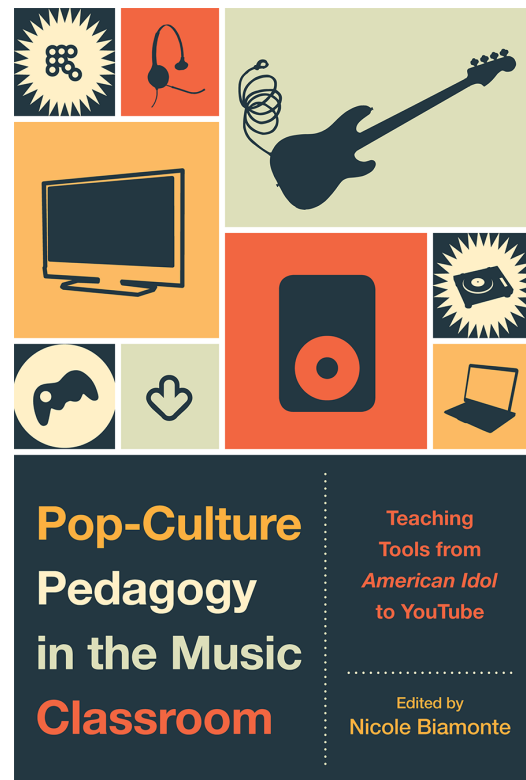**Nicole Biamonte, ed.** *Pop-Culture Pedagogy in the Music Classroom: Teaching Tools from* American Idol *to YouTube.* **Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2011. 344 pages. $90.00.**
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The cover of this stimulating collection says a great deal about its aims and the extent to which it departs from most college music pedagogy texts. Iconic species of popular music technology appear in silhouette, including natives (bass guitar and turntable), hybrids (laptop and iPod), and what some might regard as invasives: a large flat-panel TV, a gaming headset/microphone, and a Sony PlayStation controller. As the cover implies, the essays in this collection address pop music from the 1930s to today, with a heavy emphasis on the roles of technology and the media, although they make little mention of online teaching, a subject that looks to become more and more important in years to come. While the collection is directed more toward music theory than music history, it provides a wealth of ideas for

Cover image of *Pop-Culture Pedagogy in the Music Classroom* is used with the permission of Scarecrow Press.

making history classes more interactive, relevant, and engaging for today's students.

One of the strengths of the collection is the diversity of its authors and their subjects. Among the twenty contributors, seven are identified as music theorists, three as musicologists, three as ethnomusicologists, and three as music educators. Four other contributors represent the fields of music composition, mathematics, sociology, and cultural studies. The editor makes no attempt to define or delimit "popular music" or "popular culture," and the contributors address a wide range of mostly American and British pop, rock, R&B, and rap from the 1960s to today, with one chapter on world music and occasional references to a jazz standard or a folk tune elsewhere in the collection. Throughout, the emphasis is on teaching methods that could work with a number of different popular genres. Each essay includes endnotes and a bibliography, and an extensive index makes it possible to find individual artists, songs, or musical concepts.

The sixteen essays are divided into three sections. The first two sections, "General Tools" and "Teaching Musicianship and Music Theory," lean towards the practical side of music teaching. Many of the contributors argue that studying pop music can add arrows to a student's musical quiver. Since pop musicians rarely employ musical notation, pop music is a natural resource not just for ear training, but also for aural skills that are seldom taught in academia, such as analyzing the sound of recordings. Benjamin Bierman asks both majors and non-majors to map out where each instrument or voice resides in the stereo mix and to create their own simple mixes using readily available software and tracks. Lamenting the fact that most theory curricula "develop the ability to respond to visual cues in a score" (p. 109) more thoroughly than they develop listening skills, Keith Salley proposes that students learn to analyze the form of pop standards aurally. He believes this will prepare students to understand "the more complex formal relationships in Western art music" (pp. 111–12).

Several essays reflect critically on the use of pop-culture technologies for teaching. YouTube has become a classroom staple, and Hope Munro Smith gives sage advice on getting the most from it, especially for world music courses. She acknowledges such problems as copyright issues, distracting ads, videos crashing or failing to load, and the temptation to rely too much on videos for teaching. Her solutions include customizing a YouTube channel for class to hide extraneous material and downloading videos in advance. Of course in the time that has elapsed since Smith wrote this essay, many of us have learned far too much about YouTube, and a book may not be the ideal medium for an essay on the practical use of popular technology. Still, some technologies are surprisingly persistent: both Nancy Rosenberg and Karen Snell praise turntablism as a way for students to practice the skills of beat and

pitch matching, to improvise, and to study myriad popular styles to search out beats and hooks.

Two other technologies that have outlived their fifteen minutes of fame are Guitar Hero/Rock Band and Dance Dance Revolution (DDR). Given their obvious appeal to students, they receive critical attention here as pedagogical tools. Nicole Biamonte sees the simplified notational schemes for pitch, rhythm, and form in these musical games as de facto analyses that can inspire classroom discussion and further analysis. In the DDR study, Brent Auerbach, Bret Aarden, and Mathonwy Bostock asked whether several DDR sessions would increase rhythmic sight-reading performance. They found a very small (and not statistically significant) increase over the control group, leading them to conclude that DDR training may not be that helpful. Rather than practicing the drums on Rock Band, I like Rosenberg's suggestion that students practice pop-music rhythms on a drum set. Even better: in the secondary methods class for music education at my institution, students form a rock band using actual instruments, an activity that seems far more challenging and musically enriching than playing Guitar Hero.

Four essays at the heart of the volume address the integration of popular music into the music theory curriculum. These chapters are full of concrete suggestions for teaching theory with pop-music examples; particularly helpful are the lists of songs that illustrate rhythms, harmonic progressions, and other elements. To avoid the problem of pop-music examples becoming stale or out-dated, Rosenberg asks students to find their own examples of specific concepts. This thread runs through several of the essays in the collection, since ideally web technology should enable a richer conversation among students and instructors.

For music historians, the most interesting section of the book may be "Part III: Teaching Music Analysis and Criticism." These essays model ways to approach such phenomena as *American Idol*, cover songs and videos, mashups, and rap in the classroom. While some might disdain *American Idol*, James A. Grymes built a course around its 2005 spring season, using the show to teach his students to be informed, aware critics who consider everything from pitch accuracy to vocal expression, song selection, and stage presence. Cover versions of songs provide a rich vein for analysis and comparison, and Victoria Malawey, Lori Burns, Tamar Dubuc, and Marc Lafrance outline methods to focus student attention on the material differences between versions, such as tempo, the delivery of the lyric, the musical arrangement, and the shots chosen for the video. A slight disappointment here is that the authors withhold their conclusions about these comparisons, perhaps in order to keep the focus on the pedagogical method. Ali Colleen Neff's "Crunkology: Teaching the Southern Hip-Hop Aesthetic" describes a course based on her ethnographic research on hip-hop in the Mississippi Delta. Like Grymes's essay, this chapter provides a model for how to engage students in the rich complexity of popular

music cultures. The essay also includes a helpful annotated bibliography of sources on rap.

One thing the book does *not* include is a consideration of the role of pop culture in the college music curriculum. While it is hopefully no longer necessary to apologize for bringing the Beatles, Big Boi, or Beyoncé into the classroom, pop music (jazz excepted) still has only a tenuous foothold in college and university music departments, most of which remain committed to the classical tradition. Whether pop music should become an adjunct to that tradition, or even begin to replace it, would be an important subject for these contributors to consider. Those already committed to integrating pop culture into the classroom will find plenty of encouragement in this book.