp. 179–185.

The experience of recorded music as performance derives not only from our direct somatic experience of the sound and our sense of the physical gestures the musicians made to produce it but also from various forms of cultural knowledge, including knowledge of the performance conventions of particular genres of music and the performance styles of specific performers. As an audience, we acquire these kinds of knowledge from our experience of live performances and the visual culture that surrounds popular music.

Having argued in favor of considering musical performances in these various media as legitimate objects of analysis, I will offer some

suggestions of how to analyze them, beginning with the performers themselves. We may not usually think of musical performance, apart from opera and musical theatre, as entailing *characterization* in the conventional dramatic sense. Nevertheless, we must be suspicious of any supposition that musicians are simply 'being themselves' on stage. Frith helpfully identifies three different strata in popular musicians' performances, all of which may be present simultaneously. Frith proposes that we hear pop singers as 'personally expressive', that is, as singing in their own persons, from their own experience. But two other layers are imposed on that one because popular musicians are 'involved in a process of *double enactment*: they enact both a star personality (their image) and a song personality, the role that each lyric requires, and the pop star's art is to keep both acts in play at once'.[13] In this respect, Frith rightly suggests that pop singers are more like film actors than stage actors since film actors also perform both their own star personalities and the characters they portray.

13. Frith, *Performing Rites*, pp. 186, 212.

I shall both systematize and expand on Frith's account. From this point on, I will refer to the three layers of performance he identifies as the real person (the performer as human being), the performance persona (which corresponds to Frith's star personality or image) and the character (Frith's song personality).[14] All three layers may be active simultaneously in a given musical performance. For example, when Kelly Clarkson, the winner of the 2002 *American Idol* television singing competition, sang a duet on television with country singer Reba McIntyre, they performed a song in which they played the roles of women competing for the affection of the same man. In addition to these characters, however, they also portrayed musical personae of the seasoned veteran singer and her young acolyte (and perhaps future competitor); these personae were delineated through the same performance as the characters in the song but were independent of those characters – the singers could have performed their personae regardless of what song they chose. The presence of the performers as real people was implied through Clarkson's televised announcement that she had always idolized McIntyre and had therefore chosen her as her duet partner when she was in the position to do so by virtue of having won the competition. Whether true or not, this appeal to personal experience was layered into the performance alongside the two women's performance personae as seasoned veteran and young up-and-comer and their characters as romantic rivals; all three levels of personification contributed to the performance's meaning for the audience.

14. Frith uses the term *persona* but only in reference to performance artists who 'took themselves and their bodies as the objects or sites of narrative and feeling' (Frith, *Performing Rites*, p. 205) not in reference to popular musicians. I find the term *persona* useful as a way of describing a performed presence that is not a character (in the usual sense) but also is not quite equivalent to the performer's 'real' identity.

That these three signified presences admittedly are often difficult to distinguish from one another does not diminish their heuristic value. The demarcation line between real person and persona is always ambiguous in performance for, as Richard Schechner points out, performance is always a matter of the performer's not being himself but also not not being himself.[15] This logic of the double negative is represented in one way by the professional names sometimes used by pop music performers, names that initially designate their personae but are later generalized to the real people. David Jones renamed himself David Bowie; David Bowie is not David Jones, yet he also is not not David

15. Richard Schechner, 'Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed', *The Kenyon Review*, New Series, 3: 4 (Fall 1981), 83–113 (p. 88).

Jones, as suggested by the fact that the name David Bowie belongs now to both the real person and the performance persona. The real person is the dimension of performance to which the audience has the least direct access, since the audience generally infers what the performer is like as a real person from his performance persona and the characters he portrays. Public appearances off-stage do not give reliable access to the performer as a real person since it is quite likely that interviews and even casual public appearances are manifestations of the performer's persona rather than the real person.

Both the line between real person and performance persona and the line between persona and character may be blurry and indistinct, especially in the case of pop music performers whose work is heavily autobiographical. Even in the absence of overt autobiography, however, these relationships can be complex and ambiguous. Bowie has constructed a number of other identities for himself over the course of his career, many of which have names of their own: Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, The Thin White Duke, etc. It is not entirely clear whether it makes most sense to see these named entities as *characters* Bowie plays and the Bowie identity as the *persona* that remains constant across these representations, or to see them as transformations of the Bowie persona itself. Because Ziggy Stardust and the others figure primarily as characters in songs, and also because the Bowie persona is that of a performer who can transform himself completely at a moment's notice, I would argue for the former analysis, though the other argument is credible.

I will qualify this schema for popular music performance by indicating that character is an optional element that comes in primarily when the musician is a singer performing a song that defines a character textually. In other cases, the performance may be perceived as a direct performance of persona unmediated by character. This is particularly true for non-singing musicians who do not develop characters through voice and lyrics but whose personae may play roles in other kinds of staged narratives. In her analysis of Led Zeppelin's performances, Fast points out that guitarist Jimmy Page played the role of the inspirational musical genius while bassist and keyboard player John Paul Jones portrayed the persona of the band's solid, learned musical technician.[16] The interplay between the two musicians was based partly around this narrative, a narrative that did not derive from a text such as a song and involved the musicians' performance personae rather than characters. In another, more overtly scripted, example from the documentary film of David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* concert, guitarist Mick Ronson seems to assault Trevor Bolder, the bass player, during a lengthy guitar solo performed as part of the song 'Width of a Circle'. In the course of the scuffle, Bolder apparently knocks Ronson onto his back; after playing in that position for a bit, Ronson gets back up, fends off the bassist, and raises his arms in triumph in the style of professional wrestler.[17] This melodrama was presumably a choreographed, fictional battle and not a spontaneous fight between the two musicians; as such, it did not involve the characters of the song (and was not enacted by the singer) but was played out between the two men's performance personae as instrumentalists.

16. Fast, *Houses*, p. 149.

17. D. A. Pennebaker (dir.), *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars: The Motion Picture* (1982).

The idea that instrumentalists enact personae in narratives suggests how this basic schema might be extended beyond the realm of rock or popular music, since musicians and musical groups in all genres can be said to have performance personae. Jazz musicians often have very distinctive personalities as instrumentalists and bandleaders, expressed not only in the way they play but in their appearance, the way they move, the way they address the audience, and the way they deal with their fellow musicians. During a visit to New York City jazz clubs in 2001, I saw performances by two tenor saxophonists and bandleaders: Pharaoh Sanders, a veteran of the jazz experimentalism of the 1960s, and Joe Lovano, who came to prominence more recently. Sanders, dressed in a light-colored Nehru suit, presented himself as a beatific elder statesman who drifted in and out of the performance, seemingly picking up its flow when the mood seemed right. At the end of the set, he invited the audience to participate in a sing-along on a spiritual theme; holding out the microphone for responses, he seemed completely unfazed when no one in the audience replied – he was absorbed in the moment and nothing else mattered. Lovano, like the rest of his group, dressed in a jacket and tie, conversed and joked with his band mates and the audience, establishing a generally upbeat, informal atmosphere that was quite different from the reverential tone of Sanders' performance and that also belied the rigors of the hard bop Lovano and his band were playing. Lovano also seemed to be more a working member of an ensemble than the relatively aloof Sanders, who remained to the side or off-stage during substantial portions of the set. The personae these musicians performed may have some relationship to their off-stage personalities and values; audiences may in fact be eager to believe that they do. But this does not mean, once again, that Sanders and Lovano were simply 'being themselves' on stage. Other jazz musicians, notably the members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Sun Ra's Arkestra, have performed obviously constructed and artificial personae to demonstrate that jazz performance personae need not be identical with the musicians' identities as human beings.

My analytical schema applies as well to the performance of classical music. Symphony orchestra conductors have performance personae (e.g., the authoritarian conductor, the dignified, patrician conductor, the conductor as a passionate, Romantic figure, and so on) as do singers and instrumental solotists.[18] Even a classical music ensemble can have a collective persona. A particular orchestra may assume a persona so conservative that its audience's jaws drop if a 20th-century composition appears on one of its programs, while the members of a string quartet may take on the performance personae of youthful mavericks who behave more like pop stars than staid classical musicians. Symphonic musicians rarely portray characters through their playing, but it can happen, as when the instruments represent various animal and human characters in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* or Saint-Saëns's *The Carnival of the Animals*.

Other elements of rock and pop musicians' performances align with their performance personae more than with their characters. Musicians' costumes, make-up, and general appearance, along with any sets,

18. For a discussion of the conductor as performer, see Small, *Musicking*, pp. 78–86. Godlovitch argues for what he calls the 'personalist' view of classical music soloists according to which the onstage behavior and mannerisms of the performer are essential components of the aesthetic experience of the music (*Musical Performance*, pp. 140–142).

lighting, props (including musical instruments), and visual effects they may use, usually express their personae, which remain continuous throughout a performance and across their performances, not the individual characters they may portray from song to song. Fast borrows Eugenio Barba's description of the actor as possessing a 'fictional body' and applies it to musicians; it seems to me that the fictional body of a musical performer is the body of his performance persona, a body whose appearance is made to conform to the image of that persona.

Although this is a large issue that I cannot treat fully here, it is worth mentioning that a musical artist's performance persona is not necessarily static: it may evolve over time to adapt to changing fashions and cultural trends. The Beatles' personae in 1963, when they were basically an incredibly talented and successful boy band, were quite different from their personae in 1968, when they were considered serious countercultural rock artists. When and how quickly a performer's persona may evolve, if at all, and in what directions, are subject to delicate negotiations with the audience. Miscalculation can result in anything from a temporary setback to the end of a performing career, though the performer's only alternative often is to freeze a popular persona in the hope of retaining the loyalty of its original audience (this is what performers on the oldies concert circuits must do).

Popular musicians do not perform their personae exclusively in live and recorded performances; they perform them as well through the visual images used in the packaging of recordings, publicity materials, interviews and press coverage, toys and collectibles, and other venues and media. It is generally the case, of course, that the performers are not the sole authors of the personae they perform in these many contexts: producers, managers, agents, publicists, and the entire machinery of the music industry collaborate with artists, and sometimes coerce them, in the construction and performance of their personae. It does not follow from this for me, as it does for some commentators, that these aspects of pop music performance have everything to do with marketing and commodification and nothing to do with artistry and musical aesthetics. Although the commodity critique of popular music is important, it deemphasizes the practice of doing close readings of particular performances for which I am advocating here since all popular musical personae and performances are equivalent commodities.[19] Part of the audience's pleasure in pop music comes from experiencing and consuming the personae of favorite artists in all their many forms and this experience is inseparable from the experience of the music itself and of the artists as musicians. Pop music audiences are not made up of mere dupes who are sucked into a maelstrom of mindless consumerism with music as the lure; rather, pop music listeners are savvy consumers who are well aware of their role in the industrial production of music and music culture and able both to enjoy that role and critique it self-consciously.

19. See Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, 'Rock and Sexuality', in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds), *On Record: Rock, Pop & the Written Word* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 371–389 (p. 372).

There are several sets of constraints on the construction of musical performance personae, the most immediate of which are genre constraints. This much is obvious: rock musicians simply do not look or act like classical musicians who do not look or act like jazz musicians, and so on. Even within genres, there are distinctions: psychedelic rockers

do not look and act like glam rockers who do not look and act like punk rockers, and so on. The ease with which these facts can be stated belies their importance within musical cultures: musical genres and subgenres define the most basic and important sets of conventions and expectations within which musicians and their audiences function. Genres can and do overlap and musicians can draw on genres other than their own in their performances (rocker Mick Jagger, for instance, is said to have derived much of his movement style from Tina Turner, a soul music artist[20]); genre conventions change over time and never have the force of absolute dicta. Nevertheless, they are crucially important to performers in constructing their performance personae and to audiences in interpreting and responding to them.

20. Sheila Whiteley, 'Little Red Rooster v. The Honky Tonk Woman: Mick Jagger, Sexuality, Style and Image', in Sheila Whiteley (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 67–99 (pp. 76, 97).

The sociology of popular music and culture are vast fields unto themselves about which I can say very little here. But I do wish to acknowledge that all of the processes of production, performance, and reception that I have mentioned take place within the contexts of the socio-cultural conventions of the societies in which they occur, conventions that popular music both reflects and contests. The gender ambiguities of glam rockers' personae, for example, challenged the gender norms of American and European societies in the early 1970s. The performance of glam was a safe cultural space in which to experiment with versions of masculinity that clearly flouted those norms. Glam rock was in this respect a liminal phenomenon in Victor Turner's sense of that term, a performance practice through which alternative realities could be enacted and tested.[21] Inasmuch as glam rock was almost completely dominated by men and took the performance of masculinity as its terrain, however, it was also entirely in line with the conventions of rock as a traditionally male-dominated cultural form that evolved from male-dominated cultural and social contexts. Popular music is not entirely constrained by dominant ideologies, but neither is it entirely free of their influence.

21. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), p. 85.

CONCLUSION

I have summarized in the diagram below (Figure 1) the schema for analyzing popular music performance proposed here (see p. 23). The outer frames represent the most important contexts to be borne in mind when undertaking such analysis: the general context of socio-cultural norms and conventions against which performed musical behavior must be assessed, and the more immediate framing context of musical genre conventions that govern the expectations of audience and performer and the ways they communicate with one another.

The inmost frame represents the realm of popular music performance itself, a realm in which the performers and their audiences are the most important agents. The performer combines three signifieds: the real person, the performance persona, and the character. I present these entities in what I take to be their order of development. The process begins with a real person who has some desire to perform as a popular musician; this may include the desire to participate in a certain musical

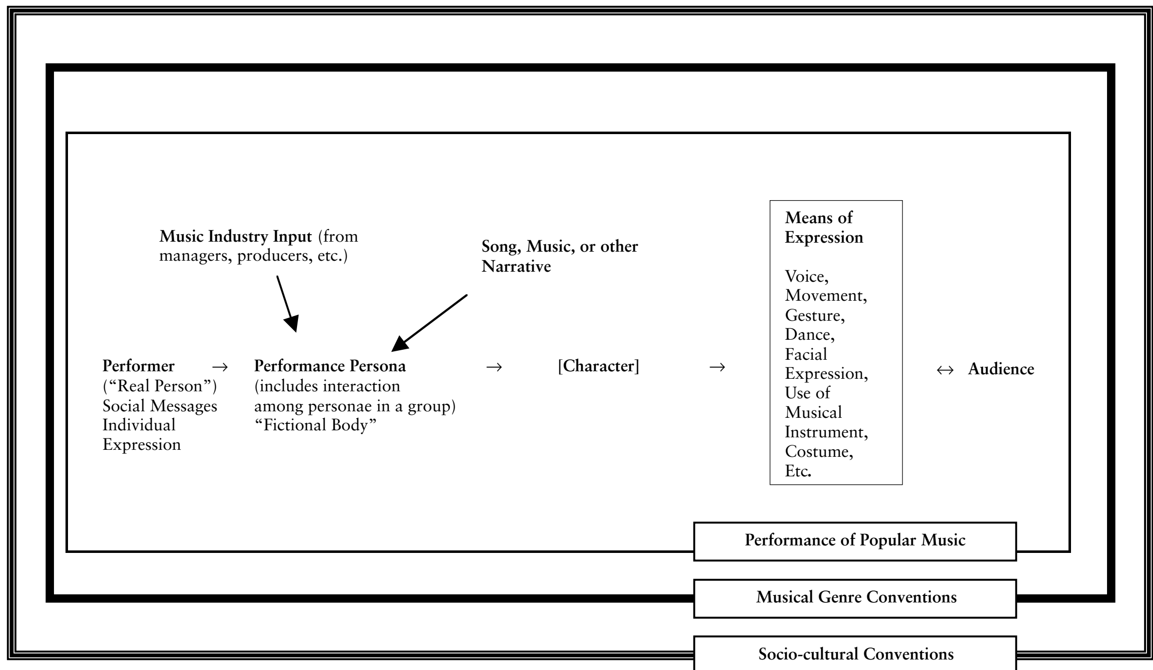

Figure 1 A model of popular music performance
Notes: A character appears in parentheses to indicate that it is an optional part of the process that occurs primarily in performances based in song narratives. The double-headed arrow before Audience suggests that this is a two-way relationship; the audience is able to give feedback to the performers using most (if not all) of the same means of expression used by the performers. The feedback may take place through audience behavior in a live performance or through responses to recorded music and various forms of participation in popular music culture, including the decision to become a musician oneself.

genre or the desire to express certain aesthetic or socio-political ideas through popular music. In order to enter into the musical arena, the person must develop an appropriate performance persona. This persona, which is usually based on existing models and conventions and may reflect the influence of such music industry types as managers or producers, becomes the basis for subsequent performances. The performer may use all of the available means to define this persona, including movement, dance, costume, make-up, and facial expression.

In some performances, the persona enacts a third entity, a character portrayed in the text of a song. This character may be the implied narrator of the song or a subject described in the song; it is also possible for the performer to embody more than one of the characters in a particular song. While the performer embodies different characters for each song, the performance persona remains constant. As I noted earlier, not all musical performances involve character – a singer or instrumentalist may well perform a persona without portraying other characters, and performed narratives may be constructed directly around personae rather than characters.

A very brief example, which I can only sketch here but have elaborated elsewhere,[22] will suggest how these frames and signifieds interrelate in a single performance. In a 1973 television performance of

22. See Philip Auslander, 'I Wanna Be Your Man: Suzi Quatro's Musical Androgyny', *Popular Music* (2004 forthcoming).

her hit song ‘Can the Can’, Suzi Quatro presented her persona as a black leather-clad, tough rocker woman, a persona that intentionally challenged both social conventions of femininity and the more vulnerable or ethereal feminine images created by earlier women rock musicians, even such powerful performers as Janis Joplin and Grace Slick. (This persona, which Quatro developed with her British management team, was quite different from Quatro’s first performance persona in the mid-1960s as a mini-skirted, braless member of an all-girl Detroit-based bar band called Suzi Soul and the Pleasure Seekers.)

Like her costume, Quatro’s voice, an aggressive scream, was not stereotypically feminine. Unlike most female rock performers of the time, Quatro was an instrumentalist as well as a singer – she played bass guitar with all the showy panache of a lead guitarist, wearing the instrument low, down around her hips in a masculine position and sometimes holding it away from herself to showcase her playing. Her movements were not dance movements but the characteristic bob and stomp associated with male rock musicians. Her facial expressions expressed the pleasure that musicians take in the urgency and hard work of playing rock – they were the expressions of her rocker persona, not of the character evoked in the song. Although the fast tempo and boogie rhythm of ‘Can the Can’ was consistent with her masculine rocker persona, the character depicted in the song placed Quatro in a more conventional role for a female pop artist, since the protagonist is advising an implicitly female listener – albeit in very aggressive terms – to safeguard her male love interest against the blandishments of other women. This fragment of analysis suggests that Quatro’s performance can be read in relation to two sets of conventions for female comportment – social conventions and those of her musical genre – and that the performance persona she created through such means of expression as costume, movement, facial expression, and the onstage manipulation of a musical instrument can be defined explicitly as an entity distinct from the characters she portrayed in the song’s narrative.

I place the performance persona at the center of the process outlined here and nominate it as the single most important aspect of the performer’s part in that process. The persona is of key importance because it is the signified to which the audience has the most direct and sustained access, not only through audio recordings, videos, and live performances, but also through the various other circumstances and media in which popular musicians present themselves publicly. The persona is therefore the signified that mediates between the other two: the audience gains access to both the performer as a real person and the characters the performer portrays through the performer’s elaboration of a persona. I wish to return in this context to a point I made earlier about the necessity of considering audio recordings as performances. I will now extend the same claim to lip-synched performances on television (such as Quatro’s) and in music videos. While such representations do not document live performances they do provide performers with good opportunities to define and extend their personae. With no obligation to sing or play, musicians are unencumbered and free to focus on performing their personae.

Audiences for popular music do not receive the performers' representations passively but respond to them actively. Conventions for audience behavior, like those of musical performance itself, are genre specific (sometimes even performer specific: think of the Deadheads or Jimmy Buffet's Parrothead fans). The double-headed arrow connecting the audience to the performance in the diagram is meant to suggest that the audience responds to the performers and that this feedback is crucial to the cultures of popular music. In live performances, audiences may respond directly to performers in ways that are not limited to applause and cheering but may include singing along, direct address to the performers, choice of costume and make-up, dancing, etc. Outside the context of live performance, audience response comes in a wide variety of forms, including the physical responses I mentioned earlier, collecting audio and video recordings, participating in fan clubs and online chat rooms, and incorporating the music into everyday life. The placement of the double-headed arrow is meant to suggest that audiences can avail themselves of most of the same means of expression as popular musicians themselves in their responses to them, including playing music. Perhaps the ultimate response to popular music performance is when a young person aspires to become a musician him or herself and join the performers he or she has seen onstage.