

Ancient World, Modern Music: Receptions of Antiquity Across Popular Musical Genres

In recent years, classical reception studies have begun expanding well beyond their more traditional topics, such as literature, opera, and film, into various other forms of popular media and culture, such as television shows, video games, and certain genres of contemporary music. In addition to Richard Thomas' work on Bob Dylan (2017), research into popular music's engagement with antiquity has so far been most fruitful in the study of heavy metal, with the publication of several articles, book chapters, and the edited volume *Classical Antiquity in Heavy Metal Music* (Fletcher & Umurhan 2019). This volume, demand for which has prompted the release of a paperback edition in 2021, originated with the panel "Heavy Metal Classics" held at the CAMWS annual meeting at Baylor University in 2014. Increasing scholarly attention to heavy metal's classical reception has been sustained by an evident interest in the subject, and it is therefore likely that potential interest also exists in receptions of antiquity by myriad other genres of popular music. The time is right to highlight and critically examine the relationships of artists working in these other genres to the history and cultures of the ancient world, not simply as a curiosity, but as an important way that these subjects are made meaningful in the real world outside of academia.

The objectives of this panel are twofold. The first is to establish that not only is classical influence present and even pervasive in a broad and diverse range of modern musical genres, but also that such interfacing with antiquity can be much more profound than mere superficial references. By exploring how these earnest forms of reception come to life in numerous artists' lyrical, musical, and visual concepts, we can better appreciate how themes from antiquity can

speak to musicians and fans on a personal and emotional level, as well as how popular music can be a powerful medium through which such themes can speak to and inform understandings of contemporary events and sociopolitical issues. Popular music, moreover, is a significant context in which artists and consumers belonging to identities traditionally marginalized in Classics, such as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and non-Western/global majority people, can offer fresh perspectives on, and readings of, topics from antiquity. The second objective, while recognizing the uniqueness of individual artists and the idiosyncrasies of particular genres and subgenres of popular music, is to foster dialogue across genres, musicians, and fanbases, and to coordinate collaboration between scholars and fans of these various artists, in order to help establish popular music as a fertile subfield of classical reception studies.

To accomplish these objectives, the proposed panel will cover a range of artists that features a stylistic variety of musical genres (e.g. pop, industrial, and indie rock), a demographic diversity of musicians (e.g. women and East Asians), multiple degrees of specificity (e.g. from individual songs to entire discographies), a mixture of classical topics adapted by these artists (e.g. the cult of Dionysus, the rise and fall of Rome, and the myth of Orpheus), and a range of themes addressed (e.g. Black queer resistance, Fate, and Jungian concepts of identity). Furthermore, the included papers tackle different forms of reception, not only looking at direct reference and adaptation, but also taking more comparative approaches. While the American, Korean, and Irish artists represented herein have international appeal, the panel focuses on those that are particularly popular in North America (e.g. Taylor Swift and BTS), and therefore most familiar to a North American audience such as the majority in attendance at a typical CAMWS meeting.

Music is an essential component of contemporary popular culture and exploring how popular music receives antiquity can give scholars valuable knowledge of not only how antiquity informs the producers and products of popular culture, but also how such things can inform academic approaches to antiquity, including in the classroom. T. H. M. Gellar-Goad has recently demonstrated how pop music can be successfully used comparatively to teach and critically discuss Greek and Roman erotic poetry (2018). A body of academic literature and public scholarship on the direct or comparative connections between the cultures in antiquity and the sounds in the headphones of everyday people would be a valuable resource for making Classics more accessible, engaging, and recognizably valuable to both students and the general public.

Works Cited

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- Thomas, R. F. 2017. *Why Bob Dylan Matters*. New York: Day Street Books