

Music Teacher Training Problems and Popular Music Research

by Philip Tagg

First published in *Popular Music Perspectives* (ed. D Horn and P Tagg), pp. 232-242. International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Göteborg & Exeter, 1982. (ISBN 91-7260-610-X)¹ New page numbers in the original version are inserted in this text as small figures inside braces, e.g. {232}.

Iwould like to recount some of the difficulties we encountered when setting up a new college for music teachers in Sweden in the early seventies and to discuss some of the areas in which popular music research could have helped us (and could still!). I will concentrate on what I found to be the most pressing educational needs for popular music research in that situation, especially those connected with teaching popular music history (in Swedish = 'Music and Society, the popular music part'). But first a short background explaining events leading to the discovery and formulation of these needs.

SÄMUS

Music teaching is still in a critical state in many industrialised countries and Sweden is no exception to the rule. This rule is best expressed by citing the well known paradox that while the average Swede (pensioners and babes-in-arms included) spends several hundreds of kronor on music every year and is subjected to three or four hours of music a day (mostly via loudspeakers), public music teaching and the formation of music teachers still seem relatively unaware of the existence of Edison, Baird, Warner Brothers, Glenn Miller, Presley, The Beatles, Hendrix, transistors, synthesizers, drum kits, Muzak, James Last, Henry Mancini and The Police. Until 1971, music teacher training in Sweden seemed to pretend that such phenomena had never existed (true of the Police but not the others!). School kids skipped music lessons but played electric guitar in their spare time. New music teaching graduates, educated at conservatories, either gave up the profession after a short time or did not enter it at all. In the late sixties only one in every four music teachers at Swedish schools had any formal training for the job.

Such a state of affairs was obviously untenable. With the 1969 revised school curriculum,² new lines were drawn up for music teaching in Swedish schools. Emphasis was to be placed on creative activities, on using music and sound from the pupils' own environment and on putting music into its social and cultural perspectives.^{233} These central directives from the Ministry of Education would, it was thought, encourage the recruitment of a new sort of music teacher, the sort of person who could sing a few 'pop songs'

1. This text scanned and retyped from original version with minor alterations only.

2. *Läroplanen för grundskolan, allmän del*. 1969, Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget, 224 pp. Also *Läroplanen för grundskolan, Musiksupplement*. 1969, Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget, 147 pp.

with the kids and thereby, with a quick and radical sort of popularised vocational training a la Woolworths, solve the general music education problem in Swedish schools. Unfortunately, the Swedish educational authorities had, in their laudably liberalist zeal, overlooked some important points: (1) the crisis in music teaching was symptomatic of a far larger cultural and political crisis in society and was unlikely to be solved by scratching it on the surface, and: (2) skills in and knowledge about various forms of popular music require just as much training, discipline, research and hard work as skills in and knowledge about the classical tradition on whose repertoire music teaching had been based for the previous hundred years.

The second of these two points soon became painfully obvious to all of us, both students and teachers, working at the new college set up for the vocational training of music teachers capable of implementing the directives laid down in the new school curriculum. During its experimental stage (from 1971 to 1977) this new college, SÄMUS (*Särskild Ämnesutbildning i Musik* = Special Education in Music as a (School Teaching) Subject), located in Göteborg, ran into a number of difficulties which can be studied as an illuminating contribution to the understanding of attitudes towards various forms of popular music theory and practice in modern capitalist society.

Pouring a gallon into a pint bottle

As can be gathered from table 1, SÄMUS was supposed to include far more skills and areas of knowledge in its curriculum than the 'old' music teacher training programme. SÄMUS was also supposed to perform this exploit in half the time. Faced with the choice between what one might bluntly call 'a bad deal' and 'no deal at all', it seemed better to opt for the former: it was the first time most of us had ever been offered any opportunity to include popular music in an official education programme.

In accordance with the new school curriculum and ministry directives to our college, it was important to train music teachers capable of dealing with a number of different genres. The classical baby should not be thrown out with the pluralistic bath water! Students should study standard music history and theory, manage the equivalent of about Grade VII (British Associated Board exam) on their main instrument and be able to sing the odd Lied. At the same time they should have a smattering of ethnomusicology and sociomusicology, be able to sight read from notation and accompany folk and pop songs by ear, improvise a little, play some recorder, electric guitar, bass and drums, be practically acquainted with the elementary ^{234} technicalities of string, woodwind and brass instruments, know the basics of tape recording, cutting, editing and montage, while being trained as good ensemble players and leaders, choir members *and* conductors, versed simultaneously in some practical experience of music in dance, drama and visual arts pictures, initiated into the mysteries of elementary arrangement and composition, able to use their voice with *and* without a microphone, etc., etc. All this was to be combined with a thorough knowledge about music in modern society (see below) and the whole programme was to be carried out in one and half years instead of three.³

3. The 1½ years were expanded to 2 years in 1978. The third year was devoted solely to teacher training.

Differences between 'old' and 'new' teacher training schemes in Sweden (1975)

'Old'	'New'
3 years music + 1 year education course	1½ years music + 1 year other subject + 1 year education
1 main genre (monomusicality)	No main genre (polymusicality)
Classical music theory <i>in abstracto</i>	Theory related to arranging, instrumentation, composition and musical communication
Ear training <i>in abstracto</i>	Structural listening, transcription and analysis for discussion and reperformance
Solo achievement on instrument and in composition / arranging	Solo <i>and</i> group skills in performance, composition and arrangement
Music 'per se'	Music as expression and communication in social and cultural contexts
Alternative to commercialism from a fixed position within the art music canon	Alternative to commercialism as dynamic processes both inside and outside the commercial production of music
'Music History': past events as 'events' and 'facts'; set canon of great names and works	'Music and Society': events past and present as part of social and cultural processes in history
Fixation on notated music (monomodality)	Oral/aural, recorded and written musics (polymodality)

Although the construction of this course offered the possibility of making structured teaching materials in new subjects, the total vocational training programme (235) was nevertheless an insoluble equation from a *quantitative* viewpoint. A gallon will not go into a pint bottle. However, *qualitative* aspects of this impossible equation caused even greater difficulties.

Changing values

In order to equip the music teacher for his/her work in the fluctuating musical, social and economic climate of Sweden in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, it seemed necessary not only to alter the quantity of skills and knowledge required in a vocational training course, but also to change its quality (see table 1). Thus, while monomusicality (one main genre) and monomodality (reliance on one mode of musical storage, traditionally notation) would need to be superseded by polymusicality (no main genre) and polymodality (orally/aurally and electronically stored music *as well as* the written product), it became apparent that this would lead to a reappraisal of certain aspects of musical practice and of criteria for evaluation of student achievement.

This tendency was further underlined by directives in the 1969 revised school curriculum which emphasised the importance of group achievements and cooperation between pupils while playing down notions of competitive individualism. Thus, without understanding too well the objective reasons for such tendencies, both students and teachers at SÄMUS found it necessary to shift the traditional emphasis on solo achievements in musical practice and theory on to a combination of evaluating these traditional aspects and aspects of group achievement as well. Unfortunately, these tendencies, although clearly supported in the general preamble to the 1969 curriculum, were in direct conflict with state legislation concerning norms for examination grades in higher education. This inherent conflict in the Swedish educational system led to serious confrontations between college staff and students on the one hand and its governors (a committee under the Swedish Ministry of Education) on the other. The college was on the verge of collapse

on several occasions and two consecutive heads resigned as a result of repeated confrontations.

In certain circles this conflict was viewed as another outburst of student radicalism from the late sixties. However, in retrospect it had far deeper causes, two of which are important in connection with topics discussed at this conference.⁴ (1) Studying certain musical practices (e.g. rock, certain types of jazz and folk music), previously excluded from higher education, implies acquiring practical skills and finding theoretical explanations relevant to the collective character of these practices. An exclusively individualist evaluation of students' progress in acquiring such skills and knowledge would obviously be irrelevant. (2) The practical and theoretical study of a multiplicity of musical practices, without placing them on an implicit or explicit scale of relative aesthetic excellence, ^{236} leads nevertheless to a critical consideration and comparison of the role of these various musical practices in society. This makes it impossible to carry out student evaluation in such a way as to favour musical practices more closely associated with individual achievement at the expense of those connected with collective activity.

A decade ago it was difficult to understand that the conflict over collective versus individual grades was *not* the cause but rather an acute symptom of a far wider musical, cultural and social phenomenon in Swedish society. It can be seen as a microcosm of the sort of collision which is bound to arise in capitalist society when the privately owned commercial mass production and distribution of music acquires such obviously public (even universal) proportions that it can no longer be excluded from the traditionally public realms of national culture and education. Most of this popular music brings with it sociocultural practices, norms and modes of behaviour incompatible with those of the traditional conservatory or university department of music. Had we but been better equipped with viable theories of music and the mass media, of musical subcultures and counter-cultures, etc., we would have been in a better position to guide the activities of SÄMUS more efficiently, more constructively, more strategically. Here we had a practical need for a particular line in popular music research. Let me briefly mention a few more such practical needs.

Practical needs for popular music research

There are numerous areas in which a great deal of research needs to be conducted if we are to equip tomorrow's music teacher for the job. There is no room here to elaborate on these points although the verbalisation and educational structuring of intuitive musical practices in non-art genres are of great importance to all subjects on our curriculum. Therefore I will restrict this account to three subjects and a telegraphic inventory (mostly in the form of rhetorical questions) which may serve as examples of the need for popular music research we experience at our teacher's training college.

Vocal skills: here the problems of polymusicality are particularly noticeable and pose the following sort of questions. How can good rock singing, good folk singing, good microphone technique and the traditional bel canto voice be combined in one and the same person? What are the connections between these various vocal ideals and the expression of gestural and musical

4. See Peter Wicke & Günter Mayer: Rock Music as a Phenomenon of Progressive Mass Culture, pp. 223-231 in same volume as this article.

relationships between the individual in a group and his/her cultural, social and physical environment? Are there any useful descriptions of non-art vocal sound ideals? If so, how could they contribute to training vocal polymusicality both practically and theoretically?

Instrumental and compositional skills: how do musicians and composers in {237} different popular music genres acquire their skills (theories of learning)? How are such people motivated to take up this sort of musical activity? What stages and modes of conception and production exist? What aesthetic and social functions and 'meanings' are carried by the choice of particular instruments, styles and other musical materials? What forms of extramusical (e.g. verbal) communication exist between the musicians themselves and between the musicians and audience in any given popular music genre? Could such insights contribute towards the structuring, verbalisation and notation (not necessarily traditional) of such genres for educational purposes?

Sound: how do recording engineers, tape editors, music editors in film and television, etc., actually work'? How can the intuitive aesthetic aspects of their work be formulated in an explicit, educationally communicable form'? What sort of vocabulary exists to describe electromusical effects from compressors, phase shifters, envelope shapers, ring modulators, tape echo, reverb, delay units, fuzz boxes, flangers, different sorts of panning, filtering, etc., etc.'? In what situations, together with what extramusical messages and for what aesthetic purposes are such electronic means of musical expression used? How can this sort of musical ingredient be reproduced graphically (i.e. in some form of notation)?

Teaching popular music history — research needs

From 1971 to 1977 my responsibilities at SAMUS included teaching popular music history and theory. It was obvious right from the start that the area was far too extensive to be covered by any single teacher or researcher, even if one were to dedicate a lifetime to popular music studies and nothing else. I was contracted to teach twelve hours of the subject every year, the remaining 95% of my duties being devoted to other parts of music history and theory as well as to ensemble and keyboard harmony lessons. There was no way in which I could grasp the total 'post Edison' corpus of music (most of which can be characterised as 'popular', as defined in Tagg (1979): 20 -31) as a whole, partly because it probably constitutes a greater quantity of 'stored music than that contained in all pre-mechanical sources, partly because the area of study was almost devoid of any tradition of serious scholarship.

The first problem was therefore deciding which popular music to study from such a vast corpus. What criteria of selection should be used? The validity of hit lists as indicators of popularity has already been challenged at this conference.⁵ What factors should then affect the choice of material to be studied by future music teachers who will face the record buying young in the classroom and who are expected to awaken their interest for understanding music in their own social environment? Should one follow some written history of popular {238} music and put together examples of important recordings mentioned there? Can one rely on the popular music historian's own selec-

5. Charles Hamm. Some Thoughts on the Measurement of Popularity in Music. In *Popular Music Perspectives* (ed. D Horn and P Tagg), p.3-15. Göteborg and Exeter: IASPM, 1982.

tion of representative examples? Even if it were possible to answer these questions, which I merely enumerate as topics still requiring discussion and investigation, a number of other problems still remain if one needs a recorded anthology of popular music history.

One cannot expect every school of music, every sociology or mass media studies department to go on accepting the present situation in which one individual, often a teacher with too many other duties apart from popular music courses, at every individual institute has to build up an individual audio and videotape library for teaching purposes. Not only is it thoroughly inefficient and irrational: it is also illegal, since the vast majority of popular music is under strict copyright control. Given this situation, it is reasonable to ask both popular music researchers and the international association for popular music studies — which I hope will be formed as a result of this conference — for help in discovering how a recorded anthology of popular music history might be compiled legally, both nationally and internationally.

The second main problem in teaching popular music history and theory concerns literature. I do not intend to enter into a discussion of individual books and articles, merely to mention general trends and problems. Considering first books on rock and pop, the problem is not a lack of words on the subject. Most rock and pop books are of the following types: (1) journalistic accounts; (2) descriptions by fans of a particular genre; (3) artist monographs *for fans*; (4) revelations about the business; (5) encyclopedias, hit catalogues, etc. There are one or two useful works in the above categories while much of the literature is of little value to popular music courses in higher education. There is, however, a considerable number of interesting studies on pop and rock in the following categories: (1) socioeconomic accounts; (2) sociological, often subcultural, accounts; (3) discussions of rock lyrics; (4) histories of early pop and rock. On the other hand, one should note the distinct lack of rock and pop literature of the following types: (1) psycho-sociological, anthropological and psychological; (2) musical/analytical and semiological; (3) combinatory, holistic, general theoretical. {239}

The lack of these last three types of literature on rock and pop and the relative excess of the first type mentioned above may be interpreted as a reflection of the fast trend character and quick turnover nature of popular music under late capitalism. However, teaching, studying, explaining and understanding popular music are obviously not equatable with producing, consuming and 'living' it. Whereas the latter can provide a possible market for the marginal cultural spin-off business of publishing rock books and magazines (verbalising mostly immediate or historically presented events related to the reader's personal experience and fantasy), the former requires literature which also presents events both as diachronic social/cultural/historical processes and as synchronic, interdisciplinarily related integral phenomena. There is still a great need for this type of discourse in popular music studies and I hope musicologists, psychologists, semiologists and anthropologists will be able to make a similar contribution to that already presented by sociologists and economists.

Whereas rock and pop books may be numerous, literature on such widespread phenomena as music in film and television is harder to come by. Existing literature on such subjects is mostly either of the composing/arranging manual type or designed for cinema devotees who are presented with biographies of film music composers, with catalogues of their works,

with anecdotes about the production of important films, etc.⁶ Here again there is a need for studies dealing with the social history of film and television music (especially the latter) as well as for works discussing the modes of conception and reception of such musical practices from semiological and psychological viewpoints.

Public studies of other background uses of music (Muzak™ in factories, supermarkets and offices, etc., the radio or cassette recorder at home, etc.) are unfortunately well-nigh nonexistent. Indeed, it almost seems as though the popular music scholar has preferred to disregard such ubiquitous aspects of musical practice in favour of music more closely connected to his/her own *consciously* perceived personal motivations and tastes. Whatever the reasons for neglecting the study of such a widespread phenomenon as using recorded music as a more or less continual sonic backcloth to some other primary activity, it seems unlikely that we shall ever arrive at satisfactory general theories of popular music which can be used by such groups as music teachers and their pupils, if the general mainstream of popular music is not studied in depth. Moreover, how, one wonders, can interesting musical subcultures, progressive trends in rock and similar 'exceptions to the rule' be put into any meaningful perspective unless the relatively unexplored territory of everyday musical situations — the rule — is not properly charted from all angles? I feel that this aspect of popular music is in sore need of public research, not least because the individual living his/her life in the everyday mainstream of popular music deserves as much of our research time and energy as the rock or jazz fan. {240}

Postscript (1982)

This talk has mainly been a kind of letter to Santa Claus in which I tried to describe the sort of popular music research questions it would be nice to have answered when working in a particular field of music education. However, it should be stressed that correspondence between music educators and researchers ought to be two way traffic. This is because the sort of experience teachers, in direct contact with young people and their personal and collective involvement in various forms of popular music, can offer should be seen as a valuable source of information to popular music researchers. For example, the numerous discussions, questions, reactions and criticisms presented by students during popular music history classes led to my finally being able to carry out some research into semiological models for analysing television music and middle-of-the-road pop (Tagg, 1979, 1981).⁷ Unfortunately, such research work cannot be carried out within the framework of a job with a lively teaching schedule. The two way traffic between practical research needs and actual research activity becomes congested when teacher and researcher are pigeonholed into different professions and different institutions. Such lack of contact has an unfavourable effect on both parties. The researcher loses his/her base in everyday musical and social life, while the educator, under continual pressure to prepare lessons, mark exams and keep up instrumental skills, will find no time

6. An exception to this trend is Hansjörg Pauli's *Filmmusik — Stummfilm* (Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1981).

7. P Tagg. Kojak — 50 Seconds of Television Music. Skrifter från Musikvetenskapliga institutionen, Göteborg, 1979. The 60 page version of *Fernando the Flute* (Stencilled Papers from the Göteborg University Musicology Department) was also mentioned. This has been replaced by the 170 page *Fernando the Flute* (Institute of Popular Music, Liverpool, 1992).

to do the necessary background work for producing new teaching materials reflecting the changing needs of a changeable society and its changeable cultural and musical patterns. SÅMUS, the music teacher training college whose problems form the basis of ideas presented here, has experienced the adverse effects of such pigeonholing during the last few years. I will conclude with a description of this development as an instructive example of the sort of problems which interdisciplinary and international popular music research might be able to help solve

In 1977 the SÅMUS experiment was disbanded and the new vocational training programme, developed since 1971, was incorporated under the Göteborg College of Music (*Musikhögskolan*) and given an official, permanent status. In 1978, the minimum length of studies was increased from one and a half to two years, but since 1980 the college of music has had to make regular cuts in expenditure. Parts of the Music and Society subject are ready to be axed this year (1982) but the sections dealing with popular music history retain their measly total of twelve hours. The economic climate (cuts threatening subjects and job security for teachers) and the amalgamation of 'old' and 'new' (see table 1) under the same roof have also led to staff rivalry. Teachers of traditional (art music) skills and theories understandably view their non-art music colleagues as posing something of a threat. The college of music's administration does not feel it can afford such confrontation and sees itself obliged to hold back on the development of popular music studies.

All these factors — the officially permanent status of the new teacher training programme, cuts in expenditure, the amalgamation of art and popular musics within the same institution and the consequent suspicion with which the popular (new, alien and of dubious worth) is viewed by art (familiar and of eternal value) — have profoundly influenced the sort of music teacher training on offer. What has actually happened can perhaps be best understood by observing unofficial musical activity among students attending the college.

During the college's experimental period a multiplicity of musical styles would waft through the doors of practice booths and ensemble rooms as one walked down the corridors. One could hear sounds resembling anything from Brahms to Brian Eno, from quena flutes to crumhorns instruments, from Darmstadt beeps to Deep Purple, etc., etc. Such musical multiplicity has decreased considerably in recent years. Walking down the corridor today one hears modal scales and sequential 'improvisation' formulae on saxophone or piano. (Would-be Rubinsteins and Heifetzes have been replaced by would-be Coreas and Parkers). True, crumhorns are still to be heard as are the sounds of students diligently practising their pop piano accompaniment figures. However, the most striking absence is that of any form of pop and rock music.

The particular absence of mainstream forms of rock and pop is symptomatic of a process in which musical practices developed in mass society for the expression of collective (as well as individual) ideas and attitudes (through electronic or electro-mechanical means of production, reproduction and distribution) are temporarily ousted by musical practices connected with earlier stages in the cultural development of our society, stages at which the individual craft of the performer and his/her qualities of individual expression were regarded as the most important attributes. It was during this earlier

stage in history that our conservatories were founded, reflecting an idealistic and individualistic view of musical practices. Therefore, when the cultural remnants of this page in European music history, preserved in public art music institutions such as conservatories and colleges of music, are confronted with new and alien types of musical (and social) ideals and purposes, it is logical that there will be a conflict in which the traditional institution will attempt first to reject and then to assimilate the new musical materials by casting them in its own familiar ideological moulds. Thus, by emphasising the individualist aspects of jazz, rock and folk music skills and by neglecting their collective and social implications, some types of such 'new' musical material can be effectively severed from their base in society. This is why there is a tendency to concentrate on forms of jazz, rock and folk music which can be regarded either as sociomusical *faits accomplis* or as sufficiently free from direct connections with real social practice (especially that of the working class in the ^{242} same part of the world) to be treated as 'pure music'. In this way it is possible for the staff of a Swedish music college to separate the musical materials produced by Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, the Ba-Benzélé, Swedish folk fiddlers, perhaps even Don Ellis, Herbie Hancock and Gentle Giant, from their social base, merely by running courses which concentrate on the intramusical and instrumental aspects of the music, aspects which can be conveniently graded in terms of individual student achievement

While Parker, Corea, Coltrane and Hancock might lend themselves to such treatment (through no fault of their own), the same cannot be said for Presley, Martha and the Vandellas, Abba, Alice Cooper or The Clash. Indeed, it definitely seems that certain types of popular music lend themselves far less readily to the sort of social castration mentioned above. Disco, punk, middle-of-the-road pop, country and western, new wave and synthesiser rock hardly ever feature in the mixture of sounds, official or unofficial, seeping through the doors of our music teacher training college. These styles, together with such phenomena as Muzak and music for film and television, seem to be so closely tied to the dynamically changeable social and collective realities of everyday life that they are far more difficult to wrap up in tidy individual parcels and study packages.

The study of this music, it is clear in both practice and theory, requires a radically different type of systematisation to that offered at present in the higher education of music. I hope that popular music researchers will be able to contribute towards this new sort of systematisation and that the questions raised here will be of some use in our future discussions on the aims and functions of popular music studies.