

Call for Articles: Special Issue of *Popular Music*

Listening to Mainstream Popular Music in Europe. A Snapshot from the Early 2020s

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This special issue takes a comparative, transnational snapshot of popular music, using the idea of the mainstream to examine prevailing aesthetics, acts, and actors within a particular time and place. Specifically, it focuses on mainstream(ing) processes in Europe at the beginning of the second decade of the century. It explores how popular music's globally circulating sounds and practices have recently been received, adapted, and negotiated in different European contexts against the backdrop of late modern global capitalism (Taylor et al. 2013, p. viii) and dominant (cross-)local conceptions and ideologies.

Thus, the special issue considers mainstream popular music not to be a coherent musical category but rather a discursive framework of cultural debate that provides listeners with “the tools to make sense of the sounds they hear” (Marshall 2011, p. 159). The particularities of this interpretation scheme (Jost 2016, p. 154) can be found, as suggested by Steinbrecher (2022, pp. 407–410), firstly in the fact that it follows a logic of processuality: something or someone becomes, is brought to, crosses over into, or slips out of the mainstream. The special issue aims to cover and compare several of these “mainstream momentums”. Secondly, mainstream notions are often closely linked to economic profit and commercial success. Therefore, music that appears at the top of the all-genre singles charts, which presumably still reaches a significant portion of the listening audience, is a fairly obvious (but of course not the only) object of analysis in this special issue. Thirdly, the term or attribute *mainstream* is inherently evaluative, often designating the inferior, mass-appealing Other to the authentic, honest, subversive, or creative (Huber 2013, p. 8). Therefore, mainstream popular music appears to be an ideal perspective to explore contemporary music-cultural valuation patterns, particularly those that emerge in the broad public sphere and in relation to societal constructions of normativity and hegemony.

By focusing on Europe, the special issue aims to open several casements of the same window for identifying how different or similar the mainstream-related responses to the mechanisms of cultural globalisation are in a region that seems so closely intertwined but distant at the same time.

This call aims to address the international scholarship that provides a wide range of evidence from various glocal contexts in (Western, Eastern, Central, North, and South) Europe and to bring together different approaches unified by the interest in the meanings, identities, experiences, and values of mainstream popular music. The special issue invites submissions that use theoretical framings and concepts of the mainstream – either already existing, updated, or newly created – as a lens through which to analyse contemporary sounds and practices of popular music in transnational European contexts. We are particularly (but not exclusively) interested in contributions that connect a reception-oriented focus with music-related questions: How is popular music listened to and made sense of within or against the mainstream frame in Europe at the beginning of the 2020s, and what is the role of the sounds and (what are) their unique characteristics?

The special issue also warmly welcomes contributions which may ask whether the *mainstream* is not already an antiquated concept in connection with music, against the backdrop of genre fluidity, fragmented media consumption, and allegedly outdated ideas of subculture.

We encourage scholars from different fields, regions, and methodological backgrounds to submit original articles. Articles may, but are not limited to, address the following perspectives and approaches in connection with European contexts:

- positive and negative negotiations of mainstream popular music (musical likes and dislikes),
- social, psychological, and aesthetic functions of mainstream popular music,
- musical theories of mainstream popular music,
- mainstream popular music as a stage for the reproduction or reworking of hegemonic intersectional constructions of gender, sexuality, race, class, and other identity factors,
- establishing and blurring the frontiers of mainstream popular music,
- local adaptations, cultural transfers, and losses in translation of global mainstream popular music.

Deadline for submitting abstracts: September 24th, 2024

- 200–250 words (plus references, if necessary)
- estimated word count of article (between 6.500 and 10.000 words)
- name(s) of author(s)
- institutional affiliations (if any)
- contact details
- a brief bio of no more than 150 words
- send your abstract to: bernhard.steinbrecher@uibk.ac.at and ondrej.daniel@ff.cuni.cz
- articles commissioned: October 24th, 2024

Deadline for submitting full articles: May 25th, 2025

- double-blind peer review
- submission: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/popular-music/information/author-instructions/submitting-your-materials#fndtn-new>

See the journal website for further information regarding submissions:
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/popular-music/information/author-instructions>

All submissions are to use the Popular Music Journal style guide:
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/popular-music/information/author-instructions/preparing-your-materials>

The issue will be **published in October 2025**.

Works cited

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- Marshall, L. 2011. 'The sociology of popular music, interdisciplinarity and aesthetic autonomy', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 62/1, pp. 154–74
- Steinbrecher, B. 2022: 'Mainstream popular music research: a musical update', *Popular Music*, 40/3–44, pp. 406–27.
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