

German Society for Popular Music Studies e. V.

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<https://gfpm-samples.de/index.php/samples/issue/archive>

Volume 22 (2024) – Version of 17 October 2024

Group Analysis Special – Guest Editors Ralf von Appen, Samantha Bennett, André Doehring and Dietrich Helms

## SAMPLES' GROUP ANALYSIS SPECIAL EDITORIAL

»Habent sua fata libelli«—books have their fates. The famous phrase from Terentianus' poem is typically applied to what happens to texts after publication. However, it is also relevant to their production, particularly for this special section of Samples. Its history began in 2015 when 24 young and brilliant scholars from eight countries and three continents gathered at the University of Osnabrück for a one-week summer school on »Methods of Popular Music Analysis,« hosted by the German Society for Popular Music Studies and generously sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation. A central element of the summer school's schedule was the task to write and present an interpretation of a given song in groups of four or five. During the week, eight established scholars gave inspiring talks and discussed their ideas with the participants: Samantha Bennett, Mark Butler, Walter Everett, Dai Griffiths, Allan Moore, and the organisers of the event, the three male guest editors of this section.

For many participants, the biggest challenge of the week was not analysing a song but doing so in a group of people whose approaches, ideas, and experiences were as diverse as their places of birth and education. Most had learned to understand analysis as a solitary struggle with the musical text, aiming to uncover the »true core« of the piece—whatever that may be—and striving for an objectively or at least intersubjectively true »understanding« of the music in question. Few had experienced the need to discuss and defend their ideas before they were documented. Students' analyses receive a grade and perhaps a comment from the lecturer, while texts by advanced scholars are published and sometimes even cited. But all this occurs after the interpretation—i.e. the process of translating music into words driven by questions—is completed. For some participants, facing other peo-

ple's ideas while trying to make sense of a song felt like battling on two fronts: they had to struggle not only with the music but also with three or four different views on the song. Who was to define what is »true«?

Our five groups found five different ways to tackle the situation. Some developed hierarchical structures, with the most experienced English native speakers taking the lead. Others practiced more egalitarian communication, trying to do justice to every member's ideas. Some found ways to avoid conflicts, such as assigning parts of the analysis to individual members, while others discussed everything at length. (For a more extensive analysis of these processes, see André Doehring's article in this section.) At the end of the week, the groups presented their results. They were then asked to write down their findings for publication—a task made even more demanding because all discussions had to be carried out via email or video conferencing software.

Some groups hinted at their discussions in their texts, while others did not. However, they all worked with the traditional idea that the outcome of an analysis or interpretation should be a homogenous argument that claims to be the »true« meaning or at least the best and most convincing approach among all possible alternatives. No group considered making their discussions a topic, displaying the ambiguities and richness of possible meanings in their songs as a feasible and practical goal. Even we, the organisers and lecturers of the summer school, were uncertain about how to manage the polyphony of thoughts and ideas in a group analysis. Our original concept for publishing the summer school's results contained various interesting ideas, none of which proved fully satisfactory when we tried them out. What remained was the significant experience that every participant and lecturer gained during the summer school: there is more than one compelling and »true« way to »understand« a piece of music, and our idea of »truth« may only be a question of authority.

While we were revising the texts for publication, history demonstrated how true this experience was: movements like Black Lives Matter and #Me-Too, to name only the most prominent, made us realise that there is more than one view of the world (and the music in it) and that what was once considered a search for truth and understanding in academia was simultaneously a hegemonic process suppressing views of people with lesser social power. When the summer school took place in 2015, the shock waves of recent events and movements were already perceptible, but they only reached our discipline after some time. It only dawned on us, participants and lecturers, that we should discuss what it meant to analyse the music of black musicians or whether songs by female musicians should be considered

differently—or not. For some US scholars, Heinrich Schenker was still the acknowledged authority for an established method of analysis, whereas Germans had been made aware of his nationalistic and racist views through Martin Eybl's publications, but with fewer consequences for music theory, as his methods are hardly taught on the European continent.

Besides teaching and exchanging hands-on methods of popular music analysis, a second aim of our summer school was to develop a new social form of making (academic) sense of music, an approach based on the idea of allowing for more democratic and equal ways of analysis. Although by 2015 we had already worked on the experiences of an earlier summer school held in Osnabrück in 2011, we were still far from a rounded, practicable methodology. We learned a lot from the experiences of the participants, who provided valuable feedback in interviews and diaries they wrote during their time in Osnabrück. There are many reasons why it took us nine years to publish the summer school's results: biographical, institutional, and epistemic. One significant reason was that we needed time to process our experiences with group work and to understand the group dynamic processes we observed. André Doehring evaluated the material we collected during the summer school, developed our ideas further, tested them in other projects, and now presents an innovative and mature method of musical group analysis in this special section.

This section can be read in two different ways: as a collection of song interpretations or as a study in group analysis with a theoretical introduction and five examples. The collection is perfectly completed by Allan Moore's essay on his understanding of »understanding music« through analysis. Moore supports our experiences from the summer school and argues for analysis as an invitation to empathetic listening. As an alternative to analysis as translation, he proposes understanding »understanding music« as a holistic process in which a song is perceived in its actual social context and the listener gets completely absorbed in it, becoming part of the music.

The lengthy publication process means that a few recent publications are not considered in our texts. Not every statement in every essay would have been written the same way today. Every analysis, every interpretation, even those by the greatest authorities, is a child of its time and place. It is the result of the perception, knowledge, and experience of its author(s) at a particular point in history. This collection is, according to Moore, an invitation to listen to five songs through the ears of 24 international scholars who met in a northern German city in 2015 and to retrace the social processes that shaped their impressions.

Before publication, we asked all authors for their consent. We reached all but one participant, and all reacted positively. One group took the opportunity to make a mild revision of their text. The others gave their consent on the condition that we refer to the time of origin of their texts.

We would like to thank all the authors for their hard work, brilliant ideas, and patience.

Samantha Bennett, Ralf von Appen, André Doehring, Dietrich Helms  
Canberra, Vienna, Graz, and Osnabrück in fall 2024