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Men, masculinity and The Beatles. By Martin King. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. 218 pp. ISBN 978-1-409-42243-3

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Abstract

This article presents a review of the book "Men, Masculinity and the Beatles" by Martin King.

Keywords

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that he gets \$40 per review compared to the money the multinational artist he is reviewing receives. Therefore his term 'mattering', which is used as an apt chapter heading for the final chunk of the text, implores us to really question what the role of a critic is. This crescendo of thought culminates with a polemic of music criticism possibility as Powers so eloquently concludes:

To live in a world that cares about music and culture, that creates musical citizens, demands that we are loud and clear in those beliefs. It also requires being proud of what criticism does well – that is, that we champion its ability to start conversations, catalyse interest in music and produce knowledge. A robust critical sphere is good for all of us less because it has mass appeal than because it is representative of the salience of music in American culture. And that matters. (p. 136)

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***Men, Masculinity and The Beatles.* By Martin King. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. 218 pp. ISBN 978-1-409-42243-3
 doi:10.1017/S0261143014000129**

Martin King's *Men, Masculinity and the Beatles* is a cultural history of the Beatles, which foregrounds their role in/as representations of men and masculinities in the four principal action films which feature them, namely, *A Hard Day's Night*, *Help!*, *Magical Mystery Tour* and *Let It Be*. The book is, King writes, an analysis of the social construction of Beatle-ness. Following Laura Mulvey's phrasing, King argues that these films are texts through which the to-be-looked-at-ness of the Beatles can be studied. Consideration of these films as evidence of the trajectory of the Beatles through the 1960s, and thereby also as a record of the 1960s, is intended to enable the reader to 'explore the idea of the Beatles as a representation of resistant masculinities' (p. 83).

The book is divided into nine chapters, which sequentially present a rationale for the work, an account of the 1960s as a period of social change and how the Beatles figure in that, an excursion through some of the literature about masculinities, and another on representation and film. The films by order of production are covered in the following four chapters, and King concludes with some reflections on the Beatles as representatives of an alternative English masculinity.

Evidently, this endeavour entails situating the Beatles in terms of a wide range of phenomena relevant to a grasp of their significance. Such phenomena include: 'the Establishment', 'white heat' and 'you never had it so good'; the mass audience for TV, relations between the BBC and ITV (and the BBC and Mary Whitehouse); James Bond; Sir Alan Sugar; *Playboy*; *Loaded* and metrosexuality. At times it is hard to tell what should be left in and out of this story and why – whether the risk of covering such a wide range of material is some rather broad brushstrokes: too much of too little of everything. It is not until about 60 pages in that sufficient space has been cleared for King to actually start engaging the subject in earnest – 87 pages if we want to get straight to the analysis of the films. The book, however, is of great value as an overview or primer of some of the events and preoccupations

of the 1960s and the role the Beatles played through this period. It is also of value as a means of reflecting particularly on the relations between masculinity and class at that time.

The core of the argument is the idea that the Beatles in these films present a kind of gender fluidity or gender ambivalence in their performance of masculinity (pp. 62–4). King acknowledges that this is also not consistent across their oeuvre, and that it is not consistent with their interpersonal relationships. He suggests, noting the role played by their manager, Brian Epstein, that their evident ease assuming ‘feminised’ discursive positions or positions as the subjects of erotic gazes, was part of their early appeal, and that their relationships with the female players later in the Beatles drama (particularly Yoko Ono and Linda Eastman) are also significant.

Unfortunately, King’s grasp of the history of the period and of the Beatles’ role in it, and his insight into the nature and themes of their representation in these films – notably in juxtaposition with the other masculinities presented in them – is not matched with an attempt to develop the concepts around gender and representation mobilised in the text. This has some critical consequences, in that the implications of what ‘resistant masculinities’ might be or do or how they are to be read are not really satisfactorily worked through. King nods variously – and approvingly – at Gramsci, Foucault and Hall for ideas around the role of representation, and at Ehrenreich, Segal, Brittan and Connell for ideas around masculinities, stating that he is using a ‘tool box’ approach to theory (p. 73).

One implication of this approach is that the reader can’t be certain as to whether the Beatles are acting as a barometer of some sort, or as a catalyst, or as something else. Relations between representation and practice are not really considered. This is somewhat disorientating considering the care King has given to attending to the implications of economic development for men in the 1960s, the acknowledgement that experiments in gender representation leave little unchanged where they do not effect material gender relations as practised themselves (p. 49), and the acknowledgement that readings of cultural products by particular individuals at the site of consumption can rather muddy the water for ‘culturalist’ approaches (p. 51).

Another, and perhaps more problematic implication, is an underdeveloped account of the politics of the Beatles’ ‘resistant’ performance of masculinity. We learn that the ‘pot at The Palace’ incident (where the Beatles did or did not smoke in a bathroom at Buckingham Palace) is a challenge to masculinism (rather than a confirmation of it), but we do not learn why this is so (p. 41). In the chapter on *Magical Mystery Tour*, King argues that psychedelia is ‘about’ childhood and nostalgia for it, and as such is opposed to bureaucracy, and opposed to the values of masculinism. Two steps in the argument are omitted: demonstrating that psychedelia is not masculinist (as one might argue, for example, with respect to the hallucinogenic frontier-conquering of the likes of Kesey or Leary), and demonstrating that bureaucracy is.

This has political ramifications. In the conclusion, King approvingly cites Ralph Waldo Emerson: ‘Who so would be a man should be a non-conformist’, thereby inadvertently acknowledging the ‘masculinism’ of resistance, which is to say, the fact that the notion of resistance is itself gendered (p. 153). There is an anecdote about Kurt Cobain wearing a dress as a teenager, in part so as to force a confrontation: he would be beaten up by the jocks at school for this. King does not address the possibility that there are limitations, as well as affordances, to this particularly masculine sort of gender-political strategy.

Furthermore, this is inflected in a particular way by the themes of upward mobility, of the Beatles as 'men of ideas' and young working-class men 'going places', and the Beatles as a precursor to metrosexual masculinity. Situating the Beatles with respect to the likes of 1950s austerity, Hefner's *Playboy* and the jet set fantasy of James Bond tends to accentuate – rather than interrogate – the notion that freedom or mobility within a gender order and resistance in or to masculinity are made most evident through more, more extensive and better developed consumption practices. Some readers may take issue with this. King's central intention is to argue that the 'feminised and narcissistic appearance' of the Beatles (p. 115) essentially foreshadows or presages discourses or models of masculinity that later become ubiquitous, an example of which is the 'new man'. However, if 'resistant masculinity' is a phrase to use in this context, its precise meaning and the relations between its two terms need to be attended to.

The Beatles are iconic symbols of the 1960s, and particularly of changing masculinities in that era and well beyond. How they played this role, and how it was presented in film, is not really well addressed elsewhere. Despite its backgrounding of some key conceptual questions, *Men, Masculinities and the Beatles* is a good starting point for anyone with an interest in the role played by popular musicians in the 1960s in British popular culture, and a valuable contribution to the growing literature on the Beatles, particularly where their films are concerned.

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Live from Dar es Salaam: Popular Music and Tanzania's Music Economy. By Alex Perullo. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011. 459 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-35605-5

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During Ali Hasssan Mwinyi's presidency (1985–1995), Tanzania moved from a policy of socialism to one of neo-liberalism. Independent radio stations and newspapers were created, and foreign goods became accessible, including high-tech music equipment and music recordings and magazines. The impact on Tanzania's music industry was profound, transforming traditionally accepted roles of both musician and listener. Alex Perullo's *Live from Dar es Salaam: Popular Music and Tanzania's Music Economy* takes on the challenge of examining Tanzania's popular music in the context of that country's shift toward capitalism. The book offers insights into the multi-sided challenges of neoliberal globalisation, and opens new avenues for thinking about the often-imbalanced demands neoliberal globalisation places on African musicians.

A particular strength of this book is its promotion of music entrepreneurship as a multiple category, whose different forms, explored through Perullo's detailed ethnography, include education, radio broadcasting, recording and distribution. By framing entrepreneurship through these distinct practices, Perullo tackles the social, cultural and economic factors behind music entrepreneurship, and emphasises the shifting roles culture and creativity play in Tanzania's economy.

Live from Dar es Salaam opens with a historical outline of Tanzanian music, addressing the broader influences politics and economics have had on music making