

# *Twenty Years After*

*Speech delivered by Philip Tagg at Founder's Event, 11th International IASPM Conference, Turku, 8 July 2001.*

*Please note that this text is not a piece of scholarly writing but a simple speech raising issues about the past and future direction of IASPM.*

I assume it's because I was involved in starting IASPM that the conference organisers asked me to reminisce about the 'good old days'. Never in my wildest nightmares did I dream that I'd become a repository of cultural experience, a IASPM anthropologist's museum piece, so to speak; (or should I say 'museme piece'?)<sup>1</sup> So, reminisce I will, but only briefly and not about any 'good old days' because the situation that gave rise to IASPM was anything *but* good. In fact, the idea of IASPM was to get rid of the bad old days, of those times when the music of most people in most of the world was excluded from the realms of institutionalised education and research.

I've already written at some length about how and why IASPM was started. I've also spoken on a number of occasions throughout the association's history about its aims, policies and problems. I will not bore you here by repeating all of that.<sup>2</sup> Very briefly, however, my short version of the IASPM saga runs as follows.

When studying at Cambridge in the sixties I had to lead a musical double life, completing Kyries in the style of Palestrina on the one hand and playing piano in an R&B/soul band on the other. These worlds never met except inside myself. I did not feel comfortable with this institutionally enforced musical apartheid and had problems during my teacher training year (University of Manchester, 1965-66) in persuading one of my tutors of the advantages of using pop music of the day in my teaching practice.<sup>3</sup>

A lucky coincidence in the early seventies, after a few years of living in

1. Thanks to Keith Kahn-Harris for this witty pun.

Sweden, provided me with my first chance to break the kind of musical apartheid I just mentioned: at that time I was apparently the only music graduate the Swedish education authorities could find who also had some practical experience of pop music. I soon found that teaching popular music analysis was impossible if you tried to use the methods and concepts of conventional, solely structuralist, musicology. This methodological impasse led me to embark on postgraduate studies, the outcome of which was my by now infamous doctoral thesis about the theme tune for the TV series *Kojak*. In the course of that primarily musicological work I also discovered that the music made little or no sense if not studied in contexts that were simultaneously technological, social, cultural, economic and political. These cross-disciplinary insights

2. The following writings deal almost entirely with IASPM and the development of popular music studies: [1] 'Music Teacher Training Problems and Popular Music Research' (1982) in *Popular Music Perspectives 1* (ed. D Horn & P Tagg), Göteborg and Exeter: IASPM, pp. 232-242; [2] 'Why IASPM? Which Tasks?' (1985) in *Popular Music Perspectives 2*, (ed. D Horn), Göteborg & Exeter: IASPM, pp. 501-507; [3] 'Address on the State of the Association' (IASPM conference, Montréal 1985: [www.tagg.org/articles/montreal.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/montreal.html)); [4] Report on 4th IASPM International Conference, Accra (August 1987: [www.tagg.org/articles/ghanarpt.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/ghanarpt.html)); [5] 'The Göteborg connection: lessons in the history and politics of popular music education and research' (1998) in *Popular Music* 17/2, pp. 219-242; [6] 'Popular Music Studies — Bridge or Barrier?' (symposium 'La musica come ponte fra popoli', Bolzano, November, 1998: [www.tagg.org/articles/bolz9811.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/bolz9811.html)); [7] 'High and Low, Cool and Uncool, Music and Knowledge' (IASPM UK, Guildford, July 2000: [www.tagg.org/articles/iaspmuk2000.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/iaspmuk2000.html)).

The following writings deal in part with IASPM and the development of popular music studies: [1] 'Analysing Popular Music - Theory, Method and Practice' (1982) in *Popular Music*, 2, pp. 37-69; [2] 'Tagg's Nag or Phil's Whinge', IPM Newsletter (August 1994: [www.tagg.org/articles/taggnag94.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/taggnag94.html)); [3] 'Studying music in the audio-visual media — an epistemological mess' IASPM, Glasgow, July 1995), subsequently published in *Music on Show*, pp. 319-329 (ed. H Järviuoma & T Hautamäki, Department of Folk Tradition, Tampere, 1998); [4] 'Open Letter about "Black Music", "Afro-American Music" and "European Music"' (1989), in *Popular Music* 8/3, pp. 285-298; [5] 'Popular Music Studies versus the "Other"' (December 1996, symposium 'Music and Life-world. Otherness and Transgression in the Culture of the 20th Century': [www.tagg.org/articles/cascais.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/cascais.html)); [6] Closing remarks at the 9th IASPM international conference, Kanazawa (July, 1997: [www.tagg.org/articles/kanazawa.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/kanazawa.html)).

All titles included in this footnote are accessible online via [www.tagg.org/texts.html](http://www.tagg.org/texts.html).

meant I had to read, in addition to work my several musicological authorities, texts by such figures as Gillett, Frith and Oliver.

To cut a long story short, I wasted a lot of time running from the social science faculty library to the Media Studies Department (housed at that time under Political Sciences), to the acoustic physics section of the technical college's library, back to the Musicology Department, etc. I also wasted time, when teaching popular piano accompaniment techniques, trying to formulate and notate patterns for students to work on, having quite often to confront the musician's unwillingness to speak about music and the theorist's apparent inability to understand processes of musical creativity.

It was in the mid seventies that I met Gerard Kempers, classical percussionist and jazz drummer. He faced similar problems in his work at a community arts college in the Netherlands. Surrounded by classical piano teachers arguing the finer points of fingering in Beethoven sonatas at a conference of Scandinavian music educators at Örebro in Sweden, Gerard and I agreed that something ought to be done: we would need to bring together information — educational, academic, musical — so that the music of most people in most of the world could be included in education. We toyed with the idea of organising a conference on popular music in education. Realising the importance of the English-speaking world in the area of popular music, we sought help from colleagues in the UK and were lucky to gain the support of Richard Middleton and David Horn. It was David Horn who joined Gerard and me in 1980 and who enabled us to invite such figures as Charles Hamm, Paul Oliver and Simon Frith to the First International Conference on Popular Music Studies which Gerard organised, on a shoestring budget, in Amsterdam in June 1981. Among others speaking at that conference were Günter Mayer (ex-DDR) and Franco Fabbri (Italy). Given the enthusiastic response to our call for papers, we decided to prepare a document proposing the founda-

3. See 'Popular music as a possible medium in secondary school', essay in Music Education, Manchester, 1966 ([www/articles/xpdfs/mcr1966.pdf](http://www/articles/xpdfs/mcr1966.pdf)).

tion of an International Association for the Study of Popular Music.<sup>4</sup> The proposals were accepted and the association has existed officially since that time. IASPM's main goals were to act as an international, interdisciplinary and interprofessional association dedicated to the serious study of popular music.

The whole ethos of the association has, since its foundation in 1981, been characterised by a spirit of democracy. Not only have IASPM gatherings been noted for their relatively informal atmosphere in which everyone is on first-name terms, but also, and more importantly, the association has taken the inequalities of an unjust world order into consideration by stipulating that students, the unwaged, and members from non-OECD countries should pay much less than the rest of us to keep IASPM going. Such commitment to democratic principles rhymes well with the underlying democratic notion of popular music studies, i.e. that the music of a majority of the world's population should be taken just as seriously as that of a tiny minority in a tiny part of the world. Implicit in this notion was of course the idea that the European classical canon and its privileged position in academe was highly undemocratic and that music which appeals as much to the body and to a sense of fun as to the mind and emotions should be treated with equal respect as music presented, on spurious premises, as being a matter of mind and emotion rather than of the body.<sup>5</sup>

From my viewpoint twenty years after the first IASPM conference in Amsterdam and looking twenty years into the future, the question to ask is whether IASPM been successful in achieving its aims and, if not, what we can do to come closer to the democratic utopia they express?

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4. In fact the originally proposed name was 'International Association for Popular Music Research'. It was Prof. Martin Tegen (Stockholm) who suggested 'Popular Music Studies' instead as complying better with the aim of interprofessionality.
  5. See [1] 'Open Letter about "Black Music", "Afro-American Music" and "European Music"' (1989), in *Popular Music* 8/3, pp. 285-298; [2] 'Popular Music Studies versus the "Other"' (December 1996: [www.tagg.org/articles/cas-cais.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/cas-cais.html)).

I think IASPM has done quite well by and large. When David Horn, Gerard Kempers and I sat in a Lancaster fish and chip shop one cold December evening in 1980 planning the Amsterdam conference, we never imagined events of the size, efficiency and breadth manifest here at Turku. But I do feel there are some causes for concern, the first of which relates to the pleasantly relaxed ambience of IASPM gatherings such as this.

While I'm delighted that the relaxed ambience remains, I can't help wondering if it doesn't sometimes act as an obstacle for real debate. I know I'm guilty of having now and again sat through papers I thought were pretty terrible and, at the end, politely applauded like some automaton at the mercy of imagined peer-group pressure. A bit like exaggerated PC language, IASPM pleasantness can, I think, conceal confrontations of idea and purpose that may be healthy for the development of ideas. I don't want to see the friendly and informal atmosphere disappear, but I will in the future try to be more aware of the hypocritical and acquiescent dangers of IASPM's easy-going atmosphere. So, please don't clap at the end of this if you think I'm talking nonsense!

Returning to the question of how IASPM has fared in living up to its three main aims, I think this founder's event could be a suitable occasion at which to voice some of the concerns I've had about the association over the last twenty years.

My first area for concern relates to IASPM's international aims. Judging from the number of nations represented at this event, the association seems to have fared quite well. However, it should be obvious that we have only one representative from Africa, just a few from Asia, none from the Arab world, only a few from Latin America, almost no-one from southern Europe, etc. Apart from Nordic colleagues here at this conference in a Nordic nation, this IASPM event, like the association in general, is dominated by anglophones or by those fluent in English as a second language. Sure, the predominance of anglophones reflects perhaps the domination of the global media industry by US and other anglophone corporations, but neither those corporations nor their sharehold-

ers have ever even pretended to believe in the sort of democracy we believed in as founders of IASPM. I feel that anglophone domination of IASPM needs to be actively challenged. One minor suggestion might be to programme more speakers from non-anglophone nations into plenary sessions and to put more anglophones into parallel sessions, another to incorporate the excellent evening sessions on popular music in the host nation and its neighbours (as in Kanazawa and here in Turku) into the conference's main daytime proceedings. That way — and I am speaking quite selfishly as an anglophone — I would learn much more and my horizons would be broadened at such an excellent event as this conference in Turku.

One obvious symptom of IASPM's anglocentrism was expressed succinctly by a Brazilian ex-doctoral student of mine who warned a compatriot, present at this conference, in the following terms: 'they're nice people but all they talk about is rock'.<sup>6</sup> As an ex-rock musician I love to hear, play and find out more about that music of 'my generation'. But what I need to hear, be it musical or metamusical — just to confirm that others share my tastes, that I am not alone, that the music (and me with it) are all valid — is irrelevant in a real learning situation such as I imagine a conference should be. It would also be rather childish, tribal and self-congratulatory to visit an event like this for such purposes. And yet, as I have written elsewhere, I fear that the classical canon of European art music has on many IASPM occasions been replaced by a sort of subculturalist or rockologist canon: socially decontextualised emotions and notions of 'absolute' music have, so to speak, been replaced by a socially decontextualised body and by notions of 'music as music'.<sup>7</sup> In a similarly uncritical fashion, anglophone youth cultures, commercial or alternative have become the main

6. Cristina Grossi relayed these words of Mércia Pinto to me yesterday in an informal conversation.

7. See 'From Refrain to Rave' (*Popular Music* 13/2, pp. 209-222) and essay review of 'Music and Cultural Theory' (by J. Shepherd and P. Wicke) in *Popular Music* 17/3, pp. 331-348.

focus of so many anglophone IASPMites that it has become necessary at this conference to flag up 'the music of most people' (the mainstream) as a subculture within the academic subculture of IASPM.<sup>8</sup> The same sort of observation can be made about music and the moving image which finally had its own slot at an international IASPM conference this year,<sup>9</sup> but which is almost certainly heard and reacted to by so many more people for so much more time than the rock and pop music subcultures to which a disproportionate number of IASPMites seem to devote their scholarly energies. If IASPM's democratic principles are still applicable and if there is any truth in these impressions of an organisation biased towards anglophone rock/pop subcultures, then we have a problem.

Of course, I do not mean that IASPM need apply a strict 'one-person-one-vote' rule in the sense of elaborating a quota system relating the amount of time and energy spent on research to the number of people in the world using a particular type of music for a particular amount of time. However, if we are content to do no more than reflect rather than actively promote the sort of internationalist democratic principles I've mentioned, we will end up as a sadly enclosed and inward-looking group of mutual admirers propagating a narrow range of ideas about a narrow range of musics.<sup>10</sup>

If there are problems with the rock/pop bias resulting from anglophone domination of IASPM, there are also, I think, concomitant difficulties with a skewing of approach. Here I concerned with IASPM's ability to reach its second main aim, that of interdiscipli-

8. This does not mean that anglophone rock and pop cultures are any less important than other sets of musical practices. It is just a matter of proportion in an international context.
9. Of course, the 1995 IASPM conference in Glasgow overlapped with an event organised by *Screen* magazine which featured several papers about film music.
10. See the sections on 'excluded musics' in 'Popular Music Studies — Bridge or Barrier?' (1998: [www.tagg.org/articles/bolz9811.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/bolz9811.html)) and in 'High and Low, Cool and Uncool' (2000: [www.tagg.org/articles/iaspmuk2000.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/iaspmuk2000.html)).

rarity. Let us assume, as I suggested last year in Guildford, that there are four types of musical knowledge (table 1):

Table 1: Four types of musical knowledge

1. <i>Music as knowledge</i>	2. <i>Knowledge about music</i>
A: Music-making knowledge	A: Knowledge about musical structuration
B: Music-using knowledge	B: Knowledge about uses of music

By ‘music as knowledge’ I mean knowledge *in* rather than about music, i.e. knowledge that is both intrinsically musical and culturally specific. This type of musical knowledge can be understood in two senses: [1A] the ability to compose, create or perform music — ‘music-making knowledge’ — and [1B] the ability to recall, recognise and distinguish between musical sounds, as well as between their culturally specific connotations and social functions — ‘music-using knowledge’. Neither 1A nor 1B relies on any explicit verbal denotation.

‘Knowledge about music’, on the other hand, always entails verbal denotation. However, like ‘music *as* knowledge’, ‘knowledge about music’ is both culturally specific and can also be divided into two categories: [2A] the ability to identify and name elements and patterns of musical structure — what is often referred to as ‘music theory’ — and [2B] the ability to explain how musical practices relate to the culture and society that produces them and which they affect. 2B covers everything from music semiotics to acoustics, from business studies to psychology, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, and has until now been predominant inside popular music studies.

Once again, I’m not suggesting that we should apportion a strict 25% share of time and energy to each of the four musical knowledges just described because IASPM must to some extent reflect the current disciplinary domicile of its own members. However — and this is also a big ‘but’ — we need to be on our guard against merely reflecting the status quo of disciplines and approaches, be



they old (e.g. conventional musicology) or relatively new (e.g. cultural studies). I've had to stop counting the number of 'embodies', 'embeddeds', 'scenes', 'fixities' and 'homogeneities' I've heard at this conference. I'd be rightly booed from the floor if I said 'diminished fifth' or 'pre-delay' that number of times! After all, I'm not here to impress my fellow musicologists that I'm the musicological jargon king of our subdisciplinary castle but, hopefully, to communicate with people from other nations and disciplines; and that means restricting in-group terminology to a minimum. So, dear cult studs, please stop putting things to 'embeddedness', whatever their 'fixity' or 'poststructural heterogeneity', or else I'll hit you with a ton of augmented elevenths in asymmetric isometre!

It's the same sort of discontent with the unquestioned canonisation of music and approaches that made Gerard Kempers and me start IASPM in the first place, except twenty years on IASPM has itself developed different canons: European art music has been replaced by anglophone rock/pop and archivist/structural musicology by cultural studies. It's ironic to think that a brave new institutionalisation process has taken place and taken *the* place of the one we sought to dismantle. It seems to me that the aim of interdisciplinarity has, since the mid eighties until quite recently, rarely been on the IASPM agenda. Latterly, however, I do think there has been, thanks to the involvement of much younger colleagues, a step in the right direction:<sup>11</sup> music and music-making are back on the agenda, even if under-represented, and 'mainstream' music has at this conference experienced its subcultural officialisation within the intellectual subculture that is IASPM.

Music and music-making introduce my third and final point of concern — interprofessionalism. Here, I think, IASPM has failed. For example, intellectually articulate and internationally respected musicians like Chris Cutler and Franco Fabbri are, to

11. This trend was particularly noticeable at the IASPM UK conference in Guildford in 2000.

say the least, disenchanted with IASPM, at least in its international anglophone guise; similarly, Gerard Kempers, co-founder of the association, felt alienated by the solely academic direction IASPM was taking as early as 1984. Indeed, who can blame these brother practitioners for shunning international IASPM events which have yet to include musicians imparting musical knowledge through music as an intrinsic part of conference proceedings rather than as add-ons we can opt for if we're not worn out after another day of 'embeddedness' discourse. Unfortunately, the fact that musicians are not employed as academics makes it difficult for them to participate in activities arranged according to the flux of the academic year rather than around tour dates or recording sessions. It also partly explains why so few Italian IASPM members are present here: most of them are active as musicians, or music educators, or as cultural administrators, or in the media rather than as academics. Their knowledge of popular music is based much more in the everyday practicalities of music, such pragmatism demanding the development of theoretical models of use in the here and now of popular music practices.<sup>12</sup>

And this is the place — in the here and now of everyday musical work — that I will end. My everyday work means trying to empower my students to live in a world where they will need not only to stand back and criticise media messages but also to talk back *through* music, more often than not in conjunction with words, images and actions. Therefore, any music I have not heard before, any idea, any approach I did not know about but which helps me, and ultimately my students, make sense of the unjust world order into which none of us asked to be born is welcome in my everyday work. Indeed, it is the renewal and expansion of knowledge, musical *and* metamusical, that IASPM should be promoting. However, if IASPM, an association set up with such aims

12. A few hours before making this speech I talked to Franco Fabbri on his mobile phone. He was on his way back from a symposium at which singer-songwriters were discussing musical diversity in the *cantautore* genre. Yes, folks, that means musicians performing and talking about their work with *music!*

in mind, ends up as an international body sanctioning some musics and approaches but ignoring music itself as a form of knowledge, then I will propose its immediate dissolution. If reflecting institutional, disciplinary, national and professional status quo is what IASPM is about, then IASPM is directly contravening its own statutes and acting unconstitutionally. After all, we are by definition dealing with configurations of music and society that are in a constant state of change. The future of IASPM is in other words directly dependent on our ability to not only explain but also influence such change.

Moreover, if we pay more than mere lip service to IASPM's democratic ideals of internationalism, interdisciplinarity and interprofessionalism, then we must expect to be swimming against the tide for the rest of our lives in popular music studies. The only trouble is that IASPM is itself now an established organisation with its own brand of institutional inertia and, as popular music studies gain a foothold in an increasing number of colleges and universities, what was once IASPM's new direction can so easily become a well-worn track, a broad highway obscuring the terrain through which we travel. This process of institutionalisation is of course paradoxical, but I do not think we are dealing with an irresolvable contradiction. If we are fully aware of the process and of its dangers there is nothing to stop us from putting mechanisms in place that will allow us to constantly review IASPM's activities to ensure that we do not become just another international guild of academics repeating similar mantras year in, year out. Travelling a well-worn highway may be less effort but, friends, it is much less fun than getting out into the terrain beyond the asphalt and billboards. After all, fun and the fact that fun is serious is what drew so many of us to popular music in the first place.

