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Is marketing music really any different to marketing shampoo? Isn’t the simple application of “mainstream” or “classical” marketing theory sufficient to fully understand music marketing and realize its potential? Music, Markets and Consumption methodically answers these questions by surveying the marketing, consumer, media, music and cultural studies literatures. It draws the convincing conclusion that music is indeed different.

The book focuses on exchange relationships where music is the focus of the exchange. It is structured into four sections. The first section provides an overview of classical marketing and how it is customarily applied to music. The second surveys the traditional supply side of the exchange relationship, including the musician’s perspective and the framing of music as a “product.” The final two sections, one of which is devoted to live music and festivals, look at the perspectives of consumers, fans and audience members.

The authors indicate that the book is intended for academics, practitioners and students of music marketing. There is no question the book will hold value for researchers, teachers and students. In terms of practising marketers, it does summarize research in areas of potential interest, such as the implications that arise from heightened consumer power and involvement through social media. Yet practitioners should understand that the book provides little guidance on the development of music marketing plans (which is not one of the authors’ objectives). Also, there is only cursory treatment of topics that often hold great interest for practitioners, such as marketing segmentation models. The final health warning is that the language is jargonistic in places, targeted more to cultural theorists than to practitioners (e.g., “the producer of a text makes a paradigmatic selection of discursive resources prior to their syntagmatic combination”; p. 127). There is, however, an impressive balance in terms of the diversity of musical genres covered, and an even-handed weighting between non-profit and commercial contexts.

A key strength of the book is that it surveys theories that enhance, broaden, challenge and complicate mainstream marketing approaches to music. The painstaking scholarship that has gone into its preparation should be applauded as a welcome gift to the discipline. Potential weaknesses arise by virtue of the vast scope and infancy of the enterprise. In a dynamic industry where practitioners may be nervous about relying on 12-month-old data, it is disconcerting to occasionally see 20-year-old research being used to substantiate contemporary issues (e.g., p. 49). In a book focused on academic research, this problem is clearly less the fault of the authors than an indication of how thin the research is in some areas.

The project is certainly worth rolling into further editions, so the following comments are intended more as suggestions than as criticisms. In discussing the “Ps” of music marketing in their book Music Marketing, PR and Image Making (Rosebery, Australia: Wise, 2006), Mark Beard and Ben O’Hara include “Partners” in the mix. This makes a great deal of sense given the extent to which promotional partnerships feature in contemporary music marketing plans (e.g., sponsorship and endorsement agreements that include cross-promotion, formal media partnerships where some degree of exclusivity is traded for increased media profile, and cross-promotional partnerships between likeminded organizations).

Given the academic focus of the project, it would have been great to see an acknowledgement of Stephen Brown’s attacks on the mainstream marketing establishment. Brown is invisible in this book, yet his focus on problems with conventional marketing theory as applied to arts and entertainment has been an important theme in his work, and highly influential.

The authors readily acknowledge that no new theory of music marketing emerges from this work, but the book does address a gap in the market, by drawing together a large number of disparate studies of relevance to music, markets and
consumption. Presenting this mountaintop survey is where the book makes its most important contribution. Music is different, and the research supporting this contention is succinctly summarized in O’Reilly, Larsen and Kubacki’s volume.

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