

Fast, Susan and Craig Jennex. 2019. *Popular Music and the Politics of Hope: Queer and Feminist Interventions*. New York: Routledge.

Reviewed by Runchao Liu

Popular Music and the Politics of Hope (2019) weaves together diverse scholarship rooted in the political promise of popular music to envision and construct alternative realities for queer and feminist individuals and allies. “Critical hope” is the emergent theoretical framework that inspires and informs the chapters in this collection. The epistemology of critical hope is to see “making and consuming popular music as activities that encourage individuals to imagine and work toward a better, more just world”; in doing so, it is possible to unveil “the diverse ways popular music can contribute to the collective political projects of queerness and feminism” (i). This framework offers a wide range of approaches, including Afrofuturism, Afro-Asian collaboration, queer diasporas, gender and racial politics, genre conventions, decolonization, and age. This collection will appeal to scholars and students in popular music studies, gender/feminist studies, queer studies, critical media studies, ethnic studies, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary studies. None of the methodologies in this book incorporate traditional musical analysis as a main approach and only a few authors adopt it as a supportive methodology.

The collection illustrates various ways that minoritarian musicians challenge dominant understandings of subjectivity and foster solidarity beyond cultural and political boundaries. Informed by pioneering research that reconceptualizes musical performance and consumption for and around marginalized pleasure and empowerment, this collection nicely aligns with and it contributes to a strand of queer and feminist musical scholarship also found in the works of Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga’s *Queering the Popular Pitch* (2006), Jodie Taylor’s *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-Making* (2012), Stan Hawkins’ *Queerness in Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender norms, and Temporality* (2016), Curran Nault’s *Queercore: Queer Punk Media Subculture* (2017), among others. Moreover, this book intentionally and exclusively focuses on “minoritarian cultures and offering reparative readings of artists, works, and genres of music often dismissed” (11), thus providing comparative insights about the forgotten among the often-forgotten while addressing less popular topics.

The book has five parts, each with an introduction written by a re-

nowned scholar in the field. Part one, “Displacing Whiteness,” comprises three chapters aiming to decenter white patriarchy and heteronormativity through decoding the performances by musicians of color on their own terms. In this part’s introduction, Daphne A. Brooks connects Adele’s acceptance speech at the 2017 Grammy ceremony, which blatantly expresses her admiration and gratitude towards Beyoncé Knowles, to the racial inequality experienced by black women blues musicians since the early twentieth century. Specifically, Brooks highlights Beyoncé’s performances in “Displacing Whiteness” and calls for the serious acknowledgment of black women artists.

In chapter one, “Visions of Wondaland: On Janelle Monáe’s Afrofuturist Vision,” Marquita Smith examines Monáe’s musical vision of “Wondaland” where “black life thrives” (34). This Afrofuturist soundscape calls on many important black figures, such as Octavia Butler, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Harriet Tubman. Critically fusing the frameworks of African American Afrofuturism and black feminism, this chapter explores the sonic and visual mythology of Wondaland constructed and led by Monáe since the founding of the Wondaland Arts Society in 2001. It also studies Monáe’s musical messages in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. Smith unveils how Monáe uses musical and aesthetic skills to create black futurities that transgress the temporal and spatial boundaries and, in doing so, displace the white supremacist historiography of activism.

Craig Jennex, in chapter two, “Listening to Difference: Recognition and Refusal in Queer Music Diasporas,” looks at the politics of queer of color diasporic identity in Canada through the musical collage curated by Kanwar Anit Singh Saini (a.k.a. Sikh Knowledge). This musical collage brings together differing indie musical genres (EDM and Dancehall) and queer subcultures, along with issues of race and religion. Specifically, Jennex articulates Saini’s performance in “More Than Aware,” which is loaded with religious visual cues from his EP *Turban Sex* (2013), with the controversy around the policies that restrict people from covering their faces or wearing religious symbols. Moreover, Jennex employs “listening” as a critical methodology to find alternative voices. This methodology displaces the “normative logic of visibility” grounded in the “white, western, Judeo-Christian-informed culture of Canadian society” that dominates the logics of belonging, queer representation, and the policing of minority bodies (50-51). Thematically, chapter two exemplifies “the hopeful politics of pop” (8) for the religious, racialized, and sexualized Others in Canada.

Chapter three, titled “Who’s Your Daddy?: Beyoncé, the Dixie Chicks, and the Art of Outlaw Protest,” looks at the controversial collaborative performance of “Daddy Lessons” by Beyoncé and the Dixie Chicks during the

2016 Country Music Association Awards (CMAs). Francesca T. Royster contextualizes this performance in relation to both the musical tension charged by the racialized and gendered politics of country and R&B as well as the narrative of Beyoncé's album *Lemonade* (2016). Through examining the unconventional arrangements of genre-specific sounds, lyrics, on-stage interactions among musicians, and Beyoncé's maneuvering of the figure of outlaw in the album, Royster argues that this collaboration displaces whiteness by protesting against "an industry invested in protecting and patrolling whiteness" and by presenting a hopeful image of solidarity and resistance across communities.

The three chapters in Part two, "Rethinking Difference," share an interest in musical personae and autobiographical discourses with a focus on their potential of steering discourses around disability and being an outsider. As Annie Janeiro Randall notes in the introduction to this part, there is a shift in the construct and marketing of popular musical personae in terms of the visibility of artist disabilities. The disclosure of artist disabilities, which used to be taboo and avoided as a marketing mistake, is now at times proudly emphasized as a promoting tool of their personal life and musical works. Together, the authors in this part rethink what being different means and does for musicians, the music industry, the audience, and, of course, for disability studies as well.

Laurie Stras, pioneering scholar writing at the intersection of popular music and disability studies, contributes chapter four, "Brave New Ideas Begin': Disability, Gender, and Life Writing in Twenty-First-Century Pop." This chapter links the politics of hope with the performances of disabled musicians. Stras first reviews the controversy around Lady Gaga's fibromyalgia condition, which is not necessarily always visible to give a context for denoting what disability means for contemporary women artists, calling Gaga's story an "overcoming narrative" (88). Then, the chapter offers comparative case studies of women musicians whose disabled bodies challenge gender and musical norms. Mandy Harvey, who suffers from Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and deafness, defies the self-objectification discourses often associated with the overcoming narrative by inserting agency in her music and autobiography. Viktoria Modesta, whose leg was amputated as a teen, uses her disability to deliver political messages and initiates projects to improve music-making conditions for disabled artists. Lastly, the Sisters of Invention, a five-women group with different physical impairments, demonstrate a hopeful politics of disability by recasting their disabilities as meaningful sources of lived experiences, as opposed to sources of problems. Overall, Stras contributes unique insights into alternative disabled subjectivities while facing the plight of self-objectification and monetiza-

tion of disabled bodies.

Chapter five, titled “‘Round My Hometown’: Listening to London in the Racial Politics of Post-Millennial British Soul,” shifts from studying artist disabilities to being an outsider. It gives a close reading of two white British female musicians – Adele and Amy Winehouse. While Daphne A. Brooks in Part one’s introduction links Adele’s music to white appropriation, the colonization of historically black culture, and the racialized discrimination of women musicians; Freya Jarman and Emily Baker in this chapter approach cases like Adele on a brighter note. Being different, for Adele and Winehouse, is not just about being women artists; their vocal performances, instead, are the prime locale of difference. While critics and scholars are usually interested in the black roots of Adele and Winehouse’s music, Jarman and Baker are wise to also attend to other cultural influences in such hybrid sounds in the modern U.K. Particularly, they argue that we need to consider both the sonic colonization and a multicultural London-ness to better understand contemporary “retro soul” music (106).

“Born to Run and Reckless: My Life as a Pretender: Rewriting the Political Imaginary of Rock Music Memoir,” the last chapter in this part, features two rock icons known for their leftist activism – Bruce Springsteen and Chrissie Hynde. Author Pamela Fox considers autobiographic life writing as an alternative form of counter-discourses, a type of text that often registers as a profitable avenue and has been neglected by scholars. Through analyzing how Springsteen’s memoir *Born to Run* (2016) and Hynde’s memoir *Reckless: My Life as a Pretender* (2015) alternate between the working-class genre and the disability narrative while recounting the artists’ life through a “counter-story” lens (138), Fox argues that autobiographic writing is a site in which political praxis happens, such as community building and self-reparation.

Part three, “Decolonizing Sound,” is introduced by Ellie Hisama, one of the first scholars to write about cultural appropriation in popular music from an intersectional viewpoint of race, gender, and postcolonialism (1993, 2000). Ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong (2004) poignantly observes that “the primary place of Asians and Asian Americans in the music industry has been as representations, not as agents” (256). The same logic applies to many social groups in creative industries. The chapters in this part, therefore, are important for upending this logic and instead foregrounding the social groups that are often silenced in the landscape of western popular music, namely, indigenous peoples and immigrants. The authors show us how these musicians mobilize their creative energy to undo sonic colonialism and imperialism as well as to build pan-ethnic solidarity through intersectional sonic critiques.

In chapter seven, “Sounding the Halluci Nation: Decolonizing Race, Masculinity, and Global Solidarities with A Tribe Called Red,” Alexa Woloshyn examines how Ottawa based music group A Tribe Called Red (ATCR) contributes to decolonization. Focusing on their album *We Are the Halluci Nation* (2016), Woloshyn comparatively considers the conceptual influence of Halluci Nation, Indigenous feminism and queer/Two-Spirit critiques, and settler colonialism’s influence on Indigenous masculinity. Meanwhile, Woloshyn does not shy away from discussing the complicated and sometimes counterproductive efforts by the allies of the Halluci Nation. Finally, Woloshyn argues that the album is “both a musical and social collaboration” that projects “a hopeful politics of intersectional Indigenous feminism,” which fosters decolonized solidarity surpassing geographical and ethnic boundaries (152).

Elliott H. Powell also takes an interest in inter-musical and cross-community solidarity, specifically Afro-South Asian solidarity, in chapter eight, titled “Addict(ive) Sex: Toward an Intersectional Approach to Truth Hurts’ ‘Addictive’ and Afro-South Asian Hip Hop and R&B.” As Powell notes, African American singer Truth Hurts’ hit song “Addictive” (2002) reflects a growing trend of featuring Middle Eastern and South Asian sounds in rap and R&B in the early twenty-first century. “Addictive” features sampled South Asian music that was popularized by the Bollywood movie song “Thoda Resham Lagta Hai” (1982), which has stimulated controversies around copyright, religion, and cultural imperialism. Nevertheless, Powell proposes a re-examination of the song from a gender/sexuality perspective and brings forth questions and possibilities of Afro-Asian solidarity and counter-Orientalism performances.

Thematically speaking to the previous two chapters, chapter nine, “Hip Hop Dialogues: Sampling Women’s Hand Drum Songs and the Canadian Popular Mainstream,” looks at musical sampling of hip hop in tandem with Canadian Indigenous music. Specifically, Liz Przybylski examines the show *Taken* (2017), a collaboration between chamber choir Camerata Nova, rapper Eekwol, artistic director of Cree descent Andrew Balfour, and composer Mel Braun. The show mirrors a controversial Indigenous-settler collaboration during the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Canadian Confederation. Przybylski argues that through sampling both mainstream pop songs and women’s hand drum songs, the show offers a model of cultural reconciling that shows cultural resilience and connectivity, which gestures towards possibilities of Indigenous-settler relationships.

Part four, “Refusing Conventions,” contemplates on how musicians refuse political and aesthetic conventions as well as how scholars refuse research conventions when it comes to feminist and queer popular music

studies. Studying “refusing conventions” in the context of popular music is to study how musicians refuse both “the western high art convention of ‘art for art’s sake’ and the pop recording industry’s convention of art for the sake of money” while bringing explicit political discourse into music (211). These chapters also discuss the political importance of refusing the hopeless, negative, and good-or-bad binary convention sometimes dominating the critical listening of popular music. In the introduction chapter, using the case of African American singer Billie Holiday and her performance of “Strange Fruit” at a racially mixed venue in New York City in 1939, Mahon reminds us of the stakes and significance for popular musicians to inject political messages into their music on top of rejecting restrictive and oppressive conventions.

Chapter ten, “Electro-Pop as Trojan Horse: Hearing the Call to Arms in Anohni’s *HOPELESSNESS*,” refuses the hedonistic interpretation of electro-pop. Instead, Maria Murphy examines electro-pop as an important medium of intersectional social critiques and explores its political significance behind a veneer of hedonism. Maria Murphy examines the lyrical and musical maneuvering in trans musician-activist Anohni’s album *HOPELESSNESS* (2016). The album is critically acclaimed for its open critiques about, among others, capitalism, imperialism, gender politics, and environmentalism. Murphy examines the techniques of irony, confessional genre, and survivalism used to raise political topics through the sounds of electric-pop, and, in doing so, proves the importance of finding hope in hopelessness in a “post-hope moment” (216).

Chapter eleven presents a conversation between Susan McClary and Jacqueline Warwick, both of whom have written extensively on the gender politics of popular music. Many interesting insights and “behind-the-scene” stories about popular music and about the scholars who study popular music are revealed. Warwick stresses the significance of girls in popular music history and reviews the long way that girls in music have come, reviewing artists from The Ronettes and Alanis Morissette to Brittany Spears and Kesha. McClary also talks about ageism but through the cases of older women musicians, such as Madonna, whom McClary (1990, 1991) has famously studied. Interestingly, like Brooks in Part two’s introduction and Jarman and Baker in chapter five, McClary also comments on Adele’s acceptance speech and Beyoncé’s performance at the 2017 Grammy ceremony, although with a focus on age, citing this as “an amazing moment of solidarity among women” aging towards motherhood (236). The conversation also discusses gendered labeling and discrimination of women composers.

Jack Halberstam has shown a consistent interest in the intersections

of popular music and queer theory (2003, 2007, 2012). In chapter twelve, “Power in the Darkness and ‘Angry Atthis’: Anthems, Genres and the Queer Voice,” he examines and compares two queer anthems – “Amazon” (1979) by Maxine Feldman, the anthem of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, and “Glad to be Gay” (1978) by Tom Robinson, written for the London Gay Pride Parade. Through two seemingly unrelated genres (punk and women’s music) and two seemingly unrelated musicians (one lesbian musician in the U.S. and one gay musician in the U.K.), Halberstam connects the dots and shows how they funnel the politicized sounds of anger, rage, and pride into their music, arguing that “they occupy their own genre of queer music that is sonically closer to ‘women’s music’ of the 1970’s than gay disco or punk” (249).

Murray Forman introduces Part five, “Voicing Resilience,” by reflecting on the varied relations between the politics of time, music, and women musicians. The running theme in the three chapters of this part is that they tackle different “human conceptions of time and its passing, taking into account the manner in which time works on and through the bodies and psyches of women in particular” (261). Forman asks us to think of time as a gendered social construct, a commodity, as well as a medium of agency. “Voicing Resilience,” therefore, is the hopeful politics of voicing and finding ways to voice empowerment and liberation through working with/against the restrictive temporal notions forced on women, such as aging and being incarcerated.

In chapter thirteen, titled “Resisting the Politics of Aging: Madonna and the Value of Female Labor in Popular Music,” Tiffany Naiman looks at Madonna and her reception as a pop icon over her long career. Through examining the misogynistic, sexist, and ageist criticisms revolved around the aging body performed by Madonna, Naiman shows the ways that female aging unfolds as an intersectional battle of contested notions of artistic values, labor, and being a pop star. Instead of arguing that Madonna transcends the evolution of time or pop norms, this chapter uncovers the power of persistent performance of commodified sexuality in an aging female body and how this persistence itself challenges pop and social norms.

Also focusing on the intersections of gender and aging, chapter fourteen, “Vera Lynn 100: Retirement, Aging, and Legacy for a “National Treasure,” examines Dame Vera Lynn, who turned 100 years old in 2017 yet is largely hailed as the Forces Sweetheart and “national treasure” by the U.K. media. Christina Baade considers both Mariana Torgovnick’s (2005) concept of the “war complex” and Elizabeth Freeman’s (2010) concept of chrononormativity while exploring the impacts of Lynn’s music career. Through examining the controversies around Lynn’s claimed retirement

from 1946 to the present, Baade reveals the gendered expectations of chrononormativity and how discourses of labor, marriage, reproduction, retirement, legacy, cultural memory, and national belonging are all woven together. Finally, this chapter presents a hopeful interpretation of Lynn's trajectory of retirement as "an agential challenge to normative distinctions between work, domesticity, and retirement" (285).

Chapter fifteen, under the title "Sounding Lockdown: Singing in Administrative Segregation at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women," shifts to examining the incarcerated voice, where music, as the authors argue, functions as a form of human testimony that negotiates the surveillance and anxiety in an extreme situation like being in a prison. Combining an autoethnographic approach and a critical approach, this chapter is a collaboration between a returned citizen from the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, Consuela Gaines, and a music scholar, Benjamin J. Harbert. The authors argue that music and singing are critical for "restoring distorted senses of time, space, and social relations" by interrupting a cycle of mental illness in the context of prison (300). This chapter presents a rarely explored example of voicing resilience by reordering sonic and social conduits, which fundamentally destabilizes the architected temporality under physical isolation.

Popular music is too often dismissed as an unimportant field for scholarly interrogation. Although mass culture has been a subject of critical inquiries for decades, they are often criticized as standardized commodities to manipulate the audience rather than being seen as a liberatory territory. It is arguable that it was not until the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies established in the 1960s that we started seeing a good number of scholars taking a serious interest in the positive political and social significance of everyday life and popular culture for marginalized communities. Under this trajectory, the chapters are clever in adopting an approach of "critical hope" that is derived from a dissatisfaction with the "everything is getting worse" narrative commonplace in certain contemporary critical scholarship (2). However, although the title of the book is "Queer and Feminist Interventions," only a few chapters actually revolve around LGBT artists. It is true that queer interventions should not be limited by identity politics. Yet, as a collection aiming at foregrounding minoritarian sounds and desires, as opposed to developing queer theory *per se*, I deem crucial a stronger focus on queer artists than what we are offered. That said, as a reader, I acknowledge the collection's commitment to the sounds of marginalized communities.

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