

BOOK REVIEWS

Music, Style, and Aging: Growing Old Disgracefully? Andy Bennett. 2013. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 226pp.

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On a January evening in 2012, I rose from my seat and joined in a rousing ovation for the Toledo Symphony and its guest artist. It wasn't a typical soloist we were cheering for, not Yo-Yo Ma or Emmanuel Ax—instead, it was Herman's Hermits frontman Peter Noone, who was headlining the annual Pops program. As the audience spilled out of the theater, I watched a diminutive white-haired woman nearly run over my companion with her walker as they pushed toward the merchandise and autograph table. My friend, a senior colleague who had first seen the Hermits with her father at age ten, got there first, shouting "I love you, Peter!" and blowing kisses across the safety barrier. She had to repeat it twice before he heard her, but then he turned and winked. She wept.

That, I thought to myself, presented a kind of live sequel to all of those archival *Ed Sullivan* clips we'd watched in pop music classes, the television screen filled with screaming, swooning girls. Those girls grew up and grew older, as did Peter Noone. But the music stayed with them in some way, stayed part of who they were, so that years after they first realized they were "Into Something Good," they wanted their grandchildren to hear it with them at the symphony.

It is this phenomenon—how people "move on from youth and effectively

grow older with popular music"—that Andy Bennett addresses in his book *Music, Style, and Aging* (2). Bennett, a post-subcultural theorist well known for more than a decade of compelling work on music "scenes," directs his research where the field of pop culture studies has long needed to go. He challenges the enduring assumption that popular music drives youth culture alone, and reminds us that the *culture* does not necessarily fade into oblivion when the period of *youth* has passed. And it is more than nostalgia, Bennett writes, that keeps popular music relevant as individuals age; we do not simply cling to memories and live in the past; rather, the past lives in us, *with* us. The aesthetics and worldviews one develops in the cradle of youth culture never stop mattering in the negotiation of identity, in the shaping of a life course.

The subtitle offered on the book's cover is *Growing Old Disgracefully?*, suggesting that the common public discourse ridiculing aging artists and fans as foolish, even senile, needs questioning. The man in his later forties who balances a steady job with steady clubbing (114) and the punk father with the "toned-down" mohawk (74) are not re-enacting their youths, but simply continuing to enact their lives as their relationship with music adjusts to the changing physical and social realities of aging. This perspective effectively normalizes many kinds of musical behaviours that might be otherwise dismissed as instances of "arrested development" (41, after Calcutt 1998), and furthers the progressively egalitarian agenda of 21st-century popular music scholarship.

The book is presented in two parts, the first contextualizing Bennett's study and engaging in provocative dialogue with established cultural scholarship; the second commendably offering rare ethnographic explorations of the lives of aging music fans.

Two of Bennett's theoretical pillars stand out: first, relying on the work of Tia DeNora (2000), he highlights the persistent importance of music as an integral part of identity as it is constructed through everyday life, *as long as that life lasts*. Second, he returns to the tripartite model of local, translocal and virtual music scenes put forth in the 2004 collection he edited with Richard A. Peterson, and introduces a fourth category as the *affective* scene. This addition is necessary and valuable because, as Bennett has found in his ethnographic work, the relationship that many aging fans have with their music does not depend on externally localized or mediated interactions at all, but rather on the very idea of an imagined community connected by shared cultural values (60). Bennett's interviews show that it is common for aging members of these communities to abandon the spectacular, visual elements of their music scene in favour of this kind of more internal, reflexive processing—some aging punks tell Bennett, for example, that because of their lifelong dedication they have “absorb[ed] the qualities of true ‘punkness,’ to the extent that these no longer need to be visually represented ... on the surface of the body” (75). No safety pins required.

The ethnographic chapters in Part II touch on electronic dance music, prog rock, and hippie culture, though it is perhaps especially appropriate that he re-

visits the central focus of early subcultural studies: punk. Some of his aging punk interviewees have left the scene behind because they associate it with values that are incompatible with a typical consumption-driven middle-aged lifestyle; some have maintained or modified their punk identities inside and out. Chapter 3 examines these shifting meanings of style, and the fourth chapter details the ways in which aging fans negotiate the changing dynamics of work and leisure. One noteworthy and very 21st-century idea Bennett's interviewees introduce here is the growing need to identify modes of “sustainable fun” (114), which provide a satisfying cultural experience but do not result in long-term substance abuse, illness, or injuries to a gradually aging body. Bennett also presents a discussion of multigenerational musics—emerging as increasingly common cultural scenes—and the conflicts that sometimes characterize such encounters. Finally, there is an inquiry into the politics of music, and how music-driven ideological stances are developed and adapted as fans' lives progress. The voices we hear in this study are largely Australian and British, and mostly male, but Bennett is remarkably successful in turning these limitations into vital discussion points, especially in the thoughtful space he dedicates to analyzing the gendering of aging music scenes and the difficulties of locating aging female music devotees.

Bennett's book is a model of clarity, and applies the most effective methods and techniques of cultural studies in an engagingly written, carefully organized text. It is, I think, an ideal resource for students of culture across the diverse fields of sociology, music studies, media

studies, and anthropology, and I look forward to assigning it in my own ethnomusicology courses. As a pioneering foray into the study of post-youth culture, *Music, Style, and Aging* also provocatively points toward possibilities for further research, particularly 1) the still-living generations that forged their musical tastes before the baby boom; 2) the expansion of the research into mainstream commercial pop; 3) the specifically localized investigation of aging global music scenes; and 4) a deeper ethnographic focus on performers. Some of Bennett's interviewees do still play regularly, and offer some of the most striking insights into the fluid meanings of style; one punk musician locates his punkness in his embodied voice, for example (79), rather than the outer trappings of punk, raising important questions about dialectics of not only sartorial style, but of *musical* style, genre and individual identity politics. In short, *Music, Style, and Aging* provides an appealing and substantial introduction to what I hope will prove to be a growing transdisciplinary field of inquiry, and nudge scholarship toward a more holistic view of music across the entire life courses of both communities and individuals. 🍀

REFERENCES

- Bennett, Andy and Richard A. Peterson, eds. 2004. *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Calcutt, Andrew. 1998. *Arrested Development: Pop Culture and the Erosion of Adulthood*. London: Continuum.
- Keith Norman MacDonald's Puirt-à-Beul: The Vocal Dance Music of the Scottish Gaels.** William Lamb. 2012. Isle of Skye, UK: Taigh na Teud.

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Puirt-à-beul is a Scottish Gaelic term that literally means “tunes from the mouth” but which is most commonly translated as “mouth music.” What differentiates puirt-à-beul from other forms of Celtic mouth music is that they consist of fixed rather than improvised texts, and the lyrics are generally formed of “real” words rather than of vocables. They are usually quite short, often consisting of no more than two “turns” of four lines each (AABB binary form, the same as the instrumental tunes with which they are associated) involving considerable textual and melodic repetition. Many of the lyrics are humorous, silly or even nonsensical. Puirt-à-beul link instrumental tunes with song, and music with language. There are some Cape Breton Gaelic speakers who argue that a fiddler cannot play in an “authentic” Cape Breton style without knowing the words (i.e., puirt-à-beul) associated with fiddle tunes, for the lyrics dictate the rhythm. Given that puirt-à-beul are quite quick in tempo compared to most other Gaelic songs, and given also that they are so short and amusing in nature, they are often popular with non-Gaelic speakers, and are regularly incorporated in Gaelic language classes.

This book is a reprint of a historically significant collection originally published in 1901 and revised in 1931. The author of the original book, Keith Norman MacDonald, is well known in