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# Crashing the Spectacle: A Forgotten History of Digital Sampling, Infringement, Copyright Liberation and the End of Recorded Music

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**CRASHING THE SPECTACLE: A FORGOTTEN  
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**Precis**

Copyright infringement, billboard ‘alteration’, an evil secret society known as the Illuminati, country music legend Tammy Wynette, the incineration of £1,000,000 in cash, and No Music Day. These odd, interconnected events were engineered by Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty, an anarchic British pop duo who used several pseudonyms: The Timelords, The Justified Ancients of Mu Mu, the JAMS, and the KLF. Between 1987 and 1992 they racked up seven U.K. top ten hits, even crossing over in America with the songs ‘3 A.M. Eternal’ and ‘Justified and Ancient’—the later of which went to number one in eighteen countries (Simpson, 2003: 199). Those super-cheesy singles are the main reason why this duo is remembered, if they are remembered at all—especially in the U.S.—as a novelty techno-pop act. (The hook ‘KLF is gonna rock ya!’, from ‘3 A.M. Eternal’, is wired directly into the synapses of millions.)

Their brief but ubiquitous popularity nicely obscured a radical and hilariously subversive critique of the culture industry—like a goofy Theodore Adorno whose *praxis* involved a drum machine. To this end, the KLF practiced an aggressive brand of creative plagiarism—otherwise known as sampling—that predated both Public Enemy’s early forays into the copyright debates (on 1988’s ‘Caught, Can I Get a Witness?’ Chuck D rapped, ‘Caught, now in court ‘cause I stole a beat/ This is a sampling sport...’) and Negativland’s impish copyright activism (which was prompted by a 1991 lawsuit for daring to sample and satirize rock superstars U2). The KLF’s debut album, 1987 (*What the Fuck’s Going On?*), made extensive and provocative use of samples from the Monkees, the Beatles, Whitney

Houston, and ABBA—with the album's liner notes claiming that the sounds were liberated 'from all copyright restrictions'.

In this respect, the KLF were pop music's first 'illegal art' ideologues, though they were loath to be pigeonholed as mere copyright criminals. 'As far as sampling is concerned', they wrote in one of their many 'KLF Communications Info Sheets', this one dated January 22, 1988, 'I'm sure we will continue doing it and from time to time get into trouble because of it, but it has always been only a part of the process of how we put our records together and not the reason for them existing' (KLF Communications, 1998). However, this didn't stop them from also firing off zingers like, 'Intellectual property laws were invented by lawyers and not artists' (Butler, 2003).

Drummond and Cauty were megastars compared to the relatively obscure sound collage collective Negativland—whose de facto spokesman Mark Hosler has observed, 'We've never had a hit single, but we had a hit lawsuit!'—as well as other sonic outlaws like John Oswald, whose 1989 *Plunderphonics* record drew the wrath of Michael Jackson's lawyers. Given the scope of the KLF's fame, it seems strange that relatively little known collage artists like Negativland have cast a much longer shadow on the history of sampling, sound collage, and other aural transgressions. Here, I want to counterbalance this absence.

In the process of reconstructing this largely-forgotten story, I also want to uncover another secret history: one that links these smart-alecky Brits to an underground of computer programmers, artists, so-called culture jammers, and other counterculture types who would later draw the battle lines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century copyright wars. While it is true that the KLF are by no means *the* central characters in this copy-fighting narrative, they nevertheless were the first to widely circulate critiques of copyright, authorship, and ownership to a broad audience. Along the way, they were interpolated into the *spectacle*, as Guy Debord called it, and then they ran for the hills—deleting their own music catalogue and, eventually, calling for an end to all recorded music.

### **The Illuminati et al. vs. the KLF, Hackers, and Tammy Wynette**

To be sure, the works of Vicki Bennett, John Oswald, Wobbly, Negativland, the Tape-beatles, and other sonic outlaws are more

willfully difficult than Drummond and Cauty's pop music transgressions. Nevertheless, the KLF could make an unholy noise, like they did on their 1987 single 'Whitney Joins the JAMS', in which they abducted the voice of pop diva Whitney Houston, forcing her to 'join' their group. (Fittingly, the word *plagiarism* is derived from the Latin term for 'kidnapping' [Rose, 1993: 39].) 'Oh Whitney, please please *please* join the JAMS', shouts Drummond over a hijacked *Mission: Impossible* theme song, a drum machine, and various other samples—adding, 'You saw our reviews, didn't ya?' Then, after more coaxing from Drummond, a snippet of Houston's 'I Wanna Dance With Somebody' finally breaks through the cacophonous collage (with a little help from their friend, the sampling machine). Delivering the song's punch line, Drummond exclaims, 'Ahhhhh, Whitney Houston joins the JAMS!'

A simulated, sampled collaboration with Whitney Houston is one thing, but one of the strangest musical events the KLF conjured up was their collaboration with country diva Tammy Wynette, who sang on the single 'Justified and Ancient'. This catchy, puzzling pop confection features Wynette uttering lines like, 'They're Justified and Ancient, and they drive an ice cream van', and telling listeners that we are 'all bound for Mu Mu Land'. (At the time of the collaboration, Wynette told a reporter, 'Mu Mu Land looks a lot more interesting than Tennessee, but I wouldn't want to live there' [Webb, 2000: 14].)

The Justified Ancients of Mu Mu, one of the KLF's many monikers, were key characters in the fantasy/science fiction/conspiracy cult novel *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, co-written by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. It wasn't just a passing cultural reference. This trilogy helped shape a cryptic cosmology that weaves its way through many of Drummond and Cauty's various pop projects. Embedded in the duo's lyrics are references to epic battles between the Illuminati and the revolutionary order of Mu Mu, among other things (though it is actually spelled 'Mummu' in the novel) (Wilson & Shea, 1984). Bill Drummond observes, 'Both secret societies have had a long history in fact and fiction and in the minds of conspiracy theorists everywhere' (Drummond, 2001: 231). In fact, as far back as 1976, Drummond was enlisted by British theatre iconoclast Ken Campbell to design and build the set for a twelve-hour theatrical adaptation of the *Illuminatus! Trilogy* (Drummond, 2001).

Hackers and budding copyright activists also embraced the trilogy's irreverence throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. *Illuminatus!*

appealed to those who actively resisted systems—social, technological, legal—that imposed restrictions on the way we can play with, remix, or ‘hack’, computer code, culture, and even so-called-reality. ‘The Justified Ancients of Mu Mu’, Drummond and Cauty write in one of their many ‘KLF Communications’ press releases, ‘are an organization (or disorganization) who are at least as old as the Illuminati. They represent the primeval power of Chaos’ (Young, 1994). (According to Shea and Wilson’s *Illuminatus! Trilogy*, the members of Mummum worshiped *Eris*, the Greek goddess of chaos—whose name translates into Latin as *Discordia*. More on that shortly.)

As for the Illuminati, a man named Adam Weishaupt founded this radical secret society on May 1, 1776, prompting the government of Upper Bavaria to ban it, along with the troublesome Freemasons. That much has been historically documented, but it quickly becomes more muddled and confusing—depending on how far down the conspiracy theory wormhole you have fallen. According to some, George Washington and the other figureheads of the American Revolution were part of the Illuminati, which was supposedly behind both the American and French Revolutions, not to mention every other major world event since the eighteenth century. Drummond and Cauty convincingly argued that the reason why major record labels churned out such bad music was because these big companies are Illuminati fronts (which is one reason why the KLF operated their own independent label).

In a möbius-like twist, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* stole a large chunk of its mythology from a prank-religion named Discordianism, whose congregation also included the KLF. Discordianism was essentially a joke that emerged from the 1960s countercultural underground, and its irreverence had a certain appeal for the nascent hacker movement of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as other budding copyfighters. The late Robert Anton Wilson, co-author of *Illuminatus!*, was also something of a hero to many hackers. There are references to Wilson scattered through many iterations of the Jargon File, a glossary of hacker slang that has been maintained and updated online since 1975. Discordianism inspired another joke religion, the Church of the Subgenius, which had ties to Negativland (Subgenius Church founder Reverend Ivan Stang appeared on the group’s 1987 masterpiece *Escape from Noise*, for instance). The Jargon File, whose contents were eventually published in a book edited by Eric Raymond titled *The New Hacker’s Dictionary*, also contains several

references to the Church of the Subgenius, Discordianism, and other related topics (Raymond, 1996).

Even though Drummond and Cauty operated on a higher commercial plane than artists like Negativland, they shared many characteristics, including a love of conceptual hijinks—such as what happened after the KLF sampled ABBA's 'Dancing Queen' on their first album. After the Swedish group took exception to having their music 'liberated', the diabolical duo took a trip to ABBA's homeland at the end of 1987. As one story goes, the KLF burned copies of their own record while standing in front of the group's Polar Music business offices—all while a prostitute dressed as one of the women in ABBA received a fake gold album inscribed 'For sales in excess of zero'. Jim Cauty explained, 'We knew that nobody would see us, we just thought that if it goes to court and it looks like we've done everything we can to put our side of the story, it'd look better for us. It worked in the end cos they decided to drop the damages charge as long as we didn't carry on making the LP' (Smith, 1987). Cauty left open the question of why he thought record burnings and prostitutes dressed as ABBA would help their cause.

In another provocation, when the legal threats against their 1987 album began flying, KLF quickly released—almost as if the whole affair was planned from the beginning, which it probably was—an edited version of this copyright infringing album. The edited version of 1987 deleted or truncated all offending samples and included instructions for how consumers could re-create the original version of 1987 by using old records: 'If you follow the instructions below you will, after some practice, be able to simulate the sound of our original record. To do this you will need 3 wired-up record decks, a pile of selected discs, one t.v. set and a video machine loaded with a cassette of edited highlights of last weeks "Top of the Pops"' (Frith, 1993: 5). Today, with home computers making cheap editing technologies widely available, it is possible to follow their instructions with relative ease; but in the 1980s it wasn't a feasible option, which only made the joke funnier.

One of their sample-heavy singles from this time—'All You Need Is Love', released under the name the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu—was an overtly political comment on media coverage of the 1980s AIDS epidemic. Much like Negativland did on *Escape from Noise*, and Public Enemy did on 1990's *Fear of a Black Planet*, the KLF mixed together news coverage with samples from popular music to make social statements. In the song, Drummond raps, 'With this

killer virus who needs war?/ Immanentize the eschaton/ I said shag shag shag some more', which translates roughly from Discordianism and British colloquial slang as, 'With AIDS, who needs war/ bring the Armageddon/ fuck fuck fuck some more!' In the case of 'All You Need Is Love', they swiped sounds from the Beatles (you can guess which song they sampled), proto-punks the MC5 (known best for their song 'Kick Out the Jams', which the KLF sampled several times), and lesser known acts like 1980s dance-pop has-been Samantha Fox. Nominally a hip-hop record—primarily because of the drum machines, samples, and Drummond's thick-accented rhyming—this single is more like a punk version of hip-hop, as Drummond later put it.

Discussing the single in their 'KLF Communications' newsletter, they mentioned their 'illegal but effective use of graffiti on billboards and public buildings. This was done in a way where the original meaning of the advert would be totally subverted' (KLF Communications, 1990). Drummond and Cauty were referring to the fact that, in 1987, they altered highly visible billboards featuring Greater Manchester Police Chief Constable James Anderton, who infamously blamed gays for AIDS. (Anderton was quoted as saying, 'I see increasing evidence of people swirling about in a human cesspit of their own making. ... We must ask why homosexuals freely engage in sodomy and other obnoxious practices, knowing the dangers involved'.) The billboard's original slogan read 'Halo Halo Halo' over which the KLF wrote 'Shag Shag Shag' next to a picture of the Chief Constable, all of which was used as the cover artwork of their 'All You Need Is Love' single (KLF Communications, 1990).

Changing public advertisements for critical purposes is one element of what is known as 'culture jamming'—wherein artists and activists attempt to speak back to the spectacle, creating a dialogue where there was only a monologue. The term was coined by Negativland on their record *Over the Edge, Vol. 1: JAMCON'84*, where the fictional character Crosley Bendix pontificates on this practice: 'The studio for the cultural jammer is the world at large. His tools are paid for by others, an art with *real* risk'. (Negativland has since tried to disassociate itself from the term, telling me, via Groucho Marx, 'I don't care to belong to any club that will have me as a member'.) During the first Gulf War, the KLF altered a billboard that advertised the *Sunday Times*, which read 'THE GULF: the coverage, the analysis, the facts'. They replaced the letters GU with a K.

### Assassinating the Author

The KLF were well aware of how technology would change popular music in the late-1980s and beyond: 'It's obvious that in a very short space of time the Japanese will have delivered the technology and then brought the price of it down so that you can do the whole thing at home' (Drummond & Cauty, 1989: 121). They attempted to assassinate the author on numerous occasions, both with their music and in their missives to the public. The duo's critique of the myth of the individual 'genius' creator was especially evident on the sleeve art for their hit record 'Doctorin' the Tardis', released under the name the Timelords. (The Time Lords are a fictional alien race from the BBC science fiction show *Doctor Who*, whose theme song they sampled, along with Gary Glitter's 'Rock and Roll [Part Two]' and other British pop culture staples.)

Drummond and Cauty claimed that their automobile—a Ford police car allegedly used in the movie *Superman 3*—talked to them, giving its name as Ford Timelord. 'Hi! I'm Ford Timelord. I'm a car, and I made a record', read the liner notes of 'Doctorin' the Tardis'. 'I mixed and matched some tunes we all know and love, got some mates down and made this record. Sounds like a hit to me' (Timelords, 1988). The way the KLF approached sampling was already an attack on the idea of originality, but claiming that a machine, a car, created this song took their critique one absurd step further. As Mark Rose argues in his book *Authors and Owners*, the idea of the 'original genius' emerged from the early-nineteenth century Romanticist movement, which assumed that a great author can only create something totally new from scratch (1993).

However, the idea that an individual author is *solely* responsible for all aspects of a work is an ideological sleight of hand, a fiction that some contemporary philosophers and literary critics—not to mention the KLF—have tried to exterminate. 'When I was nineteen and at art school, I had ambitions to be a great painter', Drummond tells me. 'At the age of twenty, fuelled with the idealism of youth, I turned my back on this ambition (the fact that I lacked the talent helped me to do my back turning)'. He adds, the 'idea of making the one-off artwork touched by the hand of "genius" to be then sold to the highest bidder meant you were no more than a lackey to the wealthy and ruling classes. I was for the mass produced art—art that could be bought by anybody, used and thrown away when no longer relevant. This was the art that found its form in the seven-inch single, the paperback, the motion picture' (McLeod, 2008).



The lone genius construction of authorship that was espoused by the Romanticist movement is not 'natural', nor has it been around forever. In early eighteenth-century England, authorship was still an unstable marriage of two key concepts inherited from the Renaissance: (1) a 'craftsman' who followed rules, manipulating words and grammar to satisfy tradition for patrons in the court and (2) a vessel that produced something 'higher' or 'transcendent', which was attributed to a muse or to God. During this time, this old paradigm of authorship crumbled and a new one emerged from the contradictions caused by the emergence of capitalism. Writers in England—and a few decades later, Germany—found it increasingly difficult to make a living because the patronage system was breaking down and no copyright protection existed to support them in this new marketplace of words. Reacting to these realities, writers and other Enlightenment era philosophers attempted to redefine how writing, authorship, and ownership were conceived (Rose, 1993).

Many of the legal battles within 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain that led to formation of copyright law were informed by emerging Enlightenment- and Romantic-period notions of originality, authorship and ownership—including, but not limited to, John Locke's notion of individual property. As the century wore on, the source of authorial inspiration shifted from the external (the muse or God) to the internal, where a great poem springs fully formed from the *original genius* of the author. Because the existence of the new work could now be attributed to the writer, the author, the newly emerging copyright system could be justified legally, economically, and philosophically (Woodmansee & Osteen, 1999). However, digital recording technologies, particularly samplers, complicate issues of ownership and authorship, and they also give the 'death of the author' a new meaning.

This is especially true when we turn our attention to their assaults on the author—such as claiming that their automobile crafted their 'Doctorin' the Tardis' with, well, a machine. Discussing this hit single (released under the moniker The Timelords), Bill Drummond stated, 'We thought, this is going to be massive, let's go for it, and we went the whole hog. The lowest common denominator in every respect' (Sharkey, 1994). Their authorial assassination was also connected to a larger critique of spectacular capitalism, and particularly the culture industry. After fast becoming critics' darlings, Drummond and Cauty focused their crosshairs on the British music press, which was repulsed by this crassly commercial song. When released, *Melody Maker* dismissed The

Timelords' 'Doctorin' the Tardis' as 'pure, unadulterated agony' and *Sounds* prophetically stated that it was 'a record so noxious that a top ten place can be its only destiny'.

The song went to number one.

The next year the KLF self-published 7,000 copies of a satirical book titled *The Manual (How to Have a Number One Hit the Easy Way)*. It is packed with business addresses, phone numbers, and other contact information, as well as ridiculously absurd and obvious instructions, such as the following:

#### THE RECORDING STUDIO

DON'T BE TEMPTED TO SKIP THIS SECTION ON STUDIOS. IT MUST BE READ OVER LUNCH - BEFORE BOOKING YOUR STUDIO.

The recording studio is the place where you will record your Number One hit single. There are hundreds of recording studios scattered across the country, from the north of Scotland to deepest Cornwall. ...

#### CHORUS AND TITLE

The next thing you have got to have is a chorus. The chorus is the bit in the song that you can't help but sing along with. ... Do not attempt writing chorus lyrics that deal in regret, jealousy, hatred or any other negative emotions. These require a vocal performer of great depth to put it over well. ...

#### THE GROOVE

In days gone by it was provided by the bass guitar player, now it is all played by the programmed keyboards. Even if you want it to sound like a real bass guitar, a sampled sound of a bass guitar will be used, then programmed. It's easier than getting some thumb-slapping dickhead in.

And so on...

At least one group scored a number one single in several European countries by following the instructions in *The Manual*. As Bill Drummond remembers, two men from Vienna stopped by for a visit in 1988—chatting up an idea they had for a single that involved hip-hop break beats, lederhosen, yodeling, and Abba samples. ‘They wanted Jimmy and me to produce their concept for them’, Drummond writes in his memoir, 45. ‘We said, “We don’t need to, you can do it yourself”, handed them a copy of *The Manual* and sent them packing back to Austria’. Within the year, ‘Bring Me Edelweiss’ by Edelweiss became a number one hit in several European countries, even going Top Five in the United States. Drummond adds, ‘It was as bad a record as (or an even greater record) than our Timelords one, with the added bonus of a truly international appeal’ (Drummond, 2001: 191-192).

### **Flaming Out**

It all came to a crashing halt in 1992, the year after they had become the biggest selling act in the world. When the KLF were voted ‘Best British Group’ at the Brit Awards, the premiere U.K. music industry awards ceremony, they bit the hand that fed it. Hard. During the 1992 awards ceremony, the duo performed an ear-bleeding rendition of ‘3 A.M. Eternal’ with the grindcore metal group Extreme Noise Terror (an accurately descriptive band name, I might add). As they pummeled the audience with deafening decibels and distortion, Drummond fired on the audience with a machine gun filled with blanks. ‘The KLF have now left the music industry’, went the post-performance intercom announcement, echoing the famous exit line used at the end of Elvis performances.

Later that night—in an admittedly tasteless (or downright repulsive) move—Drummond and Cauty dumped the carcass of a sheep on the red carpeted entrance of the award show after party, accompanied by eight gallons of blood. Around the carcass’s neck was a sign: ‘I DIED FOR YOU—BON APPETIT’. (Drummond seriously considered chopping off his own hand and throwing it into the audience during their high-decibel performance at the Brits, though he never went through with it.) Scott Piering, a record promoter who worked with the duo, explained that the machine-guns-and-dead-sheep incident was an attempt to torpedo their runaway success. ‘They really wanted to cleanse themselves and be ostracized by the music industry’ (Shaw, 1992).

After trying to subvert pop from the inside, they realized that it was a pointless, impossible task. 'We have been following a wild and wounded, glum and glorious, shit but shining path these past five years', they wrote in a KLF Communications Info Sheet dated May 14, 1992. 'The last two of which has led us up onto the commercial high ground—we are at a point where the path is about to take a sharp turn from these sunny uplands down into a netherworld of we know not what' (*New Musical Express*, 1992: 3). After the award show, the KLF deleted their entire music catalog—a feat made possible by the fact that, in the DIY spirit of punk, they owned their own independent record label. 'When we stopped doing The KLF and deleted the whole catalogue, it was not to create scarcity value', Drummond tells me. 'It was so that it could be over and done with, gone, forgotten—thus giving us a space to get on with whatever we would be doing next. I do not like things hanging around' (McLeod, 2008).

Drummond and Cauty both had a genuine love of pop music, which was equally matched by a contempt for the music *industry*; regardless, they never got caught up in the starry-eyed rhetoric of infiltrating the system and bringing it down from the inside. 'I never believed in that' Drummond told the British experimental music magazine *The Wire*. 'All that happens is that oneself gets corrupted. ... [W]e're all weak, really, so we can all be seduced and we can hate ourselves for it' (Watson, 1997). Their only choice was negation, and implosion.

After the KLF's demise they morphed into the K Foundation, directing obscene hand gestures at the professional art world. The year after the Brit Awards, they targeted the Turner Prize, the prestigious art award given to hip-but-establishment-approved young artists. In 1993, the K Foundation awarded the title of 'Worst Artist of the Year', along with £40,000 in prize money, to that year's winner of the Turner Prize, Rachel Whiteread. The K Foundation Award was announced in a television commercial aired during Channel 4's live coverage of the Turner Prize, and it was quite an event. While people gathered at the Tate Gallery, which coordinates the Turner Prize, the K Foundation transported (in a fleet of gold and black limousines) roughly twenty-five critics and other influential members of the art community to a nearby field.

Not surprisingly, the winner/loser refused to accept the K Foundation award, even though it doubled the Turner Prize's £20,000 stipend. Drummond and Cauty came within minutes of

igniting £40,000, but soon before they lit the match Whiteread reluctantly accepted the award, claiming that she would distribute the sum to ten needy artists. Part of their motivation in targeting the art world was to shoot holes in the often absurd ways that the art world creates value through a combination of manufactured prestige and planned scarcity. 'I still hate the cynically created limited edition, the one off, the ... you know what I mean', Drummond tells me. 'I have never been a collector. Never wanted amass the complete works of anyone. But I know that I have been guilty of creating things that have ended up being collectable items. As for limited editions I have been guilty of producing, things have often ended up being limited because I cannot be bothered printing or pressing up any more'.

Taking Neil Young's advice that it is better to burn out than it is to rust—quite literally, in fact—Drummond and Cauty torched the remaining money they earned as pop stars (in doing so, they were reportedly responsible for the largest cash withdrawal in U.K. history). In 1994, the two flew to a remote Scottish island accompanied by journalist Jim Reid and their roadie Gimpo, who filmed the blaze. In an article for *The Observer*, Reid soberly explained, 'The £1 million was burnt without ceremony in an abandoned boathouse on the Isle of Jura, in the Inner Hebrides, between 12.45am and 2.45am on Tuesday, 23 August. It was a cold night, windy and rainy. The money, practically all the former chart-topping duo had left in their account, made a good fire'. Describing what it is like to watch £1 million burn, Reid wrote, 'I could tell you that you watch it at first with great guilt and then, after perhaps 10 minutes, boredom. And when the fire has gone out, you just feel cold' (Reid, 1994: 28).

Reid's observaton was also a crisp, illuminating comment on the nature of the pop music spectacle—not to mention consumer culture, more generally.

### **No Music Day**

Next on Bill Drummond's hit list: the entirety of recorded music. In the first decade of the new millennium, he produced a series of broadsides that used a simple-but-bold black, white and red design scheme—which he posted in public spaces and on the Internet.

ALL RECORDED MUSIC HAS RUN ITS  
COURSE.

IT HAS BEEN CONSUMED, TRADED,  
DOWNLOADED, UNDERSTOOD, HEARD  
BEFORE, SAMPLED, LEARNED, REVIVED,  
JUDGED AND FOUND WANTING.

DISPENSE WITH ALL PREVIOUS FORMS OF  
MUSIC AND MUSIC-MAKING AND START  
AGAIN.

YEAR ZERO NOW (Drummond, 2008: 3).

In many ways, this statement was the crystallized climax (or anti-climax) of Drummond's 'career' in the music industry. Drummond recalls that, 'when Napster first hit the World Wide Web I thought it was the best thing that had happened in the music business for the last 110 years' (2008: 13). With the advent of file-sharing networks, anyone with a computer and Internet connection could listen to virtually anything in the history of recorded music—with just one click of the mouse. He saw this as a fantastic turn of events, great for people who love music, great for music itself. But despite Drummond's delight in seeing the century-old music business crumble due to changing technologies and the industry's own unchecked greed, music's newfound accessibility left him with an empty feeling.

The same is true of Drummond's feelings about sampling, whose shock-of-the-new provocations eventually morphed into just another respectable way of making music (especially after the rise of the contemporary copyright licensing regime that legitimized sampling, legally). 'Jimmy and I used the "Mind the gap" voice from the London Underground on our first LP together back in '87', Drummond remembers, discussing their desire to appropriate from the everyday soundscapes that surrounded them. 'But these days, every last sound that the world has on offer has been sampled up and used on a record somewhere' (2001: 235). When it became possible for most anyone to access, and repurpose, preexisting sounds, the magic and mystery faded from the act of collage—especially after everything from James Brown breakbeats, Bollywood soundtracks, and cooing babies have been sampled in Top Ten hits. The paradigm-shifting shockwaves generated by sampling had long since subsided, and it is now little more than a pastiche-laden technique used to resell old hits in new packaging.

‘Recorded music was great, but it is over’, Drummond says. ‘Music has so much more to offer than something to block out reality of our bus ride to work or the pain of jogging in the park’. He maintains that the promiscuous availability of music has fundamentally changed our relationship with music, especially because accessing the history of recorded music is as easy as turning on a tap. This has resulted in a perpetual, monotonous background hum that has the effect of canceling out the *experience* of taking in music. ‘After years of believing in the democratisation of cheap mass produced art’, Drummond tells me, ‘I have come to—or at least since I got myself an iPod—the opinion that it no longer works’ (McLeod, 2008).

Enter No Music Day, a holiday of sorts established in 2005 by Bill Drummond, which he refers to as ‘an aspiration, an idea, an impossible dream, a nightmare’ (2008: 252). Drummond chose to observe it on November 21 because it immediately precedes St. Cecilia’s Day, the patron saint of music. In one of his posters, Drummond pronounced, in part:

ON NO MUSIC DAY:  
 NO HYMNS WILL BE SUNG.  
 NO RECORDS WILL BE PLAYED ON THE  
 RADIO.  
 IPODS WILL BE LEFT AT HOME.  
 ROCK BANDS WILL NOT ROCK...  
 MCS WILL NOT PASS THE MIC.  
 BRASS BANDS PRACTICE WILL BE  
 POSTPONED...  
 RECORD SHOPS WILL BE CLOSED ALL  
 DAY.  
 AND YOU WILL NOT TAKE PART IN ANY  
 SORT OF MUSIC MAKING OR LISTENING  
 WHATSOEVER.

NO MUSIC DAY EXISTS FOR VARIOUS  
 REASONS, YOU MAY HAVE ONE  
 (Drummond, 2008: 245)

Such statements could have been overlooked as the raving lunacy of an ex-pop star, but it struck a chord, so to speak. In 2007, the BBC embraced the idea, and Radio Scotland completely avoided playing music for a full twenty-four hours that November 21. The regular music used in *Good Morning Scotland*, for instance, was replaced by other sounds, and *BBC News* reported that other programs that

typically featured music were substituted with ‘discussions, interviews and a chance to contemplate a world without music’ (*BBC News*, 2007). However, it’s not as if Drummond wishes recorded music never existed—or at least ceased to exist after Thomas Edison, the inventor of the phonograph, tested his new invention in 1877 by recording himself singing ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb’.

For Drummond, recorded music was a good thing. It was the great art form of the twentieth century, he says, capturing the imagination of the public—which, for the first time in history, could now access archived sound and listen to ghosts of the past. Drummond tells me, ‘in 500 years time, it will be what the twentieth century will be remembered for, from a cultural point of view’ (though he acknowledges that cinema has left a bigger footprint and continues to carry on, and thus won’t solely be associated with the twentieth century). Drummond continues, arguing that every medium has a life span, though some last longer than others. ‘Some come to an abrupt ending like the silent film, irrelevant overnight with the coming of the talkies,’ he says. ‘Others take decades to fade and die. Still others live on in evening class lessons, carried out by those in need of a hobby’ (McLeod, 2008).

In the history of music, sound recording isn’t really much more than a blip on the radar, a microscopic dot on a very *very* long timeline. Given that, it seems strange that recorded music has become so naturalized and hegemonic, especially when there are so many other ways to make and listen to songs, sounds, and noise. Because of the ubiquity of sound recordings today, Bill Drummond feels that people will begin wanting something different out of music—hence his command to ‘dispense with all previous forms of music and music-making and begin again’. It’s a radical gesture, though not at all shocking coming from a man who has spent most of his adult life contemplating the art and business of popular music. ‘I believe that the creative and forward looking music makers of the twenty-first century will not want to make music that can be listened to wherever, whenever, while doing almost whatever’, Drummond concludes. ‘They will want to make music that is about time, place, occasion, and not something that you can download and skip over on your iPod’.



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