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Music and Sport: Exploring the Intersections

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The papers in this special issue started life as presentations to a Fields of Vision conference held in 2019 on the relationships between music and sport. From team songs sung after a match to Arthur Honegger's 1928 Rugby symphonic movement; from terrace chants to Neil Hannon's concept album, Duckworth-Lewis Method, sport and music have often been intricately linked. Indeed, there are many aspects to the role of music in sport and the relationship between the two; whether for example music is used to celebrate a sport or sporting moment, to provide a musical narrative to a sporting story, to be used as a medium for sporting aesthetic expression (as exemplified by the use of Ravel's Bolero by Torvill and Dean in their winning Olympic ice skating routine), to provide a musical representation of sports physicality and bodily movement (as Carl Davis' orchestral tribute to Leeds Rhinos and rugby league), or for music and song to be used as an expression of fandom and as a means to strengthen common identity.

However, just as there are few good films about sport, there is little good music about sport. Indeed, it might appear to some that these two cultural forms have little in common. Nonetheless, as we contend and as the papers in this special issue demonstrate, the two not only have much in common but come together to powerful effect. Both produce moments of community, transcendence, and emotional resonance; and both are vital components of the past, present and future of modern culture. Music and sport are similar forms of modern leisure: created by performers, mediated by critics, and admired by fans. Quite apart from their economic functions, music and sport share the ability to entertain, emote and shape individual and collective identity. For some people competition, one of the defining characteristics of sport, is alien to music. Yet competition in music is witnessed at least as far back as the original Olympics and indeed to de Coubertin's revival with his 'ambition of enshrining music in Olympic culture' (Bale and Bateman 2009: 3). Musical competition has also long been central to Eisteddfods, and in more recent times has been manifest in the competition for Grammys and Brits and in television programmes such as Pop Idol, X-Factor and The Voice. In addition there are competitive auditions and employment interviews when one person is trying to persuade others that s/he is the best person for the job.

Perhaps (to mangle Jo Cox's quote) music and sport have more in common than things that divide them. Irrespective of that, our interest in this issue is in what happens when the two come together rather than how they might be compared when viewed discretely. In his closing remarks to our sport and music conference, Fields of Vision founding Chair, Doug Sandle suggested there was also an inherent relationship between music and sport. He drew attention to the psychologist and phenomenologist, Erwin Strauss (Strauss: 1966), who suggested that there is a phenomenological commonality of the perceptual space in which both music and physical movement take place. Strauss argued that forms of bodily movement, such as marching and dancing (and to which we could also include movement in sport) can be more successfully experienced with sound rather than vision, as sound and movement share the same experiential perceptual space; a space which he distinguishes as different from geometric or Euclidian space.

Bale and Bateman (2009) follow Snyder (1993: 168) in arguing that 'music is one of the primary phenomena associated with a sports event'. In the introduction to the earlier special issue of Sport in Society (17/3) on music and sport, Bateman (2014: 301) observed that 'Music and sport are two of the

most popular and culturally pervasive activities through which individual and collective identities are produced, reproduced, negotiated and contested'. The focus in that issue was on the construction of identity; here we see contributions to the current concern with exploring intersections.

This is not, however, a special issue that exclusively deals with intersectionality in the sociological sense of intersecting identities, though some of the papers here do discuss the intersectionality of gender, class and race in the leisure spaces of sport and music. We are drawn to the theoretical work of Watson and Scraton (2013) on critically applying the lens of intersectionality to sport and music as leisure, to interrogate the role sport and music play in reproducing multiple hegemonic constraints on the ability of some people to find meaning and identity. So we are interested here in how sport and music intersect and interact to give some people moments of fantasy and pleasure and agency, and how others struggle to have that freedom.

The interrelationships between music and sport are not 'just' about entertainment; these socio-cultural intersections fuel political processes and socio-cultural change. For example, in recent years the profile of the Black Lives Matter movement has been hugely increased by Colin Kaepernick refusing to stand for the playing of the US national anthem at the start of an American Football game and instead 'taking a knee'. Conversely, music plays an important part in what has been construed as the carnivalization of sport, starting with cricket (e.g. Burton 1985) and extending into football (e.g. Redhead 1997; Pearson 2012) and then into other sports. This may be seen as regrettable by those keen to protect their interpretations of the tradition of 'their' sport but welcomed by others who see it as widening the appeal and ensuring the survival of the game (see below). The marching bands and DJ sets, often seen at football and rugby finals, now spill over into other games through the season.

In addition to introducing the papers contained in this special issue, we want to assess our own connection with some of these intersections and then consider the wider social, cultural and political consequences, before introducing the other papers.

Some of the most popular examples of music at sports events seem strange or inappropriate as symbolic cultural representations. Why should a song about death, written by black slaves (Swing Low Sweet Chariot), have become so closely associated with England rugby union, or a song about a little saucepan on the fire (Sosban Fach) be so widely sung in Welsh rugby? Only slightly less strange are the hymns that have been adopted by fans, such as Abide With Me at the FA Cup Final and Bread of Heaven by Welsh rugby union fans. More understandable is the adoption of Flower of Scotland, a song about the Scots defeating the invading English army in 1314 (not traditional, but written by Roy Williamson of the Corries in 1967), which is sung now by fans of Scottish international teams playing not just against England, but other opponents too. Then there is the seemingly bizarre choice of Forever Blowing Bubbles by West Ham Fans. Norwich City fans sing what, according to the Visit Norfolk website, is 'thought to be the world's oldest football chant that is still in use'. This may account for its somewhat proper tone, the core of which runs, 'On the ball, City, never mind the danger. Steady on, now's your chance, Hurrah! We've scored a goal'. Perhaps the best known fans' chorus (in the UK) is that at Anfield, where Liverpool supporters sing You'll Never Walk Alone, but for a truly emotional rendition of a song by football supporters it is hard to beat fans of Hibernian (an Edinburgh football team that plays at Easter Road in Leith) singing Sunshine on Leith after their team, which was not in the top flight at the time, had beaten (Glasgow) Rangers in the Scottish Cup Final after more than a century of not winning the trophy. Some of them might even be singing in tune.

To celebrate Leeds Rhinos winning the (rugby league) World Club Challenge in 2005, the renowned composer and conductor, Carl Davis, was commissioned to write an anthem for the club, which was

then recorded by the Orchestra of Opera North. The title, *Hold On* was taken from the concluding verse of Kipling's poem, 'If'. Carl Davis' sleeve notes explain:

I attended a game... and found it full of music: continuous playing from a small jazz band high up in the stands, singing and rhythmic shouting from the fans and a high degree of almost balletic movement during the game. I immediately wanted to incorporate the team's own chant as part of the new work. *Hold On!* is in three sections: a hymn like introduction, followed by a march sequence modelled on traditional march form as perfected by Elgar; an energetic opening (the advancing lines); a dissonant section (the five tackles); a lyric theme; repetition of the above, culminating in a grandiose reprise of the lyric theme (the 'try') and a further reprise of the opening hymn (the conversion).

Innovative and prestigious as this appeared to be, sadly nobody in the sporting world of rugby league seemed to know what to do with the completed work.

Leeds' Headingley Stadium has also been the location of a surprising love affair between an opera singer, John Innes, and the fans of a supposed working class sport, rugby league (Long 2013). Interacting with the club mascot, Ronnie the Rhino, and performing to the 'ordinary fans' in the South Stand rather than the more distinguished North Stand, he became a cult hero rewarded with rapturous receptions and his own chant. One blogger wrote:

"Opera Man" as he has become known to your average rugby league fan who, it has to be said, would in all other circumstances call John Innes and his ilk "big puffs" has introduced the concept of the aria to the sport so much so that the crowd actually sing along with him now, even though they know not the words and simply make the sounds. <http://jerrychicken.blogspot.co.uk/2007/10/opera-man.html> [last accessed 27th September 2020]

As Long (2013: 78/9) explained:

Opera Man's function is to build the anticipation, 'ramp-up' the atmosphere and bring the crowd noise to a crescendo as the teams appear for the start of the game. Having joined in the singing the next step is to roar-on the team right from the kickoff... Opera Man may be a classical singer, but this is an embodied experience that is being used to share an appreciation of the roots of rugby league, moulded by physicality, strength and toughness.

It is also a form of cultural capital that affords Leeds' fans a mark of distinction that differentiates them from other clubs.

However, not all musical contributions at the ground have been so successful. A Robbie Williams tribute act was met by the chant, 'You're shite and you know you are. You're shite and you know you are'. The performer took it in good heart, gallantly saw it through to the end, smiled, waved to the South Stand, turned and walked off. Rather more disturbing is the trend for spectators to sing along to the song *Delilah* at big sports occasions, such as the Rugby League Challenge Cup Final at Wembley. The lyrics to the song, popularised by singer Tom Jones, describe how a man murders his partner: 'I felt the knife in my hand and she laughed no more'. It seems inappropriate for rugby league, a sport that promotes itself as a family sport, to encourage people to sing it (it is, of course, sung at many other sports events too).

Certainly, we should not expect these interrelationships to remain constant; change is the norm. Opera Man no longer receives quite the same ecstatic welcome; renditions of *You'll Never Walk Alone* by fans of Liverpool FC have greater poignancy following the 96 deaths of the Hillsborough disaster;

and England rugby union fans singing *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, which previously seemed strangely idiosyncratic, acquires different connotations in light of the Black Lives Matter movement. At an individual level Karl, reflecting on Hill's (2009) comments about the singing of *Abide With Me* at cup finals, wrote of his own experience:

I remember as a teenager being deeply cynical of the brass bands and the choral singing at the Rugby League Challenge Cup Final when I went down to Wembley to attend in person. It certainly wasn't my musical taste, and it made me feel embarrassed for the game. But then in 1998 when I was a bit older, I found myself crying when the fans sang along to *Abide With Me*. It certainly felt numinous, something uncanny, like the feeling I had when I first heard Iron Maiden's *Number of the Beast* all those years ago.

Hill's assessment of the significance of the song when it was first performed at FA Cup Finals in the 1920s was that the special occasion heightened feelings of collective grief and remembrance, but that with the passing of time the song has become largely meaningless for more recent crowds. Perhaps that decline will be reversed if deaths from the Corona virus continue to escalate.

Changes occur at intersections of the personal, sporting and societal levels. For example, Bateman (2014: 296) noted that 'As American models of sporting consumption are increasingly being adopted around the world, music has come to assume an ever-more dominant role in the performance, reception and mediation of organized sport'. Those involved with Rugby League like to celebrate its roots in the 1895 breakaway, so it was not surprising that many balked at what they saw as a new model imported from Australia with an emphasis on new formats, new management structures and 'glitzy' entertainment. Those responsible for the game in Australia had been attracted by what they saw as the commercial success of American sport and sought to make the match day experience an entertainment event. Following this indirect Americanisation music and dance became more common accompaniments to matches in the UK; music has been incorporated into sports events as part of the attempts to broaden the appeal of sport to engage different customer bases. In the earlier special issue on the arts in sport, Westall (2014: 415) mines the album, *The Duckworth Lewis Method*, to suggest that while globalisation may have wrested cricket away from being a colonial project 'new and old princes, new and old gentlemen might be using the game to advance the old logic of wealth, privilege and accumulation as it suits them'. In other words, in the face of apparent substantial change, some processes remain resolutely the same.

That earlier special issue sprang from a conference in Arhus (Denmark); this one springs from a conference in Leeds (UK) in June 2019 that was part of the Fields of Vision initiative (Sandle et al. 2013; Long et al. 2013). The conference included a contribution from the sporting balladeer, Keith Gregson (see his paper in this issue), and a performance of the winning entry of a sports song writing competition sponsored by Headingley Lit Fest – Peter Spafford's song about women's roller derby, *Let Her Through*.

One of the presentations, not included here, was an emotional insight to the use of music and dance to ameliorate the worst effects of Parkinson's Disease. On the basis of these reflections and discussions at the conference we can identify eight formats for the music/sport relationship.

- Music whose form evokes or expresses an aural description of the nature and form of sport or a sporting event – such as Carl Davis' piece reflecting on the game of rugby league he attended (above) or Debussy's *Jeux* (Schwab 2009).

- Music that plays an integral part in a sports event like skating (most people in the UK were probably unaware of this until Torvill and Dean skated to Ravel's Bolero), synchronised swimming, some forms of gymnastics and dressage.
- Music composed for sports events, either as a clarion call, like Three Lions, discussed here by Anthony Clavane and Jonathan Long, the meanings of which may not be purely intrinsic but accreted from the environment of the times; or as commemoration, like many of the sporting ballads that are Keith Gregson's stock in trade. A sub-set here is provided by music composed for films about sport, like Vangelis' score for the film Chariots of Fire
- Music in sporting sub-cultures – particularly in the case of 'lifestyle sports' like snowboarding surfing or skateboarding, even though music has little to do with the sport itself, it has everything to do with establishing and maintaining a sporting sub-culture. In relation to surfing The Beachboys come to mind, but so to do less obvious contributors like Bob Marley.
- Music composed about sport – for example Roy Harper's When an Old Cricketer Leaves the Crease, others of Gregson's ballads or All I want for Christmas is a Dukla Prague Away Kit by Half Man, Half Biscuit that was the subject of Jenny Williams' presentation at the conference.
- Music given new meanings or emotional attachments through an association with sport, such as: Nessun Dorma; the Turkish marching song analysed by Daghan Irak; the White Stripes / Bruckner tune that has become a sporting meme (Robert Dean); Tina Turner's The Best (Karl and Lee Spracklen); or Kasabian's Club Foot, analysed here by Nicolai Graakjaer who assesses its instrumental use in a football programme on Danish TV.
- Music that has no immediate relationship to sport. As far as we can see it is purely incidental, there purely to embellish the sport event, like the DJ sets, tribute acts or live performances by bands, singers and musicians.
- Music that uses sport as a vehicle for a wider message like Dylan's Who Killed Davey Moore? (the subject of Stephen Wagg's paper).

In this special issue our contributors explore community, identity and the emotional impact of music on memories. As such, both music and sport can emote; together they can be transcendent. But before we get carried away, we also need to acknowledge far more prosaic purposes that can include protesting antipathy to 'the other'. Just as they do separately, the intersections of music and sport can support community together or foster a sense of communities apart. Similarly, the outcome of these intersections may serve to incorporate or to bolster resistance.

We start this special with a paper by Robert Dean who follows the meme of the White Stripes Seven Nation Army, which was itself taken from a score by Bruckner, and examines its conversion to a terrace chant. As such it is one that has been adopted and adapted by fans around the country. It was used for a former captain of Leeds Rhinos and the salutation for his predecessor ('Sir' Kevin Sinfield) was derived from another classical work, Il Trovatore (The Troubadour). In the same era, the greeting for one of their teammates was an imaginative combination of a melody from Volare (originally Con te partirò) and the prosaic lyric of 'He's from Australia; he's gonna murder yer'.

In the UK the Bruckner / White Stripes refrain was incorporated into the political realm, becoming 'Oh Jeremy Corbyn' in the run-up to the 2017 general election. First heard at the Wirral Live music festival held at the Tranmere Rovers football ground (Harrison 2017), it was brought to a global audience when he appeared at the Glastonbury Festival. Exploring another political dimension of music in sport, Daghan Irak's paper examines the possibility for protest through his framing of football fandom

in Turkey as a site of hegemony and counter-hegemony in the era of Erdogan. Prime Minister, now President, Erdogan has been engaged in a battle for hearts and minds, seeking to draw people away from the norms of the Kemalist project. In light of interest in how the arts and sport might offer channels for resistance, the paper examines what that means when such channels are difficult to negotiate in an authoritarian regime. Irak demonstrates how the apparently innocuous singing of one particular Turkish military song is used on the terraces as a rallying of resistance by fans of clubs aligned with different doxa and habitus and different conceptions of Turkishness and national identity. In doing so, Irak shows how music can facilitate the communication of political messages of resistance both among and beyond the immediate sporting community.

Also considering the significance of a piece of music in a transposed context, Nicolai Graakjaer shows how a completely unrelated piece of music (by Kasabian) is used in the construction of sport. He undertakes a multimodal discourse analysis of the titles of a sports television programme to show how music is used to heighten emotion, create belonging and lure the viewer in to watching the whole show. Trans-textually this involves an exploration of how the title music relates to music from outside the title sequence, and co-textually how it relates to non-musical elements broadcast with it. Despite the music originally having no connection with football, it is crafted to convey what the producers consider to be the essence of the English Premiership game.

Anthony Clavane and Jonathan Long use England manager Gareth Southgate's embrace of diversity in 2018 as a starting point to discuss different kinds of Englishness, each of which may be supported by the everyday processes of banal nationalism. They use the music most associated with English football since the 1990s as a way of showing how genuine inclusion and belonging has still to be achieved. While in Irak's case the fans are resisting the return of what they see as repressive measures designed to reassert the Muslim state, Clavane and Long suggest that these English fans are resisting efforts to promote diversity and equality.

Moving away from football, Keith Gregson explores the historical relationship between sport and balladry by reflecting on his own song-writing. Opening with a song written for the conference he examines how sporting songs reflect the personal interests and experiences of their writers and their embedded cultural contexts. A large proportion of his songs are celebratory, but others are more poignant or critical, offering a political commentary. Regretting the many sporting ballads that have been lost because they were songs for the moment, and therefore rarely survived to be sung by the wider community, he ponders the fate of his own songs. However, those songs are now collected in a book lodged in the Leisure Studies Association archive at Leeds Beckett University.

Karl and Lee Spracklen examine how rugby league fans talk about and remember the Australian marketing videos developed in 1989 and 1990 that starred Tina Turner. They show that for some fans, and ironically given Tina's ethnicity, these videos represent a more exclusive white male, working-class Australian rugby-league. Their paper has echoes of Westall's (2009) paper on the association between cricket, calypso and the construction of manhood in the West Indies, and Maclean's (2009) analysis of the use of song to provide cultural validation of New Zealand's hard man masculinity associated with one form of nationalism. The interpretation offered by the Spracklens comes in an era when social media play a much greater part in the processes of socialisation.

Finally, this special issue returns to the theme of protest with a paper about a singer whose name became synonymous with the word. Stephen Wagg provides critical reflections on the historical and political context of the Bob Dylan song *Who Killed Davey Moore?*. Intertwined with charting changes in the way Dylan has presented himself, Wagg argues that we need to understand that Dylan's public stance on boxing, as outlined in the lyrics, are part of a wider performance of protest. His protest in

this instance is at the way sport exploits athletes with scant regard for their own wellbeing, a theme obvious in the very first Fields of Vision series of events that featured a showing of *This Sporting Life*, the film of David Storey's novel, directed by Lindsay Anderson (1963).

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