

## The 'labour intensive' job of making music

We tend to underestimate the importance of pop music in our lives. In some ways, it is the ultimate form of disposable culture. . It goes in one ear and out the other. What's hot on the charts today may be passe a year from now.

Never fear, music lovers. Pop matters to some people. I'm not talking about those obsessive geeks who can tell you exactly the last time Kitty's Back was performed at a Springsteen concert. Nor am I talking about drug-addled Deadheads who aimlessly recite obscure '70s set lists (try googling "5/8/77").

I'm talking about academics — people who write postgraduate papers titled *Egalitarianism And The Division Of Labour In The Songwriting Of Sloan*. Or my current favourite: *Issues of Fandom, Identity And Industry With The 'Quirky' Swing, Jazz, Alternative, Klezmer, Delta Blues, Calypso, Gypsy Jazz Band Called The Squirrel Nut Zippers*.

A small but devout group of university professors has dedicated their lives to the mysteries of pop. They measure the commercial viability of the DIY punk scene in east L.A., and find out why critics are so mean to Madonna.

And they're descending on Hamilton this week to share their discoveries and vent their passions. More than 80 academics from Canada, the United States and Great Britain are attending the annual meeting of the Canadian chapter of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPA-Canada, for short), which runs Thursday through Sunday at the Sheraton Hotel.

The theme of the conference is Music And Labour, which may seem a tad boring until you start to think about it. Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, The Strawbs, Billy Bragg, Bruce Springsteen, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. How about Hamilton's Arkells and their hit *The Boss Is Coming*. Don't forget Johnny Paycheck's magnificent *Take This Job And Shove It*.

But there's more to it than that.

"Making music is a form of labour, it's very labour intensive," says Susan Fast, a McMaster University professor of English and cultural studies who is organizing the conference with her colleague Christina Baade.

"Why are certain musicians' labour recognized and others not," adds Fast, an amateur clarinetist who has published scholarly works on Led Zeppelin, U2, Tina Turner, Michael Jackson and Medieval madrigals. "Phil Spector, for example, got a lot of credit for the girl group music of the '60s, but the girls, whose vocal labour went into making that music, got less."

More than 30 panel discussions and presentations will be made over four days on varying topics within the conference theme. Keynote speaker Jacqueline Warwick, of Dalhousie University, will talk on "musical prodigies and child labour," a topic that could stretch from Shirley Temple to Michael Jackson and Britney Spears.

Fast and Baade are eager to show off the Hamilton scene to their out-of-town colleagues. They've arranged for a mini-art crawl Friday night along James North that will end up at rock bar This Ain't Hollywood. On Saturday the professors will party at Homegrown Hamilton with local hip hop group Canadian Winter.

There's also a panel discussion on Friday at 4:30 p.m. at the Sheraton Ballroom East on the state of the industry in Hamilton, featuring Mark Milne of Sonic Unyon Records, CFMU radio host Jamie Smith, Casey Mecija of the band Ohbijou and yours truly of The Hamilton Spectator.

Most sessions are open to the public. For a complete conference guide visit [iaspmca2013.iaspm.ca](http://iaspmca2013.iaspm.ca).

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Johnny Paycheck's *Take This Job And Shove It* is a natural tie-in to this week's Music and Labour Conference.