

## Review

***Made in Scotland. Studies in Popular Music.* Edited by Simon Frith, Martin Cloonan and John Williamson. New York: Routledge, 2024. 185 pp. ISBN 978-1-032-16197-6**

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During my musicology studies at the University of Edinburgh in 2013, I delved into the topic of Scottishness in popular music and submitted an MA thesis on the subject. My exploration encompassed not only the music of Scotland but also various aspects of daily life and culture, as much as one can absorb in a year. This study offered essentially an outsider's perspective and my desire to understand the Scottish psyche would be an impossible task, as one of the contributors, an Englishman, sagely pointed out to me with a knowing, almost resigned smile.

Similarly, this book builds on well-informed outsider perspectives, such as those from the English and various other British Isle dwellers. However, it also goes to the heart of the matter by extracting insights from the Scots themselves, thus covering all angles, as one might say.

The contributors come from diverse backgrounds, including academics, musicians and music industry professionals. The book is clearly structured into three parts: Histories, Politics and Policies, and Futures and Imaginings. It also includes a timeline of significant events in Scottish popular music history, as well as heaps of forewords and afterwords, all designed to provide a comprehensive view of the subject matter.

A key strength of this volume is its diversity. The inclusion of interviews and conversations interspersed between more theoretical chapters enlivens the overall content and makes it more readable. This approach also underscores the underutilised potential of academic exploration, demonstrating how it can be both informative and engaging. After a thorough and clear introduction that effectively sets the scene, John Williamson introduces the Histories section and its aim (as Martin Cloonan and Simon Frith do for the other two). Williamson opens it with an intriguing chapter on the Scottish pop TV series *Stramash!* (1965/66) and its role in challenging the 'deeply conservative nature of Scottish society in the post-war era'.

In this section, the reviewer enjoyed Bob Anderson's chapter on Scottish Independent Record Labels. The global reputation of pioneering labels like Postcard and Fast Product, as well as bands such as Orange Juice, Josef K and The Pastels, cannot be underestimated. Kenny Forbes and Alistair Braidwood then provide a comprehensive look at Scotland's live music sector and Scottish Jazz. Williamson also sheds a light on the Scottish festival landscape and the Gàidhealtachd with insightful interviews. Carla J. Easton's chapter, *Place of Light*, is an anomaly, a vivid and engaging essay that eloquently captures her experiences as a female musician, offering a unique perspective on the challenges faced by women in the industry.

Martin Cloonan then informs us about the nuts and bolts of the Scottish music industry in the introduction to the Politics and Policies section. The interaction between local cultural policies and the devolved realities of the 'stateless nation' of Scotland is complex, but the chapters are diverse in scope, focusing on both broad topics and more detailed ones. In the former category, for instance, Adam Behr conducts an in-depth analysis of the interplay between Scottish music and the country's independence politics, while Cloonan explores how popular music embodies 'Scottishness'. In the latter category, Scottish hip-hop receives its due (Dave Hook) and 'cultural micro-economies' are explored in the case of the small town Kirriemuir (Emil Thompson) and its rebranding as a music town (with help from the rock belter and legend, Bon Scott). Seán McLaughlin's and Graeme Smillie's work on music education is also significant, delving into policies, institutions and the practical aspects of the field, raising numerous thought-provoking questions.

So we have the history of Scottish popular music at our disposal *and* a description of how it works. But what about the future? What lies ahead? The third section, Futures and Imaginings, tackles these questions with educated speculations, staying true to its title by envisioning potential future developments. In the introduction to the section, Simon Frith discusses the romantic ideals of Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott, emphasising their dedication to preserving Scottish values. This mirrors a comparable sentiment in 19th-century Iceland, where the Viking era served as validation for the concept of a distinctly Icelandic identity. 'The Scots have the blessing (and curse) of an imagination that willingly rides a roller coaster between the fabulous and the familiar, the mundane and the appalling', writes Simon wittily (p. 136). In his opening chapter, *The Fiction of Scottish Music*, Frith begins by analysing the representation of Scottish music in the acclaimed television series *Tutti Frutti* (1987), starring Emma Thompson, Robbie Coltrane, and others. He then shifts his focus primarily to literary fiction but also carves out a space for the exquisite and powerful song 'Letter from America' by the unmistakably Scottish band, The Proclaimers. The sense of belonging permeates the chapter, culminating in the statement that 'To be Scottish is to be *unsettled*' (p. 147). That tension is multifaceted, but Scottish authors and writers, says Frith, look at music as a way of 'resolving these tensions, the most pleasurable path toward a balance between fatalism and exhilaration', deftly put forward in the aforementioned *Tutti Frutti* (p. 147). Martin Cloonan then interviews Alisdair Roberts, a musician who convincingly straddles the line between traditional folk and underground rock and, by that, makes traditional Scottish music accessible to modern listeners. The final chapter is fittingly written by Diljeet Kaur Bhachu, co-founder of The Scottish-Asian Creative Artists' Network. There, she discusses the evolving definition of Scottish identity. She convincingly argues that there is no one singular Scottishness, as evidenced in the eyes and ears of this reviewer by the current popularity of the multi-racial band Young Fathers from Edinburgh.

Simon Frith provides a thoughtful analysis of the current state and importance of Scottish music in a finely written coda. He addresses the challenges of sustainability, visibility and overall maintenance faced by the relatively small music scene in Scotland. As someone from the micro-nation of Iceland who has been involved in its music industry, I can personally relate to many of the problems encountered by Scottish music, albeit on an even smaller scale. In Iceland, we established our own equivalent of the Scottish Music Industry Association (SMIA) in 2005, known as the Icelandic Music Export Office (IMX, also simply called Iceland music), to

address similar issues. Like Scotland, we also relied on a larger nation – with Copenhagen playing a similar role to London. Achieving self-sufficiency and preventing brain drain were also challenges we grappled with.

According to Frith, there are two ways to think about Scotland (and its music) in the world: 'In terms of the global place of local music and in terms of the local place of global music'. This concept, he argues, underpins the entire book: what constitutes 'our' music? What is 'Scottish' music? He concludes that 'being Scottish is neither a fixed nor simply a geographical identity'. Undoubtedly, smaller, more 'fragile' nations are more susceptible to and sensitive to 'non'-national influences that constantly infiltrate their psyche and shores. In Scotland, as in Iceland, 'our' music is perhaps more fluid than in larger, more powerful nations. 'We' may never fully understand the Scottish psyche, but the struggle to locate it continues (he said with a resigned smile)!

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