NORTH WEST CONSORTIUM DOCTORAL TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

Standard Application form for students applying for a +2 or +3 studentship in the Arts and Humanities

(September 2019 entry)

1. Studentship applied for (please tick):

☐ +2 (PhD - current students)
☒ +3 (PhD)

2. Institution in which you have been offered a place/or have applied to:

☐ Lancaster University ☒ University of Liverpool ☐ University of Manchester
☐ Manchester Metropolitan University ☐ Keele University ☐ University of Salford
☐ Royal Northern College of Music

3. Candidate's details:

Name:	
Application / Registration number:	
Address:	
Town:	
Postcode:	
Country:	United Kingdom
Telephone:	
Email address:	
Nationality/Resident Status:	☒ UK National ☐ UK Settled status ☐ EU National not resident in the UK ☐ EU National resident in the UK for the past three years ☐ Other

4. Project details:

Award Type	☒ a. Full award	☐ b. Fees only

Mode of Attendance	☒ a. Full time	☐ b. Part time

Pathway:	Music
Institution:	University of Liverpool

Project title (+2/+3):	The persistence of the underground in dance music scenes

5. PhD Proposal (to be completed by all students):

5a) Please provide between 6 and 10 keywords that describe your research

electronic-dance-music	cultural-planning
underground-music	Techno-music
ethnography	House-music
subcultures	gentrification
ageing	

5b) Please describe the proposed research using up to 1,500 words, referring to the guidance. Include a word count.

Rationale

Numerous texts on the emergence of electronic dance music in the late 1980s document its non-commercial origins (Reynolds, 1999; Bainbridge, 2014). Recent books focus on dance music's mainstream popularity and associated economy, especially in the USA where it has been culturally rebranded as EDM (Matos, 2016; Collin, 2018). However, there has been little music scholarship investigating the ongoing prevalence of deliberately marginal 'underground' dance scenes, which would reject association with the initials 'EDM'. Revealingly, despite widespread use of the term 'underground', it is scarcely defined in either popular or academic literature. Furthermore, underground dance music is also not a concept that can be clearly delineated as a distinct musical genre. Both mainstream and underground dance music's compositional processes, improvisational forms, and sonic qualities are remarkably similar (Butler, 2014). However, whilst the same actor roles are at play in both, the usage and expectations of musical experience appear to differ for participants. The proposed research aims to contribute a fresh perspective to the body of knowledge on dance music cultures through a case study of a particular city's underground scene and derive an understanding of what the 'underground' is.

Dance music has historically been framed as predominately a youth culture activity. However, evidence suggests that participation in dance music is increasingly multi-generational in nature (Anderson-Rich, 2017). Whilst the wider theme of 'music and ageing' receives increased academic scrutiny (Jennings and Gardner, 2012; Bennett, 2013), work focused exclusively on dance music is absent from such research. This thesis aims to build on

previous studies and address this gap by analysing the participation of older dance music crowds. It will examine whether the cross-generational appeal of underground dance goes beyond nostalgia; if subcultural identification is a relevant concept for ageing participants; and to what extent older dancers, DJs and promoters significantly contribute to the persistence of an 'underground', as they continue their activities well into and beyond their 40's.

Studying a particular UK city's scene aims to provide a focused, in-depth account of events, relationships and social processes evident in that locale. Liverpool, a city characterised by its distinctive identity, has attempted a transformation from industrial roots into an economy of creative culture. Since 2008's European Capital of Culture year, the city has experienced significant infrastructural investment; municipal establishment of a dedicated Cultural Quarter; and was awarded UNESCO Music City status in 2015. This decade represents a fascinating timespan in which to frame the research, as entrepreneurs have established spaces for an underground dance music scene to emerge, operating outside of the traditional city centre. The tensions between less-commercial venues and mainstream clubs reflect patterns seen in cities across the world seeking to simultaneously promote cultural innovation and foster economic growth. Scenarios unfolding in Liverpool, as corporate bodies seek to establish accommodation developments in geographies deemed as hip, parallel gentrification tendencies seemingly inherent in urban regeneration projects. Consequently, this study's scope will reveal informative and valuable findings, not only for scholars but also for stakeholders in music policy and cultural planning, on how underground music scenes impact on urban culture and night-time economies.

Questions
1. Using Liverpool's ongoing resurgence of non-mainstream parties and club nights as a case study, what can be revealed about the notion that an 'underground' is inherent and persistent within electronic dance music?
2. What can the motivations and participation of older members of dance music scenes reveal to further an understanding of ageing and musical identity?
3. What tensions are at play between the 'underground' and the mainstream, as promoters navigate the issues of delivering an authentic 'underground experience' within the constraints of managing contested urban spaces?

Literature Review

Whilst rich in anecdotal histories, the narratives in popular writings on house and techno follow paths towards increased popularity, neglecting non-mainstream cultures. Academic ethnographic research tracing club music's pre-commercial origins in the USA (Rietveld, 1998; Fikentscher, 2000) cite its sonic and social genetic lineage from underground disco (Lawrence, 2003). However, despite their rigorous critical analysis, these studies have now aged and reveal little as to why some scenes remain or re-emerge, as distinctively 'underground'. This field remains largely unexplored, compounded by the absence of a comprehensive term definition of 'underground' in popular music studies literature. Graham (2012) has attempted to provide a general model distinguishing 'underground' characteristics, and Wiltsher (2016) claims authenticity and subcultural activity distinguishes the 'genuine' from the mainstream. Building on these theoretical frames of reference, this thesis aims to identify meaning for the term 'underground' through in-depth analysis of participant's perspectives.

Subcultural identification amongst contemporary clubbing scenes' diverse audiences is inherently complex,

perhaps more so than earlier ethnographic music studies (Cohen, 1991), as the singularities of marginalisation: age, fashion or class are now heterogeneous (Hebdige, 2005). Dance events tend no longer be exclusively 'youth phenomena', with increasing involvement of middle-aged dancers maintaining their connection to significant music and experiences established in their youth (Bennett, 2013). The research will investigate differing hierarchies of experience and quantities of subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) within dance scenes' stratified age groups. Dance music's sonic qualities also provide a rich vein of inquiry in this regard (Butler, 2006). Despite technological advances, dance styles have aged well, with remarkable consistency in terms of rhythmic pattern and timbres. Consequently, DJ mixes become 'age-eclectic' as they blend tracks across a range of eras and subgenres. There emerges a sense in which both the music, and the participants, are engaged with a youthful attitude, irrespective of their actual age (Hodkinson, 2013).

Liverpool's music scenes have received substantial academic scrutiny, though invariably dominant discourses dwell upon the legacies of white male pop and indie bands such as 'The Beatles' or the post-punk era (Du Noyer, 2007; Leonard and Strachan, 2010). Alternative musical subcultures are often ignored (Lashua et al., 2009; Brocken and Scott, 2010). The city's dance music history, though not neglected, is dominated by super-club Cream's mid 90's heyday. This study would fill a gap by examining the resurgent 'underground' thriving in the Creative Quarter's once disused warehouses which now provides the city a fresh cultural kudos (Naylor, 2016). However, this area's renaissance has invariably attracted property developers seeking to capitalise on the 'trendy aura', leading to tensions between the conflicted priorities and vested interests of venues, promoters, councils and developers. The real prospect of gentrification looms with an associated creative exodus as witnessed in other cities across the globe (Stahl, 2009; Florida, 2017; Hickley, 2018). Consequently, investigating Liverpool's 'underground' scene now is timely as the formative subcultural actors remain active and available to be studied. It is anticipated that the findings will provide a basis for the development of further theories towards understanding the significant states of torsion facing creative cultural cities and music policy stakeholders internationally (Homan et al., 2016).

Methodology and Timeframe

A case study framework facilitates a holistic approach, allowing a variety of data sources and a combination of methods. Particular emphasis will be placed on obtaining primary ethnographic data in the form of participant's personal histories and empirical field observations. Semi-structured interviews will be arranged with promoters, venues, DJs, artists and clubbers. Recent contributions to clubbing field-research data collection will be of particular relevance (Gadir, 2013; Lars Nørr, 2013). To derive meanings from the dataset, grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) would be applied to identify patterns, similarities and divergences (Charmaz, 2014) through the use of coding actions and assumptions against transcriptions.

Year One

Research design and obtaining ethical approval; a thorough review of the literature; and collation of contemporary and historical extra-musical representations of the city's dance culture, such as radio stations, club nights, social media groups, and online magazines.

Year Two:

Ethnographic data collection and assimilation leading towards analysis and identification of core themes. In anticipation of the unexpected, contingency planning will allow for follow up interviews. Latterly designs for the initial drafting will commence.

Year Three:

The final year will be concentrated on writing up the findings with supervision and guidance, towards a final draft of the PhD paper.

Select References

Bainbridge, L. 2014. *Acid House: The True Story*, London, Omnibus Press.

Bennett, A. 2013. *Music, Style, and Aging,* London, Temple University Press.

Butler, M. J. 2006. *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Cohen, S. 1991. *Rock culture in Liverpool,* Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Collin, M. 2018. *Rave On: Global Adventures in Electronic Dance Music*, London, Profile Books.

Du Noyer, P. 2007. *Liverpool Wondrous Place: from the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, London, Virgin.

Fikentscher, K. 2000. *"You better work!": Underground Dance Music in New York City*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press.

Florida, R. 2016. *Winner-Take-All Urbanism*, Brown Journal of World Affairs, 23, 103-118.

Graham, S. 2012. *Sounds of the underground,* New York, University of Michigan Press.

Leonard, M. & Strachan, R. 2010. *The Beat Goes On: Liverpool, Popular Music and the Changing City*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Rietveld, H. C. 1998. *This is our house: house music, cultural spaces, and technologies*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

Thornton, S. 1995. *Club cultures: music, media and subcultural capital*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Word count: 1,499

5c) Please provide information on how the proposed research and postgraduate training will contribute to your career development

If successful, a doctorate would represent an opportunity for me to pursue a career in music focused lecturing within higher education, or as a music researcher. I would therefore seek to maximise any teaching opportunities available to PhD students, and would additionally aim to submit articles for publication in journals; attend conferences; and actively engage and collaborate with other academics.

I am aware of the stiff competition for academic jobs as lecturer or post-doc research associate. I would therefore keep other options open and recognise that the range of transferable skills I would acquire would benefit me in an array of potential further careers. These skills would include enhancing my ability to analyse complex data sets; to organise and deliver clear presentations of extensive information in a range of formats; in conjunction with communication, negotiation and diplomacy skills broadened through ethnographic field work.

6. Qualifications:

Year awarded	Qualification type	Qualification Subject	Awarding institution	Level	Class
2018	Masters Degree	Music Industry Studies	University of Liverpool	MA	Distinction
Description:					

7. Relevant Experience:

Description of relevant experience:	I bring to this proposed research a combination of academic qualification, in the form of my MA degree and a range of experience directly relevant to the area of prospected study. My motivation stems from a desire to apply the proven ethnographic study skills gained through my MA dissertation to investigate why 'underground' dance scenes re-emerge to reinvigorate a locale's urban nightlife. I found the MA course thoroughly rewarding and through my coursework grades and feedback from lecturers I recognised that I have strengths in academic research. This was evidenced with me graduating with a distinction. Wishing to undertake further research to a greater depth, I am applying to study a PhD, confident that I am capable of continuing to contribute academic research to a high standard. I am a long-time resident of Liverpool; an aging participant with many contacts in the 'underground' dance scene; and one with a fresh drive for undertaking ethnographic research. As such I feel I am in a unique position in which to study this question. Furthermore, I have been both a producer of 'underground' techno (Discogs, 2018) and a participant in dance music scenes since 1992. As an artist I have released over 25 vinyl records since the 1990's and also contributed to the running of club night in London. Since the emergence of YouTube and the subsequent availability of my music online, a resurgence of interest has enabled a number of new releases and a

series of performances at 'underground' parties in Berlin. In addition, I featured heavily in a recent cinematically released art documentary film which traces the relation between underground techno, political activism, and the celebration of marginality (Hinant and Lohlé, 2017). These experiences and historical points of reference have provided me with a wealth of contacts within underground dance scenes across a range of locales and eras.

Bibliography

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8. Supervision

Please propose up to 3 prospective supervisors for your PhD:

Institution	Supervisor
University of Liverpool	
University of Liverpool	

9. Research Training previously undertaken

9a) Please give details of the Masters programme and research training undertaken previously:

Through studying modules 'Recorded Music Industry', 'Music Management', and 'Contracts' I gained advanced and critically discerning knowledge through extensive research into 'post-mp3' contemporary industry practices. I undertook detailed analysis of economic models surrounding music streaming and examined the implications 'platform' technologies may have for musicians, in terms of their time-management, independence and self-promotion. In studying 'Audiences' I gained appreciation for how audiences are changing; how they evolve, develop; and are nurtured. This complimented the 'Globalisation' module through which I gained an awareness of international music business and marketing operations, with considerable attention on emerging Asian markets, particularly South Korea and Japan. My dissertation topic was an ethnographic study of local musicians and their use of music platform services, asking 'What potential do they see in new technology platforms which offer money-making opportunities for aspiring recording artists?' In this research, I effectively positioned aspiring artists as start-up businesses who have an opportunity to utilise technical innovation to access new markets utilising a DIY approach.

During the Masters I was trained in use of the library, its search tools and bibliography management software. I

attended a lecture workshop on the importance of ethical research and how to conduct this. I also attended University training in the use of Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. I put all of this training to practical use throughout my Masters though particularly in my dissertation thesis.

9b) Relevance of Masters and other previous training to your PhD project (up to 100 words):

During my Masters I examined 'underground' music, as a term of distinction between 'the genuine' and the commercial. This highlighted that the concept of 'underground music' is an overlooked area of musical academia. This PhD project aims build on this earlier study to advance knowledge in this area.

My MA dissertation, researching local musician's attitudes and practices in Liverpool towards technology platforms, utilised semi-structured interviews and grounded theory for analysing findings. These are the same ethnographic research methods I intend to employ in the proposed thesis.

10. Research Training needs

10a) Please give details of the anticipated research training needed for your PhD project, including difficult language training:

Training which would enhance my researcher skills would include:

- Presentation skills - for lecturing / hosting seminars / conference delivery.
- Interview technique training / mentoring, especially for field interviews.
- Any advanced use of grounded theory methodologies / further in-depth Nvivo software training for finding analysis.

10b) Please give details of the kind of resources you will potentially need during your PhD. Please also indicate whether your research project will require you to undertake research abroad.

Access to EndNote software for literature review, and Nvivo software for transcription coding within a grounded theory framework.

It may be useful to visit Berlin for comparative purposes as I have a number of contacts who have been participants in underground techno scenes in that city for many years. Berlin, as a post-industrial city maximising its cultural offering shares many characteristics with Liverpool, and thus may highlight parallel themes. This is not however a primary line of research.

11. Collaboration with External Partners

11a) Is this or does it have the potential to be a collaborative PhD? If so, give the name of the partner organisation, describe the planned collaboration and what discussions you have so far had with the partner organisation. You must also attach a letter from the partner organisation indicating its support in principle.

N/A

11b) Please give details of any potential collaboration you may plan to develop with external organisations during your PhD programme (industry, cultural organisation, government bodies etc…), including possible placements.

N/A

12. Additional Applications

☐   Have you been nominated for or applied for any other studentship this year?

If yes, please provide details:

13. References / Transcripts

☐ Your institution will attach two references and your transcript(s) from your programme application to this application form once you have submitted it (However you may request separate references – please see guidance for details).

14. How did you hear about us?

Please let us know how you have heard about the NWCDTP and its studentships:

Through University of Liverpool Music Department staff and other PhD students.

15. Acknowledgement

I confirm that the information I have provided in this form is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge at this date. I fully understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the relevant forms are submitted to the relevant office in due time and that any missing information may render my application incomplete and ineligible. I authorise the North West Consortium DTP to disclose to the AHRC any information that is relevant to my application.

Signature: (Type Name if submitted electronically)	
Date:	05/02/2019