

Popular Music Education

A White Paper by the Association for Popular Music Education

Introduction

The Association for Popular Music Education (APME), founded in 2010, is the world's leading organization in popular music education, galvanizing a community of practice, scholarship and innovation around the field. Popular music education (hereafter PME) is exciting, dynamic and often innovative. Music education – meaning formal schooling in music – has tended most of the time to exclude almost all forms and contexts of music, and therefore has also elided most models of music learning and teaching. Popular music is among these excluded musics. The report is based on the knowledge, perspectives and experience of APME Board members, and therefore reflects the Anglophone and largely US American orientation of the contributors. We recognize that popular music is as diverse as the world's cultures, and that writing on popular music education is as nuanced as the languages in which it is communicated.

What is Popular Music Education?

Popular music is qualitatively different from other forms of music, in function and aesthetics (although there are areas of commonality). PME, therefore, may also be understood as necessarily different from Western Art Music (WAM) education. However, APME does not intend to construct or to construe PME as existing or working in opposition to existing music education programs and paradigms. PME, like popular music, is highly complex, problematic and challenging, as well as being inspiring and deeply meaningful to many people, individually and collectively. This is true of all musical traditions, their associated hierarchies, embedded practices and assumptions, and attendant educational practices. APME recognizes that change, stasis and tradition all constitute the lifeblood of popular music. As such, and to reflect that ongoing change, the authors assert that popular music education practice and scholarship must remain reflexive, allowing for and embracing constant revision and re-contextualization. As such, this paper marks a moment in time, but is not intended to codify, define or delimit PME.

Popular music has a growing presence in education, formal and otherwise, from primary school to postgraduate study. Programs, courses and classes in popular music studies, popular music performance, songwriting, production and areas of music technology are becoming commonplace across higher education and compulsory schooling. In the context of teacher education, classroom teachers and music specialists alike are becoming increasingly empowered to introduce popular music into their classrooms. Research in PME lies at the intersection of the fields of music education, ethnomusicology, community music, cultural studies and popular music studies.

Who are the Popular Music Educators?

The following page quotes and borrows from the editorial article introducing the issue 1, volume 1 of the *Journal of Popular Music Education*.¹

The popular music education world is populated by two largely separate but far from discrete communities. One of these groups comprises mostly school music teachers and those who work in higher education institutions to 'train' teacher/musicians for the workplace. For them, music education is a high art and prized craft; PME is one part of the jigsaw puzzle of a schoolteacher's diverse portfolio of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The other community primarily teaches popular music studies (including popular music performance, business and songwriting) in institutions of higher education. For them the goal is to learn (about) popular music; 'education' is implicit in the fact that this activity takes place in a college or university. These two communities (crudely bifurcated as they are here, for the purposes of this short paper) collide and collaborate at APME conferences. They rarely seem to bump into one another, however, at meetings of IASPM (frequented primarily by members of the popular music studies community) or ISME (attended mainly by music teachers and music teacher teachers).

People's experiences of education are frequently self-defining and life-changing – affirming, uplifting, crushing, celebratory and (dis)empowering by turns; the same can be said of people's encounters with music. Humans' engagement with popular music and experiences of education are vital to people's understanding and tolerance of themselves and one another. APME believes in the necessity and transformative power of deep educational experiences that critique and enable, challenge and transform. Popular music exists at the intersection of folk and celebrity cultures, combining the everyday with the exceptional and fantastic. It merges commerce, community, commodity and the construction of meanings. People live their lives both as popular musicians and through popular musicians, realizing identities as fans, consumers and practitioners. Popular music scenes, communities and subcultures are local, regional, national and international. PME thus takes place at the cross sections of identity realization, learning, teaching, enculturation, entrepreneurship, creativity, a global multimedia industry, and innumerable leisure, DIY and hobbyist networks – online, and in physical spaces. Popular music education is business and social enterprise. It is personal and it is collective. It is vocational and avocational, and it builds and develops communities.

Popular music stands as a vital part of our modern lives. A valuable form of artistic expression, it embraces all facets of the human experience. It blends art with contemporary culture and tradition to make relevant the ever changing now.

¹ Smith, G.D. & Powell, B. (2017). Welcome to the journal, *Journal of Popular Music Education*, 1(1)