

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Liverpool
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 35 – Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
<b>Title of case study:</b> <i>The Beat Goes On: Popular Music in Museums</i>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This case study describes how collaboration with museums enabled research conducted and directed by Sara Cohen and Marion Leonard of the Institute of Popular Music (IPM) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulate tourism and the regional economy and enhance the quality of the tourist experience</li> <li>• Enrich public understanding of, and engagement with, popular music history and heritage, and the experience of museum visitors</li> <li>• Influence how popular music is preserved, conserved and presented within museums</li> <li>• Expand knowledge of museum collections and curatorial approaches to popular music</li> <li>• Develop the practice of museum professionals</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The underpinning research relates to <i>The Beat Goes On</i> (TBGO), the first major exhibition to explore the popular music history of Merseyside, and was undertaken in three consecutive phases:</p> <p>Phase 1: Involved pioneering research on the relationship between music and place that was drawn upon for TBGO and conducted previously by IPM staff. Research undertaken and led by <b>Cohen</b> (then Research Fellow) on popular music in 20th-century Liverpool life (1991-94) produced a deeper understanding of the city's popular music past that went beyond the conventional and narrow focus on the Beatles, showing how music was related to a broad range of music genres and diverse cultures and identities, histories and heritages, including ethnic identity and histories of immigration. Cohen's subsequent research (as Lecturer) used Liverpool as a case study to enhance understanding of how music influences and is influenced by urban decline and renewal (2007). It was carried out over a ten year period through a series of projects, including those on tourism and the music industries. Meanwhile <b>Leonard</b> (then Lecturer) undertook research on Irish traditional music in Liverpool and Coventry (2005), and research on gender and the music industry (2007) that highlighted the under-representation of women within music histories.</p> <p>This research provided a basis for three exhibitions developed in partnership with National Museums Liverpool (NML), and without such a strong research foundation the historical depth and critical insights of these exhibitions would have been significantly reduced. The first, <i>Harmonious Relations</i> (co-curated by Cohen), explored music and family life on Merseyside (Merseyside Museum of Labour History, 1994). The second, <i>Talking Traditions</i> (curated by Leonard) explored Irish music and dance in Liverpool and Coventry (Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, 2000; Museum of Liverpool Life, 2002). The third, TBGO, was a major exhibition exploring the popular music history of Merseyside. Staged as part of Liverpool's 2008 Capital of Culture programme it ran for 15 months at the World Museum Liverpool (12/8/08-1/11/09).</p> <p>Phase 2: Involved substantial new research undertaken specifically for TBGO. Cohen (then Senior Lecturer and IPM Director) and Leonard played a central role in the initial planning stages and joined the NML steering committee in 2005. From 2006-2008 Leonard was seconded full-time to NML as Lead Curator, directing not only the development of the exhibition and its content but also new, impact-driven research conducted with the NML curatorial team. This research involved establishing the key exhibition 'messages'; undertaking oral histories; identifying materials within museum, record company and library collections; shaping how the materials were presented to the public; and sourcing, selecting, and interpreting over 900 loaned objects and a further 400 objects from NML collections. The research provided new perspectives on creative practice and production, identified hidden music histories, critiqued dominant historical narratives and deepened understanding of the relationship between music and place. Cohen directed research informing two specific exhibition outputs that took 12 months to complete. One was <i>The Beat Goes Online</i>, a 250-page online resource designed to accompany the exhibition and produced by a team of IPM staff, students and fellows. Edited by Cohen and Leonard, the resource is permanently hosted on the NML website. The other was <i>Mapping the Beat</i>, an interactive touch-screen installation enabling users to access six digital maps featuring contemporary and historical sites of music-</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

making in Liverpool and Merseyside. The maps were created by Cohen and **Lashua** (Research Assistant) as part of a project on music and urban landscape funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, 2007-9), and based on research that revealed music's contribution to the character of place within a context of urban change. Research undertaken for the exhibition by Cohen, Lashua, Leonard and **Strachan** (Lecturer) provided a basis for six chapters of an edited book produced in association with NML (Leonard and Strachan, 2010) and additional publications (e.g. Cohen, 2012; Leonard, 2007, 2010).

Phase 3: Involved subsequent research on museum practice that TBGO inspired. The exhibition provided a platform for further regional and international projects on popular music heritage, place and identity directed by Cohen and referred to in REF5, but it was Leonard's AHRC-funded project *Collecting and Curating Popular Music Histories* (CCPMH, 2010-11) that continued the museums collaboration. Assisted by **Knifton**, Leonard produced the first detailed research on popular music collections and exhibitions within UK museums, exploring collecting practices and policies, museum interpretation and curatorship, and the communication of music histories. Outputs included articles on music, museums and material culture (e.g. Leonard, 2013), and an exhibition, *Mixcase: Music Memory Traces*, focusing on the value of material popular music culture and staged at Liverpool's Victoria Gallery and Museum (VG&M, 22/8/11-15/2/12).

### 3. References to the research

Websites: [The Beat Goes On](#) and [The Beat Goes Online](#)

Publications (\* indicates items submitted for REF or RAE2008):

- \*Cohen, S. 2012. 'Live Music and Urban Landscape: Mapping the Beat in Liverpool', *Social Semiotics*, 22 (5), pp. 587-603. (Peer-reviewed journal).
- Leonard, M. 2010. 'Exhibiting Popular Music: Museum Audiences, Inclusion and Social History', *Journal of New Music Research*, 39 (2), pp. 171-181. (Peer-reviewed journal).
- Leonard, M. and R. Strachan (eds). 2010. *The Beat Goes On: Liverpool, Popular Music and the Changing City*, Liverpool University Press.
- \*Leonard, M. 2007. 'Constructing Histories through Material Culture: Popular Music, Museums and Collecting', *Popular Music History*, 2(2) pp.147-167. (Peer-reviewed journal).
- \*Cohen, S. 2007. *Decline, Renewal and the City in Popular Music Culture: Beyond the Beatles*. Ashgate. (68 citations listed on Google Scholar).
- \*Leonard, M. 2007. *Gender in the Music Industry*. Ashgate. (80 citations, Google Scholar).

Grants: The research has been supported by the Landscape and Environment and Beyond Text programmes of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Cohen, 2007-09, £174k; Leonard, 2010-11, £128k); the Leverhulme Trust (Cohen and Horn, 1991-94, £128k); and the Cultural Dynamics programme of the Humanities in the European Research Area (Cohen, 2010-13, £225k).

### 4. Details of the impact

Through collaboration with museums the research conducted at Liverpool:

- i. Contributed to tourism growth, economy and experience

*The Beat Goes On* (TBGO) **attracted 478,188 visitors**. Using data on the profile of visitors to the museum, together with visitor spend figures supplied by the Mersey Partnership Digest of Merseyside Tourism, NML calculates that these visitors **contributed £22,255,060 to the local economy** (corroborating source a). The extensive research at Phase 1 enabled a richly layered exhibition allowing visitors to access different levels of detail and depth, and information on a broad range of music styles and histories. Indicators of **the quality of the exhibition** included favourable press reviews and radio coverage, recommendations by national newspapers such as the *Independent on Sunday* and *Daily Telegraph*, and a short film for *The Guardian* website (corroborating source b). The exhibition was shortlisted for the '**Tourism Experience of the Year**' award in the Mersey Partnership Annual Tourism Awards 2010; and was voted by the public as their favourite NML exhibition of 2008 (corroborating source c), and by *Daily Post* readers as their favourite large venue exhibition of 2009 (corroborating source d).

- ii. Enriched public understanding, engagement and experience

## Impact case study (REF3b)

Dissemination of the underpinning research (through object displays, text panels, images, commissioned films, gallery puzzles, computer interactives, and audio recordings) **stimulated public engagement with music heritage**. For example, the *Mapping the Beat* installation based on Phase 2 research enabled visitors to explore music's contribution to local character by clicking on and through sites featured on digital maps of the city to reveal layers of related materials (written narratives, archival images, and excerpts from interviews, songs and live performance). The exhibition content, design and approach **attracted new visitors** to the museum, particularly teenagers (often a lost audience to museums). The NML Annual Report 2009-2010 notes, 'Visitors learnt about the remarkable achievements of Merseyside artists from across the years ...The exhibition proved to be very popular, especially with 13 -18 year olds' (corroborating source e). *The Beat Goes Online*, a resource designed to support the exhibition and produce a lasting legacy, **extended possibilities for learning beyond museum visitors** and has had 130,700 page views since its launch in August 2008.

The research underpinning TBGO **enhanced the cultural experience of museum visitors** by stimulating memories, providing an educational and enjoyable experience, and encouraging awareness of and pride in local cultural heritage. A 2009 NML exhibition evaluation report (corroborating source f) based on interviews with 203 museum visitors, revealed that for 70% of them the exhibition brought back memories, 98% found the exhibition text engaging and easy to understand, and 83% felt they had **learnt something new**. This is also evidenced by remarks on comment cards (corroborating source g), such as: 'This exhibition is fantastic I could spend hours reliving my childhood & teenage years here' (58 year-old woman from Sleaford, Lincolnshire); 'Today I learned just how much influence Liverpool has on musical history' (15 year-old girl from Liverpool); 'This has been an educational experience' (21 year-old man from London). Subsequent (Phase 3) research by Leonard and Knifton underpinned additional public engagement events. They included the *Mixcase* exhibition (VG&M, 2011; **23,417 visitors**); and workshops organised in partnership with NML (April 2011): one on popular music objects and memory; and one at Merseyside Maritime Museum involving guest speakers, theatrical performance and the handling of museum objects. A 72 year-old woman participating in the latter wrote on a comment card, 'Liverpool has a great "track record" of music which should keep our heritage alive. Music enriches our lives'.

iii. Influenced how museums preserve, conserve and present popular music heritage

Cohen and Leonard influenced NML's decision to depart from initial plans for a chronological approach to TBGO and develop an alternative approach underpinned by a substantial body of (Phase 1) IPM research, and based around various themes, including musicianship, sounds of the city, and music sites and scenes. Leonard's research on gender provides just one example of how that **research informed museum practice**, enabling NML to exhibit material related to local female performers, and present new histories of women's experience in the music industry, histories included in the TBGO book produced in association with NML. Meanwhile (Phase 2) research undertaken for the exhibition resulted in the **accessioning of objects and oral histories into NML's permanent collection**. It also enabled NML to explore and test innovative approaches to display, including the museum's first use of digital cultural mapping and an online resource as a public interface. Moreover, NML used TBGO as **a pilot for the new Museum of Liverpool** being built on Liverpool's waterfront. Most of the TBGO curatorial team were simultaneously developing displays for that museum and the **content and approaches of TBGO were adapted and adopted** for one of its central galleries. Since opening in July 2011 the museum has won numerous awards and attracted over two million visits (corroborating source h).

iv. Expanded knowledge of museum collections and approaches to popular music

Subsequent (Phase 3) research by Leonard and Knifton involved working directly with museum-practitioners to **expand awareness and influence approaches to the collection, care and curation of popular music** and related materials. They presented and discussed this research with museum professionals from Malaga and NML; with UK artists and curators at the National Conservation Centre seminar 'Music in Action' (13/8/10); with curators and a museum director at the Museum Association conference (6/10/10); and through a front-page and feature article in *Museums Journal* (1/03/11). They also organised a British Library symposium (5/7/11) for museum

## Impact case study (REF3b)

directors, curators, librarians, archivists, collectors and scholars, which generated **exchange of information about current practice**, and **established a network of professionals** engaged in collecting and curating popular music materials. Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive, with practitioners welcoming the opportunity to connect with and learn from others (corroborating source i). One curator stated that he would work 'on incorporating music in future book and exhibition projects', while another wrote that the event provided an 'invaluable look at issues surrounding music and museums' and he intended to apply what he had learned.

## v. Developed the Practice of Museum Professionals

Research (Phase 2) led by Leonard during her secondment to NML (2006-2008) contributed to the **personal and professional development of museum staff**. As head of the TBGO curatorial team she provided expert knowledge based on IPM (Phase 1) research which informed the exhibition approach, content and interpretation of materials. An Assistant Curator who Leonard mentored states that 'as a direct result of this experience' she secured the role of Curator of Special Exhibitions at another museum, and was 'provided with the theoretical and practical framework essential for delivering quality projects and success in the role' (corroborating source j). Leonard and Knifton's subsequent (Phase 3) research (2010-11) **influenced curatorial practice**. Developed in partnership with the V&A and NML and with support from the British Library and the British Music Experience, it informed the practice of V&A curators at a time when they were revising the museum's rock and pop collecting policy. Leonard and Knifton also advised on the development of popular music exhibitions, including the major *Home of Metal* exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (2011) where one of the curators commented that their advice had '**informed the approach and development of the exhibition**' (corroborating source k). Leonard and Knifton co-organised a study day for gallery and museum studies postgraduates from north-west England (Merseyside Maritime Museum, June 2011), and their research also informed Leonard's teaching of cultural management students in Kufstein, Austria (July 2011). Thus our research is also now contributing to **the professional development of the next generation of curators** by increasing their knowledge and capacity for working with popular culture materials.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- a) Administrative staff at NML have provided a statement to corroborate visitor figures and calculation of the economic impact of *The Beat Goes On* exhibition.
- b) [Liverpool: The Beat Goes On](#), Short film, *The Guardian* (available since 26 Sept. 2009), featuring footage of the exhibition, as well as comments from the presenter and a museum visitor verifying that it enriched public understanding, engagement and experience.
- c) [National Museums Liverpool Blog](#) (2 January 2009), *Your Favourite Exhibition Was...*, verifies that TBGO was voted by the public as their favourite NML exhibition of 2008.
- d) Davis, Laura (2009), '[Daily Post Arts Awards Unveiled](#)', *Daily Post* article (23 Dec., p.14) verifying that *Daily Post* readers voted TBGO as their favourite large exhibition of 2009.
- e) [National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside Annual Report and Accounts 2009-2010](#), The Stationery Office: London. This report corroborates the claim that TBGO contributed to learning, attracted new museum visitors, and was especially popular with 13-18 year olds.
- f) [The Beat Goes On Evaluation Research Report \(National Museums Liverpool, 2009\)](#), verifies that museum visitors were engaged and felt they had learned something new.
- g) [Remarks left on comment cards by visitors](#) to *The Beat Goes On*, 2008-2009, verifying that the exhibition enhanced their cultural experience.
- h) Corroborating statement from Director of the Museum of Liverpool (NML) which verifies the benefit of IPM research for the TBGO exhibition, and the fact that the exhibition research informed subsequent permanent and temporary displays within the Museum of Liverpool.
- i) [Feedback from museum professionals](#) at the British Library Symposium verifying that the research enabled them to connect with and learn from others.
- j) Corroborating statement from Director of Strategic Partnerships (The Landing) who was mentored by Leonard when working as Assistant Curator on TBGO, verifying that the research contributed to her continuing personal and professional development.
- k) Corroborating statement from the Creative Director of Capsule, a Lead Curator of *Home of Metal*, verifying that the research informed the approach and development of this exhibition.