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Thesis outline:

The rise of jazz and rock journalism: mediating the meanings of popular music

In the last fifteen years, some of the most influential research in popular music studies has centered on music historiography. In both the studies of jazz (DeVeaux 1991, Gabbard 1995) and rock (Peterson 1990, Ennis 1992), scholars have begun to revisit critical periods in music history to challenge the myths and assumptions about the formations of important genres. Among the most important sources for such research are the archives of music journalism: scholars and journalists have routinely relied on music magazines to get a sense of how musical and cultural events were covered as they were unfolding. The music press has been influential in its construction of the language and concepts used to discuss popular music in everyday life; because they are writing music history as it happens, journalists and critics are often given the first shot at selecting which cultural moments are important enough to appear in print and therefore remain in cultural memory, as well as selecting which interpretive themes are best suited to framing these events. But music magazines are not staffed by disinterested observers objectively reporting events in a music scene; in order to understand the history of popular music, we must understand how these magazines worked *as magazines*—how commercial considerations affected their aesthetic and editorial directions, and how the peculiarities of personal and professional relationships in the world of music journalists shaped the way musical events were written about. Yet Steve Jones has recently noted that “little has been published about popular-music criticism” (2002: 1). There has also been almost no historical-comparative work done within popular music scholarship: jazz and rock are two of the most influential musical cultures to emerge in the past century, and both have received much academic attention, and yet so far no study exists which seriously compares the histories of jazz and rock, and what exactly jazz and rock studies share as academic disciplines.

My research aims to address these issues by exploring the rise and relationship of jazz and rock criticism, focusing in particular on the two oldest surviving and most influential jazz and rock periodicals: *Down Beat* and *Rolling Stone*. This study is relevant to at least three research fields. The first field is *sociology of music*, as a critical comparison of jazz and rock and how they operate as “art worlds” (Becker 1984), generators of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1993), and areas of academic study. The second field is *cultural studies*, as an examination of the roots of the art-commerce tension in popular culture using popular music as a case study (Frith 1983, Peterson 1997). The third field is *journalism and mass communications studies*, as an historical-comparative study of two music publications using socially grounded discourse analysis and a “production of culture” perspective to examine how the music criticism in these magazines related to their development as commercial media institutions trying to survive and compete in the American press industry (Peterson and Anand 2004).

The study is divided into three sections, each tackling a critical period in history when the meaning of either “jazz” or “rock” was being challenged. The first section of the thesis will examine the reactions of music critics to the birth of jazz and the formation of the field of jazz criticism. There has already been some good research on pre-1950 jazz criticism (Welburn 1983, Gennari 1991, Stowe 1994, Lopes 2002), so this section will act partly as a literature review, with an eye towards seeing not only what was unique about early jazz criticism, but how the critical issues first explored by jazz critics would reappear in other forms of popular music criticism, not least of all in rock criticism. Gendron’s historical discourse analysis has grouped prominent interpretive themes in jazz criticism into binary oppositions: art/commerce, authenticity/artificiality, folk culture/refined culture,

technique/affect, modern/traditional, black/white, and so on, and Frith has proposed that all of popular music criticism can be mapped in terms of competing and overlapping art, folk, and pop discourses (Gendron 2002: 139; Frith 1996: 26-46). I intend to build on their work and examine tropes in popular music criticism that recur throughout history and across genre boundaries. My use of secondary literature will be supplemented with primary archival research of periodicals that had a significant interest in jazz, such as *Metronome*, and will focus in particular on the birth and early years of *Down Beat* magazine. This section will also consider the influence of British and French jazz criticism on *Down Beat*.

The second section will examine the reaction of jazz critics to the birth of rock 'n' roll, as well as the formation of the field of rock criticism. I will focus in particular on *Down Beat* magazine, which managed to survive and eventually thrive as a music publication despite the decline of the jazz/swing music era which it had originally been designed to cover. Part of its success was due its gradual transformation from a trade publication read by dance band musicians to a consumer publication read by fans. Throughout the 1950s *Down Beat* also experimented with coverage of genres such as country and western, rhythm and blues, and rock 'n' roll, as it struggled to reinvent itself in a changing musical landscape. Certain performers, such as Louis Jordan and Ray Charles, mixed musical influences and resisted generic classification (Ake 2002). I will explore how *Down Beat* writers and other journalists navigated the early boundaries between jazz and rock 'n' roll, particularly when writing about such "crossover" performers.

The third section will examine the interaction between jazz and rock criticism at beginning of the so-called "fusion era" in the late sixties. "There are straws in the wind that the future paths of jazz and rock may converge," wrote *Down Beat* editor Dan Morgenstern in 1967, as he announced the jazz publication's new policy of including rock music in its coverage (13). For years, the jazz-oriented *Down Beat* magazine had dominated the market, and at the time of Morgenstern's announcement, its circulation was over twelve times that of the fledgling *Rolling Stone* magazine launched that same year. But the vision of *Rolling Stone*'s co-founders, Jann Wenner and Ralph J. Gleason (formerly a contributing editor to *Down Beat*), would ensure that *Rolling Stone* would quickly grow to become the most authoritative pop music periodical in the world. This section explores a period in history when the two most significant vehicles for popular music discourse in the United States and Canada, *Down Beat* and *Rolling Stone*, each tried to mediate the meaning of popular music. It will investigate how jazz journalists covered rock music, how rock journalists covered jazz, what this can tell us about what these two genres have in common, and how journalistic discourses contribute to the formation of taste groups and cultures (Bennett *et al* 1999).

This three-part historical study will be bookended with introductory and concluding chapters examining how themes in the history of popular music criticism have survived in contemporary popular music discourse, connecting the issues to debates within communications studies about the role of critics and arts journalism in popular culture (Toynbee 1993, Shrum 1996, Scott 1999, Forde 2001). Through this project, I hope to demonstrate that there is a remarkable continuity in how different popular music cultures are conceived, expressed, and understood across genres and over generations. This continuity exists despite a widespread popular belief in the exclusivity of musical genres generally, and of jazz and rock in particular. I will also show how the accepted histories of these musical cultures have been influenced by non-musicological factors, and not least of all by the music press and their drive for commercial success.

My methodology pairs discourse analysis with social history. I will examine recurring themes in music criticism using the magazines as my primary sources, and explore how these publications operated as social and commercial institutions. In addition to archival research of the publications in question, I will use existing historical work on the roles of key editors, writers, and other figures in popular music criticism (Hammond 1977, Feather 1987, Gorman 2001, Lindberg *et al* 2005), and conduct personal interviews.

I am currently at the halfway point of this project: I have completed archival research and data collection on the first two thirds of the historical study and have now begun work on the last third. This thesis is funded by a three-year studentship from the University of Stirling until

September 2006, and a one-year SSHRC award would enable me to complete my dissertation in the fourth year. I am carrying out this study at the University of Stirling in the department of Film and Media to work under the supervision of Professor Simon Frith, who, in addition having worked as a professional music critic for over thirty-five years in publications ranging from *Rolling Stone* to the London *Sunday Times*, is well known for his landmark work on the sociology of rock and pop (Frith 1978, 1983, 1996, etc.).

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