

Music, Mediation and Place: A Cultural Musicology of the Cosmopolitan City

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Introduction

Cultural Musicology is not a new term, nor perhaps necessary, as many academic studies apply due cultural contextualisations in contemporary thinking about musics. Even so, academic preferences and territorialisms are culturally and socially hard-wired and continue to divide the musical fields of study, notably fields like ethnomusicology whose proponents often tend to maintain allegiance towards its particularly problematic prefix (e.g., as “musicology’s ‘Other’” (Nooshin 2008:72)), even though they commonly share with other musical fields (like musicology) the adoption of ethnographic methods, the valorization of musical performance, the acknowledgement of multiple histories of musics, and, ultimately, the interrogation of aesthetic hierarchies (Cook 2008). Yet in maintaining disciplinary separateness, ethnomusicology is at times not “ethnomusicological enough”, hence “fixed” by its own history and by its focus on “tradition” (Bohlman 2008), which is evident, for instance, by a re-perpetuating emphasis on certain subject matters that often exclude commercialized musical styles and processes of mediation in urban contexts. Here, a recent lecture by British ethnomusicologist Keith Howard (2009) shows how binary thinking between “ethnographically rooted music of authentic traditions” versus commercialized (familiar/Other) world music; “music studied by ethnomusicologists” versus music made for consumption; diversity (“local music”) versus standardization (the “great melt”) is still well and alive in ethnomusicology. While the interrelatedness between music and mediation is still often absent in the ethnomusicological literatures, “urban ethnomusicology” is not yet fully theorized in ethnomusicology either (Stock 2008:202). Research that focuses on the interrelatedness between music and mediation, whilst being informed by critical theory from cultural studies, may thus be better placed within a “broader musical scholarship” (Shelemay 1996) under the umbrella of cultural musicology. This paper, which is informed by urban ethnographic research conducted during 2008 into the interrelatedness between music, mediation and place, explores these notions by focusing on the mediation of cosmopolitanism in the place branding of Liverpool as European Capital of Culture under the banner *The World in One City*, and thus presents a case study example of a cultural musicology in urban contexts.

Constructing the Cosmopolitan City

The European Capital of Culture programme, an initiative launched by the European Union in 1985, operates particularly in the context of broad urban regeneration of de-industrialising cities by utilising cultural capital for long-term economic and social change towards a secure post-industrial future. The ECOC programme can be seen as an effort to develop, promote and market a place brand in order to enhance a city’s image, to attract tourists and to stimulate regeneration.

In 2008, Liverpool was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture in an effort to reposition the city as a World Class City and rebrand Liverpool, specifically under the banner *The World in One City* in reference to and celebration of its apparent cosmopolitanism.

An integral component of Liverpool’s ECOC status involved its marketing and promotional strategy, whose main objective of Liverpool’s media activities was the promotion of the city and its image, and the promoting of the ECOC’s events and attractions. The place rebranding of Liverpool as a city as being “both local and international – *The World in One City*” echoed journalistic and academic

discourses that often accredit Liverpool's port as a source of movement, migration and settlement—a centre for imperial trade and human transit, “the world port city, former capital of the slave trade and gateway of empire” (Belchem 2005:152)—as the main influence on Liverpool's cosmopolitan identity:

Liverpool is a veritable cocktail of cultures; Irish, Welsh, Scots as well as English; Jewish, Muslim, Hindu; Chinese, Greek, Italian, Spanish; more recently Caribbean, Somali and Yemeni; and most recently refugees and asylum seekers from the Balkans and the Middle East. Liverpool accords to every person the right to be themselves. (LCCL 2002:1102)

In the bid that won the ECOC title, LCCL represented Liverpool as an ethnically and socially diverse, as well as a tolerant city, and emphasised the role of culture for community integration alongside more economic goals. The narrative placed a marked emphasis on the city's people, notably from the “Scouse”, Irish, African, Arabic and Chinese communities, and branded Liverpool as an 800-year old city that embraces and celebrates its cultural diversity, a cosmopolitan city with apparently the longest established truly cosmopolitan communities in Britain.

A promotional film titled *Liverpool: World in One City* (River Media 2002) accompanied the city's campaign bid, described as an 8-minute “postmodern city symphony” that delivers a “vibrant image of a global, multi-cultural city” (Roberts 2010:200). Taking its lead from the marketing tag-line *The World in One City*, the film emphasises Liverpool's strong commitment towards cultural diversity and inclusivity, which can be duly contextualised within European policy making, where diversity is usually related to ethnicity (Cohen 2012:586). The film thus highlights Liverpool's rich musical potpourri by juxtaposing images of orchestras, multicultural festivals and celebrity musicians in a celebration of Liverpool's status as the “World Capital of Pop” and “Liverpool's impact on world music”, and thereby constructs an image of Liverpool where popular and “multi-ethnic” cultures have equal status to European “high” art.

Performing the Cosmopolitan City

Liverpool's ECOC programme effectively combined both a major cultural festival and cultural mega event, which involved a vast programme of activity, totalling around “7,000 cultural events, activities and projects... attended by over 15 million people” and thus making it “one of the most extensive ECOC programmes to date” (ECOTEC 2009:65). In considering music, specifically, the Liverpool ECOC programme featured an impressive range of musical activities, underpinned by the desire to feature a nuanced range of international, national and local artists with a strong focus on community access and participation via, for instance, the Creative Community Programme:

The Creative Communities Programme is crucial in making sure that the promise of “inclusive community participation” which helped win the bid is now fully delivered.... The Culture Company is committed to building community enthusiasm, creativity and participation in 2008. (LCC 2008:11)

Under the banner “community inclusion” also featured multicultural festivals like Africa Oyé and the Arabic Arts Festival. For instance, Africa Oyé is the largest African music festival in the UK featuring international bands and musicians from the African continent and diaspora. Beginning in 1992 as a series of small gigs in the city centre, the event grew steadily, moving to its present Sefton Park location in 2002 to cope with rising audience numbers: The 2007 event attracted an audience of over 40,000 people, which was expected to be exceeded in 2008. As a result, LCC chose to feature Africa Oyé in the bid and accompanying promotional film that won the ECOC title:

... I think it was about 2003 we [Africa Oyé] were told that Liverpool was gonna be bidding for the Capital of Culture, and that Africa Oyé would kind of be at the forefront of that, you know. We were featured in the bid video, you know, as one of the jewels in the crown of the city. (Paul Duhaney; interview transcript available in Andersson 2011:107-12; reprinted with permission)

Meanwhile, the four-day Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival was grouped into the Creative Community Programme and promoted as follows:

This annual festival of Arabic culture features dance, art, music and more. Performers come from Liverpool's own Arabic population, regional communities and from abroad. The largest event of its kind in the UK, the Arabic Arts Festival has a truly international profile. The festival also extends to outreach work with schools via workshop events. Direct beneficiaries include Liverpool's own Arabic community and those further afield. (LCC 2008:34-5)

Yet Liverpool's inclusive cosmopolitan identity during 2008 became not only defined in terms of ethnicity, but also in regards to class, which was achieved by actively involving "white" communities from less affluent working class areas across the city. Noteworthy here is the Rightful Owners of the Song project, led by Liverpool-based musician Jonathan Raisin and supported for the Liverpool Commissions strand, which brought together a small number of Liverpool's pub and karaoke singers to perform a one-off concert of pub classics with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra providing the backing music. The combination of working class and "high art" is noteworthy, as it reflects EU rhetoric and agendas to promote both the canons of "high" European art and other forms of "popular" culture (Lähdesmäki 2009). Indeed, whilst some forms of difference in the city were not deemed commodifiable or acceptable for inclusion in the new city brand, the staging of white working class culture in the Philharmonic Hall served to turn it into exactly that acceptable commodity for its marketing imagery:

The event will be a spectacular one-off performance bringing together two significant music cultures within the city.... "The Rightful Owners of the Song" seeks to acknowledge and celebrate "working" culture. Working class. A manual labour tradition.... To place this economically impoverished musical culture in relation to the incredible richness of resources available to a Symphony orchestra offers the possibility of exposing and bridging such cultural "rifts". In this sense, the project is a reflection on the processes of "dereliction" and "regeneration". (Project Synopsis, provided to author, 2008)

Stereotyping the Cosmopolitan City

So far, I have argued that the brand Liverpool under the theme The World in One City was actively constructed and promoted as a *positive* signifier of the city's cosmopolitan identity. The official narrative thereby condensed Liverpool's 800-year history into an easily promotable image:

Take a closer look! Almost eight centuries have been [?] the diversity of peoples, influences and unique culture that make Liverpool the place it is today and the place it will be tomorrow. (Cathy Tyson, River Media 2002)

However, images in the official Liverpool 08 programme often featured orientalist representations of people of Indian, Arabic or African descent, whilst slogans like "wondrously diverse" and "melting pot" used in the backgrounds of most promotional materials romanticized and celebrated difference and otherness, and sought to stage and museumize Liverpool's diverse cultural heritage.

Thus the agendas adopted by the city created an official culture that reinforced authenticity, difference and otherness in the depictions and representations of these groups. For example, in regards to Liverpool's Arabic community, the city chose to mediate *local* Yemeni culture that is

“traditional” and in some way “other” in contrast to modern life in Liverpool, rather than to emphasise modern popular culture, as represented by the Algerian *rai*-singer and superstar Khaled (Marcel Khalife) who performed in the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in July 2008. Whilst Khaled’s performance was regarded amongst many local Arabs to be the highlight of the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival that year, the concert was not mentioned in any of the official Liverpool 08 promotional materials (except a negligible inclusion in the festival programme), which reinforces the ways in which Liverpool’s Arabic community became associated with otherness that is defined in terms of the “local”, the “past” and the authentic Other.

Meanwhile, other promotional materials similarly tended to emphasise Orientalist representations of Arabic culture, here via depictions of a female belly dancer accompanied by a traditional *daf*-player, which clearly reinforce prejudiced Orientalist views of gender roles in the Arabic Middle East. That Orientalism played a role in the city’s official representations of the Arabic community is also controversial, as belly dancing and other performances like, for instance, the “Middle Eastern Dance Bonanza” held on 17 July 2008 were strongly scorned by the local Arabic community and even boycotted, for example when a large group of Arabic families left the contemporary dance performance “Shifting Sands”, held in the Bluecoat on 18 July 2008, as it featured scantily dressed female dancers.

This strategic performance of cosmopolitanism where pluralism and difference were turned into a spectacle for consumption through “museumizing” culture clearly involved the representation of dancers and musicians in sexualised and exoticised clothing and accessories, which signified affiliation to another, different music culture and thereby reinforced ideas of authenticity, tradition and the exotic other, as the musicians and dancers who looked “right” resembled the same origin as the music culture depicted, at least in the eyes of Western/European audiences.

Representations of African diasporic culture in official promotional materials surrounding Liverpool ECOC also projected a concern with “simple” or “old” cultures, signified by images of half-dressed dark-skinned people playing African drums made from natural resources, prejudiced portrayals of African music culture that reaffirm Orientalist concepts of African musics to be traditional, not modern, and thus authentic.

In all of the above examples, Liverpool’s cosmopolitan identity was mediated via an emphasis on ethnicity, yet a kind of inclusive cosmopolitanism was also evoked in regards to class through mediating representations of “Scouse” identity and the social stereotyping of Scousers. For instance, in the marketing film, the inclusion of Liverpool comedian actor Ricky Tomlinson during a short, satirical “intermission” (accompanied by merry-go-round-type music) that briefly breaks up the film’s serious focus on Liverpool’s art, museum and music scenes serves to reference the local working classes and Scouse humour and convey “an inclusive, ‘democratizing’ message that all Liverpudlians, irrespective of class, educational background, or communication skills, have a stake in the Capital of Culture enterprise” (Roberts 2010:205). Such representations indeed help to create and sustain the image of Scousers as friendly and naturally funny (Boland 2008).

Stereotypical representations of Scousers also crossed the age and gender divide, even though these seemed underpinned by stereotypical views of Scouse “lads and wags” as being “a bit thick”, further accentuated by associations with the peculiar Scouse accent. For instance, former Big Brother celebrity Craig Phillips is depicted in the marketing film unable to communicate the phrase “Good luck to Liverpool for Capital of Culture”, whilst the three members of Atomic Kitten are seen in “girly” attire and pose and slightly orange-tinted skin tone (associated with working class girls in cities like Liverpool and New Castle) shouting to the camera: “.... We would just like to say big big

shout out for Capital of Culture. See you later!” [followed by a high-pitched Ooooooh and frantic waving].

Cosmopolitanism in the Post-Industrial City

Liverpool’s new city brand was not exclusively defined by its cosmopolitan identity. For instance, the narrative of the marketing film also emphasises an image of Liverpool as a place and space for postmodern consumption and lifestyle, where cosmopolitanism becomes entangled in complex and problematic ways:

Vibrant street culture and fashion, unrivalled nightlife and Cream, its very own super-brand, coupled with an amazing choice of retail, hotel, bar, music and entertainment venues make Liverpool a super-charged cosmopolitan cultural capital. (Cathy Tyson, River Media 2002)

In this melange of street and shop signs, famous music venues and global brand logos, the act of consumption and lifestyle is foregrounded as the preeminent marker of Liverpool’s urban renaissance, epitomised by the Liverpool One development, one of the largest retail developments in Europe. The mediation, packaging and selling of brand Liverpool as a place and space of consumption reflects the culture economy approach to urban development where culture becomes a crucial resource in the post-industrial economy of deindustrialising cities, as is reflected in the use of cultural heritage in the development policies of the European Union more widely.

It is specifically within the context of neo-liberal and entrepreneurial urbanisms, which often ground ideas of cosmopolitanism in the rebranding of the post-industrial city, that Liverpool ECOC must be placed, and this has consequences for dealing with difference. For instance, while some neo-liberal interpretations (including the writers of the ECOC bid) may dream of the ideal Liver-/Cosmopolis, there is evidence to suggest that neo-liberal and entrepreneurial policy territorialises difference and normalises “acceptable” and “unacceptable” others, and thereby reinforces the binary opposition between self and other informed by the contested politics of class, race and gender.

A remodelling and reimagining of the post-industrial city may thus lead to exclusion, marginalisation and disempowerment of certain individuals and groups of people, where the middle-class gentrified lifestyles exist “in a bubble”, and otherness is valued “as a kind of social wallpaper” (Young, Diep and Drabble 2006:1690-91), and where some “local inhabitants may end up feeling that they are part of an extravagant ‘show’ being staged primarily for the benefit of tourists” (Richards 2000:179). In the context of Liverpool ECOC, the narrative spun around slogans like “Liverpool as a city of contrast”, “Liverpool, city of many faces”, “a myriad of cultures” and “The World in One City”, alongside representations of difference and otherness as outlined here, would indeed support such criticisms.

Conclusion

The European Capital of Culture event is firmly rooted within the current age of city marketing and rebranding so as to attract the mobile postmodern consumer and harness cultural tourists. Such event-led cultural and economic policies by the European Union are marked by a more economic view of cultural policy aimed at economic growth and the attraction of inward investment.

In the case of Liverpool, official agendas were underpinned by neo-Kantian ethical universalism and humanitarian values with an emphasis on community access and participation, and celebrations of cultural diversity and inclusivity. In doing so, the official promotional materials indeed served to rebrand Liverpool as an inclusive festive city representative of neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism—a carnivalesque utopia—that framed culture in more socially-directed ways.

Yet official place branding initiatives via media and promotional strategies are “highly selective and sanitised to satiate external audiences” (Boland 2008:366-7) and often lead to stereotyped representations of places that construct and reinforce a certain acceptable image of the city. In other words, place rebranding can lead to oversimplification and stereotyping of places, produce sameness, and reflect what powerful groups imagine and construct as the acceptable image of the city, most notably affecting those groups and areas in the city that are regarded as “exotic” (e.g., multicultural) and white working class.

The rebranding of Liverpool as a cosmopolitan festival city may thus be scorned as nothing more than providing the official gloss in the city’s role as ECOC in promoting a “sloppy feel-good rhetoric of melting-pot harmony” (Keith 2005:8). Romanticised virtues of a civil society and community mobilisation, as mediated in Liverpool ECOC, deliberately distract away from actual injustices and fail to reflect the full realities of life in the city, with much of the official narrative mediating brand Liverpool as a place and space for hyper-consumption and touristic spectacle. Thus even while some critics suggest that “the rhetoric of social inclusion is not necessarily at odds with a liberal economic development agenda” (Griffiths 2006:428), it appears that post-industrial cosmopolitanism—and, with it, the neo-liberal illusion of equal access—poses serious concerns about the uneven nature of post-industrial capitalist development.

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