David Knapp

Editor of Journal of Popular Music Education

Q & A



David H. Knapp is an assistant professor of music education in the College of Music at Florida State University. His research and teaching focus on removing barriers to participation in music education.

Could you tell us a little about the *Journal of Popular Music Education* and what it aims to do?

The journal, simply, aims to bring the somewhat wide range of thinking in popular music and teaching into conversation. This is often from music education circles, but also from musicology, cultural studies and industry. By having all these voices in the same room, I hope the journal can elevate and strengthen our field.

What inspired you to get involved with the journal and what have you enjoyed most about being an editor?

Being an editor is a joy, a privilege and... a lot of work. I took the opportunity because service is very important in our field and I'm lucky to be able to point my service toward something fun. I think what I've enjoyed most is getting to read writing from so many different corners of the field.

How has the journal developed since it was first established?

The journal was begun by Gareth Dylan Smith-Lee and Bryan Powell about ten years ago. I'll let them argue about whose idea it was. Since then it has developed across all the metrics that matter: institutional subscribers, impact factor, readers, etc. More importantly, I think the breadth of topics and methodologies has developed, the number of submissions has increased and the level of scholarship is higher.

What makes the *Journal of Popular Music Education* different from other music education journals?

I suppose the simple and obvious distinction is the most salient one. By attending to popular musics, the journal is the only one dedicated to one of the most central topics in our field. I was at the recent music education national research conference in the states this last week and there was a noticeable increase in the presentations on popular music. The journal is happy to be a home for these conversations.

What role does popular music play in music education today and how has this changed in recent years?

It used to be that popular music was fringe. And then it was that popular music is being put up in opposition to traditional music education (e.g. large ensemble, western canon, etc.). Now, I think most people in the field see it as just another area within music education. I see this with my university students, especially. Articles I have them read that advocate for popular music used to be seen as controversial, but now they're very nonplussed by it all. They see that the field is a big tent for so many different music learning activities.

What are some of the key issues or debates currently shaping popular music education?

Oh gosh, do I want to wade into this? OK, let me give you a few that I'm thinking about. But I don't pretend these are key to everyone else. The first is the utilitarian advocacy argument that many people make for popular music as supporting students' future opportunities in the music industry. I understand this argument and see how it's a useful one to make. However, I think inviting students to engage in popular music learning has so much more to offer than possible future employment. This also relates to the various kinds of literacy that students can engage with. There is some recent talk about artistic literacy and critical literacy within popular music education and I think our field should spend a lot more time developing how these ideas of literacy inform students' experiences.

And another thing that I've been thinking about for a while is what kinds of popular music our field is interested in supporting. I think there are some gaps, and I think those gaps align with the ideological orientation of the people in the field. For example, one of the most popular genres of music for students in the US is Christian praise music. Yet, there is almost no discussion of this because practitioners in the states are wary of engaging with religious music. I think they're wary because of some thinking about separation of church and state, but also because there is concern about giving more air to a musical genre that they see as related to the rise in Christian nationalism in my country.

Many of these same teachers who are advocating for student-centred, culturally responsive practices would be interested in supporting the inclusion of drill music in schools, but not Christian praise music. So, I think there is much more thinking we should be doing about Christian praise music specifically, but also how our own ideologies are present in the choices we make.

Sorry, you asked me for key issues and I just gave you hot takes.

How does the journal bring together research and practice and why is this important?

The quick answer is that the journal allows for both research articles and practitioner articles. Often times there are practitioner articles in an issue that relate to the research article in some way. But if I'm honest, I don't know if we do a good job of bringing these two together. It's not the journal's fault, it's academia in general. There needs to be a much stronger connection between research and classroom practices. I think one way we can strengthen this is to develop other pathways of dissemination, including social media, and we are working to put together these pathways that live alongside and in conversation with the journal.

What advice would you give to early career researchers interested in publishing in *Journal of Popular Music Education*?

Don't be afraid to put yourself out there! The peer-review process can be intimidating for people, even later-career folks. We try very hard to pair articles with peer reviewers that are knowledgeable about the topic. And I've heard from authors that this is their favourite journal to submit to because the reviewer comments are both thoughtful and supportive, even if they are critical. Hopefully there is someone seeing this who has wonderful ideas. I would like for that person to take their idea, strengthen it and get it out into the world.

What are your hopes for the journal's future?

There is so much to explore in our field! I hope the journal continues to deepen and strengthen this exploration. Of course, I'd also like our metrics to continue to grow. But I'm less interested in that than I am the content of the journal becoming more a part of the conversation. When I'm at a conference and I see someone citing an article in the journal or even bringing something up in conversation, I'm like 'Yes! We're doing it'. The metrics will come, as long as we're helping disseminate good research.

And finally, as I said above, I would like the journal to be much more a part of the general conversation. I'd like to come up with ways to efficiently support public knowledge dissemination.