POPULAR MUSIC IN LEEDS

Histories, Heritage, People and Places

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Introducing Leeds

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Rebecca Solnit contends that 'every place deserves an atlas' (2010: vii) and this book is intended as a kind of atlas of popular music in Leeds. It is the first academic collection dedicated to mapping Leeds' popular music histories, heritage, people and places. As each of the contributing authors uniquely argues, Leeds is deserving of, and long overdue for, serious attention. The city has spawned crooners, folk singers, punks, post-punks, Goths, DJs, popstars, rappers, indie rockers and more. Yet – with a few exceptions (Butt 2022; O'Brien 2012; Riches and Lashua 2014; Spracklen et al. 2016; Spracklen et al. 2013; Thompson and Nicholls 2021) – Leeds has not been studied for its musical cultures like other UK cities, such as Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Sheffield. Having lived, worked, studied and even performed here, we have found the absence of literature about Leeds' popular music histories and heritage curious. In some ways, Leeds is a city with a 'lost' local musical heritage (Carr 2019), hidden even to those who reside there. While a number of bands from Leeds remain beloved by fans – late 1970s punk and post-punk groups Gang of Four, Delta 5, Scritti Politti and the Mekons; early 1980s goth-rock group The Sisters of Mercy, indie rock band The Wedding Present, dance duo Utah Saints, and in the early 2000s, Kaiser Chiefs – recent events including the death of Gang of Four guitarist Andy Gill (1 February 2020) have sparked renewed interest in the city's musical heritage. This book aims to give Leeds the atlas that it deserves and put popular music in Leeds firmly 'on the map'.

This introductory chapter is designed to help contextualize the book, give the reader an overview of Leeds and establish the sociohistorical context of the chapters that follow. It also offers an overview of some of the theoretical developments in scholarship on popular music, cultural heritage and music geographies (Baker et al. 2018; Bennett 2022; Draganova et al. 2021; Lashua et al. 2019). Finally, it provides a snapshot of the book's eighteen chapters, delineating and linking some of the shared and contrasting threads among them. The collection has been developed from the work of a diverse range of contributors, including interdisciplinary scholars, musicians, local historians, journalists and community

members. Significantly, elements of it have been drawn from a major public museum exhibition *Sounds of Our City: Leeds' Music History* (January 2020–December 2021) led by social historian and curator (and co-editor) Kitty Ross (see Chapter 15), in partnership with Music:Leeds (lead by Sam Nicholls; see Chapter 18), with contributions by academics (see Chapter 3 by Peter Mills), community historians such as Danny Friar (see Chapter 13) and musicians such as Michael Meadowcroft (see Chapter 14). All chapters in this collection build upon contemporary research.

The breadth and range of contributions help to map something of the complexity and diversity in perspectives of this city. As Solnit (2010: vii) pointed out:

> A city is a particular kind of place, perhaps best described as many worlds in one place; it compounds many versions without quite reconciling them, though some cross over to live in multiple worlds [...]. An atlas is a collection of versions of a place, a compendium of perspectives, a snatching out of the infinite ether of potential versions a few that will be made concrete and visible.

In ways that each of the book's chapters explores, Leeds' popular music exemplifies and informs complex understandings of the materiality and intangibility of the city. Leeds has a rich musical history and heritage, a long tradition of vibrant music venues, nightclubs, dance halls, pubs and other sites of musical entertainment. Through these, the book traces broader social, cultural and urban changes – both across Britain and in wider global contexts – of the historical significance of music as mass entertainment; of music and migration; of music and social equity; of industrialization and de-industrialization, regeneration and the rise of the 24-hour city (Chatterton and Hollands 2003) and more. Charting moments of stark musical politicization and de-politicization, the chapters concomitantly trace arguments about 'heritagising' popular music (Roberts and Cohen 2014) within discussions of music's 'place' in museums (Baker et al. 2016) and in the city's economy. Importantly, this book contributes to debates about why music matters (Hesmondhalgh 2013), has mattered, and continues to matter – in Leeds and beyond.

Locating Leeds

Although Leeds is considered the fourth largest metropolitan area (by population) in the United Kingdom, it remains peripheral to better-known British cities in many ways. Chartered in 1207 and granted city status in 1893, Leeds became a major industrial centre in the North of England in the nineteenth century, primarily in

manufacturing textiles such as wool and flax. During the mid nineteenth century, Marshall's Mill in Leeds was one of the largest factories in the world. Spanning the River Aire, the city benefitted from waterways and canals, and later rail links, across the north of England to port cities such as Liverpool and Hull. With 95,000 residents in 1801, a century later Leeds' population had reached over 550,000. Although its growth slowed after the First World War, the district had approximately 750,000 residents in 2011, and Population UK (2022: n.pag.) predicted that Leeds reached around 840,000 residents in 2022.

Its manufacturing base saw the city through the Second World War and, like many UK cities, waves of migration from South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Europe transformed the demographics of metropolitan Leeds in the post-war years. Industrial decline and a shift to a service economy, coupled with more recent moves to turn Leeds into a '24-hour city' of nightlife and entertainment, saw the remaking of the city centre and visions of Leeds as the 'capital of the North' (Chatterton and Hollands 2004: 266). Once 'a grim industrial city on the edge of the Yorkshire coalfields' (Connell 2014: 97), Leeds has been transformed into a centre for retail, leisure and entertainment since the 1990s (Unsworth and Stilwell 2004). With five universities, Leeds has a large student population, which has impacted and influenced its nightlife and popular music scenes (Lashua and Skeldon 2023). Despite its long working-class history and abundance of students, Leeds has not received mainstream music industry attention beyond a small handful of celebrated bands and artists such as The Wedding Present, Gang of Four, the Mekons, Kaiser Chiefs, Utah Saints, Corinne Bailey Rae, Chumbawamba, Soft Cell, The Sisters of Mercy and more recently, Yard Act. Yet, as this book's chapters showcase, the city has supported vibrant folk, jazz, punk, post-punk, goth, metal, African-Caribbean, electronic dance music and hip hop scenes. Although not renowned for producing global music superstars, Leeds nonetheless has a reputation as 'a good place to do and see music' (Spracklen et al. 2016: 149). But what makes a 'good place' for music?

Placing popular music and heritage

In the last 25 years, scholars have increasingly given attention to questions of music and place (Leyshon et al. 1998); for example, why are some cities viewed as more musical than others? Connected to these are further questions of cultural heritage and the ways in which understandings of the past inform the present (Smith 2006). There is an established body of scholarship on popular music, place and cultural heritage (e.g. Baker et al. 2018; Bennett 2022; Cohen 2007; Connell and Gibson 2003; Lashua et al. 2019; Lashua et al. 2014; Leyshon

et al. 1998; Mahoney and Schofield 2021), and the potential for further explorations in this nexus remains vast. From specific in-depth studies of single venues or local scenes to neighbourhoods, cities, regions and nations, 'place' matters in popular music heritage. The relations of music and place – politically, culturally and economically – offer important registers of cultural identity and meaning-making, particularly during times of intense debates about the loss, forgetting or erasure of these distinctions (Waxer 2002; Whiteley et al. 2004). This is especially the case for debates about cultural heritage, cities and urban cultural regeneration, where music is very much a part of what makes a city unique and helps to give it character (Lashua et al. 2010).

With a view towards the past, numerous cities have sought to capitalize on their popular music heritage (e.g. Liverpool, Memphis, Detroit, Nashville and others; see Cohen 2007; Cohen et al. 2014; Fry 2017), with varying degrees of success amidst broader attempts to regenerate urban centres, especially in smaller or regional post-industrial cities such as Sheffield (UK), Cleveland (USA), Melbourne or Wollongong (Australia) (Brabazon and Mallinder 2006; Cantillon et al. 2021; Homan et al. 2021; Lashua 2019; Long 2014).

Some interventions to regenerate urban centres through musical activities have been part of a larger cultural policy (Hutton 2009; O'Connor and Shaw 2014) or may have been part of a strategy to address noise, gentrification or zoning of the night-time economy within a local authority's urban planning policy (e.g. Gibson and Homan 2004; Homan 2014; Strong et al. 2017) rather than specific attempts to capitalize on a city's notable music history. As a result, some of these strategies have sidelined local creators and artists. They may have emphasized short-lived, rather than sustainable cultural activities, or exacerbated the instability of an already unstable local musical economy (Scott 2006). Leeds encapsulates and epitomizes these debates, with its new arena (2016) and iconic venues, such as the Brudenell Social Club (established in 1913, rebuilt in 1978, and hosting local musicians and professional touring bands since 1992) in the heart of the student district, and longstanding pubs such as the Fenton (which has been a pub since at least 1872, although it is better known since the 1970s as a punk, post-punk, alternative and metal venue – see Chapter 1 by Rio Goldhammer), or vanished venues such as the Duchess of York (1987–2000; with events put on by John Keenan, including pre-fame Nirvana). Accordingly, our focus on Leeds also necessitates a shift away from a broader mapping of the city to explore what Long (2014: 51) referred to as 'obscure places' in popular music heritage. These explorations include the stories of people and places that have been largely overlooked as well as those that, although neglected, serve as points of entry into explanations of larger events and wider historical processes.

So, why dedicate a book to the popular music histories and heritage of Leeds? As noted above, the musical cultures of Leeds have not been the focus of intensive studies as in other UK cities, such as Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol or Canterbury. We are curious why Leeds – arguably similar to many British post-industrial cities with large student populations such as Sheffield, Newcastle and Birmingham – has remained an 'obscure place' in popular music history. Despite being home to many fascinating musical scenes and cultivating a number of globally recognized artists and bands, Leeds is not widely perceived as a 'music city', and not widely viewed as having its own distinctive (if mythologized) 'sound'. Yet, in some ways the popular music heritage of Leeds is hiding in plain sight, hidden by its perceived ordinariness. A sense of rediscovery is at the heart of this book: to recognize and remark upon Leeds, in some ways an 'ordinary' UK city, yet in other ways an extraordinary one. Perhaps we had failed before to see and appreciate its extraordinariness because it is widely perceived through the lens of the ordinary and unremarkable.

The book extends wider discussions and debates about music, place and heritage in Leeds and beyond. As one of our contributors, Jonathon Long, commented, this book is 'about Leeds and of Leeds, but it is about more than that' (see Chapter 7: 103). For example, the book is about the radical politics of post-punk, collective activism, anti-racist and anti-sexist politics, and the power of music as art. In this context, Leeds serves as a remarkable case. The book is also about the flourishing of creative entrepreneurialism, for example, in do-it-yourself (DIY) dance music and DJ cultures in Leeds stretching back into the 1940s and read across 80 years of the changing city. In this sense, the book captures wider urban changes in connection with innovations and shifts in the music of the city. The book also presents numerous niche scenes in the city – e.g. jazz, hip hop or noise music – read through global musical flows with strong local inflections. In this, several chapters evoke the changing relationships between the local and the global. Additionally, the book is about the ways that the city remembers itself. In official civic discourse and wider media narratives, Leeds seems reluctant to celebrate itself, to embrace and retell its own musical stories. This is, in part, what made the *Sounds of Our City* exhibition so refreshingly vital, because it showcased many stories of why music has mattered in Leeds and, in telling those stories, it said something more about why music (and music heritage) matters in other cities, too. Invariably, it takes special attention to focus and draw out such significances and resonances; as each of our contributors explains – whether in folk, music hall, Americana, calypso, electronic music, hip hop or punk – Leeds is perhaps not a unique musical city, but it is a fascinating city to explore the relations of popular music, places, people, histories and heritage.

Introducing the chapters

As an atlas of popular music in Leeds, this book is structured in four parts: places, people, histories and heritage. The chapters have been contributed by an array of authors – academics, a museum curator, historians, a politician, a journalist and musicians – and this variety of voices and views is a notable strength of the collection. Part 1 presents chapters that primarily map places of popular music in the city and the wider Yorkshire region. While the chapters in Part 2 maintain geographical perspectives, they shift focus to musical communities and cultural identities – Leeds' people – and the music that informs a sense of belonging in Leeds. Part 3 features histories that showcase broader eras in the city's musical past, from music hall and dance venues to its Caribbean carnival, as well as the city's twentieth-century jazz scenes. Finally, in Part 4, the chapters explore cultural heritage, popular music legacies and the current (re)configurations of music in the city. The concluding chapter draws upon an art installation led by two of the co-editors (Lashua and Thompson) that aimed to map the book overall – as a full-sized wall mapping – to bring together the diverse themes of the collection, while also pointing to gaps and directions for future scholarship. The book's parts and the chapters that comprise them are introduced in further detail, below.

Focused primarily on places of popular music in Leeds, Part 1 also acknowledges the ebb and flow of people and cultural changes in Leeds. The first chapter by Rio Goldhammer takes us into The Fenton, where musical pioneers such as The Mekons, Gang of Four, Delta 5, The Three Johns, March Violets and a host of others contributed to the cultural significance of the post-punk era in Leeds during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Fenton was also a birthplace of Rock Against Racism, and Goldhammer locates this venue within the sociopolitical crises of post-industrial decline and decay, the Yorkshire Ripper and National Front activity. In Chapter 2, Karl Spracklen shares the history of Mr. Fox, a group that emerged from the 1960s Leeds folk music scene. Situating Leeds in a regional context, the chapter recounts how Mr. Fox constructed an imaginary Yorkshireness, blending elements of the historical, spatial and cultural relationships between Leeds, Yorkshire and the Yorkshire Dales. Spracklen locates Mr Fox's attempt to recreate an authentically northern sound through the myth, folklore and magic of Yorkshire. Chapter 3 by Peter Mills takes readers into the suburbs of Leeds, tracing the exceptional history of popular music concerts in Roundhay Park, one of the largest urban parks in Europe. Attracting megastars like The Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen, Michael Jackson, U2 and Ed Sheeran from the 1980s through the present, Roundhay Park's open-air arena became an international pop venue and arguably helped to put Leeds on the map as a significant music city. In Chapter 4, Dan Lomax takes us into the underground of the 1990s, with an

exploration of key venues in the Leeds indie scene during that time. Although they have vanished from the city's popular musicscape (Cohen 2012), Lomax explores how indie venues, such as The Town & Country Club (est. 1992), The Well (est. 1992) and The Cockpit (est. 1994), offered spaces for a new generation of music promoters and entrepreneurs to develop an interconnected music ecology in the city that continues to endure. Chapter 5 completes Part 1 by venturing into iconoclastic experimental music. Here, Theo Gowans, Phil Legard and Dave Procter introduce the underground noise and power electronics scene of Leeds through a specific focus on the Termite Club, which served as a location for an influential promoter of 'difficult musics' between 1983 and 2010. Although controversial, often confrontational and always niche, the music that featured at the Termite Club found an audience in Leeds' student population, and its legacy in Leeds also endures, if arguably in 'safer spaces' than during its heyday.

Building upon Part 1's geographic foundations, Part 2 of the book explores the people of Leeds by putting the spotlight on varying musical identities and communities. The biography of the Leeds-born singer Jake Thackray (1938–2002) is examined in Chapter 6 by Stephen Wagg. Thackray rooted his music in French chanson and the 'satire boom' of the 1960s. He often sang of women, unfulfilled sexual desires and a mythical Yorkshire. Wagg remarks upon the conflicts that characterized Thackray's life, as well as the recent renewed interest in Thackray as a performer. Jonathan Long (Chapter 7) looks at migration and the role that it has played in the musical makeup of Leeds. Leeds has longstanding Irish and Jewish communities, well-established populations that have roots in the Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean and southern Asia, and more recent migrant flows, from places like Eastern Europe and the Horn of Africa. Long's interlocutors share the ways in which migrants commonly come to the city with few material possessions, but carry within them a cultural repository, including the musical traditions of their country of origin. For Chapter 8, Beccy Watson shares a tale of two Leeds women, Sara and Fuzzy, who became musicians, DJs and producers. Viewed through an intersectional lens that accounts for gender, race, class and place, Watson explores how Leeds has shaped the routes Sara and Fuzzy have taken and ways that intersectional forces have influenced their professional pathways. Chapter 9 returns focus to Leeds punk and post-punk music, but through a feminist lens. Mallory McGovern charts the anti-sexist, anti-elitist and anti-racist principles that characterized elements of this scene in the city. Spotlighting the music and politics of groups such as Gang of Four, the Mekons, Delta 5 and The Catholic Girls, McGovern illustrates how some of the actions taken by feminists and punks during this time found particular resonance with one another. Next, Dave Robinson takes us inside the Americana scene as an ongoing and often vibrant site of counter-hegemonic resistance at the heart of

Leeds in Chapter 10. As some venues have closed, new ones have opened, and a few – like The Grove – continue on. Robinson illustrates how music of the rural American south has come to form part of the musical narrative, and grit, of this northern English city.

Part 3 shares some longstanding yet lesser-known musical histories of Leeds. It begins with music hall, and in Chapter 11, Dave Russell tells the unique story of Leeds City Varieties, set against the broader national decline of the music hall tradition and changing media landscape of music and entertainment as spectacle in the 1950s. Established in 1865, Leeds City Varieties continues to offer a tangible link to a rich performance heritage, and it remains one of the UK's most historically significant live entertainment venues. Chapter 12 shares the remarkable, expansive history of DIY dance music spaces and the rise of DJ cultures in Leeds. From 1940s tearooms and 1950s milk bars through to 1980s warehouses and 1990s raves, then into house parties in the 2010s, Stuart Moss charts how DJs have provided music for audiences who wanted somewhere to dance, using found spaces to make events happen, often in non-traditional spaces for musical performance. In doing so, the chapter traces Leeds' significant role in the development of UK youth (sub) cultures within the changing terrain of music entrepreneurialism. Music journalist and community historian Danny Friar presents an account in Chapter 13 of the Leeds West Indian Carnival (LWIC) and chronicles the ways in which LWIC has played a vital role in preserving, promoting and developing Caribbean music in Britain since the 1960s. The chapter shares the often forgotten and unknown story of Caribbean carnival music in Leeds and its importance to the Leeds West Indian Carnival, the black community in Leeds and the broader musical landscape of Britain. Michael Meadowcroft closes Part 3 of the book and explores Jazz communities in Leeds (Chapter 14). He introduces the post-war Jazz revival that was largely inspired by the influx of records from the United States and notes key musicians and places around Leeds – such as Studio 20. These venues hosted Jazz in the city in the 1940s and 1950s, before entering a period of decline and largely disappearing from view, except for a core of Jazz enthusiasts, like Meadowcroft, who continue to perform in remaining venues.

Part 4 is concerned with popular music heritage in Leeds. It begins where the idea for this book began, at Leeds Museums' exhibition *Sounds of Our City* which opened at Abbey House Museum in January 2020. In Chapter 15, lead curator Kitty Ross (along with co-editor Paul Thompson) guides us through the exhibition, which spans music in Leeds over two centuries – from a 1769 cello used in Hunslet Parish church before they installed an organ, a mix of musical artefacts that may have been found in a Leeds teenager's bedroom ranging from the 1960s to 2000s, to event flyers collected to give a snapshot of the Leeds music scene in 2019. Sarah Little and Alex Stevenson (Chapter 16) explore the Hip Hop

scene in Leeds through a unique archival partnership between a recently formed community-led organization, the Hip Hop Historian Society (HHHS) and Leeds Museums. They argue that although Hip Hop in Leeds has been overshadowed by attention to other UK cities, Leeds provided a fertile environment for early pioneers to forge their 'glocal' interpretations of Hip Hop culture. Leeds was a creative base for multiple generations of Hip Hop practitioners. Little and Stevenson introduce the Hip Hop archive as a way of connecting voices, generations and places in Leeds. In Chapter 17, Brett Lashua and Paul Thompson hit the streets of Leeds and take the reader on a psychogeographical tour of the city. Going on a series of walks, they explored the materiality of the city to attempt to answer the question: where is popular music heritage in Leeds? Walking and drifting through the city, they stumbled across some tangible material artefacts of the city's popular music heritage, on the ground and on the walls, including a song tunnel and a surprising connection to the Beatles in a cemetery close to the University of Leeds. Part 4 concludes with a look at Leeds' popular music present and future, in which Paul Thompson and Sam Nicholls (Chapter 18) provide an overview of the cultural, economic, political and environmental factors that have contributed to Leeds' diverse and eclectic music sector and communities, despite lacking a coherent infrastructure to develop new talent or retain established artists. Thompson and Nicholls survey the stakeholders in the private and public sectors, celebrate achievements and remarkable music events and projects, and explore how the variable institutional support over the last 40 years has left the potential for music as a driver in the city unfulfilled.

Finally, in the Conclusion, we return to the notion of the book as an atlas of Leeds popular music. Here, we recount the creation by two of us (Lashua and Thompson) of an art installation (March–April 2022) at a Leeds art gallery, Ginger Works. In this installation, Lashua and Thompson produced a wall-sized mapping of the city that plotted the sites noted in this book's chapters – over 150 venues, pubs, clubs, records stores and other sites of popular music heritage. Yet, even a mapping of this size fails to adequately evoke the historical depth and social complexity of the city, just as a book limited to eighteen chapters can only include a few facets of Leeds' musical histories and heritage, and its people and places. Nevertheless, both the art installation and this book offer different and powerful kinds of cultural mappings. In these, we have sought to 'bring alternative and local perspectives' (Crawhall 2009: 7) to wider attention and showcase distinctive accounts, or mappings, of Leeds. Like the museum exhibition (*Sounds of Our City*) and art installation that served as bookends for this collection of chapters, we believe this book also makes moves to 'transform the intangible and invisible into a medium that can be applied' (Crawhall 2009: 11) to put Leeds and its people, places, histories and heritage 'on the map' as a noteworthy musical city.

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